

HE WALKED PAST THE GIRL IN PINK AND TOOK ON THE HOPELESS JOB.

# A DEATH IN EMERGENCY ROOM No. ONE

By JIMMY BRESLIN



Dr. Malcolm Perry was on duty.

The call bothered Malcolm Perry. "Dr. Tom Shires, STAT," the girl's voice said over the loudspeaker in the doctors' cafeteria at Parkland Memorial Hospital. The "STAT" meant emergency. Nobody ever called Tom Shires, the hospital's chief resident in surgery, for an emergency. And Shires, Perry's superior, was out of town for the day. Malcolm Perry looked at the salmon croquettes on the plate in front of him. Then he put down his fork and went over to a telephone.

"This is Doctor Perry taking Doctor Shires's place," he said.

"President Kennedy has been shot, STAT," the operator said. "They are bringing him into the emergency room right now."

Perry hung up and walked quickly out of the cafeteria and down a flight of stairs and pushed through a brown door, and a nurse pointed to emergency room No. 1 and Doctor Perry walked into it. The room is narrow and has gray-tiled walls and a cream-colored ceiling. In the middle of it, on an aluminum hospital cart, the President of the United States had been placed on his back and he was dying while a huge lamp glared in his face.

John Kennedy already had been stripped of his jacket, shirt and T-shirt, and a staff doctor was starting to place an endotracheal tube down the throat. Oxygen would be forced down the tube. Breathing was the first thing to attack. The President was not breathing.

Malcolm Perry unbuttoned his dark blue glen-plaid jacket and threw it onto the floor. He held out his hands while the nurse helped him put on gloves.

The President, Perry thought. *He's bigger than I thought he was.*

He noticed the tall, dark-haired girl in the pink suit that had her husband's blood all over the front of the skirt. She was standing out of the way, over against the gray tile wall. Her face was tearless and it was set, and it was to stay that way because Jacqueline Kennedy, with a terrible discipline, was not going to take her eyes from her husband's face.

Then Malcolm Perry stepped up to the aluminum hospital cart and he took charge of the hopeless job of trying to keep the 35th President of the United

States from death. And now, the enormity of what had happened to John Kennedy came over him.

*Here is the most important man in the world,* Perry thought.

The chest was not moving. And there was no apparent heartbeat inside it. The wound in the throat was small and neat. Blood was running out of it. It was running out too fast. The occipitoparietal, which is a part of the back of the head, had a huge flap. The damage a rifle bullet does as it comes out of a person's body is unbelievable. Bleeding from the head wound covered the floor.

There was a mediastinal wound in connection with the bullet hole in the throat. This means air and blood were being packed together in the chest. Perry called for a scalpel. He was going to start a tracheotomy, which is opening the throat and inserting a tube into the windpipe. The incision had to be made below the small bullet wound.

"Get me Doctors Clark, McClelland and Baxter right away," he said.

Then he started the tracheotomy. There was no anesthesia. John Kennedy could feel nothing now. The wound in the back of the head told Doctor Perry that the President never knew a thing about it when he was shot, either. (The second bullet tore through his cerebellum, the lower part of the brain.)

While Perry worked on the throat, he said, quietly, "Will somebody put a right chest tube in, please."

The tube was to be inserted so it could suction out the blood and air packed in the chest and prevent the lung from collapsing. A transfusion was begun, with O-negative type blood.

These things he was doing took only small minutes, and other doctors and nurses were in the room and talking and moving, but Perry does not remember them. He saw only the throat and chest, shining under the huge lamp, and when he would look up or move his eyes between motions, he would see this pink suit and the terribly disciplined face standing over against the gray tile wall.

Just as he finished the tracheotomy, Malcolm Perry looked up and Dr. Kemp Clark, chief neurosurgeon in residency at

Parkland, came in through the door. Clark was looking at the President of the United States. Then he looked at Malcolm Perry and the look told Malcolm Perry something he already knew. There was no way to save the patient.

"Would you like to leave, ma'am?" Kemp Clark said to Jacqueline Kennedy. "We can make you more comfortable outside."

Just the lips moved. "No," Jacqueline Kennedy said.

Now Malcolm Perry's long fingers ran over the chest under him and he tried to get a heartbeat, and even the suggestion of breathing, and there was nothing. There was only the still body, pale white in the light, and it kept bleeding, and now Malcolm Perry started to call for things and move his hands quickly because it all was running out.

## There was no time

He began to massage the chest. He had to do something to stimulate the heart. There was not time to open the chest and take the heart in his hands, so he had to massage on the surface. The aluminum cart was high. It was too high. Perry was up on his toes so he could have leverage.

"Will somebody please get me a stool," he said.

One was placed under him. He sat on it, and for ten minutes he massaged the chest. Over in one corner of the room Dr. Kemp Clark kept watching an electrocardiogram for some sign that the massaging was creating action in the President's heart. There was none. Doctor Clark sadly turned his head away from the electrocardiogram.

"It's too late, Mac," he said to Malcolm Perry.

The long fingers stopped massaging and they were lifted from the white chest. Perry got off the stool and stepped back.

Dr. M. T. Jenkins, who had been working the oxygen flow, reached down from the head of the aluminum cart. He took the edges of a white sheet in his hands. He pulled the sheet up over the face of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The IBM clock on the wall of the room said it was one P.M. The date was November 22, 1963.

Three policemen were moving down the hall outside emergency room No. 1 now, and they were calling to everybody to get out of the way. But this was not needed, because everybody stepped out of the way automatically when they saw the priest who was behind the police. He was the Rev. Oscar Huber, a small, 70-year-old man. He was walking quickly.

Malcolm Perry turned to leave the room as Father Huber came in. Perry remembers seeing the priest go by him. And he remembers his eyes seeing that pink suit and that terribly disciplined face for the last time as he walked out of emergency room No. 1 and slumped into a chair out in the hall.

Everything that was inside that room now belonged to Jacqueline Kennedy and Father Oscar Huber and the things in which they believe.

"I'm sorry. You have my deepest sympathies," Father Huber said.

"Thank you," Jacqueline Kennedy said.

Father Huber pulled the white sheet down so he could anoint the forehead of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Jacqueline Kennedy was standing beside the priest, her head bowed, her hands clasped across the front of the pink suit that was stained with blood which came from her husband's head. Now this old priest held up his right hand and he began the chant that Roman Catholic priests have said over their dead for centuries.

"Si vivis, ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen."

The prayer said, "If you are living, I absolve you from your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The priest reached into his pocket and took out a small vial of holy oil. He put the oil on his right thumb and made a cross on President Kennedy's forehead. Then he blessed the body again and started to pray quietly.

"Eternal rest, grant unto him, O Lord," Father Huber said.

"And let perpetual light shine upon him," Jacqueline Kennedy answered. She did not cry.

Father Huber prayed like this for 15 minutes. And for 15 minutes Jacqueline

