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Bob Considine

Putting You In the Death Car

William Manchester's second installment of "The Death of a President," which appears in the current Look magazine, is a choking shocker. With extraordinary reportorial skill and a clinical detachment that can only add to the total impact, he transports the reader into the death car.

Gov. John Connally, hit in four places by Lee Oswald's ricocheting first bullet, which had first passed through the President's neck, is screaming, "No, no, no, no — they're going to kill us both!" Secret Service agent Roy Kellerman, riding in the front seat, thinks he has heard the President say, "My God, I'm hit!" Mrs. Connally begins to shriek. Jacqueline Kennedy, in a daze, wonders why Connally is shouting.

Secret Service agent Greer, driving the topless Lincoln, glances over his right shoulder and continues to hold a steady course, instead of taking evasive action to avoid any subsequent shot. Everything is happening in split seconds — but that was all Lee Oswald needed.

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MRS. KENNEDY, whose recollections must have reconstructed the scene for Manchester, is turning toward her husband.

"The First Lady, in her last act as First Lady, leaned solicitously toward the President," Manchester writes with frugal but unforgettable use of words for so momentous a point in time.

"She had seen that expression so often, when he was puzzling over a difficult press conference question. Now, in a gesture of infinite grace, he raised his right hand, as though to brush back his tousled chestnut hair. But the motion faltered. The hand fell back limply. He had been reaching for the top of his head. But it wasn't there any more . . ."

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THE AUTHOR is unable to clear up one of the major questions that linger in the wake of the tragedy: Why did Jacqueline Kennedy leave her shattered husband and crawl out on the trunk of the Lincoln as Greer finally reacted and began to race away from the assassin?

Secret Service agent Clint Hill, who had bounded out of a car behind the moment he heard the first shot, was trying to clamber aboard the Lincoln. Its sudden and belated burst of speed tore his foot from the metal step on the rear. He was in danger of being forced to fall off.

"Mrs. Kennedy pivoted toward the rear and reached for him; their hands touched, clenched, and locked," Manchester writes. "It is impossible to say who saved whom. Neither remembers . . . Mrs. Kennedy . . . has no recollection of being on the trunk at all"

Hear Bob Considine on KGO Radio (810) Monday through Friday at 5:50 p.m.