

The hands of the clock on the wall at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas were at 12:46 P.M. when Secret Service agent Roy Kellerman came into the emergency room where a team of doctors had been laboring to save the life of President John F. Kennedy. A sheet had been pulled up over Kennedy's head as he lay on a table. The sheet wasn't long enough. The President's shinbones and feet gleamed under the overhead light. Kellerman looked at Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy, who sat in the outer room. He looked at the doctors, and at the white-shrouded body on the table. Kellerman went back out into the hall and ordered a fellow agent, Clint Hill, to telephone Gerald Behn, chief of the Secret Service's White House detail in Washington.

"Clint," Kellerman said, "tell Jerry that this is not for release and not official, but the man is dead."

While Kennedy's death was known to a select few, it was not known to Kennedy's successor, Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson, seated with Mrs. Johnson in Booth

13, a hospital cubicle 35 feet away from the room in which Kennedy's body lay. Inside that room, Dr. Kemp Clark signed the death certificate and gave it to Kennedy's personal physician, Dr. George Burkley. And an FBI man grabbed Parkland's administrator, Jack Price, and said: "Don't let anybody know what time the President died—security."

A few minutes before, Kennedy aide Kenneth O'Donnell had peered in at the Johnsons. "It looks bad," O'Donnell had said, "perhaps fatal. I'll keep you informed." But Johnson had not been informed. Now, with Kennedy dead, who commanded the power of the United States? For one thing, where was the Bag Man, U.S. Army Warrant Officer Ira Gearhart? Gearhart was never supposed to be more than a few seconds from the side of the President, because inside his attaché case with its safe dial was the electronic apparatus with which the President could call, in code, for a nuclear attack.

The Bag Man had come to Parkland with the rest of the tragic Kennedy motorcade. When Secret Service man Lem Johns reached the hospital he kept asking people, "Are you the Bag Man?" Finally, Johns located Gearhart and ordered him to hurry to the side of the Vice President. But during the eight minutes that elapsed between the time the cars arrived at Parkland and the moment Johns found Gearhart, no one knew where the Bag Man was—or who he was. And the Bag Man didn't know where the President was—or who he was. If there was ever a time when the United States could not retaliate instantaneously to a nuclear attack, these were the minutes.

The Bag Man hurried to Johnson in Booth 13, but the Secret Service men didn't know him and couldn't identify him. They saw him with the satchel, and shoved him into Booth 8, where he remained under the watchful eye of an agent until Emory Roberts of the Secret Service came in and verified him as the Bag Man.

"THE DAY J.F.K. DIED" BY JIM BISHOP

Never before had Lyndon Johnson told how he felt and what really happened to him on that catastrophic day when he was suddenly President. Now, he has confided in Jim Bishop, author of "The Day Christ Died" and "The Day Lincoln Was Shot." It was an anguished, historic confrontation: "I am grateful to President Johnson for a private interview on the assassination," says Mr. Bishop. "It was the first time he had discussed it and, from the manner in which it affected him, it may be the last."

Copyright © 1968 by Jim Bishop. From his book "The Day Kennedy Was Shot," to be published by Funk & Wagnalls.

Photograph by Mark Shaw

Had anyone told Johnson that the frightful decision to launch a nuclear counterattack was now his? Had Major General Chester V. Clifton, Kennedy's military aide, told the Vice President that it was now within his power—with that Bag—to dial any one of several types of attack? Did Johnson know? Had anyone ever briefed him on these awesome and irrevocable decisions?

No. The United States of America stood, for a little time, naked. The men around Kennedy had kept the secrets of power from Lyndon Johnson. He knew there was a Bag. He knew there was a man several booths away, with a Bag. But, if the assassination was part of a larger threat to the security of the United States, Johnson had neither the combination to the Bag nor the exact knowledge of what to do with it. And all day long on November 22, 1963, the Bag Man would be lost and found and lost again.

The confusion had begun the moment the Presidential motorcade had reached Parkland.

At the little emergency overhang, the cars skidded to a stop and men began to tumble out, all running toward the Kennedy automobile. Secret Service agent Emory Roberts ran from the follow-up car to the Kennedys'. He opened the door on Mrs. Kennedy's side, saw the President face down on her leg, and said: "Let us get the President." Mrs. Kennedy, bending over her husband's head, said "No." It was firm and final. Roberts turned to agent Kellerman, nominally his superior, and said: "You stay with the President. I'm taking some of my men to Johnson."

Three Secret Service agents hustled Johnson through the emergency door. He was flapping his arms, and trying to get back to the Kennedy car. One of the agents, Rufus Youngblood, said "No," and kept pushing. "We are going to another room, and I would like you to remain there . . ." Other agents surrounded Mrs. Johnson, who was looking at the Kennedy car and saw a blur of pink and the edges of some red roses.

The moment was hectic, hysterical and historical. The nation had a new President, but he did not know it, although the men around him did.

Johnson was hustled to a remote part of the hospital's emergency area. He followed the phalanx of Secret Service agents without hesitation.

Johnson kept rubbing his sore right shoulder. It had sustained the weight of Rufus Youngblood's body when the Secret Service man threw himself on top of Johnson in the automobile a few seconds after it became apparent that someone was shooting at President Kennedy. Passing nurses saw Johnson rubbing his shoulder and spread the rumor that he had sustained a heart attack.

The stretchers were going by, almost at a run. First there was Texas Governor John B. Connally, who had been wounded; behind him was President Kennedy, on his back with a coat over his face. On his chest were a few bloody roses and a pink hat. Mrs. Kennedy, as forlorn as the bloody roses that had been given to her that morning, trotted beside the cart, her fingers trying to maintain contact with her husband, while visitors leaving the emergency area bumped into her. Her head was back, her dark hair swinging behind from side to side, the mouth was open in anguish, and the eyes begged for the assistance no one could give.

A nurse found an emergency room to satisfy

Roberts and Youngblood. It had one patient. He was taken out at once. The room had a small window. The shades were drawn. It would hardly be called a room. There were a dozen or more cubicles in one blue-tiled room. This was the one farthest from the door, and it was screened by sheets on poles. Roberts told Youngblood to remain with the Vice President, and guards were posted at the door.

Revolvers were drawn there and outside. Roberts convinced Youngblood and the Vice President that, at the moment, no one knew whether this was a widespread plot to assassinate the leading men in the United States Government. If it was, they would be after Johnson as well as Kennedy. The Vice President was entreated to please do as he was told, promptly, until the matter could be cleared up. He said: "Okay, partner." He began to understand that this could be a broad plot. Youngblood and Roberts agreed that perhaps it would be best to get Johnson out of the hospital at once and hurry him off to Air Force One, the Presidential jet, which was waiting at Dallas Love Field.

The smooth continuation of government depended on Johnson. They had to keep him alive. The Republic was in his hands, and, no matter how, the Secret Service had to protect him and get him back to Washington safely.

Johnson's guards told him little. He kept asking for President Kennedy, asking if it was all right to go see him, and he received suggestions in reply. Emory Roberts said, "I do not think the President can make it. I suggest we get out of Dallas." Youngblood asked Johnson to "think it over. We may have to swear you in." The Vice President held his wife's hand, trying to infuse her with courage. Only she and Cliff Carter, his Executive Assistant, knew that Johnson had never really aspired to be President.

Now Lyndon Johnson was President, but he did not know it. To keep him safe in that little hospital cubbyhole, Congressmen and Secret Service agents kept reminding Johnson that the assassination attempt could well be part of a much bigger day of terror. Johnson began to believe it.

Agent Roberts suggested that Johnson leave at once for Air Force One. Johnson said he would not leave, he would not board AF-1 "without a suggestion or permission of the Kennedy staff." Roberts asked Kenneth O'Donnell, and O'Donnell said: "Yes." But Johnson refused to move.

Roberts returned to O'Donnell and asked again: "Is it all right for Mr. Johnson to board Air Force One now?"

"Yes," O'Donnell said, "yes."

Mrs. Johnson asked if she could stop a moment and see Mrs. Kennedy again. Lady Bird Johnson had seen Mrs. Kennedy a few minutes before, in the room outside the room where doctors were working frantically on Mr. Kennedy. Mrs. Johnson had found herself beyond tears as she clasped the younger woman's hands in hers. Mrs. Kennedy had looked up, the drawn, dead expression still on her features, her dark eyes searching Mrs. Johnson's face for something. The new First Lady had begun to tremble violently.

Now agents formed an advance guard for her. Mrs. Johnson was opposed to violence of any kind, even in speech. She was in the bottom of a well of marching men, marching through corridors of silent men, and, when the ranks broke, the young widow was standing before her. Mrs. Johnson's opinion of Mrs.

Kennedy had been summed up in a sentence years before: "She was a girl who was born to wear white gloves." Mrs. Kennedy's opinion of Mrs. Johnson had also been summed up long ago: "If Lyndon asked, I think Lady Bird would walk down Pennsylvania Avenue naked." No one spoke. There was nothing worth saying. No miracle could repair the personal wound.

Mrs. Johnson began to weep. She grabbed Mrs. Kennedy and said: "Jackie, I wish to God there was something I could do." Then Lady Bird Johnson walked away, looking back and shaking her head and wiping her eyes.

With President Kennedy's press secretary, Pierre Salinger, away on a diplomatic mission to the Far East, Salinger's duties had been taken on by his assistant, Malcolm (Mac) Kilduff, who walked dazedly through the hospital until he met Kenneth O'Donnell. "Kenny," said Kilduff, "this is a terrible time to approach you on this, but the world has got to know that President Kennedy is dead." O'Donnell looked surprised. "Well, don't they know it already?" To him, President Kennedy seemed to have died a long, long time ago.

"Well, you are going to have to make the announcement," O'Donnell finally told Kilduff. O'Donnell became conscious of a new order of things. "Go ahead, but you better check it with Mr. Johnson," he added. Kilduff nodded.

Kilduff found the new President sitting on an ambulance cart, his legs dangling, looking moodily at the floor. Kilduff swallowed hard and said: "Mr. President . . ." Mr. Johnson brought his head up sharply; Mrs. Johnson held a hand against her mouth. This was the first time Lyndon Baines Johnson had been so addressed; it was the first time he knew that he was the Thirty-Sixth President of the United States.

"Mr. President," Kilduff said, "I have to announce the death of President Kennedy to the press. Is it all right with you?" Johnson hopped off the cart and jiggled a hand in his trouser pocket. "No, Mac," he said. "I think we had better get out of here and get back to the plane before you announce it. We don't know whether this is a world-wide conspiracy," Johnson said, quoting Emory Roberts and Rufus Youngblood, "whether they are after me as they were after President Kennedy, or whether they are after Speaker McCormack or Senator Hayden." (Representative John W. McCormack of Massachusetts and Senator Carl Hayden of Arizona

were next in line for the Presidency should anything happen to Johnson.) Johnson saw the fresh shock in Kilduff's eyes. "We just don't know," the President said.

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Johnson looked at the Secret Service agents. "I think we had better wait a minute. Are they prepared to get me out of here?" he asked.

Kilduff went to discuss the matter with Roy Kellerman. If this was a plot, a conspiracy of some dimensions, Kellerman said he would feel better if they got Johnson back on the plane. Roberts and Youngblood wanted him to get aboard Air Force One and fly at once to the White House. The plane had brand-new, highly sophisticated equipment, some of which was directly related to the Bag Man. The Vice President's plane did not have this equipment.

Kilduff left. In his subsequent announcement, he gave the time of Kennedy's death as 1 P.M. Actually, Kennedy died at least 14 minutes earlier. When Roy Kellerman of the Secret Service entered the room at 12:46, Kennedy was already dead. This is corroborated by Father Huber, the Roman Catholic priest who administered the last rites. When Father Huber reached Kennedy's side, it was 12:49—and the President's face was covered by a sheet. The priest saw Mrs. Kennedy and said, "Mrs. Kennedy, my sincerest sympathy goes to you." Then he peeled the sheet back from Kennedy's head. The President's eyes were closed.

The Catholic Church maintains that the sacrament of Extreme Unction is not valid if the soul has departed, but Father Huber gave the last rites anyway. As he left, Mrs. Kennedy took his arm.

"Father," she said, obviously frightened, "do you think the sacraments had effect?" "Oh, yes," the priest said reassuringly. "Yes, indeed."

Outside the room, two Secret Service men took Father Huber by the arm. "Father," one said, "you don't know anything." Huber understood. Kennedy was dead, but nobody was to know. The priest promised not to tell. As he emerged, reporters engulfed him with questions about the President's condition. Begging God's forgiveness for what he was about to say, the priest replied, "He was unconscious."

Why, then, did the official announcement say Kennedy died at 1 P.M.?

The inaccuracy can probably be attributed to Mrs. Kennedy's desire to make it clear that the President had received the last rites of his church before he died.

With Kennedy dead, Lyndon Johnson's cubicle became the center of power. Ken O'Donnell came to see Johnson. The new President was still unsure of himself. He had become the only President who ever witnessed the assassination of a President, and it was too much for one set of shoulders to bear. At times, his ideas had been treated with contempt by Kennedy's palace guard; now the palace guard attended him and called him "Mr. President."

The President asked O'Donnell if it might not be better to get to Carswell Air Force Base. It was military; security would be easy. No, it would not be better. Carswell was 31 miles away. No, Mr. President, the safest course would be to traverse those two miles from this hospital to Love Field. O'Donnell also pointed out that the short trip should be all the safer because it was not scheduled. No one knew about it.

Part of Johnson's political philosophy was to seek intelligent help with the utmost candor. He knew O'Donnell was a "take-charge" man, and the new President looked him in the eye. "I am in your hands now," he said.

O'Donnell misunderstood. He thought that Johnson was asking for a pre-endorsement of his actions by the Kennedy group. To the contrary, Johnson was as dazed as any of the others, and in urgent need of good counsel.

"Well," Johnson said, "how about Mrs. Kennedy?"

"She will not leave the hospital," O'Donnell said, "without the President." There was no doubt about which President he meant.

Mrs. Johnson nodded approvingly when her husband said that he would not go back without Mrs. Kennedy and the body of her husband. O'Donnell said that he still thought the best move would be for President Johnson and his "people" to get aboard that plane now. "I don't want to leave Mrs. Kennedy like this," Johnson said. Perhaps, he conceded, it would be just as well to wait for her on the plane.

Had O'Donnell been clear-headed, he would have recognized that, even though Johnson automatically assumed the burden of the Presidency the moment Kennedy was incapacitated by a rifle shot, he had none of the executive powers until he was sworn in. He was President, but could not act as one until that oath had been taken. It was printed in almost all almanacs and could be administered by a notary public. This lapse cost the nation the services of a chief executive for two hours and five minutes. All Johnson had was the title.

The silence thickened. Johnson asked if he could see Mrs. Kennedy for a moment.

Agent Clint Hill shook his head negatively. "You should not leave this room, Mr. President."

The Secret Service advised Johnson to get aboard Air Force One at once, and to take off for Washington. Johnson was shocked. He asked where Mrs. Kennedy and the casket would go. "Air Force Two," they said, referring to the Vice Presidential plane. Morally, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson could not consider the proposal. They would not fly back to the capital alone, with a dead President and a grieving widow on a following plane. Johnson said that he would agree to get aboard Air Force One, but he would wait "for President and Mrs. Kennedy."

That settled it. Agent Youngblood filled a

gap of conversational vacuum by announcing that the Secret Service had located one Johnson daughter, Lynda, and that she was now protected. The younger daughter, Luci, had been found in a Washington, D.C., school; an agent was at her side.

The Johnsons realized that the country was certain to interpret a quick return to Washington as "fleeing" and leaving the widow alone with the body of her husband. The President solicited advice from everyone around him, but no one thought of the oath of office.

If it occurred to the President, he did not mention it, for the same reason that he would not depart alone on Air Force One—it would look like a precipitous power grab. No one recited the substance of Article 2, Section 1 (7) of the Constitution of the United States, which is explicit: "Before he enter on the execution of his office, he shall take the following oath or affirmation . . ."

Legally, Johnson was no longer Vice President, and had none of the powers of that office; he was now President of the United States, but, technically, had none of the powers of that office.

Johnson ordered the Secret Service to get him "and my people" to the plane. He still wanted endorsement for his actions, and he ordered Rufus Youngblood to ask Ken O'Donnell once again if the Johnsons should use Air Force One. The agent returned and reported that "O'Donnell says yes," although O'Donnell later denied that he had been asked specifically about Air Force One. The President suggested that the party leave in unmarked cars. He did not want to have his wife risk her life with him, so he ordered her to ride in another vehicle. Agent Youngblood said: "Mr. President, if we're leaving now, I wish you'd stick close to me." Johnson was pressed between Youngblood and Kilduff. He kept glancing over their heads to Mrs. Johnson, to reassure her that it was going to be all right. Youngblood also asked Johnson to keep his head below window level when he got into the car.

"Let's go," the President said, and the party whirled out of the area at top walking speed. To keep up, Mrs. Johnson had to run between Secret Service agents.

Out front, Agent Johns had three unmarked cars. There is something profoundly humiliating to see a President of the United States emerge from a building in an American city running in fear. Some people, lounging at the bottom of the huge hospital building, became alert and shouted: "Tell us something" . . . "What the hell is going on?" . . . "What happened?"

The party kept walking at top speed, the Secret Service agents fanning out ahead and some walking backward. The President jumped into the back seat of the lead car, driven by Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry, and slouched as low as a big man can. Youngblood sat beside him. Mrs. Johnson was shoved into the second car.

The ride amounted to flight. When the police escort started the sirens, the President said: "Tell them to shut those sirens off." Still, the wailing could be heard for a mile. It required two or three requests before they shut down.

The last part of the run was made at dangerous speed, and at the airport the Presidential jet had never looked so big, so friendly and so impregnable. There was no

time for farewells. The party hurried to the ramps and ran up into the plane without looking back.

The forward door on Air Force One was closed. A Secret Service man turned the handle inside and locked it. Another agent was stationed there, and still another at the rear ramp.

When Johnson got aboard, he ordered all the shades drawn. The interior was hot and stuffy. The air conditioning had been shut down when the engines stopped. Johnson and his party threaded the aisle through the communications shack, where sergeants with headsets crouched, looked up in wonderment as their new President passed. In the middle of the silvery wing was the door to the President's private stateroom. An attendant held the door open, and the seal of the President shone in white.

The first sound inside was from the television set. Johnson looked up to see Walter Cronkite, in New York, discussing a dark deed in Dallas. The President shh'd everyone, hoping to hear something new about the extent of the assassination plot.

Mrs. Johnson walked aft to the bedroom with tears in her eyes. She alone had noticed the hospital flag at half staff, and it had crushed her with its finality.

The President left the television and walked toward the back of the plane. He instructed the stewards to hold the private bedroom for Mrs. Kennedy's use. However, Johnson quickly discovered that there was no other place from which he could make a private phone call, so he removed his jacket, tossed it on a clothes tree, and signaled the communications crew that he would be using this phone for a while.

One of the first calls was to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. This one required some thought. Johnson wanted to convey the depth of his personal loss as well as offering his hand to the Kennedy family; he also wanted to ask the Attorney General for a legal opinion on when to take the oath of office as President.

Robert Kennedy, on the phone, was less emotional than the President. He had no report from the FBI or any other government agency that there was a broad plot against the leading officers of government; he knew that Governor Connally had been hit, but it could be an accident, because he had been in the same car with John F. Kennedy.

So far as the oath of office was concerned, the Attorney General wasn't sure when it should be administered, or by whom. He promised to have Assistant Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach call back with the correct answers.

Officials at the Pentagon were calling the White House switchboard at the Dallas-Sheraton Hotel asking who was now in command. An officer grabbed the phone and assured the Pentagon that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff "are now the President." Somehow, in the flight from the hospital, the new President had overlooked the Bag Man and Major General Clifton, the Kennedy military aide who understood the coded types of retaliation. Both were left behind at Parkland. When Gearhart and Clifton learned that Kennedy was dead, they hastened to Johnson's side aboard Air Force One. But it took a half hour for them to get there. If, at this time, the Soviet Union had launched a missile

attack—referred to in the Department of Defense as a "Thirty-Minute War"—that half-hour lapse could have been disastrous.

The sun turned Air Force One into an aluminum oven. It was unbearably hot inside, yet people were running toward the front or back with imperative instructions. Both entrances were shut tight. President Johnson received a return phone call from Assistant Attorney General Katzenbach with the precise wording of the oath of office. Johnson asked a secretary, Miss Marie Fehmer, to please take it down and type it. Then he looked at the television set in time to hear a commentator say that the Dallas police had just arrested a suspect in the assassination.

Then Johnson thought of Federal Judge Sarah Hughes, a Kennedy appointee. She could administer the oath. He called Judge Hughes, but she was out. He asked that she be found at once.

Mrs. Johnson was nervous and distraught; she wrung her hands walking up and down the aisle of the plane, and didn't feel the stifling heat. The day was so horrifying, so beyond belief, that she had to keep reminding herself that it really happened; then, when the reality crushed her, she tried to think of other things. Sometimes, she was seen with a fixed half-smile on her face, as though people were watching and she had to put up a front. She wondered what her daughters were thinking. She thought of the two little ones of the Kennedys, and it was a thought impossible to sustain.

Judge Hughes phoned, and Johnson briefly explained the tragedy and asked if she could come right out to Love Field; he would send Secret Service agents to escort her. No, the judge said, she knew quicker ways of getting to the airport than the White House detail; she would be there in 10 minutes. The President said to please hurry, they wanted to take off for Washington. He hung up and told Agent Youngblood: "Check on the location of Mrs. Kennedy. Let me know when she will arrive."

An ambulance, its red blinker flashing, was coming into the airport. It was followed by two cars, all traveling at high speed. The ambulance pulled up at the rear ramp of AF-1, which opened briefly. A host of Secret Service men carried aboard the bronze casket of John F. Kennedy.

The door slammed shut. The casket was dragged across the floor. Kennedy aide Larry O'Brien noticed that a space had been made for the casket. He told the agents to secure it on the left side of the plane, barely inside the rear door. Mrs. Kennedy slumped into a seat at the breakfast nook opposite.

The passengers were growing in number. There was no passenger manifest. Some, like Liz Carpenter, secretary to Mrs. Johnson, reported to AF-2 and were told that the Johnsons were now on AF-1. The Kennedy people were aboard because this was the aircraft they had arrived on. Malcolm Kilduff, standing at the foot of the front ramp, was astonished to hear that President Johnson wanted to speak to him at once. The Assistant Press Secretary did not know that Johnson was on Air Force One.

Few others knew about it. Larry O'Brien, still crouching over the casket, looked up to see the President and Mrs. Johnson coming down the aisle from the private stateroom. He was flabbergasted. He saw the Johnsons move silently over to the breakfast nook.

Mrs. Kennedy looked up. There can be no doubt that she was surprised to see them aboard this aircraft. Until a few hours ago, they would not even be invited aboard AF-1 because security dictated that the President and the Vice President must fly on different planes.

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Mrs. Kennedy took Mrs. Johnson's hand. "Oh, Lady Bird," she said. "It's good that we've always liked you two so much." Mrs. Johnson began to weep again. "Oh," said Mrs. Kennedy, "what if I had not been there? I'm so glad I was there."

The President stood big and helpless. Like many men, he quailed in the face of grief, and could not cry. Mrs. Johnson kept thinking, in horror: *This immaculate woman . . . this immaculate woman caked with blood, her husband's blood . . . That right glove is caked . . .* She suggested that Mrs. Kennedy get someone to help her change clothes. "Oh, no," Mrs. Kennedy said. "Perhaps later I'll ask Mary Gallagher (a secretary). But not right now."

"Oh, Mrs. Kennedy," said Lady Bird. "You know we never even wanted to be Vice President and now, dear God, it's come to this." Mrs. Kennedy nodded.

The disparity between the Kennedys and Johnsons was apparent to both. The Kennedys were European in manner and dress; the Johnsons were earthy Americans. It was not a detriment to either family to be what it aspired to be, to nourish its own style of living and its culture. The subtle *bon mot* was an effervescent joy to John F. Kennedy and his Jacqueline; it was lost on the Johnsons. The beauty of the hill country of Texas was lost on the Kennedys; to the Johnsons, a frame farmhouse, hard furniture, and cattle silhouetted against a sunset brought serenity to the heart.

The latest book, the newest song, the gossip of high society, the galas at the watering places were daily food and drink to the Kennedys. To the contrary, it was said of Johnson that he could ruin a good suit of clothes merely by putting it on; his humor was a rough Texas guffaw and his wife enjoyed buying dresses from the rack. Mrs. Kennedy enjoyed her lack of knowledge of politics; Mrs. Johnson worked full time as her husband's assistant from the time he left Texas to take a seat in the House of Representatives. Lady Bird also found time to take her inheritance and build it into a television and ranch fortune.

The meeting in the back of the plane was awkward for both sides. Suddenly, the simple, blunt people were running the United States of America. The adroit, the charming, the

sophisticated Kennedys were out. A single blow had reversed the roles, and no one was prepared for it. No one said: "Now the Kennedys must move out of the White House and the Johnsons will move in," but the shock wave moved through Air Force One as the passengers sat in gloomy meditation. When Brigadier General Godfrey McHugh, Kennedy's Air Force aide, said, "The President is aboard," he assumed that there was only one President. Many of the passengers could not acknowledge Johnson's supremacy, even to themselves.

The President and the First Lady retired from the aft compartment, and Johnson went into the private bedroom to make certain that Marie Fehmer had the oath typed correctly. He was barely in the chair when the door opened, and Mrs. Kennedy was in the doorway. She looked as though this was the final humiliation.

The President jumped to his feet, asked Miss Fehmer to leave, and apologized to Mrs. Kennedy. He said he was checking something—"there's a little privacy here"—and was leaving at once. He got out, and went into the main stateroom, the area of desks and couches and television sets, and Mrs. Kennedy disappeared into the lavatory.

Johnson knew that his swearing-in would go down in history as one of the most somber. His impulse was to have it done quickly and secretly.

"Do we have to have the press in here?" he asked Kilduff. "Yes, Mr. President," Kilduff replied. "Also, Captain Stoughton should be here to make pictures of the scene." The President rubbed his big hand down the front of his face. "All right," he said. "Okay, Mac. If we must have them, then we might as well invite the other people to come in and witness the ceremony."

The President summoned O'Donnell and O'Brien. The new President admired these men. He wasn't certain that they were superior to his own team, but he knew that Ken and Larry had spent almost three years at the font of power in the White House, and they had an intimate working knowledge of the Executive office—which he lacked. Johnson asked both men to remain in government. "I need you more than he did," he said, jabbing his finger toward the back of the plane. Both men glanced at each other and said they would give it some thought.

O'Donnell was anxious for the plane to take off. He asked the President about it.

"I talked to Bobby," Johnson said. "They think I should be sworn in right here. Judge Hughes is on her way—should be here any minute."

They all sat watching Cecil Stoughton, the White House photographer, try to line up his cameras in a corner of the stateroom. "I would like you fellows to stay, to stand shoulder to shoulder with me," Johnson said to the Kennedy assistants. They did not commit themselves. They watched the photographer without seeing him.

Someone told Kilduff that O'Donnell had ordered the plane to leave. Holding his temper in check, Kilduff said: "He may want to take off, but he isn't in charge anymore. Johnson is now President." The word filtered quickly to the aft section, and it was interpreted as another indication of Lyndon Johnson's grab for power. It was O'Donnell who kept goading General McHugh to go forward and "get this plane out of here," although

O'Donnell had heard from the President that he was going to be sworn in before takeoff.

The stateroom began to fill. Johnson told O'Brien that someone should ask Mrs. Kennedy if she would stand beside him during the ceremony. He said he would like her to stand at his side and the oath-taking would be of short duration. The President said he would also need a Bible. There must be one somewhere on the plane.

O'Donnell came in. Photographer Stoughton was leaning against a bulkhead. "Mr. President," Stoughton said, "if you are squeezed any closer, I won't be able to make the picture." He tried one shot and the flash didn't go off. There was a second try. Mrs. Johnson, still wearing the half-frozen smile of shock, looked small beside her husband. The President fidgeted with his shirt cuffs, and Judge Hughes smiled patiently.

O'Brien found that Mrs. Kennedy was not in the breakfast nook beside the casket. He knocked on the bedroom door, and, getting no response, turned the knob and entered. The room was empty. He tried the knob to the lavatory and found it locked. Mrs. Kennedy was inside, alone. Whether she knew what was expected of her, and was trying to avoid it, or whether the depression of spirit led to nausea, no one knows. O'Brien left and asked Evelyn Lincoln, Kennedy's personal secretary, to see if she could get Mrs. Kennedy's attention. Mrs. Lincoln said she would try.

Looking around the room, O'Brien found a small gift box. Inside was what he thought was a Bible. It was a missal—the prayers of the Roman Catholic mass in both Latin and English. He carried it out and gave it to the judge. Kilduff couldn't find a tape recorder, so he used an electric dictating machine. Then he placed the microphone between Judge Hughes and the President. Marie Fehmer handed the judge a sheet of Air Force One letterhead with the proper words typed on it.

Mrs. Kennedy stepped timidly into the room. The President grasped both her hands in his and whispered, "Thank you." He nodded for the ceremony to start. Mrs. Johnson was on one side of the President; Mrs. Kennedy, still in her bloody gloves and garments, the face still stunned and expressionless, was on the other.

Kilduff switched the Dictaphone on. Judge Hughes held out the missal. The President looked down at his wife and placed his left hand on the book. The right hand moved up slowly, almost reluctantly. The oath of office required but twenty-eight seconds. Johnson said loudly: "... so help me God." The Thirty-Sixth President, who now had the power to implement his decisions, turned to Lady Bird, grabbed her by both shoulders, and kissed her. Then he turned to Mrs. Kennedy, put an arm around her, and pecked at her cheek.

Some rushed forward and tried to give him a hearty handshake and a congratulatory grin. President Johnson turned a stern expression on them and the bud of conviviality was crushed.

Mrs. Kennedy seemed unaware of what to do. She stood near the door with the President's seal emblazoned on it and looked blankly ahead. Mrs. Johnson grasped her hand and said: "The whole nation mourns your husband." There was no response. Dallas Police Chief Curry tried to grasp Mrs.

Kennedy's hand. His voice cracked with sobs. "We did our best," he croaked. "We tried hard, Mrs. Kennedy." She glanced at him, a small man with cross-hatched wrinkles on his chin, his spectacles gleaming in the dull cabin light. She nodded.

The chief shook his head. He took Judge Sarah Hughes by the arm. "God bless you, little lady," he said to Mrs. Kennedy, "but you ought to go back and lie down." Mrs. Kennedy summoned a smile. "No, thanks," she said. "I'm fine."

The President said: "Let's get airborne."

As the plane rose over Texas, one of the stewards thought: *How strange. For the first time in history, we have two Presidents aboard.* The big Texan, Cliff Carter, passed Ken O'Donnell, who appeared to be lost in thought staring at the back of Lyndon Johnson. Carter grasped O'Donnell's arm. O'Donnell neither flinched nor looked up. He stared without expression at Johnson. "He has what he wants now," he said, "but we'll get it back in 'sixty-eight."

The people on the plane gravitated into two groups. The Johnson people sat forward; the Kennedys aft. The Johnsons pretended that the situation did not exist. The Kennedys—which is to say Mrs. Kennedy, O'Donnell, David Powers, and McHugh—sulked in the rear compartment as though Johnson had boorishly appropriated the President's stateroom, evicting them all. Mrs. Kennedy, having surprised the President in her bedroom, sat in the tiny breakfast nook near the casket, trembling with the vibration of the tail section.

For two hours and twelve minutes, the two camps remained apart. They employed messengers to walk the corridor with whispered wishes. The alchemy of the hours had transmuted the grief of the Kennedy group to rancor; the assassination was a deep personal loss, but it was also a fall from power. The Ins were Out; the policy-makers were beholden to a new man for a plane ride.

Mrs. Kennedy, having retreated from the private bedroom to the aft galley, found there were only two seats in that part of the plane. She sat on one. Ken O'Donnell sat on the other.

O'Donnell stood. "I'm going to have a hell of a stiff drink," he said. "I think you should, too."

Mrs. Kennedy said: "What will I have?" O'Donnell said he'd make her a Scotch. She thought about it. "I've never had a Scotch in my life." O'Donnell moved on to call a steward. "Now is as good a time to start as any," Mrs. Kennedy said.

The President had two bowls of steaming vegetable soup. Mrs. Johnson saw the small packages of salted crackers and, knowing that her husband was on a salt-free diet, munched them herself.

The Johnsons, anxious to show a smooth continuity in the transfer of government, desired their group and the Kennedy group to appear as one family. At least, the Johnsons felt, the former rapport between the two groups could be maintained. They were wrong. After the swearing-in, Mrs. Kennedy did not return to the private stateroom of the First Lady. She remained with the casket, and those of the Kennedy camp who wished to sit the vigil remained at her side.

In Washington, officials began to depart for Andrews Air Force Base, across the river. Robert F. Kennedy was shocked. He tried forbidding, or dissuading, some from going.

Then he heard that more and more dignitaries were already waiting there.

Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota phoned the White House and asked if he could pay his respects by waiting at the air base for the body of the President. He was told, "No."

"The hell with you," Humphrey said. "I'm going."

Two stenographers were in President Kennedy's office removing some of his keepsakes. The memento book of photos of his trip to Ireland, which reposed on a table behind the desk, suddenly disappeared. A painting of a sailing ship followed. A mounted fish in an office across the hall came off the wall. The rocker with the U.S.S. *Kittyhawk* embroidered on it was placed on a dolly and wheeled into the hall. It was incredible that anyone could have issued such a callous order, but the mementos were being moved abruptly—reportedly on the instructions of Kennedy's brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver.

By hurrying them outside to be carried away to a private place, the press cameras could make the Kennedy bric-a-brac appear to be forlorn mementos; could make it seem as though the new man was in a hurry to take over the executive office. In time, the Queen Victoria desk would disappear, too, although it was U.S. property.

The commanding officer at the U.S. Naval Hospital at Bethesda, Maryland, Captain R.O. Canada Jr., ordered an ambulance to be dispatched to Andrews Air Force Base. So far as the captain knew, no one had asked for one. Aboard Air Force One, two requests for an ambulance had been relayed to Washington, but both had been refused on the grounds that the District of Columbia had a law prohibiting the transportation of a deceased person in an ambulance.

Canada, who sat at his television set, recalled that, eight years ago, Senator Lyndon B. Johnson had sustained a moderately severe myocardial infarction. Johnson had been his patient. The crushing events of this day could induce another heart attack. Captain Canada sent the ambulance and told the personnel to wait for Air Force One.

Back in the ornate President's Stateroom on Air Force One, Johnson telephoned Kennedy's mother, Mrs. Rose Kennedy.

Johnson was seldom more eloquent, or more helpless. "I wish to God there was something I could do," he said. Rose Kennedy thanked the President for his thoughtfulness in calling. She never lost her composure. Mrs. Johnson said: "Oh, Mrs. Kennedy, we must all realize how fortunate the country was to have your son as long as it did."

Rose Kennedy did not ask Mrs. Johnson to switch her to Jacqueline Kennedy, who was sitting 50 feet behind the Johnsons. Nor did Mrs. John F. Kennedy phone her mother-in-law. (Four months after the assassination, I sat with Rose and Joe Kennedy at their home in Palm Springs. Mrs. Rose Kennedy said: "I have not heard from 'Mrs. Kennedy' since the funeral.")

Johnson noticed Charles Roberts of *Newsweek* and Merriman Smith of UPI writing the story of the plane trip on typewriters, one of which was borrowed. He stooped over both men and whispered that he wanted all of the Kennedy White House staff and all of the Kennedy cabinet to remain.

Johnson sat with Kilduff and made memorandums on a sheet of paper of personalities

that he should meet at once at Andrews, of others who should be called to his office this evening at the Executive Building office, of what time to have a critical cabinet meeting in the morning. The more ground he covered, the more there was left to cover.

When President Johnson saw Larry O'Brien walking by, he called Kennedy's legislative assistant to his side. "Larry," he said, looking up earnestly from the desk, "you have a blank check on handling this program. Go ahead just as you would have under President Kennedy." O'Brien nodded, and walked on.

The President was conscious that Mrs. Kennedy might, at this time, have composed herself and want to express her wishes. He sent Kilduff aft several times, but there was nothing Mrs. Kennedy wanted from the President. Kilduff felt the stiff politeness of the Clan Kennedy and recognized his role as the emissary under flag of truce.

In the forward compartment, Liz Carpenter worked on the short statement to be delivered by the President on his arrival in Washington. She was block-printing it. Mrs. Carpenter would have liked to have used a typewriter, but she reminded herself that "they are their typewriters. Besides, they make noise." She wished that the Kennedys would understand that the Johnsons had also lost a President. While she wrote, she remembered a ball in the East Room a month earlier. Lyndon Johnson had danced with Jacqueline Kennedy. He knew that Mrs. Kennedy seldom accompanied her husband on trips. The Vice President had put on his best smile. "Why not come to Texas with the President?" he had said. Mrs. Kennedy had wrinkled her nose. "You have never seen a real ranch," he said. She began to brighten. "A real Texas ranch. We're going to bring in some good Tennessee walking horses and have a ranch barbecue..."

"I think I'll go," Mrs. Kennedy had said. "It could be fun."

Liz Carpenter, a woman thinking like a woman, wondered if Mrs. Kennedy felt any gratitude to Johnson for persuading her to go.

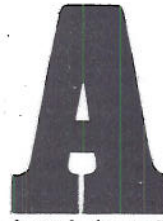
The road to safety, for Lyndon Johnson, lay in immersing himself in work. He had spent a time of terror in that hospital, but it would not happen again. He made decisions. The Kennedy people asked that the press be barred from Andrews. Johnson said no. "It will look like we're in a panic," he said.

The confinement of the Johnsons and the Kennedys in the plane for a period of 150 minutes was sufficient to cleave the families in permanent schism. Johnson was not, and could not, aspire to be "Kennedy people." He could be tolerated as a Vice President because his loyalty to John F. Kennedy was complete and unquestioned. Within the family, only Bobby and Kenny O'Donnell could not abide him as Vice President. To them, he was a rumped wheeler-dealer—part Southerner, part Westerner, with cowdung on his heels. He lacked "class."

Lyndon Johnson must be charged with a lack of understanding of the Kennedy mentality. They required a villain. When their chief fell among the dead roses, the heart of their political cult stopped. They had no standing anymore; no prestige. Many held Johnson in such contempt that they could not endure his offer of resurrection.

In the first moments of Johnson's presidency, he did not feel strong enough to go alone. He needed these people. He was willing to bury his pride in his pocket and tell them

that he required their counsel, their guidance. In spite of his own considerable ego, Lyndon Johnson lacked the confidence of John F. Kennedy. Most of all, Johnson needed a feeling of continuance of administration. And this is what the Kennedys would deny him.



As Air Force One began to descend, the small group in the back of the plane began to plot ways and means of keeping the President of the United States out of the casket photos. The world would be watching, and the Kennedys did not want the Johnsons in their mourning pictures. At one point, when Major General Ted Clifton went aft to ask a question, O'Donnell, sitting opposite the grieving Mrs. Kennedy, said: "Why don't you hurry back and serve your new boss?"

The Secret Service suggested that the new President spend the night at the White House. This was declined at once. Johnson was irritated by the proposal.

"We are going home to The Elms," he said. "That's where we live. If you can protect us at the White House, by God you can protect us at home, too."

The plane came up the taxiway slowly, a huge bug whining and rocking. Johnson had his short statement in his jacket pocket. He had issued an order for a ramp to be brought to the plane. The order stated that the Secret Service men aboard would carry the body of President Kennedy down the ramp. The casket would be followed by Mrs. Kennedy on the arm of President Johnson.

The President looked around as the plane waddled toward the big circle of light, and he wondered where everyone had gone. The cabin was empty, except for a few of his staff. Mrs. Johnson sat gazing out the window at the darkness. In the back of the plane, Kenneth O'Donnell issued his orders. They, too, were explicit. As soon as the aircraft stopped, he wanted the Kennedy group to crowd the rear doorway. They and the Secret Service men would take the coffin out of this exit and down a fork lift. President Johnson was not a party to this plan.

Johnson felt that, as the new President, he should stand behind his fallen chieftain, and he should offer his widow the protection of his person. The Kennedy people felt that this was boorish and overbearing. The plane was still in motion when they formed an unbreakable clot at the rear exit. They knew what was expected of them. In the group were Powers, O'Brien, O'Donnell, McHugh, Mrs. Lincoln, Mrs. Kennedy and her secretary, Pamela Turnure, flanked by Secret Service men.

An engine was still idling, when the President came down the aisle. He found his progress blocked. A male voice from somewhere said: "It's all right. We'll take care of this end." He recognized the humiliation. The plane stopped, and Johnson slowly walked back to the Presidential cabin to join his wife. He was about to take the arm of Mrs. Johnson when he saw Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy running at speed from the front of

the plane to the back. Sadly, the President stuck his hand out and said: "Bob!" The Attorney General ignored the hand and kept running toward the aft section.

Robert Kennedy made it down the aisle of the front cabin, squirming past the people who stood in the aisles, opened the door to the private cabin, and ran straight through. At the human knot, people stepped aside so that Jacqueline could fall into Robert's arms.

The forklift pulled up at the port hatch aft. The operator then pulled the small elevator upward, but it was at least three feet too low. Inside, someone was opening the hatch, and the door swung backward and away. Onlookers saw a group of people squeezed together in the doorway and five Secret Service men, stooping and pushing, shoved the edge of the casket into the doorway. It was caught in the light and everyone below knew that John F. Kennedy was truly dead.

A few men jumped down on the lift. They pulled on the forward handles. Others, at the rear, pushed. The Secret Service wanted to carry the casket. So did O'Brien, O'Donnell, Powers and McHugh. Everybody could not find room around the casket. The men pushed each other. The heavy bronze coffin teetered off the edge of the plane and began to wobble in air. Robert Kennedy watched it, saw the men on the lift catch and steady it; then he dropped nimbly onto the platform. With arms outstretched, Robert Kennedy reached up for his sister-in-law Jacqueline.

She crouched and dropped, and Robert Kennedy held her. The TV cameras caught the scene, saw the pink suit, the stains of blood, the twisted right stocking.

"Will you come with us?" Mrs. Kennedy whispered to her brother-in-law. He nodded. Standing beside the ambulance were the cardiologist, the nurse and driver sent by Captain Canada of Bethesda in case President Johnson sustained a heart attack. They were told that there was no room for them.

Meanwhile the motorcade began to form for the ride into Washington. In the fourth car was George Thomas, the President's valet. That morning, at the Dallas Sheraton Hotel, Thomas had tapped lightly on the President's door. Inside, there was a moment of silence, and President Kennedy muttered, "Okay."

The word had meaning that only the President and his valet would appreciate. In the White House, when Mrs. Kennedy shared her husband's bedroom, a light tap by Thomas would elicit a small cough as response. The tap and cough were designed not to disturb Mrs. Kennedy's slumber. The word "Okay" would signify that Mrs. Kennedy had slept in another room.

Now George Thomas sat silently in a car, wondering what would become of him.

The new President and Mrs. Johnson emerged from the plane. Johnson glanced around grimly, his mouth compressed. They started down the steps. Defense Secretary McNamara shook hands with him. "It's terrible. Terrible," the new President said.

With Mrs. Johnson, he stood before the microphones, rustled a piece of paper and made his brief speech to the nation. Then he took his wife by the arm, entered the Presidential helicopter and sat down wearily. As the greenish craft rose, the President spoke of Dallas as though he were talking of himself. His speech was disjointed. "It was an awful thing . . . horrible . . . that little woman was brave. . . . Who would have thought that this

could happen. You fellows know I never aspired to this . . . Kennedy could do things I know I couldn't. He gathered a fine team of men." Johnson's deep-pooled eyes moved from face to face as they had on Air Force One. "I need you more than he did."

Minutes later Johnson entered the White House. Directly ahead he saw the lighted French windows of the oval office. The drapes were half-drawn. There had been times when, faced with a problem, President Kennedy would turn his stern eyes on his advisers and ask: "Well, what should we do?" Lyndon Johnson always hoped that the President would not ask him first.

Now someone said that Johnson should use the office of the President. "No," he said, "that would be presumptuous." Instead he crossed the street to his office in the Executive Office Building. He went behind his desk, moved all pending papers to one side to clear the blotter, and looked up at the men who stood waiting. He said that he wanted a cabinet meeting for 10 A.M. He was going to require a lot of service tonight, and he wanted no excuses. An aide left to begin phoning the cabinet ministers—some of whom were on a plane coming in from Hawaii.

Johnson was now in command. To prod people, he put on his son-of-a-bitch face. Kilduff, who had worked so hard, was dressed down for not having the casket leave by the front ramp. The President didn't care for excuses; it would have been proper for him to leave the plane with Mrs. Kennedy and the body of John F. Kennedy. Who the hell's idea was it to get that fork lift at the back of the plane?

A Secret Service man informed him that his home phone number at The Elms had been changed. It was now hooked into the White House. "Luci Johnson was picked up at school and is at the house. Lynda is at the home of Governor Connally with the Connally children." It eased his mind to know that the girls were protected; it made him feel better to know that Mrs. Johnson was on her way home. He knew that the scar of that noon would never heal in his wife. The house would be a warm refuge for her.

At one point, while dictating a memo, Johnson lapsed into reverie. He stared at the far wall. "Rufe did a heroic thing today," he murmured. "He threw me down in that car and threw himself on top of me." This was one facet of Johnson's character that few people knew. He was genuinely surprised when someone did something for him gratuitously.

The new First Lady crouched in the back of the limousine. On the other side of the seat, silent, sat her secretary, Liz Carpenter. Mrs. Johnson felt cold. The Secret Service agents up front turned on the heater, but Lady Bird Johnson felt her arms and her knees fall into spasms of shivering, and her teeth chattered. She wished she could be cast into the blackness outside. She was going to have to live with this day, but it would take time.

Now she rode through this darkest of nights without elation. Her husband had become the President of the United States. But was any of it worth the LBJ Ranch? What good could possibly come of leading a nation in an era of chronic tension? What if it broke his health and he had another heart attack?

The car pulled into the drive at 4040 Fifty-Second Street, Northwest. There was a crowd outside. Mrs. Johnson felt small and alone in

the back seat. She thought: *I love this house I love it. Now we'll never live in it again.* Under the dome light at the entrance, she saw the slender figure of Luci. Three Secret Service agents stood in the shadows. "Oh, Mother!" Luci said. Mrs. Johnson pressed Luci in her arms for a moment. "My school said prayers," the girl said.

Mrs. Johnson stepped inside with Luci and was surprised to find people standing everywhere: personal friends, or co-workers, or people important to the administration. As she nodded and summoned her small smile, Mrs. Johnson realized that it would never be quiet and peaceful again.

Luci was prattling, but her mother did not hear the words. Mrs. Johnson, rubbing her wrists, went upstairs with Liz Carpenter. "How do you feel?" Liz said. Mrs. Johnson reached into a closet for a dressing robe and slippers. "I'm freezing," she said. "Please turn that set on. We can watch it up here."

She propped several pillows at the headboard. A great weariness overcame her. There was no sleep in it. Mrs. Johnson phoned Lynda in Texas. She wondered what Luci had been talking about downstairs.

Lynda was saying: ". . . the first thing I did was to go to the Governor's Mansion to be with the Connally children."

Mrs. Johnson nodded. "That was just right, darling." Beneath her massive fatigue, she felt pleased. Her girls had thought of constructive things. One prayed; the other hurried to help Nelly Connally's little ones. Mrs. Johnson glanced at Mrs. Carpenter. "I don't know when he'll be home," she said. "But he'll probably have people with him, and he hasn't eaten yet." The First Lady pulled a quilt over her and felt a spasm of shivering.

In his second-floor office, Lyndon Johnson was bringing an administration to life. "Cliff," the President said to Cliff Carter, "go down the hall and you will find a White House secretary. Ask her for two sheets of White House letterhead and two envelopes."

Johnson was going to write personal notes to Caroline Kennedy and John Kennedy Jr. The new President would tell them how he felt about their father; how proud they should be of him. Johnson did not expect that the notes would mean much to the children now; he was thinking that, when they matured, Caroline and John Jr. might like to know that the President had thought of them on the day their father had been cut down.

Carter walked down the hall. A middle-aged woman was sitting behind a silent typewriter. He asked for the two letterheads and the envelopes. Her mouth became firm. "Who are they for?" she said.

"President Johnson," Carter said. The woman stared at him in disbelief. Then she opened a drawer, and took the stationery out. "Goddamn that man!" she shouted. "The President isn't even cold in his grave yet and he wants to use White House stationery. Goddamn him!"

Carter said thank you, and departed. He never told the President what had happened. Johnson wrote the notes, and asked that they be delivered to the White House at once. It left him depressed. He sat behind the desk, staring at the blotter. The President was thinking of Mrs. Kennedy. He shook his head negatively. "I wish," he said, "that I could reach up and bring down a handful of stars and give them to that woman."

END