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JFK: ENDCGAME DALLAS



allen peppitt

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End of Sample

*For all those souls who
are still on the trail...*

*When beggars die, there are no comets seen;
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.*

Julius Caesar, Act 2, Scene 2

Intro

Time traveler John Youngblood thinks there's a future in raking up the past. That's why, armed with previously unreleased files, he's traveled back 300 years to the time of JFK's assassination. His aim is to right some historical wrongs.

Helping him are hard-living, womanizing lawyer, Rufus Jones and feisty Dallas cop, Darlene Andrews. For them, you could say it was lust at first sight. But when historical destiny takes a detour, they fall for each other as events unfold, dragging them dangerously into the conspiracy.

Combine the greatest conspiracy generator of the 20th Century with an explosive romance, throw in some biting satire, a good measure of time travel and the result is one very original novel.

Please note: JFK: Endgame Dallas is an adaptation of a book written several years before Stephen King's 11/22/63 which although the same in that it features time travel, is a totally different book.

U.S. English Edition

JFK: ENDGAME DALLAS



allen peppitt

Part One - Before

[Chapter One](#)

Brodin watched with satisfaction as his target exploded in a bloody starburst. Then he put down his smoking rifle and walked over the top of the hill to inspect his handiwork. Already the flies were buzzing around the carnage that was once the watermelon. He picked up a piece and put it in his mouth – it tasted sour, not fully ripe.

Out here he felt at ease with himself. Yes, a man could breathe out here. A man could do no better than to die out here. Leaving the rest of the melon to the creatures of the desert, he drove back into town. Arriving back at his rooming house, he was confronted by Mrs. Fritz...the bitch wanted rent? *Suck on this*, he said, forcing the barrel of his *Mauser* into her mouth. Scared for her life, she ran back into the house and called the cops. Then she called her husband, Joe Fritz, a retired police officer and sometime private eye. When he seemed less than bothered, she called her lawyer nephew, Rufus Jones. *Don't worry*, he said, *we'll be over that way real soon*. There was a lot about Rufus she didn't care for, but he was generally as good as his word.

Mrs. Fritz heard the sound of a motor vehicle leaving the property. She waited until it was quiet, then peered through the window and into the yard. The man with the rifle had gone, and there was now a patrol car parked close to the house...

Sitting at his twenty-third century workstation, oblivious of the Yuletide season, John Youngblood, experienced journeyman of the Internet, looked at the start of the story he'd never fully written down. All it lacked was maturity and content. He had barely started it and already it was something he didn't recognize as his own. Yes, he'd meant to finish it, but life happened so damned fast; one moment he was a young man about to write the Great American Novel – now he was forty. He knew he had to get it finished soon or before he realized it, he'd be dead and gone like all the other fossils fuelling the conspiracy.

But why a novel about the assassination of JFK? From an early age he'd felt a strange affinity to this particular time in history. He felt somehow he was cosmically connected to the grim events in Dealey Plaza. Although one of nature's skeptics, he did occasionally allow indulgent thoughts of reincarnation to enter his otherwise logically wired brain. But who the heck was he kidding? In his novel John Youngblood imagines himself as being just a small kid at the time of the Kennedy assassination:

I wasn't even a natural born American. I'd arrived in the USA the day Kennedy died. I was five years old and the world was still strange and incomprehensible. It had happened in Texas, the Wild West, where the men were big and strong; they had to be, I told my father, because they wore their 'stepsons' on their heads. I'd watched it all from a television at Idlewild Airport and then from a mean little cold-water and cockroach residence looking out over 'Gotham City.' In that way, I was totally connected with the death. Only five; yet, for years after, I knew it was my fault. That was my darkest secret; if only I hadn't come here, then it wouldn't have happened.

In my personal library were the seminal works about the assassination by William Manchester and Anthony Summers. They were worthy authors, yet somehow self-righteous, as though they had a copyright on the truth. I liked the wildcard players best, enraged citizens seeking justice from a secret government that no longer represented them. Men like Walt Brown, Robert Groden, David Lifton and Harold Weisberg, who by dint of sheer effort and obsessiveness had uncovered things that others had discounted or overlooked. It was like the whole thing had a life of its own; now there were more suspects and theories than you could squeeze into Dealey Plaza, let alone the grassy knoll - that notorious sloping lawn overlooking The Dallas Amphitheater of Death.

But the assassination was a lifetime ago. I was too young to remember JFK as anything more than a creature of modern mythology – for me the man had always been dead, always resting at Arlington with his wife and children.

Now in the year 2263, the final secret files on the Kennedy case were due to be opened - three hundred years after the killing of JFK. These ultimate pieces of the jigsaw had remained hidden from the world because somebody (or some organization) had made sure they were filed in a place where they hoped they would never be discovered.

John Youngblood's lifelong obsessional fascination with the assassination was computer enhanced. The pixel was king. Objective truth was a talk show legend; the kissing cousins of fiction and virtual reality had mutated into Siamese twins. Like a picture of a hand drawing a hand, it was impossible to see where one ended and the other started.

He tapped in his password: #brownsRgr8

Now he and his story were linked to the Assassination Archives and Research Center in Washington. He gazed into the three-dimensional composite of the assassination site on his screen; that was the only Dallas he knew, caught, like Kennedy and Connally, in a triangulation of gunfire and supposition. Using his input device like a scalpel, he cut away layer after layer of foliage and shadow to reveal the gunman on the grassy knoll.

Armed with the appropriate ID, cash, clothing and a stolen 'TimeMan' No 7 touchscreen wrist device, he now had all he needed for his 'Trip of Lifetimes.' Feverishly tapping in the coordinates, he set his TimeMan for Dallas, November 1st 1963. He held tight to the bag containing his talking book and prayed to the Gods of transformation.

He breathed out as the device powered up.

Only one person could save the day, the ace time detective, falling into the harsh, eternal light of the Internet. Falling through the centuries... hitting the roadside of a dark, desert highway.

He was gone...

Somewhere an angel sang. *'On the first day of Christmas, my true love sent to me, a lone gunner in the book depository.'*

Chapter Two

As usual, Rufus Jones was thinking more about sex than the job in hand.

‘Your wife’s worried about you, Uncle Joe,’ he said, watching the headlights race over the darkened road ahead.

The driver of the car, Joe Fritz, just grunted and turned on the radio: ‘...the route of the President’s motorcade is being finalized tomorrow...’

‘That kid has no respect for Texas,’ said Fritz.

‘That man you got staying...’ Rufus continued, suckling on his cigarette.

‘That’s my business,’ replied Fritz, switching the radio off.

‘...she don’t like him,’ continued Rufus, annoyed that he was having to waste time on family matters. ‘She’s scared.’

‘Got no reason,’ lied Fritz.

‘He put a rifle muzzle in your wife’s face this morning.’ said Rufus.

‘Madge imagines a lot...since them diet pills you given her.’

‘That’s why she called the police.’ retorted Rufus.

‘She shouldn’t a done that!’ he yelled, banging the dashboard with the same paw he used on the radio.

‘I’m just telling you what she told me.’

There was a silence. Rufus looked at his watch. Twelve hours without any sort of drug. He thought that might be some sort of record. Fourteen days without the comforts of a woman; that was like the rains had failed.

‘How’s business?’ he asked, trying a more elliptical approach to the problem.

‘Could be better...’ replied Fritz.

Rufus was well acquainted with this particular brand of self-delusion; as private dicks went, his Uncle Joe was more of a Moby than a Tracey.

‘This guy?’ Rufus asked, pausing to inhale, ‘...paying any rent is he?’

‘...will soon.’

This was getting nowhere. Rufus wondered if that woman he’d seen earlier outside Joe’s house was a good lay...how hard her nipples might get in the chill of the night – important stuff. Then he glanced out of the side window. In the twilight gloom he saw a flash of cobalt. Initially, it had looked like a meteorite.

‘Pull over!’ he shouted, stubbing his cigarette out in the ashtray.

The car screeched to a halt near a telegraph pole.

‘Why d’ya make me do that?’ asked Fritz.

Rufus wound the window down and blew out smoke into the night.

‘I think there’s a man over there.’

‘Is he dead?’

‘Fuck knows,’ said Rufus.

‘Don’t you cuss at me, Rufus boy,’ snarled Fritz. ‘Get out there and take a look.’

‘What if he’s got a gun?’

‘You just holler...’

And you’ll get the fuck out of here, thought Rufus, as he clambered out of the car. He walked over to the shivering denim-clad heap. Both of the man’s hands were visible – he had no weapon – just a freaking huge wristwatch glowing in the gloom.

‘Is he dead?’ asked Fritz again, from the relative safety of the car.

‘I don’t think so,’ said Rufus, who had now liberated the man’s holdall.

Fritz, now sure there was little danger, turned off the motor.

‘Put him in the back, Rufus,’ he said. ‘Take him to my place – might be something in it for us.’

‘That’s very neighborly of you, Uncle Joe – maybe we can collect a Samaritan’s fee.’

‘Huh?’

‘Just a joke, Uncle Joe,’ said Rufus. ‘Just a joke.’

Flashlight in hand, Joe Fritz hauled his bulk out of the car and walked over to where the man lay twitching. He stood over him as if about to urinate.

‘You ain’t from round these parts, are you boy?’

A man called John Youngblood was now staring blankly into two dead gray eyes anchored in a florid sea of flesh. Small broken capillaries lurked beneath the man’s pitted skin; here and there stood petrified hairs in blackened follicles. On his head squatted a Stetson; wrapped around it was a headband decorated with a peacock and a jackrabbit engaged in clearly unnatural activity. Then the horror of the image was bleached into nothingness by the powerful beam of the flashlight.

‘What parts are you talking about?’ John Youngblood asked, squinting, in a vain effort to gain a sharper focus on reality.

‘Hi!’ said a newer voice. ‘My name is Rufus Jones. I could be your duly appointed legal representative. Your problem would then become my problem.’

John Youngblood attempted to stand up, but his legs wouldn’t move.

‘If I was your attorney, I would advise you not to try and stand up,’ said Rufus, helpfully.

By now Rufus was on the floor, his face level with that of John Youngblood’s.

‘Excuse me asking,’ said John Youngblood. ‘But where am I?’

‘You’re with us, boy,’ said Fritz.

Give me places, dates, names, times, thought Youngblood, desperately, as he threw up something green and vile. He felt his wrist, the TimeMan was still there. Then he lost consciousness.

‘I think we’d better get him straight into the car,’ said Rufus, now trawling through the contents of the bag. A book, driver’s license and...his heart raced, \$20,000 in non-consecutively numbered bills! That would solve a few pressing alimony and IRS problems; trade had been slack since being caught in the sack with the daughter of that judge.

‘Anything interesting in there, Rufus?’ asked Fritz.

‘No,’ lied Rufus, in his best lawyers’ voice. ‘Just a book and a driver’s license.’

They hauled him onto the back seat. With Fritz at the wheel, they drove off in the direction of Fritz’s house in Desoto.

About fifty yards down the road, Darlene Andrews had watched the scene unfold. On special orders, she’d been following a hit man named Brodin who had been staying with Joe Fritz.

There’d been some sort of incident with the local cops; now Brodin was gone and these losers looked like her only chance of finding him – she wondered what scam Frankenstein Fritz and his lowlife nephew was into this time. With headlights down low, she trailed them back down Highway 35.

‘I get the feeling,’ said Rufus, ‘that we are being followed.’

Joe Fritz turned the radio back on. A chill of fear ran through his bowels. Ever since he’d agreed to look after that Brodin, he’d felt pretty much the same thing.

For the remainder of the journey back, they listened in silence to ‘...*Edward McMahon, on KPWZ, the British voice of Dallas...bringing you the sound of the Brompton Mix – four working class boys from Woking, England.*’

Arriving at the single floor wooden house, they hauled the man out and took him into the study that served as the office of J.J. Fritz, Private Investigator.

To the relief of the pair of them, the house was empty as they dragged in their prey.

‘I think we should let him go,’ said Joe Fritz, worried that he might be from the CIA.

‘Go where?’ asked Rufus, hoping his uncle wouldn’t find the money.

‘Any-fucking-where. What does his book say?’ he asked, pointing to the blue bound volume Rufus was now holding.

‘It don’t feel much like a book,’ said Rufus.

‘Just read me some, boy.’

Rufus started to read aloud from what he thought was page one:

‘In the twenty-third century, time travel had become so frequent that history had ceased to exist. Because of the insistence on deregulation anyone could go to any time and simply change the great historical events.’

Fritz began to laugh, almost out of control. ‘So we got ourselves a time traveler by the tail,’ he said, as he wiped tears from his eyes, relieved that it was just fiction.

‘Do you want to hear any more of this?’ asked Rufus.

‘Oh sure son, just tell me when you get to something that a common-born man can understand,’ replied Fritz, settling his bulk into a rocking chair.

Rufus was about to continue when the book started talking all on its own, in a clear Texan drawl – all honey and wood smoke wrapped around steel:

‘At first, it was just the scientists and academics going forth and back through time and space. They were very careful not to disturb as much as a single stone or grain of sand. Occasionally, they might crop up on the historical record...one of them was spotted in Dealey Plaza, behind the picket fence, the day President Kennedy was shot by Jimmy Brodin; but a quick flash of a twenty-third-century library card was enough to convince a Dallas policeman that he was really a member of the Secret Service!’

Before Rufus could be shocked at what the book had done, Fritz was out of his chair and viciously kicking the man who had not yet fully come round.

‘What do you know about this! Tell me, you little piece of shit.’

Rufus just looked on in disbelief.

‘Uncle, this book is just a talking piece of crap. What are you getting so excited about?’

‘You ever come across a talking book?’

‘Well no,’ said Rufus.

‘I hear they got them in the CIA,’ said Fritz in a panicked tone. ‘Orders to kill in talking books. Orders to kill...’

‘What are you involved in, Uncle Joe?’

‘They know,’ he sobbed. ‘They know.’

‘Know what?’

‘I’m implicated, Rufus boy. Implicated.’

‘In what for godsakes?’

‘Dealey Plaza...the route of the motorcade downtown. The police parking lot in the railroad yard. They’re going to bushwhack the President. I thought it was just a joke – but these are fucking crazy guys...they’re gonna do it. Brodin’s got a gun with a ‘scope. He’s part of a team. They really are going to.’

Joe Fritz was starting to cold-sweat. He kicked their prisoner hard in the ribs.

‘What do you know about me?’ he screamed again and then ran over to his desk drawer.

‘What the fuck are you going to do?’ asked Rufus, as he watched the old man pull out his ex-service revolver, the one he liked to call ‘ol’ smokey.’

‘I don’t know,’ he sobbed. ‘I don’t know.’

‘Start at the beginning,’ said Rufus, trying to calm him down.

Fritz settled back into his rocking chair, stroking his gun.

‘When they made me leave the force, I couldn’t get the business going...looking after this guy was going to be easy money...’

‘It was easy money that got you drummed out in the first place,’ said Rufus.

‘I know. I know. Then they tell me he’s gonna hit the President.’

‘Yeah like they just gave you a hit man to look after – like he was some kind of pet?’

‘No Rufus, boy. I was talking to these good ol’ boys about how that sonofabitch Kennedy deserved to die...I said I wanted to help. Said it was my patriotic duty. I thought they were just beer buddies talking shit. I had no idea they were fucking serious. No idea.’

He started to blubber.

‘You oughta be more careful about the company you keep.’

‘And now this guy turns up with that book.’

At that moment, the man they’d dragged in started to groan. This set Fritz off again:

‘Ol’ smokey gonna sort you out, CIA boy.’

Letting out a valedictory roar, he rushed at the man with his gun raised high above his head and then keeled over like an elephant shot between the eyes.

‘Uncle Joe!’

There was no response. No noise save the gentle groan of their prisoner.

Rufus leant over the body of his uncle. Blue lips – clouded eyes. The old man had simply dropped dead from a heart attack in front of him.

Rufus ran to the desk. As he was dialing 911, the other man staggered to his feet.

‘What do you know about this?’ he asked the man with the killing book.

‘My name is John Youngblood,’ he said, between gasps. ‘And I’ve just come from the twenty-third century to help you fulfill your destiny.’

Like my destiny is going to be in slapstick, thought Rufus, as the man fell down, flat on his face.

‘There was no need for your uncle to have died at all – it was just like he was beating himself up.’

‘Yeah,’ said Rufus. ‘And the rest?’

Now the man was on his knees, dark hair falling in his face, a prophetic finger pointing at Rufus.

‘They’re going to kill Kennedy in Dallas this month,’ he said, between gasps, ‘and you’re going to defend his alleged assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald.’

‘Drop dead,’ said Rufus, as he pocketed his uncle’s handgun.

This was not what Rufus wanted to hear. He was *nouveau riche*. His name was Rufus not Doofus. He was not going to get himself into a lot of trouble with the government, he was going to straighten himself out and spend his newly acquired money on women and drugs.

Then the man collapsed again.

Not yet up to explaining two bodies in the same house, Rufus dragged John Youngblood into the spare bedroom.

‘You’re only the second person today to tell me that Kennedy’s gonna get shot if he comes a’ visitin’ Texas,’ he said between gasps, his hands braced on his knees. ‘Proof positive that I just ain’t been getting out enough recently...but with this little windfall...well now, things are definitely going to rock and roll.’

Then, humming a couple of lines from ‘Jailhouse Rock,’ he went out to wait for the ambulance.

Chapter Three

The paramedics arrived in a blaze of sight and sound.

‘In the study,’ said Rufus, leading the way.

It took four of them to load Joe Fritz into the ambulance, not that there was any hurry. He was long past saving. After Rufus had signed some papers, the paramedics turned the siren back on and pulled away in a cloud of dust.

Rufus lit up a cigarette, hands cupped against the breeze that blew his hair all over the place. Then he remembered the idiot who claimed he was from the future. He was responsible for this mess. At that point, John Youngblood fell out of the house. Down on his knees, he looked up at the night sky. Then he looked across the road which seemed alive with the crawling tumbleweed that blew in from the desert. She was there.

From the other side of the street, Darlene Andrews watched John Youngblood stagger towards Rufus. Maybe he had something to do with Brodin as well. She thought.

‘You must take me to Vernon O’Neal’s Funeral Parlor,’ pleaded John Youngblood.

Rufus cast his sunken eyes up to the heavens. He wondered what kind of retard they had sent him, and why. ‘I told you once to drop dead,’ he said.

‘I seem,’ said John Youngblood, patting his pockets, ‘to be \$20,000 down since I met you...’

‘So what?’

‘Maybe I’ll just crawl over to that nice-looking police woman and tell her what you have done to me...show her the bruises...that kind of circumstantial nonsense.’ said John Youngblood.

So that was who she was, blonde haired lady ruby nipples of his nighttime musings; thought Rufus as he conceded defeat. ‘What d’ya call this freaking place you want to visit?’

John Youngblood smiled at him.

‘Here,’ Rufus pointed at his car. ‘Get in, before I change my mind.’

It was a ‘53 Packard Patrician, metallic blue with a white roof. Whitewall tires, naturally.

Darlene Andrews was already ambulance-chasing when she got a call from HQ: ‘Case 14 closed on Brodin, Darlene – we’d just got a call from the Agency to say he’s on the level.’

‘Thanks Chuck,’ she said, signing off for the night.

On what freaking level, she wondered. Just your standard abusive out-of-

state male with a high-powered rifle and a bad attitude towards women. Orders were orders, but she knew something was going down. She hated to admit it, even to herself, but Rufus Jones and his weird new companion were starting to intrigue her.

They arrived at O'Neal's in the early hours of the morning. Alone in a showroom of eternal slumber, John Youngblood started throwing up again, quietly, into a nice African mahogany number.

'Make sure you close the lid afterwards,' Rufus said, unsympathetically.

He was also wondering whether it was worth taking him anywhere else, since he was certain the retard would be back here as a customer before the end of the night.

'Thanks for your concern,' said John Youngblood.

'Death doesn't exactly come cheap around here,' said Rufus, studying the display.

But John Youngblood wasn't listening any more, his watering eyes had settled on the most expensive casket in the room. The Elgin Casket Company's 'Britannia.' His long fingers caressed the cold metal. The heat from his hands misted the bronze glow for an instant.

'Look,' said John Youngblood, pointing to the specifications. 'Double-walled. Hermetically sealed. Solid bronze.'

Rufus noted with ironic interest that this was a man who was developing a will to live just by looking at caskets.

'Why,' said Rufus, trying to find something for Uncle Joe for around two hundred bucks.

'Why are you so interested in this one?'

'It's his,' replied John Youngblood.

'His?'

'They flew, fly, Kennedy out of Dallas in this.'

'So what?'

'So what? This is the key to the whole conspiracy.'

Across the casket, their eyes met. Rufus's eyes were a piercing blue green. Rufus looked into the eyes of a man, who by his own admission couldn't have had sex for three hundred years. They were red and gone. It confirmed what he always suspected about celibacy! Rufus was at least as tall as John Youngblood. A good six-footer. His hair was a dark blonde and there was a slight peppering of freckles across his nose and cheeks.

'Anyway,' said John Youngblood. 'They pronounce the President dead at Parkland Memorial Hospital and they need a casket...'

'This one?' asked Rufus, exhaling loudly after he spoke.

'That's right. So he's taken out of Dallas in this casket with a bandage

round his head and plastic sheeting to stop any blood from messing the lining of the casket. This is the casket everybody sees at Andrews Air Force base.’

‘Andrews Air Force Base?’ asked Rufus.

‘Washington DC,’ said John Youngblood, warming to his theme. ‘And when the body gets to Bethesda Hospital for the autopsy, it’s in a completely different casket – a shipping casket in fact.’

‘Oh sure, Mr. John Youngblood from the twenty-third century, the President’s body is switched from one casket to another and nobody notices.’

John Youngblood smiled and starting pointing his finger at Rufus – again: ‘That’s the point. You see. People did notice but they didn’t realize it at the time; technicians do see a different casket come in at Bethesda, but they think it’s part of some decoy plan.’

‘So the chain of evidence breaks,’ said Rufus. ‘Even a lobotomized trial lawyer could tear that apart in seconds. End of story.’

He tried to walk away.

‘But it never gets that far,’ said John Youngblood, triumphantly. ‘Lee Oswald, the only suspect in the case gets killed by Jack Ruby before he can be tried.’

‘Jack Ruby?’ asked Rufus. ‘C’mon, I know Jack – he’s a lowlife pimp for the Dallas P.D. That’s way out of his league.’

‘Have I ever lied to you?’ asked John Youngblood.

‘Damned if I know,’ replied Rufus. ‘And who is Oswald?’

‘He’s a communist, ex-marine who defected to the Soviet Union, then came back and settled in Dallas.’

‘A communist *in* Dallas?’ he asked, frowning.

‘Some people, me included, think he probably wasn’t and that he was set up by some rogue, black organization working within the intelligence community, covert ops...it’s all there in my blue book.’

‘Book?’ asked Rufus.

‘My blue book,’ John Youngblood said again.

‘I guess I must have left it back at the house.’

‘We must get it,’ said John Youngblood, desperately. ‘It’s more than just a book.’

‘Oh...’

‘It’s a multi-media reference,’ he said. ‘Over three hundred years of data on the Kennedy assassination.’

‘Why the crappy story at the front?’ asked Rufus.

‘That was the bit I wrote,’ said John Youngblood, who was a little stung by his criticism.

‘As your attorney,’ said Rufus, ‘I would advise you to stick to the facts.’

‘Hey!’ came another voice.

Rufus and John Youngblood looked in the direction of the sound; it was the night manager of the funeral parlor.

‘I hope you boys are thinking of buying something.’

‘Sure are,’ said Rufus, swiftly walking away from the bronze casket.

‘You interested in the Britannia?’ the manager asked, smoothing a non-conforming strand of hair that had, somehow, sprung vertically from his skull.

‘No sir,’ said Rufus. ‘It’s not the money you understand; nothing would be too much for my dear uncle. He just wanted something rough and ready, you know, kinda unvarnished...to be closer to the good soil of Texas.’

The manager responded with a knowing nod and a wink. Then, he went over to the sales desk. He rummaged around for a few seconds, coming back with a catalog full of cheapies.

He knew his market well.

‘You want to put him in the meanest box we got.’

‘Got it in one,’ said Rufus, poker faced.

‘Two hundred and fifty dollars with all the extras,’ said the manager pointing at a picture in the catalog.

Rufus pulled out a roll of bills that John Youngblood recognized as his own.

The deal done, Rufus wanted food.

‘Come on, Johnboy,’ he said, ‘let’s boogie on outta here. I fancy me some breakfast.

Your treat.’

‘Again?’ said John Youngblood.

‘You learn fast – maybe you can hang out with me.’

‘Right,’ said John Youngblood. ‘But first we get the book.’

‘So,’ said Rufus, trying to put it together. ‘Let me get this straight; Oswald kills Kennedy...’

‘Allegedly.’

‘But,’ said Rufus, ‘it’s really Brodin...’

‘Who is part of a bigger conspiracy,’ chipped in John Youngblood.

‘And,’ continued Rufus, ‘Ruby kills Oswald...’

‘Televised live,’ said John Youngblood, with a certain relish.

‘And that’s your story?’ asked Rufus.

John Youngblood nodded. ‘You learn fast too,’ he said.

‘Let’s get outta here,’ said Rufus. ‘I’m worried that I’m gonna start believing you.’

‘You will,’ said John Youngblood. ‘In time, you will.’

‘Don’t count on it.’ replied Rufus.

Chapter Four

He steered the car back to Desoto, arriving, as usual, in a cloud of dust, at the house that had been home and work place to his uncle.

‘Did you see how close you came to that truck back at the intersection?’ exclaimed John Youngblood, as he waited for the dust to settle before venturing out.

‘What truck?’ asked Rufus, jerking up the brake so hard it nearly came off in his hand. Actually, he was wondering, ‘What intersection?’ and thought that this man worried too much.

As they climbed out of the car, Rufus glimpsed the barbecue area set out in the backyard.

He wondered if anyone would ever beat Uncle Joe’s rib and wing eating record. The thought of it made him feel a little nauseous. Rufus pulled back the screen door and gave a gentle knock.

‘Anyone home?’ he hollered, hoping there wasn’t.

‘Expecting anybody?’ asked John Youngblood, who thought he knew that Jimmy Brodin was now being looked after in another safe house in Dallas.

‘That was why I was coming over here last night,’ said Rufus. ‘My mother wanted me to clear out some bozo who’d been staying here for the last week.’

‘Here’s the book,’ said John Youngblood, not wishing to invite any further talk about Jimmy Brodin. ‘Look after it more carefully from now on please.’

‘Why?’

‘Twenty thousand dollars, tax-free?’ said John Youngblood.

‘I’m your man,’ said Rufus, having already spent it ten times over in his head.

As the car pulled away, a scowling Jimmy Brodin eased his way out of the garage. ‘That fucking hag Ma Fritz has blown my cover,’ he muttered to himself, ‘and she couldn’t have given it away in a brothel for the blind.’

He went back into the house and dialed his contact. ‘This is Jimmy,’ he said, as the sweat ran down his face. ‘You’re gonna have to move me out for a while. Things are getting too hot.’

The man at the other end of the line was very displeased. ‘You pull another stunt like that, Brodin, and you’re off the team.’

‘Just find me another joint,’ he said, knowing it was too late for them to find somebody else. He wished now he’d killed that stupid fucking crone.

‘It’s not that easy...’

‘Hey,’ he said. ‘I got a cop on my case as well.’

‘No cop’ll figure you out; your cover’s tight.’

‘This one’s smart,’ he said. ‘A regular fucking Einstein considering she’s a broad.’

‘Just stay away from desert-dry, shriveled old women in future.’

‘Won’t be easy,’ said Brodin, who thought his reply the height of witty repartee.

Driving out of his uncle’s street, Rufus remembered himself as a small boy chasing the ice truck down the road hoping to pick up a few slivers of ice that slipped out from under the tarp.

Now, like his uncle, the ice trucks were gone.

‘I used to dream about all of this,’ said John Youngblood, looking out on the traffic of another day in Dallas. ‘I wonder what James Joyce would have made of all of this, just think: a *Finnegan’s Wake* version of the assassination with all the dead speaking of their lives.’

‘Yeah Yeah Yeah,’ Rufus said, drumming his spare hand on the dashboard. ‘Tell me. Do you ever dream of anything else?’

John Youngblood looked at the sad, fat, drops of rain that were beginning to fall on the windshield; as each raindrop splattered it took on the look of a cat’s paw. Then more rain fell and the ‘paws’ were gone with the luckless flying bugs that adorned the car. Washed into oblivion. The rain fell harder. Before it became impossible to see the road, Rufus switched on the wipers. It was a hard rain that cleared out everything from the dust on the buildings to the dog shit on the sidewalks. For a moment, the city shone brilliantly as the lightning flashed across a bruise-colored sky.

‘Just don’t lose the book, man.’

‘So it’s one breakfast at Harry’s,’ said Rufus, seemingly unconcerned by any of this.

‘Then I need some shut-eye – it’s been a long night.’

Now John Youngblood was beginning to wonder if Rufus really was the man for the job.

Chapter Five

It was nearly seven in the morning when they hit a fast-food joint near the city limits. They watched the sun come up over the desert as they drove through to their destination.

‘Dallas may be a sewer,’ said Rufus, ‘but I love to watch the day start out here.’

‘Why don’t you go someplace else,’ said John Youngblood, still fighting off the effects of time-lag. He felt a welcome sort of pain of real sunlight on his eyes for what seemed like the first time in many years.

Rufus gave out a hollow laugh: ‘The whole United States is a sewer; in fact the whole world is a sewer; you must know your history, Johnboy. The world is not a moral place to be living in.’

‘But you stayed here?’

‘I was born here. I was raised here. I will probably die here. Dallas is a sewer, but it’s my sewer. I know my way around. I belong.’

John Youngblood felt a slight tug in his guts. He had never really belonged anywhere and that had never occurred to him before.

They’d driven out of the city, heading east toward Mesquite. Rufus turned off the Thornton Freeway and carried on until they came to a sign saying ‘*Harry’s Diner*.’ The sign was still illuminated, but only partly worked and consequently read in the distance as ‘Har D.’ This served well as advertisement and warning to the times you had to fall on to be part of the regular clientele.

Everything had decayed, including the proprietor, a failed astronaut called Al. He thought he might retain business if he kept the old name. However, while decayed, it wasn’t sufficiently picturesque to have any of the radical chic that might have pulled in the students or young professional thrill seekers. It balanced somewhere between total collapse and further decay. It seemed to exist by the ability of the desert heat to sweat out of its seedy customers, almost osmotically, the margin required to generate a positive trickle of cash. It was a dive. It was a dive’s dive.

Rufus came here from time to time because he was too lazy to cook meals and liked to vary his eateries, since it was his firm belief that familiarity bred bad service and that in such a place service was all. The lack of attractive waitresses was another plus because he could concentrate totally on his chow. He never wanted to talk to anyone who would inhabit such a place on a semi-permanent basis; if ever he wanted to converse with the scum of the earth, there was always family and clients. However, Rufus would brave the cultural and literal wilderness of *Harry’s*, as above almost all else, he loved the great American breakfast it could deliver: orange juice, buckwheat pancakes, syrup, waffles, eggs over easy, hash browns, sausage

and enough coffee to give an elephant irregular heart rhythms.

‘The Breakfast of Champions,’ said Rufus, pointing to the spread now before them. John Youngblood said nothing. He was looking at the sign above faded pictures of Al and John Glenn which said: ‘NO CREDIT OR QUEERS.’

‘Look at that,’ he said pointing to the sign. The whole sickly ambience was turning his stomach. He knew he shouldn’t, but he felt he had to say something about this dismal destination. He watched a spotty short order chef standing over a pan of grease and burgers. Maybe the kid had popped a big white acne blister into the hot oil.

Rufus tried to make him see sense: ‘Hey Johnboy, these are the Middle Ages we are living in; life is short and full of ignorance,’ Rufus replied filling his mouth as he spoke. ‘Beshides, it used to say, “No coloreds, credit or queers”. Broke uncle’s heart when them signs started coming down; he claimed it was unconstitutional and that you never could tell anymore if a place was fit for eating in.’

‘And you call that progress?’

‘Hey Johnboy, one step at a time.’

John Youngblood continued looking at the sign as a cold, churning pit was forming in his stomach. He knew he shouldn’t mess around with the ephemera of the assassination matrix, but he was angry. It was stupid, but he couldn’t help himself.

‘Hey, handsome,’ he called to Al, waving the bill like a hanky.

Al came, dragging a greasy rag in his wake which seemed to serve much the same purpose as a silvery slug trail: with it he could find his way back to the cash register. He looked at what he took to be some new-fangled pilot’s watch on the man’s wrist and smiled at what he thought was some sort of parody by this stranger in his lair. Some of the pool players heard the dinky little call.

A ball plopped into a side pocket.

Al arrived at the table and saw that the customer was really no kind of stick and rudder man. ‘You got a problem with the sign?’ he grunted, as it dawned on him that this guy might be a queer for real.

‘You don’t like homosexuals, do you?’

Al smiled and pointed proudly at his sign.

‘Read it and weep,’ he said, wiping his nose with the rag.

‘You think there ought to be laws against that sort of thing,’ said John Youngblood.

‘There are,’ replied Al.

‘Ah lawdy lawdy. Silly me,’ he said in the manner of a southern belle as he slapped himself on the wrist. ‘This is the south, the land of Dixie; you got more chance of beating a homicide rap, or getting away with humping your mule on the Mayor’s lawn.’

John Youngblood had lit the blue touch paper. Things were smoldering. Rufus gagged on his waffle and took a slug of coffee to send it down the right way. Smiling Al had stopped smiling. The background hum of the diner had disappeared. Only the wheeze of an asthmatic air conditioning unit broke the silence. Rufus checked to see if there was a clear path to the door.

Bang! went another ball on the pool table.

‘You ain’t welcome here anymore,’ said Al. ‘Pay your money and get out.’

But John Youngblood wasn’t ready to go yet. He slowly refilled his coffee cup from the pitcher on the counter. Then, even more slowly, he added cream and sugar to the mixture. This was only remarkable because he preferred his coffee bitter and black. Then he leant past Al for a clean spoon and stirred the whole thing up.

‘Think homosexuals are all wannabe women with handbags and rouge?’

‘You’ll leave now if you got brains in your head,’ snarled Al, who was about ready to launch.

Ten, nine...

Rufus looked all around the diner and felt the walls closing in. John Youngblood was either oblivious to the danger or felt that his captive audience was still too stunned to do anything really nasty. He took a sip of the coffee. It was foul. He spat it out over the counter. Instinctively, Al tried to wipe it clean.

All around, muscles started moving tattoos up and down forearms the size of cooked hams.

John Youngblood stood up. He was now some six inches taller than Al. He stared down with a manic intensity.

Eight, seven, six...

Rufus felt all astronauts were nothing more than spam in the can, small men with big egos. But like rattlesnakes, they were best left alone, or reduced to small pieces and fried.

Somehow, what John Youngblood was doing was neither of these things.

Al made up in girth and ugliness what he lacked in height. All he ever wanted to be was a lab monkey; a jockey on top of a ninety-foot bomb; a phallus shooting flame out of its anus. As an astronaut, he didn’t have the right stuff. And now, now he was taking crap from a fag who didn’t know his place.

John Youngblood pushed his barely drunk cup across the counter. The cup made a ringing sound before it hit Al’s gut and the contents sloshed on to his apron. Al looked as though he might be waiting for an apology. John Youngblood looked at Al more closely; he appeared to be waiting for some dismal fag to beg for his life. He was also wondering about his first maxim of business: never kill a customer until they have paid their tab.

John Youngblood carried on, no longer the belle of the ball. ‘Wouldn’t

you say it took a real man to have sex on equal terms with another, to plunge deep into the dark unknown, to give as good as he got?’

As it happened, Al didn’t. But John Youngblood carried on regardless: ‘You think it’s macho to be strapped to an intercontinental missile. That makes you a pervert in my book. Now, a man making love with a man, *that’s* machismo.’

Fivefourthreetwone...

Now that all of Al’s buttons were punched out, he blasted off.

Rufus could only speculate how long his companion was going to live. It all depended on whether they roughed him up before, or after, they filled him full of lead.

‘Don’t you ever call it making love,’ screamed Al, who couldn’t decide whether to call the cops or shoot them himself. Al was clear of the launch tower and everyone was still watching for what he might do next.

Rufus could taste the temporary indecision in the air:

‘Okay Johnboy,’ he said. ‘Fraternity initiation is over; let’s leave while we still got balls.’

John Youngblood’s response was to hurl a bowl of sugar across the counter. It missed Al, but took out his short order chef. Rufus pulled John Youngblood away. The tableau they left looked like some updated Hogarth painting. Al was in the center, seemingly apoplectic with rage, and about ready to leave the earth’s atmosphere. Some of the ‘*dinersaurs*’ had realized a violation had taken place, but weren’t really sure what it was or what they could do about it. Rufus was certain that this was no way to behave in or outside Dallas’s city limits and uncertain whether he now wanted his new companion any more.

‘No way out here,’ said a voice hardened by whiskey and cigarettes. Somebody had barred their way to the door.

Bang! A pool ball missed John Youngblood’s head by about an inch.

‘Over the counter quick,’ yelled Rufus.

John Youngblood jumped, and came crashing down on Al’s hand which was reaching for his trusty baseball bat.

‘You fucking fag bastard,’ screamed Al as he felt the bones in his hand crunch.

He stopped screaming when Rufus pulled out his late uncle’s handgun. Rufus had no idea how to release the catch on this evil instrument, but it gave them a couple of seconds. As the image imprinting of the barrel remained and rooted Al to the spot, they sprinted through the kitchen. They smashed into everything, struggling to stay upright on the treacherous floor.

‘I like this door,’ said John Youngblood. He was pointing to a sign which said ‘*Exit*’ and was otherwise deserted. They flung open the double doors and burst out into the morning sunlight.

By now Al was sub-orbital.

‘Run like fuck,’ was all Rufus could think to say.

This was not how he liked to digest any meal – let alone breakfast, which was his favorite meal of the day. Rufus figured they might survive because nobody knew what car they drove. He was right; on the other side of the parking lot a few of Al’s patrons were reducing Al’s own pride and joy to iron filings because somebody said that ‘the fags’ were driving a blue car. But it wasn’t a *Chevy*. They made it to Rufus’s own blue automobile. Now sweat drenched and, fearing the worst, he turned it over.

‘There they are,’ shouted one of the men who had been pounding Al’s car.

In five seconds they would be dead anyway, so John Youngblood leant out of his window and shouted, ‘HAVE A NICE DAY ASSHOLES!’

Rufus was much more preoccupied with the technical niceties of urban survival. ‘Start praying that Cousin Jed serviced this baby properly,’ he said with one eye on the entrance of ‘*Harry’s*.’ The car burst into life as what looked like the Hell’s Angels All Stars was pouring out of the front of the grim eating house. Rufus spun the car into reverse, then he put the car into first and hoped for the best.

‘Let’s hope nobody got your number,’ said John Youngblood.

‘None of those bastards can read or write,’ said Rufus, somewhat optimistically as he put his foot to the floor.

John Youngblood watched out of the back window as Al splashed down in the parking lot.

It looked like he was sprawled full length across the hood of his broken car, blubbering his eyes out. John Youngblood felt good thinking about how many brain dead bozos Al would have to poison to pay off today’s debts.

Rufus was still manically going through the gears as they hit the first intersection which was still within sight of the diner. Wheels spun and the dirt flew everywhere as they fishtailed down the freeway.

‘Why couldn’t you just eat your waffles and shut the fuck up?’ he said, checking again in the mirror to see that they were not being followed by a posse of truckers, bikers or any of the sundry perverts of prey that might live in the wainscoting of such an establishment.

‘Because it was there,’ replied an unrepentant John Youngblood.

‘What was there?’ asked Rufus.

‘That sign – “No Credit or Queers” – Didn’t you see it?’

‘Hey Johnboy. I always pay cash. And I never argue with somebody who serves food.’

‘I wouldn’t call that stuff food,’ replied John Youngblood, still gasping for breath. ‘And I wasn’t talking about credit.’

‘No queer would be seen dead in that place,’ said Rufus.

‘That is totally beside the point,’ argued John Youngblood.

‘You ain’t one yourself are you?’ asked Rufus, not sure he wanted to have this guy in the front seat anymore.

‘Ain’t one what?’ snapped John Youngblood. ‘What’s the big deal? You’re not homophobic are you?’

‘Er no sir,’ said Rufus, working out the meaning of a word he hadn’t heard before.

Getting his wind back, John Youngblood switched into lecture mode: ‘You don’t defend the rights of black people just because you are black yourself, or the rights of women just because you are a woman. You do it because discrimination threatens the liberty of everyone in a free society. Besides, those guys ought to get themselves a sense of humor.’

‘If you want to stay with me, John,’ said Rufus, ‘you won’t ever do that again.’

Rufus was at first a little dismayed when John Youngblood gave no reply. Then he laughed.

‘You know what Johnboy?’

‘What?’

‘I’m a Texan lawyer agin the death penalty; you’re just about the only guy I’ve met who’s crazier than that.’

That was the truth they were beginning to realize; that they were natural-born holy fools, kindred spirits blessed with the inability to say and do the right things at the right times.

‘Right,’ said Rufus. ‘Let’s go see how they prettied up Uncle Joe.’

Back at *‘Harry’s Diner,’* Al had got part of Rufus’s number and was now calling in a marker with a friend of a friend who had contacts with some unsavory factions of the Dallas P.D.

...’fix that bastard’s wheels, Jack.’

‘Consider it done, my astral friend,’ said the voice at the end of the line.

‘I want to see him laugh that one off,’ said Al as he put the phone down and surveyed the damage to his property.

Chapter Six

In the funeral parlor, the mortal remains of Joe Fritz were put on show for Rufus. The embalmer's assistant was shifting from foot to foot. He was clearly very agitated about something. 'I'm sorry sir,' he said. 'We tried real hard with this one.'

Rufus peered into the box; the once bloated body was now desiccated by the embalmer's dark arts. His hands were down at his sides and the remaining strands of his hair were plastered tightly to his skull in the style of Bela Lugosi. But was it really his uncle? Yes. Beneath the cosmetic finery was the lipless face of a lizard left in the sun too long.

Rufus looked back at the kid and smiled, a little too cheerily. 'You boys have done a real fine job,' he said. 'You can take it from me. He was one mean, ugly hombre. My oh my! Why, he looks so good I can only just recognize him myself.'

'Here's your bill,' he said, thrusting what looked more like a wedding invitation in to Rufus's hands.

John Youngblood caught a glimpse of the name on the bill, ...'embalming of one Jeremiah J. Fritz...' Fancy that, he thought, he changed his name from Jeremiah to Joseph.

'Thank you,' said Rufus, not even bothering to check the cost. 'If you'll excuse me, I would like a few minutes alone with my uncle.'

'Sure sir,' said the student, visibly relieved at the outcome of events here.

Rufus went back to where his uncle lay; he stood over the simple box knowing that he would not be able to conjure up the words he wanted.

'I never did like you, even when I wanted to. And believe me, there were times when I really needed somebody to look up to. Why couldn't you have been more like a father to me...just once in your lousy freaking life?'

Then the kid came back with a tastefully, black trimmed, toolbox. 'I need to close this thing now,' he said, pointing to the casket.

They looked one last time at the face of Joe Fritz.

Then, the casket lid was put on. Rufus was pleased to see that top and bottom fitted perfectly. Like the best Tupperware money could buy, there was an almost imperceptible hiss of a vacuum seal being formed. The kid worked carefully and methodically as he put each of the brass screws in.

'Make a good job son,' said Rufus. 'I don't want that that bastard getting out before we bury him.'

The boy carried on working and said nothing. He had been there long enough to know that bereavement hit different folk in different ways.

Outside the rain kept falling. Soon, the short-fuse flowers of the desert

would bloom again like brilliant grounded fireworks. Life was brief and full of pain; such beauty that you found was transient. Death was everywhere. The moment was everything.

Chapter Seven

Joseph Jeremiah Fritz was lowered into the Texas clay on the morning of November 13, 1963. Rufus had picked out a final resting place in the Laurel Land Cemetery, making a mental note not to end up here himself. 'Frankenstein' was being buried with as many of the honors that the Dallas Police could be bothered to muster – for such a universally unloved outcast of the law enforcement community.

The funeral service had gone with a bit of panache, thought Rufus. Delivering the eulogy with a style the old man did not deserve, Rufus had made use of the same professional detachment and élan that he bought to bear when acting as defense attorney to the murderers, rapists and child molesters that periodically came his way, fetched up like raw sewage on a bathing beach.

If he felt any sadness, it was for his mother. She remembered the man before the pornography entered his soul. For her, Joe was still the big bear who protected and cared for her and her young family when no-one else would.

John Youngblood was now feeling more like a twentieth-century man. He had dipped into Rufus's wardrobe, and when he felt taste was lacking, he had started buying his own clothes. Today, he was not borrowing a suit; he had bought his own. It was a lightweight, black, double breasted affair. His shoes were as comfortable as he could get in 1963 without looking like something from the Beat Generation. He wore a white shirt with a black tie, which hardly matched his mood that morning.

John Youngblood was like a small child seeing snow for the first time. He looked up and down the assembled multitudes and saw, in them, a goodly proportion of his life's studies. He could get into a car, preferably not Rufus's 1953 Packard Patrician, and ride Highway 35 right through Oak Cliff and into the heart of Dealey Plaza.

At the back of the cortege stood Jack Ruby, soon to be the first man to commit a murder, live on television. John Youngblood watched him, too closely, fingering his gold cuff-links and stretching the muscles in his neck in the manner of a prizefighter. There he was: the Jack a' Diamonds waiting to avenge the Jack O' Hearts. He watched him moving through the mourners, slapping backs, zigzagging, handing out free passes to his nightclub. Jack Ruby himself was beginning to feel that this was a wasted morning. He already knew most of the men who were at the funeral – his boys – and Joe Fritz was no friend of Jack's. He'd even booked him once, called him Jew boy Jack. Given half the chance, Jack would rather spit on his grave than send flowers. It was the Fritz name that had drawn Jack, like a spider, out of his predatory, twilight, sleaze parlors. He was disappointed to discover that Joe Fritz was nothing more than a dim and distant cousin, several generations removed, of Captain Will Fritz, Chief of Homicide for

the Dallas Police Department. Everyone's a relation in this city, thought Jack, distant cousin damn near a stranger. Still, he was trying to make the most of it. He loved it when people said, 'Hey Jack!' or, 'He's a good ol' boy.' He could forget who he really was. That was the only narcotic he ever needed.

Rufus noticed that his friend was quite near to all the good-looking women, such as ever there were at an occasion like this. Needing no more excuse, he went over to see them.

'Hey! John my man, meet Jack,' Rufus said.

'Hello,' said John Youngblood, fixing Ruby with a three-hundred-year intensity gaze. It was a look that triggered, in Jack, something that he could not explain.

'Are you an undercover cop or something?' continued John Youngblood in his best naivety.

'No,' beamed Jack. 'I provide essential services to the good servants and citizens of Dallas.'

'Oh,' said John Youngblood. Jack's eye twitched. He made his head go through a sort of circling motion.

John Youngblood stood and stared when he should have looked the other way.

There was a brief silence.

Then, apropos of nothing, Jack continued, 'my name is Jack Ruby, but all my good friends call me "*Sparkey*."'

'Why's that?' asked John Youngblood, now getting out of his depth. These animals were uncaged.

'It's a nickname,' replied Jack, who could only think on one level at a time.

John Youngblood, stupidly, arched an eyebrow.

A muscle tightened in Jack's neck.

'Nice tie you got there,' said John Youngblood, again managing to say the wrong thing.

Rufus had decided to let his friend get on with it this time.

A red mist descended. Suddenly Ruby had him by the neck. John Youngblood's wrist device was not giving him the kind of protection that its manufacturers had claimed it was capable of. Now, one peanut tie too late, it quietly hummed out a warning.

'Are you calling me a fag or something?' Jack growled, softly.

'No Jack,' gasped John Youngblood. 'I just like the color.'

Remembering the company he was keeping and the occasion he was at, Jack loosened his grip on John Youngblood who sunk to his knees. This, thought Rufus, as he watched John Youngblood's color change from pale death to suffocating florid, seemed to be the guy's favorite position; whether

he was puking or being beaten up.

‘Sorry if I caused any offence,’ said John Youngblood, timidly, as he got back onto his feet.

Then the mist had lifted.

‘None taken,’ replied Jack.

And, once again, he was rambling Jack, gambling Jack. Jack a’ Diamonds.

‘Hey Jack,’ said a nearby beat-cop. ‘Caught the act a while back. I like the new finish.’

‘A guy gets a little mushy at times like this,’ laughed Jack, mock-punching John Youngblood on the shoulder.

‘Hey buddy,’ said Ruby to Rufus. ‘Your man needs a good workout. I know people. Here’s my card.’

‘He’s not my man, Jack,’ said Rufus.

‘Whatever,’ said Jack.

He placed his bare-assed girl calling card in the breast pocket of John Youngblood’s jacket and strutted off like a bantam rooster.

‘Wow,’ said John Youngblood, between gasps. ‘A souvenir from the twentieth century.’

‘Just remember you are in Texas,’ said Rufus, ‘in the twentieth century. Rule one: you don’t annoy the locals.’

‘If I’d really wanted to annoy him, I could have asked about his \$46,000 back taxes,’ sneered John Youngblood, in a knowing sort of way.

‘Chicken shit. Round these parts; it’s your patriotic duty not to pay tax. That goes trumps for men like Jack,’ said Rufus, adding a little local flavor to John Youngblood’s specialist subject.

‘In three weeks he’ll be under the microscope; everything from his pubic hairs to his mother’s false teeth,’ said John Youngblood, fatalistically, as he brushed the dirt from his knees and pondered on about taking a trip to the dry cleaners.

‘You know what, Rufus,’ said John Youngblood, stroking his newly red and raw neck, as Jack Ruby bobbed and weaved back into the crowd, such as it was.

‘What?’ replied Rufus, as he looked out for more black sheathed, female flesh.

‘I should be as paranoid as hell about all of this,’ continued John Youngblood, catching his reflection in one of the brightly polished hearses. ‘I may well have violated all the time space laws of the twenty-third century for all I know. Here I am, in the middle of what might well be the prime conspiracy of the twentieth century, making small talk with cops and small-time gangsters...’

‘Hey! Don’t knock it,’ laughed Rufus. ‘Some of my best friends are

small-time crooks.’

‘I think you mean,’ continued John Youngblood, ‘that some of your best clients are small time crooks.’

‘Crooks, clients, friends, family,’ said Rufus, his shrouded, chameleon, eyes hunting for more prey. ‘All the same to me, I guess.’

An eye zeroed in on a woman adjusting her stocking. He liked black on a woman. Or white. Or green. It all depended really. Most times, when he gave the matter deep and philosophical thought, he realized that what he most often liked on most women was Rufus Jones.

He followed the swing of the woman’s breasts – that was the place to be.

John Youngblood looked up in despair. It was no good trying to reason with so much testosterone and frustration.

With the funeral gathering now breaking up, John Youngblood and Rufus Jones went back to Rufus’s classic blue automobile.

‘See you tonight,’ said another woman Rufus had been looking over. It was Darlene Andrews.

‘My place or yours?’ asked Rufus, opening the door of his Packard.

‘Call on me later,’ she said, and handed him a piece of paper. She eased herself, limb by limb, into a red, V8 Corvette.

‘Nice bone structure,’ said John Youngblood, in passing.

‘And I’m going to be jumping all over them tonight,’ replied Rufus with a grin.

‘Don’t you think she might have some ulterior motive for seeing you?’ asked John Youngblood.

‘Wouldn’t you like to do something to her?’

‘Get real,’ said John Youngblood. ‘She’s more than three hundred years older than me.’

Rufus just carried on with his Cheshire cat smile. He was Mr. Sex. What other motive could there be for any women aged between 18 and 318?

Now no longer sure of the lines separating business and pleasure, Darlene Andrews drove out of the cemetery.

After most of the mourners had left the cemetery, Jimmy Brodin stepped out from behind some trees and walked up to the grave of Joe Fritz.

‘This is what I think of losers like you,’ he said, removing his shades and spitting into the newly turned clay. ‘Hey, maybe I’ll go and do your ugly wife a favor – screw her, shoot her in the head...shoot her in the head, screw her...then screw that freaking cop...then shoot that freaking lawyer nephew of yours.’

He laughed maniacally at the thought of what he might...what he could...do to anyone.

JFK: ENDCAME DALLAS

End of Sample

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