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## *The Day Kennedy Died*

Suppose on the day Kennedy died you had a vision. But this was no inner movie with a plot or anything like it. Not even very visual when you get down to admitting what actually occurred. About two-thirds of the way through 4<sup>th</sup> period Senior Civics, fifteen minutes before the longed-for lunchtime, suppose you stood up for no good reason—no reason at all really—and announced, as you never had before, to the class in general and to yourself as well, “Something. Something is happening. I see. Something coming. I can see. I . . .”

And that was all. You stood there: blank. The class roared. Even Phyllis Hoffpaur, girl most worshipped by you from afar that year, turned a vaguely pastel shade of red and smiled, and Richard Head, your best friend, Dick Head to the chosen few, pulled you down to your desk whispering, “Jesus, man! Jesus Christ!” Then you went numb. You did not know for sure what had occurred. But less than one hour later, when Stella (despised) Vandenburg, teacher of twelfth grade English, came sashaying into the auditorium, informing, left and right, as many digesting members of the student body as she could of what she had just heard, several students began to glance at you, remembering what you’d said. A few pointed,

whispering to their confederates, and on that disturbing day they slinked away in the halls. Even Dick Head did not know what to say.

In 5<sup>th</sup> period Advanced Math, Principal Crawford played the radio over the intercom and the school dropped deeper into history. For the rest of that day, everyone slinked away—except for the one moment Phyllis Hoffpaur stared hard, the look on her face asking, assuming you would know, “Will it be ok?”

And you did not know. No one knew. Everyone staggered back to their houses that evening aimless and lost, not knowing, certainly sensing something had been changed forever. *Silsbee High forever! That is our claim! Never, no never! Will we lose our fame!* you often sang. But this was to be the class of 1964, afraid of the future at last, who would select, as the class song, Terry Stafford’s *Suspicion*. And this was November—even in Texas the month of failings, month of sorrows—from which there was no turning. It would be a slow two-months’ slide until the manic beginnings of the British Invasion, three months before Clay’s ascension to the throne, but all you saw walking home that afternoon were the gangs of gray leaves clotting the curbs and culverts, the odors of winter forever in the air: cold, damp, bleak, dead, dull: dragging you toward the solstice like a tide.