

ACT I SCENE V

ROBERT KENNEDY sits at his desk. Standing around him are CONNALLY, MOYNIHAN, and MCNAMARA. The faint sound of a TV newscaster can be heard reading off results from the night's midterm elections.

NEWSCASTER

We can now say, at 3 A.M. here on the East Coast, that with reasonable certainty Governor Ronald Reagan of California has held on to his Governorship against close ally of President KENNEDY, Jesse Unruh.

KENNEDY

Well, this night has been one for the history books.

CONNALLY

Books that'll be written by the Republicans at this rate.

MOYNIHAN

You think they didn't like our Poverty tours?

MCNAMARA

Was our policy in Vietnam not messaged well?

CONNALLY

Look at our losses in the South, Christ.

KENNEDY raises his hand to silence the voices around him.

KENNEDY

Gentlemen, we can't say we didn't expect this. Tonight was tougher than most. But every President faces a midterm wave against them, this is nothing new. The worst thing we could do is overreact and make it seem like we don't have control over the situation.

CONNALLY

Did we really expect carnage on this scale? With this many losses? We haven't lost Congress yet, but look at the governorships! The state legislatures! They don't like what we're doing out there, we have to try something different.

KENNEDY

No.

MOYNIHAN

Mr. President-

CONNALLY

No? How can you say no when our boys are being slaughtered? My people. The backbone of this goddamned party for a hundred years and you're leaving them all out to dry? To die like dogs?

MCNAMARA

The slaughter is in Vietnam, Mr. President. September's casualty reports.

MCNAMARA hands KENNEDY a piece of paper. KENNEDY looks it over as CONNALLY continues rambling. He struggles to finish the brief before needing to wipe his eyes.

CONNALLY

After everything we've done for you? Put up with you and the way you treat our interests about preserving our way of life? Why I ought to—

MOYNIHAN

If I may, Mr. President, neither party rewarded their fringes tonight. The center held. If we want to get reelection back on track we should move some of your messaging from your bolder ideas to more reasonable ones. National unity. Creating good jobs. No more pie-in-the-sky bills.

KENNEDY

Hm.

MCNAMARA

Peace in Vietnam, how we can't expect a withdrawal until—

KENNEDY

Do as you wish, gentlemen. I'll be speaking to the press tonight.

KENNEDY gets up from his desk and walks off stage. The three remaining men are in shock. After a few seconds, they frantically chase after him, begging for his attention.

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ACT II SCENE IV

ROBERT KENNEDY sits alone at his desk. The red phone rings. Across the stage, a beleaguered RUSSELL LONG waits patiently for the President to pick up. KENNEDY holds the phone up to his ear and answers.

KENNEDY

Russell, any good news?

LONG

Mr. President, these polling numbers against Rockefeller, they're... well they're dismal. He's beating you in the West, the Plains, the Great Lakes. Christ, he's even making New York look close. It can't go on like this.

KENNEDY looks calm as he absorbs the information. When LONG finishes, he motions to put down the phone, but hesitates. He continues.

KENNEDY

Hm. Well certainly Tower doesn't seem to be dragging Rocky down where we thought he would.

LONG

That's correct, Mr. President.

LONG pauses. Now tapping his foot, he waits a moment before speaking again.

LONG

Mr. President, we've been needing to talk for a while now. About my role in this administration.

KENNEDY

Hm.

LONG

I've seen how the White House has changed over the past two years. The relationship you have with BYRD... my people at the Naval Observatory feel left out. I can't help but think- I'd be of more use to you in the Senate than as Vice President.

KENNEDY once again puts on a calm demeanor as he listens to LONG. He speaks.

KENNEDY

If that's what you wish, Russell. I don't want this to be a messy process.

LONG

No sir. And I believe that BYRD would be a good fit to replace me.

Panic begins to set in. The audience can see it in KENNEDY's eyes. The South is playing him like a fiddle.

KENNEDY

Well if that's what you wish, Russell. I, uh, I suppose I should call up BYRD's people and, uh, let them know the good news then.

LONG

I suppose you should.

KENNEDY

Hm.

LONG

Take care of yourself, Mr. President, and good luck on your reelection campaign.

KENNEDY

Thank you, Russell.

KENNEDY hangs up the phone. He buries his head in his hands and groans. He remains in this pose for a few seconds before picking up the phone to call Senate Majority Leader BYRD.

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ACT II SCENE IX

A crowd surrounds KENNEDY. Each member of the crowd is holding signs for either KENNEDY and Ralph Yarborough, KENNEDY's chosen Senate candidate to replace John Tower. One sign reads "DALLAS LOVES YOU BOBBY!" A light version of KENNEDY's lemotif plays in the background. Suddenly, a man in a trench coat emerges from the crowd and points a gun at KENNEDY.

KENNEDY  
Oh.

The music cuts out. The gun clicks. No shot is fired. The absence of a loud bang is noticeable. The ENSEMBLE screams. They crash into KENNEDY like a tidal wave on the shore. KENNEDY stands up, unscathed, spotlight shining down on him, as the crowd prepares to rush in. The ENSEMBLE freezes.

KENNEDY  
Jack. Jack, I'm so sorry. Why are we doomed by fate? Why is our family nothing but the violence that stalks us? Why did God choose to take you and not me? Why does he choose to spare me now when he did not spare you? And what will this violence make of me, as a man? They'll always remember this moment. The moment when Bobby Kennedy almost was slain in the same city as his brother was five years before. They'll always speculate on what could have been. They won't remember what I've done for this country. What I've done for the poor, and black folks, and native americans. They won't remember my Presidency. The progress we've made. The lives we changed. But they'll always remember the click of the gun in my face and the screams of the crowd as they thought, for a moment, that they had lost another member of the Kennedy family.

A member of the ENSEMBLE comes up behind KENNEDY and puts a crown of thorns on his head.

KENNEDY  
And this— they'll fashion me a King for this. A living God. For surviving. An electoral coup, a landslide. And for what? For nothing I had any kind of control over. For the fact that I am a Kennedy and that death stared me in the face, and I survived. Future generations will invoke my name, the click of the gun, to justify whatever their heart's content. What a cruel world this is, that both life and death make man a martyr.

The crown of thorns is ripped from KENNEDY's head and whisked away.

KENNEDY

Jack...

The ENSEMBLE unfreezes. KENNEDY is swallowed by the crowd as his secret service agents push him to the ground and smother him. Panic and confusion fill the stage as discordant voices scream out. The gunman is hauled off. KENNEDY is lost below the sea of voices. He does not attempt to scream.