

Secret Talks on The Kennedy Book

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Washington

Direct negotiations were resumed yesterday in a final effort to settle the dispute over William Manchester's "The Death of a President" before what Jacqueline Kennedy has described as a "horrible" court trial.

The negotiations were aimed at striking a compromise that would protect Mrs. Kennedy's privacy while retaining the historical accuracy of Manchester's 700-page account of President Kennedy's assassination.

A source close to the situation expressed optimism that the line-by-line effort to edit the controversial manuscript would succeed. An announcement is expected today.

The negotiations, cloaked by secrecy, took place in the New York offices of Cowles Communications, Inc., which last August purchased the serial rights to Manchester's book. Look magazine, published by Cowles, intends to bring out an 80,000-word version in four parts beginning with the issue to go on sale January 10.

It was understood that Harper & Row, Manchester's publishers, would be willing to incorporate the changes hammered out by Cowles and a representative of Mrs. Kennedy in the 300,000-word version scheduled to be published April 7.

The negotiators were working against a deadline tomorrow, on that date, lawyers for Harper's and Cowles were due to appear in New answer, in a series of legal briefs. Mrs. Kennedy's "threatened publication is in total disregard of my right and, if

it goes forward, will utterly destroy them."

The legal action could cost the Kennedy family as much as \$5 million if it loses the

suit. If Mrs. Kennedy wins an injunction next Tuesday, she would have to post an

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indemnity bond for this amount covering Look's potential losses in advertising, circulation and production costs.

Presumably, the Manchester text would be purged of its description of how her daughter, Caoline, then 5, was told of her father's death by her nurse, Maud Shaw, after Mrs. Kennedy found herself unable to tell the child.

Kennedy's reaction to being informed that Lee Harvey Oswald was identified as her husband's killer.

"That's absurd," she reportedly said. "He didn't even have the satisfaction of being killed for civil rights. It had to be some silly little Communist."

Although it has been previously published, Manchester also notes, in detail, that she used Petroleum Jelly to slip her wedding ring from her finger and to place it on her husband's hand as he lay dying in Dallas.

The ring was later removed from the President's body at Bethesda, Md., Naval hospital, where his body was prepared for burial. Mrs. Kennedy wore the diamond and emerald ring Monday night when she attended a performance of the Broadway musical "Cabaret."

The two men who earlier read "The Death of a President" for Robert Kennedy — Edwin O. Guthman, national editor of the Los Angeles Times and John Seigenthaler, editor of the Nashville Tennessean — let this material stand.

They are known to have felt that, above any question of taste, Manchester's account was relevant, of genuine historical interest and acceptable when viewed within the entire context of the book.