

*LIES YOU CAN'T MAKE UP by James Kent*

# LIES YOU CAN'T MAKE UP

remembering JFK, a play in two acts

by James Kent

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A play in two acts  
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*Two-to-eight actors portray galvanizing characters in this non-linear play with flashbacks and flashforwards. At indicated times they speak as a unified voice, and may be considered a Greek chorus -- which initiated fervent non-linear mantras and morality tales about the complexity and inherent corruption of giving birth and rebirth to democracy.*

*Staging in a black box features a hierarchy of low, medium and high performance platforms. Perhaps intervals of fog suggest a non-place or, specifically, inside the human mind attuned to the American Experience.*

*Act One, Scene One.*

Another

You know exactly. Don't you? Where you were. When it happened.

A Mother

I hate that question.

One Someone

You shouldn't ... hate. He would still be alive. John Lennon, too.

Another

If not for hate.

A Mother

Hate metastasizes. Fear. Even worse.

A Daughter

I shouldn't have been where I was. It never should have happened.

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One Someone

No going back. It was the end of something. Of hope. And trust. Mostly our treasured false sense of security -- from sea to dimming sea.

Distinct Voice

For 'decent white people,' maybe. 'A dream deferred,' was already spoken. Gospel. According to Langston Hughes.

**by Langston Hughes**

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--  
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over--  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

A Mother

Explode. Did rationality abruptly end?

One Someone

Do you seriously believe rationality abruptly began?

A Son

It doggedly persists. In dog years. About every two presidential terms.

A Professional Person

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Elite?

A Daughter

Yes, he was. You're such a professional person.

A Professional Person

True. I legally changed my name to Professional Person. Was JFK elitist?

One Someone

His murderers thought so -- sufficient reason to de-exist him. There are still people who believe if you're intelligent you're gay. Either, definitely both, deserves death.

A Mother

C'mon. You do still believe in the conspiracy theory?

Journalist

You want the same laundry list, Ma? Only a nitwit believes in the Warren Commission. OK, possibly Mrs. Warren. Even the name -- all corrupt. Why not have called it the Warren G. Harding Commission?

Timmy

Right now I'm fifteen. In some ways I'm still fifteen -- going on now sixty-six. Thing is: I met JFK on his campaign -- when I was fifteen. The airport in Paducah, Kentucky. September. Steam rose from the tarmac. An oven. Hot as hell. Kennedy refused to sweat. You could really see him concentrating on it. The crowd -- all in tatters and cut-offs. Yet. Here was this Harvard man with French cuffs. A chalk-stripe suit. My first. He shook my hand. At that precise moment, I thought: Such a light gesture for so strong a presence. I looked deep into his eyes -- he didn't see me. I wasn't tall. He was. His spectrum was the back edge of the crowd, the vanishing point. It was a little like meeting James Bond. He loved Ian Fleming's books. He always needed escape. Funny. I don't recall a single Secret Service man. Not one! Then I realized what it must be like to be so loved and hated -- what every candidate must feel. Far too many handshakes. JFK. His hands felt numb. Could that have been portentous?

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William Goldman

Only in a screenplay. With MTV edits. Oliver Stone's. Mrs. Luce?

Clare Booth Luce

Be kinder than movies. After all, you're William Goldman. I'm more interested in the views of our poet laureate, Richard Blanco.

Richard Blanco

Oh, alright, Clare. But only if people try to become poems. ¡Basta ya!

Oliver Stone

People in the moment. Not many of those. John Kennedy, for instance, lived in the moment. He admired poetry. He was and wasn't those things. He desperately desired a vision to unite fifty countries -- oh, sorry, states.

John Marcellus Huston

Oliver Stone, you're not even Irish.

Oliver Stone

Mr. Huston. I've seen "Sierra Madre" fifty times. I so admire you.

John Huston

Sure. In a soppy Bogdanovich way. Which is his pension.

Oliver Stone

There were no forensic scientists on the Warren Commission, no doctors, no coroners, ballistics experts, no physics experts, and no law enforcement officers. The truth will never be known.

John Huston

Horse feathers. Take it from a dramatist: Nothing lies like the truth. Where do you get off talking about a man you can only composite -- your green-screen tools to exploit JFK? You'd rot without apps. All people choose among distractions. Insight and concentration. Hemingway and Cuba.

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Clare Booth Luce

I'm so glad we can still summon these dead-and-living AA meetings. Thermonuclear War -- if the Russians had fired on Miami, AA meetings wouldn't have skipped a beat. I could've been a playwright. And I was.

A Daughter

Miss Luce, or Mrs. Harriman, you're referring to the Cuba Missile Crisis, aren't you?

Clare Booth Luce

No. I'm sharing a personal moment with myself. It's a sort of Soliloquy.

A Daughter

I meant no intrusion.

Clare Booth Luce

No liquor. It's what makes cocktail parties festive since political correctness. I, Clare Booth Luce, Ambassador to France. The Paris embassy. Charming parties. The champagne was still French not California. Of course, I had to spend my own money to fix up the place. Nothing quite so dreadful as decadent splendor. I remember Letitia Baldrige as Camille. Nearly fainted on a decayed *chaise longue*. Jackie was all encouragement.

Cocktail Waitress (*balancing a tray of empties*)

You're off base. It's the Ouija Board. That's the draw. Not you, Honey. Even if you are the living dead. And a make-believe aristocrat. Where'd you earn your diplomatic stripes? As Winston Churchill's courtesan?

Clare Booth Luce

Exceptional training. Jack and Jackie believed in me. That's all it took. They energized everyone except Khrushchev. Is Kennedy ... alive in your memories, Mr. Times-Slate?

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Journalist

No. Not after you're murdered. Only a murderer supersedes memory.  
Three hundred million guns. Shoot famous, be famous.

A Mother

To the victor belongs the spoils. And what was RFK, 42? How can you  
compare one man's brief spirit to another's ghost without regrets, locked  
away for life?

A Daughter (*excited*)

You must write for the Times editorial!

Journalist (*shrugs*)

And Slate. Mrs. Luce. You guessed.

Clare Booth Luce

Even dead I can't escape Twitter or Facebook.

A Son

You might well know. Is Kennedy still alive in people's hearts?

Clare Booth Luce

Like the 'Queen of Hearts.' Limelight wrecks a girl's complexion. Even Paris  
can be a dead end. Do you know how little space in Père Lachaise there  
was to bury Frédéric François Chopin? The slimmest tombstone. Simply  
reads "Fred Chopin." Must've been buried feet first.

A Daughter

He meant: Is it possible to know him? Or does he sail alone? Since you're  
dead, um, deceased, too, are you and John Fitzgerald Kennedy still pals?

Clare Booth Luce

The other side doesn't work that way, jeune femme. Like the White House,  
there's no single portal. Like sovereign countries, you see. The other side,  
too, has infinite borders. Splayed like the arms of Shiva. It's sort of Hindu.

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A Mother

I don't want to be in dead in India! You mean ... when I die I won't meet Golden Era movie stars? Norma Shearer? Then what's the point of living or dying for that matter?

One Someone

Let's bring back JFK.

A Son

Isn't it insane even to say that? Isn't Homeland Security always listening?

Clare Booth Luce

You who tolerate the democracy of murder are insane.

One Someone

Let's bring him back. To see the mess we're in.

John Huston

'What fools these mortals' -- you think John doesn't already know? What are you people, Vaudevillians?

One Someone

This scene, dream, actors' nightmare -- whatever it is, I pray it ends. Mr. President! Take us away. Maestro. If you please!

*The Chorus choose partners and dance -- do the Twist to Mahler.  
Fade out.*

*Act One, Scene Two.*



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*Clare Booth Luce rushes past wearing a full skirt and straw hat.*

Another

Mrs. Luce, you look years younger.

Clare

Well, I am. Today I'm attending Grace's wedding in Monaco.

A Son

You're not staying?

Clare

Forgive me. The best days are over. Staying where for WHAT?

A Daughter

We don't know. Please stay. We feel as if we're trapped in a play for life.

Clare

If you feel that way, dear, you're probably miscast.

One Someone

But don't you want to see what happens next?

Clare (*leaving*)

No, my dears, it's my upbringing. Only fools and their faces appear in public places.

The Mother

Wish someone had reminded Jack of that.

*Two television cameras swarm around a nattily dressed man, Gore Vidal.*

Off Stage Voice (*posh English accent*)

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But you knew JFK very well. You're related to the Kennedys. Mr. Vidal?

Gore Vidal

I never believed in John F. Kennedy's charisma. He was one of our worst presidents. Robert F. Kennedy was a phony -- a little *Torquemada*, and their father, Joseph P. Kennedy was a crook -- should've been in jail. But John F. Kennedy had great charm. So has Barack Obama. He's better educated than Jack. And he's been a working senator. Jack NEVER went to the office -- he wanted the presidency. And his father bought it for him.

The Journalist

Whose idea was Dallas?

Gore Vidal

Johnson's. Jack never wanted to go. The once 'Solid South' had already trended away from Democrats because of Jack's Civil Rights legislation. But Jackie insisted. She always wanted to be seen the helpful housewife in *haute couture*. So it turned into a parade -- mostly for a pink pillbox hat. She and her clothes were wildly popular at the time. The *first* First Lady with style. Gads. Revolutionary!

Jacqueline Kennedy (*talking on a white phone*)

I launched myself -- my tour of the White House with Charles Collingwood. Oh, I don't know. I had to feel my way into becoming First Lady. I guess I supported Jack. Whenever he ran for any office there were those awkward teas with his mother in Boston. Every woman in Beantown who could afford a hat was invited. Some of the crockery went missing, I think.

But I did try. There was no guide book, no role for a first lady except, well, Dolly Madison, the last woman who tried, you know? Who would I have modeled myself after, Mamie Eisenhower? She was always upstairs -- snockered. Her husband cheated since the war and she actually took it personally. That's how high wattage she was. You won't believe this. She had a sort-of toile dress with images of her smiling self -- in RED toile -- *with* Ike that matched the draperies in ... I forget which room. I just remember my first day ripping those damn things right out of there.

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Anyway, no role model in those times. Family was no help. Most of mine were already gone. Lee was busy being expat princess of a Soviet satellite. Gore hates the Kennedys. Which is OK, really, since he hates everyone. Kidding, right? Gore Vidal, my cousin! I guess my half brother, too.

His own father, also my father, was asked how Gore came by his courage. Gore said he had his number, our father. Hugh Auchincloss said, "Courage about what? It's not courageous if you don't care what people think of you." Gore made me feel like a Philistine, as if I knew nothing.

*She pushes against a small, rustic TV atop a walker.*

Jackie (*continued*)

Oh, no! What's this crap? Not another hack play about Jack! I don't know. Downtown somewhere. Wherever these things happen. Would you like to go with me to the Strand Bookstore? It's on Channel One now. Oh, Mike! What's the problem with it? Why? Because I like 'weather on the

ones.' Oh, NO! It's going to be that terrifying woman reviewer. Oh, you do too, Mike, the one with her hair on fire. I don't agree. She doesn't use her dryer too much, it's her vacuum cleaner. *Now you know who I mean?* What? (laughs) You said that. (*laughs*) "Mother Superior of the theatre."

*A fast cross fade to a woman behind a television news desk.*

Roma Torre (*flat, rapid fire delivery*)

Hello from New York One On Stage, I'm Roma Torre. Yes, it's another play about JFK. Always a docu-paeen to Camelot or, like this one, tries to be a new form; however, it's nothing but another oral biography. Very Condé Nast. Infra-dig quotes squiggled everywhere. But Dominick Dunne didn't write it!

To this reporter, it's just filing not even reporting -- certainly not playwriting! The actors who shall go nameless just phone it in. For my money -- and most people who need theatre can't begin to afford it -- this new JFK play is about as exciting as a fence post. As for a new form, hah! It's exotic as Calico Poi, glug, glug. So would someone kindly connect Japan

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with JFK? Did PT-109 run down Hirohito? More pretentious James Bond political trash from the city that ought to sleep. That's a wrap!

*She drains a tall cardboard cup of Starbucks. She looks blank at a switched off camera -- she assumes. She puts her feet on the desk. In what might at first seem like a monologue, she yammers to her earpiece, to her producer.*

I'm Catholic, too, and I lived on Long Island so I oughta know morals from JFK. They never mention Marilyn or they never mention anything else! All I get to perform now is myself, background in movies, reviewing movies or playing Channel One reporter. Endless. Did you know my Ed and I started a theatre in Boston that lasted three years? Yeah, we did. And heaven only knows I did my share of acting Off-Broadway ... before television called.

Roma Torre (*continued*)

WHAT? What do you mean, I'm live? You mean NOW? There's no light on the camera. This mike is live? Of course I care! Why can't you edit this out? You mean I'm STILL live? What glitch? I'm voicing over Starbucks?

Jacqueline Kennedy (*still on the phone*)

She voiced-over Starbucks? Damn, Mike, I missed the whole thing. A helicopter flew over this building. Penthouses are so noisy. No, you may NOT use that as a line in your next scathing movie! Some people already think I'm Mrs. Robinson. Just say the air is thin at the top like your hair -- you don't always have to be original. Are you both coming to the Vineyard this weekend? Then whadayawanna do? Go places or just flop?

*Jackie does her bye-byes and hangs up the phone as Caroline enters the reception room. She jumps on the overstuffed sofa and cuddles next to the fireplace.*

Caroline

I love to flop here. Have you painted the walls in twenty years?

Jackie

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Course not, Caroline. How bourgeois. I paint paintings.

Caroline

Mom, you're not Katharine Hepburn in 'West Side Waltz.'

Jackie

You're right. I'm 'The Mad Woman of Chaillot.' You just missed John.

Caroline

No. We kissed in the lobby. I miss him. He's in such demand.

Jackie

He is, yes. Such a strange story. He left his staff at George and deadlines just to tell me.

Caroline

Do I want to hear this? John has nothing but strange stories.

Jackie

I believe this one.

Caroline

That's too bad. Oh, I believe John believes. He's like Father. That's where his charisma comes from -- that prepossession. It's also why he's publisher of a slick -- ostensibly about nothing. Except what he likes, of course.

Jackie

Are you and I so different?

Caroline

John's all Catholiced up. He owns more scary stories than the Convent of the Sacred Heart. So many Dorothys where Kansas meets Park Avenue, all imbued with the notion they're better than Episcopalians. And their daughters can't keep their hands off him.

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Jackie

Before either of you were born Jack and I stayed at the Carlyle when we came to town. Delightful, naturally. Now, only the Waldorf comes up to Secret Service snuff -- with that Aztec maze below. The service used to accommodate the president -- not his fleet of SUVs.

Caroline

OK. You want to spill. What did John tell you?

Jackie

He and Princess Diana spent the night at the Carlyle.

Caroline

Spent the night. Spent the night? What do you think?

Jackie

Caroline, I'm just his mother. Obviously, I have no opinion.

Caroline

Sure you do. Didn't John ask your opinion? No? He didn't?

Jackie

OK. It's a scary story. It's scary because it was a one-night stand.

Caroline

Yes. That's how Diana Spencer feels about it.

Jackie

You know about this? You know Diana Spencer?

Caroline

Mother, I'm educated. From a good home, right? I know people. I also know La Spencer is into dread. And superstition. Worse than Nancy Reagan and her fortune teller. Really a shame. John is so in the moment.

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Jackie

Does John know you know?

Caroline

God, no. So far, no. I don't think he'll tap my wire.

Jackie

Whatever the outcome and there will be none with Diana because they're much too much alike -- how could she divorce Wales to marry a Catholic?

Caroline

Hope it was a good shag. She should rejoice. He's our prince. He'll be president.

Jackie

If he isn't killed.

*Caroline wraps a lumbar pillow around her ears.*

Jackie

Lee's first marriage was to Michael Temple Canfield, publishing exec.

Caroline

Mother why are you abruptly bringing up Aunt Lee?

Jackie

What have we ever been too much of but family? You're named after her, Caroline Lee.

Caroline

Puh-leze.

Jackie

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Michael Canfield had been adopted as an infant by Cass Canfield, the publisher. He was actually the son of Kiki Preston. Remember?

Caroline

Mommy, how could I? She died a millenium before I was born.

Jackie

Not exactly. She jumped out a window of the old Stanhope Hotel -- a few blocks south of that window. Notorious socialite. In Paris she was "The girl with the silver syringe." It was rumoured Michael's biological father was Prince George, Duke of Kent, later King George V.

Caroline

Rumoured. Why bring this up? It's so..... What's the difference anymore between the truth and a lie?

Jackie

Well, let's see. After Lyndon was president he told the Greek Ambassador: 'Fuck your parliament *and* your constitution.' Ari was surprised I already knew that. Truth is told over and over. Interpreted. Revisited. Revised.

Caroline

Recycled. Like a whispering parlor game. Truth is too incredible to be a lie.

Jackie

Incidentally, it was a ménage a trois with Kiki, Prince George and Jorge Ferrara, the bisexual son of the Argentinian Ambassador to England. This isn't gossip. This is history.

Caroline

You say that like there isn't a difference. What if there isn't?

Jackie

I'm a pretty good editor. What's the most valuable biographical material?



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Caroline

Hold on. They taught this at Radcliffe or Harvard. Or was it Columbia? I'm kidding. Primary Source.

Jackie

That's you and me. We've been front and center for many world changing events.

Caroline

I blush to defer. You, Mother, have. Absolutely no one could dispute that.

Jackie

OK. Let's say it's me. But what if I'm wrong! What if I didn't see and hear what was going on around me? I was greeted by hundreds of thousands of Parisians ... yet all I truly remember is my feet itched.

Caroline

Time out. What are we talking about?

Jackie

Prince George's father, Duke of Windsor, later King Edward VII agreed.

Laura, Duchess of Marlborough, Canfield's second wife, also believed it.

Caroline

Primary Sources. After a sticky romp did they shower together before all the king's men played polo? Skip that. If this is another verifiable lie, then Aunt Lee's first husband would also be a first cousin of the present Queen.

Jackie

He divorced Lee in '59, the same year she married your Uncle Stan, Prince Radziwill, *also* a cousin of the Queen. Meanwhile Kiki plunged al fresco onto the dessert cart in front of the Stanhope. Who's to say? The only logical part of this is the Stanhope, darkened by disgrace, immediately went co-op. Naturally the cafe vanished. Sad, really. I did so love to lunch there.

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Caroline

Cozy. The fire. But the reason I flopped here is to learn how John is connected to the British Royal Family. As an Irish Catholic.

Jackie

I never said he had been.

Caroline

What then?

Jackie (*laughs*)

That's what's so funny.

Caroline

Really. You could let me in on it.

Jackie

He's been 'related' to the British Royal Family since the night he parted the sheets with Princess Diana. Wouldn't in the least surprise me in if she gives birth to a very handsome second son one day who looks nothing like Wales.

Caroline

Seems unlikely. Just one toss in the hay?

Jackie

Highly marriageable English noblewomen have a penchant for getting knocked up following each climax. Horsey dames -- it's in their DNA. Speaking of straw in the hair, the Spencers have been shepherdesses for five hundred years. And most of their dearest friends are in foal. Any English countess who can mount can at least serve as midwife. Fecund.

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Caroline

OK. Here's what you're really saying. Who is more attentive to this lovely, beautiful woman, John or Charles?

Jackie (*sighs*)

My point.

Caroline

I finally see. It did require an instant global search without an app. Have you had very much espresso? Crazy, this. What are hinting? Should we go into hiding or call Billy Norwich? Do magazines still print blind items?

Jackie

Do you do Bookface with him or linkety-link?

Caroline

Pardon me, Mother?

*There is a stack of leather-bound jewelry boxes on an end table.*

Jackie

I've misplaced my hand mirror, Caroline. What do you think of these earrings? Do I know Billy Norwich?

Caroline

I don't think so. You'd remember. He's unforgettable since he's everywhere. We were so briefly introduced. Since that time I always profess to him my early Alzheimer's -- hoping he'll print it. But I think he sees it as a sick joke -- which of course it is. Still I thought it might appeal to him since he does 'jaded' better than anyone on the Upper East Side.

Jackie

NO! Not possible. There are thousands of those jalopies. Do these look any better?

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Caroline

Fewer diamonds, Ma. C'mon. It's still early (*yawns.*) Anyway Norwich has studied everyone and even some of their husbands.

Jackie

And does he want it badly?

Caroline

Inside the Room? He so wants to be among if not one of them. But which room?

Jackie

Am I picking up a low self-esteem vibe? Is that all he does? Not a single screenplay?

Caroline

Oh, I'm sure he must. Everyone has at least one of those. Why do so many people on this street seem to have read Alice too many times? Or not enough? Damn. We're back to gossip. Please stop with the earrings?

Jackie

How much history have you read?

Caroline

Enough to know the difference between what takes place in the room versus desperately trying to get a glimpse.

Jackie

This room for instance. Is this the 'room'?

Caroline

With you in it? How can it not be?

Jackie

I've never asked you this. What do you remember about visiting the Oval Office?

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Caroline (*gasps*)

I didn't even know it was the 'Room.'

Jackie

Power. With an Appalachian rocking chair ... I gave him for his bad back.

Caroline

When your little brother is busy trying to find ways to take your father's desk apart..... Power. No. It never occurred to me.

Jackie

You could always walk into the room, that's why. Where did we live?

Caroline

It was a little like this place.

Jackie

I bought the 1040 Penthouse on Fifth.

Caroline

It's seamless. I was so young when we moved in here. Before that I thought we rented a penthouse atop a government building.

Jackie (*smiling*)

The White House.

Caroline

John and I talk about it. We thought we visited. Once we even melted into the crowd and took the White House tour. Tourists rip off thousand dollar passamenterie -- drapery tassels. You knew that? Anyway, the Chief Usher snagged us.

Jackie

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Most of the time you were someplace else. Carefully chosen. Just the three of us. Painting in Nantucket. You couldn't see the Secret Service.

Caroline

Yeah, that's how it was.

Jackie

I planned it that way. It wasn't easy.

Caroline

I'm sure it wasn't.

Jackie

I was very determined in those days. I knew what I was doing. Even if I did make it too convenient for Jack and the Rat Pack. No matter. If you remembered the White House at all it would always be as Daddy's Office.

Caroline

But! Those caverns below. John and I knew they were there. We made up scary stories to help us sleep.

Jackie

But you were never, never there. That's the escape hatch or booby trap. And quite a bit more.

Caroline

I can't say why. I still knew he was president. I did. I did know. I just didn't know what it meant. Suits and ties -- what little girls remember about their daddies' offices. Oval. That shape made the biggest impression.

Jackie

John told me you thought it looked like the fishbowl upstairs?

Caroline (*laughs*)

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In the penthouse? Yeah. Weird. Fishbowl existence. Kids know everything except that they know they know.

Jackie

You mean conscience? You were closer to angels than to human beings.

Caroline

I felt it for many years. How to thank you for that?

Jackie

You were too young, vulnerable to form a conscience in the White House.

Caroline

Then I never really knew where I was!

Jackie

It's delicious isn't it, being loved and cared for -- protected from danger. I got a second chance with Ari.

Caroline

He was having a fling with Aunt Lee. She never really forgave you.

Jackie

We both had more than anyone I know. What joy was to me was always a burden to her. Ari was really nothing more than another argument over toys or ponies. People don't change essentially. So competitive of me. She was so tired of hiring publicists she became one.

Caroline

Maybe this is why I don't go to movies anymore. The scenes are too short.

Jackie

You reach your conscience at seven in time for the second sacrament, Holy Communion.

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Caroline

I wasn't quite seven but I knew what the parade meant. Jon-Jon called it a 'parade.' It was his third birthday, the day he was trying to understand why he was saluting. You've always been expert at creating iconic moments.

Jackie

I'm dedicated to the idea the English don't own a patent on pageantry.

Caroline

Fashion, ritual, tradition. Where to be and when and what to say.

Jackie

No one else had done it before me. I found my role too late. But I'm no Audrey Hepburn. Now there's a woman with grit and class.

Caroline

Look at this place. A testament to the composition of your priorities.

Jackie

Funny, hm? I was a professional photographer. Well, no. I wasn't but I lied and fumbled through it. I was really a reporter but you had to do both jobs. I realized photography was meaner and leaner than painting. Powerful. I deconstructed people. Long before it became fashionable.

Caroline

That's how you met Daddy. Did you come away with his story?

Jackie

I believed he believed in his own destiny. And we were both right. We were never apart, really, after that. The wedding in Newport. The Hammersmith Farm. Thousands of guests. Meyer Davis Orchestra played 'I Married an Angel.' See those photos on the piano?



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Caroline

I have them memorized.

Jackie

Before you and John -- the happiest day of my life. I've never worn so much Irish lace. And I don't even know where it is! There must be three tons of treasures, lost boxes and whole crates between so many moves. I suppose 'destiny' is good a word as any.

Caroline

Weren't we taught at Sacred Heart -- that fate and destiny were in league with fortune telling and astrology?

Jackie

Back when they had nuns there, they tried to form a pure conscience.

Caroline

I don't think a clear conscience is possible now.

Jackie

It's *always* been close to impossible. After Dealey Plaza our well scrubbed faces never get completely clean. There. That's a close-up primary source epiphany as you're likely to find. The country, the world -- stunned. Nothing like it since the Lindbergh baby: the Dallas Mob killing your daddy because of a thing.

Caroline (*hesitates*)

Thing.

Jackie

Politics! This thing -- Bay of Pigs. Civil Rights. Defense contracts. That thing -- your Uncle Bobby chasing down Jimmy Hoffa. A deeply envious, paranoid Dallas Cabal meeting at Clint Murchinson's high-rise office in a

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gated low-rise community. My God, it's more secure than Camp David. He used a first floor apartment as his special office -- reserved for below-the-belt deal making. Weirdly, floors above, always in her own world, retired Greer Garson entertained old Hollywood chums, at home with *her* oil tycoon.

Jackie (*continued*)

Murchison gathered the whole lot -- racists, radical Miami Cubans. LBJ *and* Nixon. The night before they planned to blast Jack's brains from his skull, their unified hatred could've fueled Project Mercury. It's no quiz.

Caroline

Still ... most people treat it as a mantra: Who killed JFK?

Jackie (*sits next to Caroline*)

Nearly everyone important to eliminate him and too morally feeble to care.

Caroline

How do you teach me to transcend the incredible, the lies no one can make up? You have. I don't know how. It's you. Beyond 'unique' has anyone ever defined you? I love you and I'll never really understand you ... your equilibrium. You've lived on the world stage most of your life.

Jackie

I'm an amateur. Callas could've handled my life better. Ari should've stuck by her. Greeks are trained to take on high tragedy.

Caroline

Ari, Alexander, Cristina -- the list goes on.

Jackie

Except they take tragedy literally. They don't disappear into the wings. They die. As George Burns says, "I don't want to die. It's been done." I met Groucho once.....

*LIES YOU CAN'T MAKE UP by James Kent*

Caroline

I go home to the wonderful man I married. He teaches me, too. Ed taught me to stay near myself -- even nearly myself. And I have you and John.

Jackie

And when we're gone?

Caroline

I wouldn't be here now living in the moment if I looked into a crystal ball. I'll leave that to Nancy. Ed and I have a lot of work to do. We're getting smarter at helping people with what they need.

Jackie

Tenn Williams's line for beleaguered Blanche duBois. Help me.

Caroline

My degree is in law.

Jackie

Typical Kennedy. Ah. *(turns away from Caroline)* "Suddenly, there's God."

Caroline

Mother! Have you been inside too long again? You're running a high cabin fever! This is like Alice down the Vanity Fair hole.

Jackie

Why did you mention that? Oh my God.

Caroline

Mommy, I'm sorry. What did I say?

Jackie

That JFK play. They're at him again!

*LIES YOU CAN'T MAKE UP by James Kent*

Caroline

Who? Who's at him? What are you-- Where?

Jackie

Some basement somewhere. Ultra creative. The walls painted with dirt.

Caroline

Really must go. What's your game plan for today? How 'bout Eggs Benedict with me right now at Nectar's on 79?

Jackie (*glancing at her watch*)

I was dragged by the hair for tea at Sign of the Dove, ghastly place. No one makes conversation. F.A.C.S. faces. The mouths ... don't move. For my sins Nan Kempner, whom I scarcely know, is on her way over to stack then organize my sweaters -- by "tonalities." Apparently it's her best event.

Caroline

I'm outa here!

Jackie

Kiss first. Women's Wear should never have called me a clothes horse. That was unkind. Pure Onassis envy. Don't you agree?

Caroline

Nan Kempner will sort you out. Tomorrow, Mom! Love you!

*Fade to black.*

*Act One, Scene Three.*

*LIES YOU CAN'T MAKE UP by James Kent*

*People everywhere. They push prams. Carry briefcases or groceries. A delivery guy on a bike. A man with a taxi light on his head. New York. A typical day in.....*

*Each line belongs to an unnamed character, the aforementioned Chorus.*

You can't make it up.

Only in New York.

Taxi!

"Sit on a park bench like bookends. How terribly strange to be seventy."

We're STANDING on a park bench, afraid of bed bugs.

How long ago was that Simon and Garfunkle concert in the park?

September 19, 1981. Don't ask a Google question. You show your age.

Truth is we're old timers. The real truth is we were fifteen watching the Kennedy/Nixon debates. Fifteen then was twenty-five now.

Fifty years later, we're all of sixty-five. Yeah. Old timers!

First campaign in modern times that was as important as the candidates. First election with style. Revived bumper stickers. A new 'New Deal.'

Think so? I'd say the first modern election with narrative: 'The New Frontier.'

Versus what? 'They pummeled my black Cadillac in Nicaragua'?

*LIES YOU CAN'T MAKE UP by James Kent*

Just as down on his luck as Nixon, Brando does the film version called 'The Ugly American.' Americans, especially Vets, incensed by the title.

First time we lovable folks ever thought of ourselves as anything except the world's savior.

You mean the world's cop.

Flower-power trash. We weren't all hippies, you know.

What came after the Dawning of Aquarius?

Kent State without a cast party.

Fifty states or countries? How do you win a national election without stealing it? Has anyone won the White House with completely honesty?

George Washington. The capital was still New York.

Don't know but no one ever will again.

Starting with the over-rehearsed conventions.

Donate all that Super-Pac money to starving American kids.

Elections are clown shows. And clowns are scary.

You'd have to fiddle with the Electoral College. Think they're up to that task, the 113th Congress? HAH.

Wasn't Eisenhower in office forty decades?

Seemed like it. Change in the air? We were asphyxiated by entrenched conformity. Then carbon emissions. Closing ranks -- no legs crossed.

White men only. For every action, including no action there was--

*LIES YOU CAN'T MAKE UP by James Kent*

A reaction. Pollock, Brubeck, Rothko, Bird. Kerouac, Ginsberg, Presley.

We were pulling apart.

We were pulling each other apart.

Oh, come now. We haven't been put back together since the Civil War.

I hate paradigms.

The big picture -- wide screen is just letterbox. History is boring.

Except mine.

The start of the Culture Wars -- that was the Kennedy-Nixon clash of wit versus deadpan.

Kennedy's strength was this: He was a writer. Obama, too.

Suddenly we had candidates who not only read but also wrote books.

JFK's 'While England Slept.' And 'Profiles in Courage'.

Oh, really? And just how did he show courage for the Bay of Pigs?

True. Anyway, I don't vote for authors. I want a president.

Athletic and intellectual.

Still sounds elitist. No one paid attention to me in Toledo until Karl Rove knocked on my door. Recognized him immediately from Fox.

It's on 24-7 in my house. My son can eat a w-h-o-l-e cake.

Back then, television was still new. Republicans didn't take it seriously.

The Internet is still new. Republicans didn't take it seriously.

*LIES YOU CAN'T MAKE UP by James Kent*

STOP. There are too many talking heads. The U.S. is a nation of critics.

Addicted to apps, everyone. We choose among distractions, to proffer judgmentalism. Seething for our fifteen seconds. The Twitterazzi.

Wouldn't know content if it hit 'em like a book in the face.

From a grassy knoll?

You ought to be arrested. Probably you will be. Probably everyone will.

No matter. Content is dead. Publishing is dead.

From apps? What would it be now? The Gettysburg Tweet?

From publishers publishing so many awful books. Gore Vidal said so.

Speaking of Culture Wars, how many Americans read more than fifteen books last year?

I'd say 80%.

Closer to 10%. The 47% work two-to-three jobs. Would Americans even consider such a non-mediocre candidate today?

STOP. Wouldn't we rather lie in a hammock and dream of what might've been?

You mean eight years of President Kennedy?

No Vietnam War. Twenty-two million Asians dead, fifty thousand American soldiers. He said the U.S. couldn't win it! That it wasn't ours but theirs.

How far did Eisenhower lead Korea? What good came from that war?

JFK, the first modern president offended by a war legacy.



*LIES YOU CAN'T MAKE UP by James Kent*

U.S. Education would be highest in the world. Curricula based on true knowledge without constantly vomiting the Scopes Trial.

Popular support for the arts and sciences.

A college education or equivalent as an inalienable right.

Infrastructure not about to collapse around the country. Respect for the ecostructure.

Climate Change repelled.

Discovery of cancer, then a cure.

A gap year like the English only through Peace Corps service.

Poverty obliterated.

Satire that doesn't open and close on the same night.

I admired Jacqueline Kennedy until she married that Greek guy.

How'd she get away with that?

There was no 'Live from New York: It's Saturday Night!'

What's a Greek chorus in America?

Laugh-In.

What's Laugh-In?

Some old fart show. Wait. Old farts are the only theatregoers who can afford tickets to plays.

*LIES YOU CAN'T MAKE UP by James Kent*

Re-enact the assassination today on Broadway, you'll need the limousines on stage.

No. They'd have to fly.

STOP.

Man, you are such a drag.

No wonder theatre can't pay for itself. A play about JFK? A mere tribute? Without the sex and violence?

You can't find enough of that? We didn't think that way then. It was a fresh start from the General of the Army.

Not a redux of Oliver Stone's JFK.

The Zabruder tape is on the Internet. His life was far more than losing his life.

In an indelibly unwatchable way we nevertheless can never forget.

Not a play about sex and violence. JFK had a LIFE.

We didn't know anything about JFK back then.

And now we do? Most of his archives -- in Boston or D.C. -- a lot of juicy stuff is still off limits -- even to scholars. Wait till 2027.

Have you read 'Listening In'?

Yeah, it wasn't Nixon who was the paranoid audio tape freak.

John Kennedy taped every conversation, meeting and phone call.

Jacqueline Kennedy made tapes of her own only months after she cradled her husband's head with a quarter of his brain on the upholstery.

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Renowned historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. interviewed her.

Since then the tapes have been sealed in a vault at Kennedy Library, Boston, and ordered by Mrs. Kennedy to remain secret for another fifty years.

Now, seventeen years after the enigmatic Mrs. Kennedy died of cancer, her daughter Caroline has chosen to release the tapes. They reveal her staunch belief Johnson and a Texas Mob including oil tycoons orchestrated the murder of the President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Here's what we do know about LBJ -- largely ignored news from Texas.

Never mentioned in school textbooks, and most of those are published in Texas -- a Texas Grand Jury officially indicted and found LBJ GUILTY as a co-conspirator in the following nine murders.

The killing of Henry Marshall.

The killing of George Krutelnik.

The killing of Ike Rogers and his secretary.

The killing of Harold Orr.

The killing of Coleman Wade.

The killing of Josefa Johnson. She was LBJ's own sister.

The killing of John Kinser.

And, yes, the killing of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Why? What was LBJ's motivation?

The toxic relationship began at the Democratic convention.

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JFK couldn't win on the first ballot because LBJ had been a much more powerful senator. It's a warning: He may easily have been the most powerful senator in U.S. history. Since Caesar senators still bear knives.

Reps and Senators can run till they drop. The Supreme Court is for life. So much importance placed on the president. In reality, it's now a constitutional monarchy -- except legislators and justices are the royals.

It wasn't always this way.

After FDR died during his fourth term, Congress led by bitter Republicans changed a clause in the U.S. Constitution. No one could run for president more than twice. And no more suspense.

Result? 'Lame Duck Presidency' -- the first time this term was used.

Evelyn Lincoln, JFK's secretary, said it started at the convention.

Evelyn Lincoln

'In the room at the Biltmore Hotel, they were huddled together closely on the bed, discussing LBJ. Bobby would get up, look out the window and stare. John would sit there and think. It was an intense 30 minutes. How to maneuver to get it so Johnson wouldn't be on the ticket.' It was blackmail or my name isn't Evelyn Lincoln. The malicious rumors were fed to LBJ by J. Edgar Hoover about Jack Kennedy's womanizing. LBJ and Hoover had boxed him into a hole." But Johnson was top dog, THE Lone Star senator.

The vice-presidency comes with a murky job description in the Constitution. Until Mondale, he did little more than ribbon cutting, attend state funerals --perform ceremonial tasks.

Johnson couldn't take it -- he was outraged. Limited to handing out autographed pens -- the way Rudy Vallee used to tip -- it humiliated him. He had no Constitutional authority. He'd been unofficial King of Congress.

This he NEVER forgot: Traveling on Air Force Two to Scandinavia, the U.S. embassy sent an uncoded telegram. Everyone could read -- nothing

*LIES YOU CAN'T MAKE UP by James Kent*

Johnson said should be interpreted as representing the American government.

That's where the pin dropped!

Days after Kennedy was buried, Johnson proudly told his girlfriend, Madeleine Duncan Brown, "Those SOB's Will Never Embarrass Me Again."

*Blackout. Four gun shots in the dark.*

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