

Edgartown, Mass.: The Strange Case of Senator Kennedy

By JAMES RESTON

EDGARTOWN, Mass., Jan. 6 —Senator Edward Kennedy begins to look like a man who is finally recovering from a long illness. The visible edginess of last summer is gone. He now seems a little more solid, a little more composed, and a little more patient with the crowds that still point and mutter as he goes by.

Yet one cannot help feeling as he goes through the last legal stages of the Chappaquiddick nightmare that the routine of living for Edward Kennedy is still a very complicated business outside the privacy of his home, and that it probably always will be so long as he remains in public life.

The Calculated Life

He cannot go anywhere now and not feel on display. He is always pretending not to notice the flutter in the crowds around him. He cannot relax into the comfortable anonymity of life. He smiled coming out of the Court House here and somebody wondered out loud: "What's he got to smile about?" He cannot take a drink at a public bar without provoking gossip and he can never say, as all other politicians are

always saying: "I'll cross that bridge when I come to it."

In short, he now leads a *calculated* life. He has to plan his moves, like an actor going on stage, anticipate questions, rehearse answers, and negotiate even his old friends in the press. How will he answer? What will people think? These questions are never far from his mind.

The Security Problem

For example, he didn't go into a public hotel here this time as he did on Martha's Vineyard last summer, and this was not because most of them are closed for the winter. He would not accept the hospitality of friends on the island, but rented a private house where he could be alone with his wife and lawyers, and he flew here in a private plane to avoid reporters who would have been waiting for him if they had known when and where he would land.

The problem of his personal security dramatizes his dilemma. Before the inquiry started here, he sent word to the Chief of Police, Dominic Arena, what he wanted done. He didn't want to be surrounded by cops when he came out of the Court House and hustled into his car. For he knew this would look on television as if he were a criminal

or at least that he was trying to duck the waiting reporters' questions.

He would walk from the Court House to his personal quarters on School Street, he said, and the result was that he plunged into the crowd of questioning reporters and on-lookers where anyone who wished him harm could easily have stuck a knife in his ribs.

This is no melodramatic reflection, but something he can never put out of his mind after the fate of his two brothers. There are people who do wish him harm. The Kennedys have always inspired fierce loyalty and savage hatred, and the tragic history of the family still seems to hold great fascination for people with twisted or deranged minds.

He has become, in short, not only a prominent political figure but a symbol of the tragedy and caprice of life. Accordingly, the press and particularly the television not only cover him but smother him. Seldom in the wonderful goofy history of politics and the press have so many reporters and so much expensive gear been transferred at such cost to cover so little news as in the current Kennedy inquiry.

It is a non-story, held behind

closed doors, to repeat old tales, which few people quite believe anyway, yet it is a ghoulish mystery and even Chet Huntley and David Brinkley thought it more important than any other story in the world on the day the Senator merely went in and came out of a court house door.

The Might-Have-Beens

What one would really like to know is not what he testified but what he thinks. He has chosen to live the calculated life with all its accidents and irritations. Nobody of course is forcing him to go on in politics, nothing perhaps but some sense of duty or ambition, and when the inquiry is over and maybe the grand jury after that, he will be starting out on another long campaign for re-election.

A year ago this campaign in Massachusetts was widely regarded as merely a preliminary to the Democratic Presidential nomination of 1972, and maybe to the Presidency itself, but the tragedy of Chappaquiddick has changed all that. And the paradox of it is that he is probably a more reliable man today than he was a year ago—sadder, wiser, more disciplined, but rejected for the Presidency of 1972 by his party and by himself.