

Post Daily Magazine

The Kennedys vs. Manchester

THE SHOWDOWN

ARTICLE V

By WILLIAM H. RUDY

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JACQUELINE KENNEDY returned from a seven-week sojourn in Hawaii last year on July 25. The relative quiet of that month gave way to a tempestuous August.

Serial rights to "The Death of a President" were about to be sold to Look, with Robert Kennedy's approval, and Harper & Row still was working on changes in the text suggested by Kennedy readers. But the readers were to complain that changes agreed to by editor Evan Thomas still had not been made weeks later by Bill Manchester.

The storm started over money. Jackie had been alerted on her return by her press secretary, Pamela Timmins, to the need for changes in the book's text to protect her privacy. She did not get into the dispute herself, however, until after Bobby told her in a phone call on July 31 that Look had obtained the serial rights for \$665,000.

According to Manchester later, "a mushroom cloud appeared over Hyannis Port."

He added: "She was concerned over the sum of money and what she felt was commercialization. Apparently Jackie didn't know the details of the memorandum of understanding between Bobby and me."

"I began hearing rumors of discontent," Manchester told Murray Kempton. "I tried to get in touch with Bobby and talked to his wife and secretary but he never called me back. Then, on Aug. 1, Arthur (Schlesinger) went to Hyannis Port saying he would try to get it all cleared up. He called back and said, 'They're tranquil; they're composed' and I assumed everything was all right."

"Then there started the business of Jackie being against reauthorization. You know, 'The book is all right, but the sensationalism of a magazine is what's wrong.'"

"Then they suggested that I give the magazine fee to the (Kennedy Memorial) library and just take a straight royalty on the book. That seemed to me the strangest thing of all. I'd have been richer that way than any other. I'd be getting \$150 royalty on a \$10 book."

"Of course, we were still cutting. But with these people, when you cut something, nobody ever says 'Thank you.' They look at the rest and try to think: 'What else can we cut now?'"

At about this time, three things happened: Dick Goodwin came back into the picture, now as Jackie's personal reader; former Judge Simon H. Rifkind was retained as her attorney (he recalls it was Look and not Harper & Row, that presented the problem), and Robert Kennedy scheduled a meeting in his Washington office with Manchester, Thomas and John Siegenthaler, who had been representing him in many of the dealings with Thomas.

ON AUG. 18, KENNEDY, APPARENTLY UPSET BY Jackie's objections, wired Thomas that "with the situation as difficult as it is, I feel the book . . . should neither be published nor serialized."

"It just seems to me that rather than struggling along with this any longer, we should just take our chances with Jim Bishop."

This was a reference to an account of the assassination that Bishop planned.

Two days later the confrontation took place in Washington. The airlines strike was on and Thomas and Manchester flew down in a chartered plane. The entire project seemed at a crossroads.

Manchester is described as arriving in Kennedy's office "wearing his PT-109 tie clasp up high, above his



Jacqueline Kennedy

buttoned jacket, like a badge of fidelity." He sat on a chair between two couches occupied by Siegenthaler and Thomas, while Bobby paced about the room much of the time.

The New York Post has been given this account of the meeting:

Manchester, in an attempt to get things going smoothly, remarked: "Maybe we ought to have dueling pistols or something," and added that he had just told Thomas he'd always "had luck working face to face with Kennedys."

The talk went right to the Look contract and money, and Manchester said:

"I've always said I didn't want to make a lot of money. But I'll tell you one thing. I want to be the man who says how much I'm going to give to the library, and nobody should tell me how much."

Manchester told how he suffered during the writing and was under a doctor's care. He said Bobby Kennedy's latest telegram had given him another setback. Finally Bobby said:

"Look, there are two points: One, you told us John (Siegenthaler) and Ed (Guthman) would read everything before it went into Look; two, you told me and Evan told me that the publisher and the author didn't want to get rich off that book."

Thomas spoke up: "Senator, you're absolutely right, and we're now in the process of seeing that the library gets more money."

THE DISCUSSION TURNED BACK TO THE OTHER big issue, the Look text. Manchester said: "Well, Look won't let me make any other changes. I'm tied up."

This was a bombshell. Until then, the Kennedy people say, they had been assured by Manchester that he has "tied the tightest strings in publishing history to serial use of the text."

Siegenthaler got angry, his voice rising: "Now listen, I had an understanding with Evan and you that this was not going to be published on the anniversary

of the President's death. But with seven installments, you'd have the assassination on the stands on the day of the death. This was exactly what you, Evan, said we would be covered against, and what you said would not be done."

Kennedy, pacing about: "I can't believe it, I just can't believe it."

(Harper's had originally planned to publish the book in December, 1966, and since magazine serialization customarily ends at the time of the book's publication, it would have had to start in early fall. Harper's, however, was not a party to the serial contract.)

Thomas, the only calm man in the room, spoke up:

"I'll publish the book any time you want to publish it—or, if you don't want to publish, Senator, that suits me fine. But there's the problem you've got with Look. He's signed away his rights."

Manchester, very agitated: "Well, it won't be on the newsstands at the same time as the assassination. They (Look) don't have a book (an issue) published that week."

Siegenthaler: "Don't ***** me. You know it's going to be on the stands at the same time."

Manchester, on his feet, waving his hands: "Give me the name of the individual to whom I can send my contribution to the library."

Kennedy: "Oh, I guess you can send it to Steve Smith in New York."

Manchester methodically wrote down the name of the Senator's brother-in-law and Kennedy, seeking to keep things quiet, recapitulated. He said to Manchester:

"You told me you didn't want to get rich. You told me John and Ed would have the Look galleys and make changes—and now you're telling me it's going to run that day. Mrs. Kennedy is going to get very upset about this."

His voice rose: "You're telling me you're going to put those magazines on the stand. You're going to hurt Mrs. Kennedy in this way. You've refused to stand by your commitment not to get rich, or you said you wouldn't, and now it doesn't mean anything to you. You're going to put Mrs. Kennedy to great pain, great torture—and all the Kennedys. And I can't—I don't believe Look will do this."

Bobby then changed the subject: "Will you get the galleys to John and Ed?"

Siegenthaler: "If I get them, you won't get them back until next year."

Manchester: "The contract says I have to have it back to Look in five days."

"You've signed this agreement," Bobby repeated to Manchester, holding a copy of the document. "You've signed this agreement and what you've done is gone back on your word. You're distressing Mrs. Kennedy. You're distressing me and all the Kennedys."

"If you really wanted to, you could do something about this. I don't think it serves any purpose in discussing this further so I'm going to leave."

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THOMAS TOLD BOBBY THAT MANCHESTER HAD put two years of his life into the book and ought to be heard out. Manchester said:

"This book has ruined my life. My family life is not the same. I've been under a doctor's care."

Kennedy: "I'm in sympathy with all that. But what I want to know is are you going to live up to that agreement? Evan says he won't publish. If you're just reasonable, you'll get everything you want. But you're going to have to live up to your agreement. You've got to tell Look what's to be done. It is your work."

Manchester: "I can't. Look won't go along. I've got a contract with them."

Kennedy: "You've got a contract with me. You must tell them that. Or tell me who the man up there is and I'll tell him myself. Give me his name. I'll call him now."

Manchester gave the name of John Harding, Look's general counsel, and Bobby got on the phone.

In the sudden quiet, Manchester blurted: "There's something wrong here. This is not the brother of the man I knew. There's something definitely wrong here."

Everyone was embarrassed.

Bobby reached Harding, who stood fast. Bobby then said, "Well, I'll talk to the Cowley family."

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AS THE MEETING ENDED, KENNEDY TOOK

Thomas aside and said: "I think the best thing for us to do is try to get Look to reduce the number of editions, run them at times other than the assassination, and make the corrections."

After Kennedy left the room, Manchester still was saying: "This is not the man. This is the vicious Bobby Kennedy I've been hearing about."

Aboard their chartered plane, The Post was told, Thomas chided Manchester, "Stop acting like an old woman," and the writer is said to have "cried all the way home."

Three days later, before the Look people were over the shock of this meeting, there was a breakfast session with Jackie's lawyer. The first hint of legal action was dropped.

Continued in the Weekend Magazine.