

Plot Twist

23.8.1963

As he walks through the night-time café, the calm, somewhat discombobulated atmosphere saturated perfectly by the soft 4-beat jazz, which sautés the flavour of the room as the bass ever-patiently waits for their solo, he thinks. As he walks through the night-time café, the calm smell of coffee enveloping the customers, both frequent and occasional, drinking coffee or not, in a haze of warmth and friendly conversation, he thinks. He's thought about it before, and he'll think about it again. But despite this, he's not a heavy thinker.

Thinking is vital to him. If too little thought goes into his actions, he'll lose his job.

He chuckles. *In a way, I suppose that someone lost their job today. What a way to approach an article!*

And what a way to think!

That day had been a tough one. The first time he'd heard the big news, he'd jumped, and asked, his voice, coated in its thick accent, showing his already-apparent shock, "Is this some kind of lame joke!?" before it was confirmed. Confirmed and all over the news – the President was dead.

And while it was a shock, some part of him was unfazed.

After all, as a writing man, he knew how to turn this turn of events into cash.

But the rest of him was shocked, and still is. Gobsnacked. The President, good old JFK, *murdered*? It sounded like the kind of thing you'd see in a novel from thirty years ago, not like real life. And a murder that had been recorded? The evidence... well, JFK had been shot, alright – there the President was, in a motorcade in Dallas, *dead*. Shot.

Of course, he thinks that the country will be in a panic by tomorrow. He's surprised that it isn't already! After all, the President – and a *good* President at that – is dead. But, as a reporter, he seems to have only one thing to do, thanks to this turn of events.

He sips his coffee. It fills his mouth. The taste is syrupy and strong.

And he writes.

His fountain pen scratches up and down against his notepad. Up, down, and onto the next word, he writes, putting together the details of it all. The incident was a shocker, so the article needs to pack the same punch as the murder itself. Of course, it's not easy to write in a way that makes words into a bullet, but he tries. The trouble is staying away from hyperbole and still getting the facts down.

The public seem to respect the former President, so shocking the reader might not be as challenging as it seems. He crosses out a few adjectives, and looks at the draft.

Alas, no. It shall not pass. The draft seems so... nonchalant about such a matter, that no matter how many occurrences of the word *tragedy* he includes, it is too flat to make it into the papers.

Draft two begins.

Five minutes later, and draft two is on the table, scrunched up in an unruly mess of corners.

Draft three begins. It is like a story, following twists and turns, and relaying the tragedy of the President's death.

It would have made for a great thriller novel, but now it, too, resides next to draft two as a failure.

Draft four, and he does not know how to start it.

He sighs. He knew he would encounter this problem. He's never written about something like a murder, so how is he to know where to begin? Yes – the papers are always laden with stories of politics, but not of dead politicians.

He isn't sure what to do, but he's filled up... filled with frustration! He lets out a low growl, before breathing in and out. No – he can't write when he's angry, but the paper needs to be finished by tonight.

He opens his satchel. A small, brown item is withdrawn from its leather jaws.

Taking a long draw on a cigar, he sighs, and looks at the notepad paper. He's meant to be writing about an assassination, but is there another way he can approach this?

His mind pores over the possibilities. He could write about a President, or a nation with a lost leader rather than the leader's unfortunate fate. But how would he begin this? "*Last night, America shook as...*" too

informal. "On the twenty-second of November, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the President of America, was shot dead in a motorcade that was passing through Dallas, Texas." ...blunt. Not his style. But if nothing else works...

He hears the sound of sliding, grating – the sound of a plate going against metal. *Screeeech*.

"Table for two?"

He looks up, and there stands a friend of his. Still the same short blond hair and square jaw as last time, but this time, looking wirier than ever.

"Don't see why not, Richard," he says, and allows his friend to join him at the table, noticing the coffee cup that had been surreptitiously placed there. "Come right over."

"Good," the blond comments – "you know me – I'd just sit down anyway."

He shrugs. Richard winks back. "How's life been?"

"Writer's block," he says, feeling the anger of being unable to write about the topic flooding back through him. To calm himself, he exhales again through the cigar.

"Aw, come on, Eugene!" Richard coaxes, shaking his head. "You know you can do this!"

"And how would you go about saying that the President has been murdered?"

"That's a damn fine question, and I know you can find some answer. If you can't find it, I know you'll just make it instead. Knowing you, though, you could scavenge for answers in a desert, if you were given the right questions."

"The one that surfaces now is 'is it even physically possible for Richard Roger to stop talking?', and it speaks for itself."

"The answer would be 'no', I'm afraid. My question to you – 'do you know the meaning of the word *subtlety*?'"

They both chuckle. They never laugh, they just chuckle as if amused by a ridiculous prospect. As they chuckle, in the background, the jazz, carefree, walks on.

Richard looks at his friend. The bedraggled, brown-haired, glasses-clad man in front of him somehow looks far too curious to be a newspaper writer, of all things. But still – writing is a creative process. Eugene Marvin still seems... tired, but he always has that spark of humour about him.

"Well, what did you think of the President?"

"Past tense required, Eugene?"

"I would say it is!" They both chuckle again at that.

"Well," Richard admits, "I may not've voted for him, but maybe I was just being religious about it, and hot dang! Yeah, that guy – he did some good stuff..."

"Tell me, tell me," Eugene prompts, vaguely excited and scribbling down notes.

"To start, well, Eugene, did you know that he was in the army before he came to politics?"

"Hmmpf." Eugene exhales to answer. Smoke is released into the room thanks to this gesture.

"...I'll say no. Well, actually, he was in the navy, not the army. The guy must've saved lives or something!"

"Resource used to obtain information?" Eugene asks.

"Guy at work told me. Said he knows the President. Or at least he did."

"Can't trust everything you hear."

"Personally, I'd call Gary a reliable source of information."

"Suit yourself." Eugene scribbles down an extra note. "If this were true, then our old President would have seen some pretty rough times."

"Yeah. But politics itself is pretty rough, wouldn't you say?"

"When people are involved, I suppose."

"Each decision... having that kinda impact... I don't know whether I'd love it or crack under pressure."

"I'm happy with what I've got."

"A moment ago, you were struggling with writer's block."

"And now," Eugene says, "I am curious."

"That killed some felines..." Richard mutters. "But still," he says as his voice crescendos to a conversational mezzo-forte – "I think the boat our President worked on... *PT* something-oh-nine. Commanded it, actually. Got a few medals or something of the like."

"I will check that later," Eugene says, nodding, taking in the information. "What did you think of the President as a President, however?"

"Well, I've always been a bit more of a Republican type, and never, *never* pro-Catholic, but I can't deny that JFK worked for the better. Gave the inspiration-laden speech, worked hard, defended his goals...mind you, all of that business with Cuba was a bit nasty, don't you think?"

"I would agree with you there," Eugene nods, satisfied. Roger looks at him, and knows that his friend will want far more than just satisfaction.

"Well, think – that guy averted a nuclear crisis, but," Eugene notes how Richard pronounced *t's* as *d's*, so the phrase comes out as "*wey-ahl, think – thad guy aver'ed a new-clear crisis, bud,*" thanks to the thick accent and a glottal stop, "you'd honestly think that... well,, he had a heap o' responsibility thrown on his shoulders, broad as they might be – I dunno – I've never met him!"

"Ever heard of television? You can see him on that."

"Do I look like I can afford those fancy-shmancy gadgets like a TV?"

"Yes."

"Ha!"

Eugene always smiles when Richard makes the 'working-class' joke. It's clearly not true, but it's still funny.

"Well," Eugene comments, "perhaps you didn't learn as much about the election thanks to missing out on the important role of the television then."

"Pfft." Richard's chest swells up with disbelief as his facial expression feigns horror at the thought of being uneducated and poor. "Perhaps I could afford one."

"Oh, yes, you could!"

They don't even chuckle this time – they just laugh and laugh as the cigarette almost falls out of Eugene's mouth as he laughs so hard while Richard gasps for breath.

"But, yes – that President, dealing with near-nuclear disaster and all... How can a guy dealing with that smile so much?"

Eugene scribbles down '*the smiling President – the wise man*' as a note to use later on.

"How he could, I don't really know..."

The jazz walks on. Coffee's smell drenches the room in a mushy haze, given a slight bitter flavour by the cigar scent.

Richard sips his coffee. It doesn't taste the same as the smell, which is proper coffee as opposed to his instant. He personally prefers instant coffee. It gives him more of a kick than regular coffee. But, God, the smells!

"And, well there's messy international business, as well."

"Yeah," Richard says. "He dealt with that pretty well as well..."

"And what about just getting elected in the first place? That can't have been easy..."

"No, it can't. But there our to-be President was, smiling, talking about things, and speaking oh-so charismatically."

"Yeah. I mean, 'not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country'. Talk about inspirational quotes."

"It's an excellent example of chiasmus."

"How did I forget that you're doing a degree in Shakespearian English?"

"You forgot?"

"Yes, but your unintelligible babble brings me back to my senses, sadly. I really could have done without Greek in my life, but of course, it isn't very easy to avoid using it if you're you, Richard, is it?"

"And that's a good example of litotes."

"Li- what?!"

"Essentially, reject a possibility using understatement. Easy to confuse with a double negative."

"Sounds perfectly ridiculous to me. Who puts a name to all of these silly devices?"

"The Ancient Greeks."

"You are joking."

"It's perfectly simple, you know."

"Maybe if you're studying it for a degree, not if you're human and of regular bog-standard intelligence."

"You're smart. Learn."

"We're getting off-topic."

"Good," Richard concludes firmly. "I'm enjoying this."

"How your wife lives with this is a mystery to humankind." Eugene raises an eyebrow. "Scholar-kind, on the other hand, has evolved a ridiculous level of unnecessary comprehension that mucks up everybody's day. Excellent job, evolution."

"You're not a creationist?"

"In a way that is not meant to insult any creationists, I think myself perfectly rational, unlike a certain someone's ostentatious vocabulary."

Richard shakes his head, sighing and smiling. Eugene returns the playful gesture, shrugging as if to say, '*I have one brain, and it comprehends rational thought and banter. You should try it sometime rather than using that deformed peanut that floats about being idiosyncratic and idiotic.*'

"Writer's block so strong now, Eugene?"

"I'll see what I can do."

He looks at his notes, and smiles. Good. He may find an article in this.

"Well," Richard says, finishing his coffee with a large gulp and leaving the cup on the table while getting up and stretching slightly, "good luck with your article."

"Same to you about your degree. Bon voyage."

The two of them smile, and Richard leaves, walking on like the jazz.

Eugene smiles, inhales, breathes out, and sighs with the remaining air. If he can write this, he'll have done his job. If not, well...

He'll just have to try.

Scratch, scr-scr, rr, scratch, goes his fountain pen. Up and down and onto the next word.

What He Could Do For Our Country

24.11.1963

Our shocked nation shall forever mourn the date November 22. The President was riding in a motorcade through Dallas, Texas, when he was shot in the back of the head and the throat, dying immediately after.

The attack was believed to have been performed by Lee Harvey Oswald, not your textbook murder, but a small, innocuous-looking man, who is currently being transferred from one jail cell to another. He has not been interrogated yet. While the reason for the murder is unknown, Oswald has denied all charges.

The death of President Kennedy has not just left him with a bullet wound in his head, but America with a wounded heart. The former President's many great acts, such as uniting black and white people under a flag without segregation, have left the country mourning.

The President's last words were believed to be 'No, you certainly can't,' as a response to being told that he 'couldn't say Dallas doesn't love you'. No, he couldn't deny that.

It also cannot be denied that America loved Kennedy, and he will be dearly missed.

Jacqueline Kennedy, the President's wife, and Governor John Connally were in the motorcade with Kennedy at the time of his death. Mrs. Kennedy and Connally panicked when they heard the gunshot, which would have been heard three times - once, and then another two times closer together.

The assassination of the President is a terrible tragedy. We shall always remember the smiling President John F. Kennedy, a brave and wise man who allowed us to see justice and hope. To us, he was like a soldier leading on his troops in the wake of his broken commander.

President Kennedy did incredible things for our country. From averting a nuclear crisis to opening our eyes to the harm done by segregation, and ending said segregation, he was a remarkable man. Having served in the army years before coming to politics, the man had seen both pain and hope. America mourns this tragic event.

Kennedy's inspirational quote 'Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country', taken from his inaugural address, has left countless minds filled with determination and hope. America weeps for this great President.

