



THE KENNEDYS

by Daniel A. Wolf

SYNOPSIS

The Kennedys tells the story of the late President John F. Kennedy (JFK) from his days as a freshman senator in 1953 to that fateful day in Dallas, 1963. The play covers among other things his meeting with Jackie Bouvier (the future Mrs. Kennedy), their courtship and wedding, his decision to seek the Democratic Party's nomination, the placing of Lyndon Johnson on the ticket, the televised debate with Vice-President Nixon, victory in the general election, and finally the assassination and aftermath. In between are poignant scenes between Jackie and Joseph P. Kennedy, patriarch of the Kennedy family; between JFK and his brother, Bobby; and between JFK and Jackie as they struggle to balance the demands of political and personal life.

The Keennedys is divided into 3 Acts. Act I deals with the relationship between Jackie and JFK. It shows their first meeting, her visit to Hyannis Port to meet his family, her difficult encounter with his father, and their wedding reception. Act II deals with the primary season leading up to the national convention. It opens with JFK declaring his intention to run for President, Hubert Humphrey's loss in the all important West Virginia primary, the winning of the nomination in Los Angeles, and the choosing of Lyndon Johnson as JFK's running mate. It ends with JFK's acceptance speech, the powerful *A New Frontier*. Act III centers on the general election and beyond. It covers the televised



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debate between JFK and Vice-President Nixon, campaign

speeches of the two candidates, election night, the

inauguration, and first days at the White House. It ends with Dallas, the assassination, and aftermath.

Act I opens in 1953 where 23 year old Jackie Bouvier is interviewing people in downtown Washington D.C. She works for the Washington Times-Herald newspaper as *The Inquiring Camera Girl*. Interviews finished, she sits down with her assistant, Janet, and reveals things about her past which include winning the prestigious *Prix de Paris* writing contest and traveling through France with her sister. Janet asks whether French men are as romantic as many say. Jackie concedes they are but admits she still hasn't met the man she's looking for. In *Where is My Love?* Jackie sings about the kind of man she hopes to meet and someday marry.

The following day Jackie goes to the office of Frank Waldrop, editor of the paper. He is pleased with Jackie's work and assigns her to interview some of Capitol Hill's newest congressmen and senators beginning with John Kennedy of Massachusetts. Jackie protests vehemently claiming that "John Kennedy is the biggest playboy in Washington." Her protestations have no effect, however, as Waldrop insists she be at JFK's office the following day.

Jackie enters JFK's reception area while he busily grooms himself in his office. He comes out to greet her and leads her into his office. Jackie explains that following the



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interview she will take his picture. The interview is testy and when JFK answers “Me!” to the question “What do women desire most?” Jackie quickly tries to leave. He reminds

her, however, about his picture. Jackie reluctantly agrees and photographs him by an open window. When he asks her to stand with him by the window she refuses. However, amidst the banter in *Without a Warning*, they lock eyes and fall in love.

Jackie goes to the Kennedy Compound in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts to meet JFK’s family. He introduces her to his brothers Bobby and Teddy, sisters Pat and Eunice, and his mother (Rose) and father (Joe). His father, the powerful patriarch of the Kennedy family, asks whether he can have a private chat with Jackie. None object and while JFK and his siblings leave to play football, Jackie and Joe sit down to talk.

Though pleasant at first, the conversation descends into a heated exchange as Joe nearly insists Jackie marry JFK in order to help advance his political career. Joe leaves to help Rose in the kitchen while Jackie remains seated “completely stunned.” JFK enters and Jackie asks if he truly loves her. “I love you very, very much,” he answers before going into the house to change for dinner. Joined by Pat and Eunice, Jackie sings *If You Want My Love*, a song asking JFK or any man to be emotionally honest when dealing with the heart of a woman.

JFK and Jackie marry and at the reception future brother-in-law, Hollywood star Peter Lawford, sings the romantic *Like a Star*. JFK and Jackie are called to the bandstand



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where he makes a few brief remarks before both sing *A Wedding*

Vow, committing “to remain and help each other through” as Act I comes to an end.

Act II opens in October, 1959. JFK has brought together his father, Bobby, and 3 advisors: Ted Sorensen, Larry O’Brien, and Arthur Schlesinger to his home at Hyannis Port, Massachusetts. There he announces his intention to seek the Democratic Party’s nomination for President. The advisors are surprised and offer a number of reasons why he shouldn’t run. JFK understands their reservations but responds, “You’re all forgetting one thing” and, by the end of *I’m a Kennedy!*, all are on board and begin mapping out strategy for the upcoming primary season.

It is election night in the all important West Virginia primary. Hubert Humphrey and his campaign manager, George Scott, enter Humphrey’s campaign headquarters. Humphrey has lost but doesn’t know why. He asks Scott to tell him but Scott tries not to answer. Eventually Scott tells him. “You’re just not a very good-looking man,” he says. Humphrey counters that he’s had a far more successful legislative career than Kennedy has had. Still, it is the age of television and Scott knows that Humphrey is no match for the telegenic Kennedy, a theme highlighted in *You Can’t Beat Kennedy*. With his financial support evaporating, Humphrey grudgingly admits defeat and agrees to drop out of the race the following day, assuring JFK the Democratic nomination.



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It is the night of the roll call of states at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. The hotel suite is crowded with Kennedy family members and advisors. JFK enters the room to find that he is only a few votes shy of nomination. All cheer as Wisconsin declares its delegates for JFK. Finally, Wyoming takes him over the top and

all except Jackie engage in celebration. Jackie enters an adjacent bedroom and paces the floor nervously. JFK enters to see what's wrong and Jackie asks why he needs to be President. JFK replies that the Presidency is something he has aspired to for a long time and in *I Want to be the President* JFK tries to allay Jackie's fears.

The following day JFK interviews Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri as a possible running mate. JFK is satisfied with his answers and offers him the number two spot on the ticket. Symington accepts and JFK summons Bobby to tell him. Bobby enters and privately tells JFK that Senator Lyndon Johnson of Texas is interested in running as Vice-President. JFK is firm on Symington but agrees to meet with Johnson.

Symington leaves to write his acceptance speech and Johnson soon enters. A seasoned politician, he tells JFK that going with Symington will spell certain defeat. Johnson not only cites the large number of electoral votes Texas has, but also his ability to give people "a feeling of hope." JFK remains undecided but after Johnson's *Everything Will Turn Out Right*, he becomes JFK's running mate much to Bobby's great surprise.



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It is the last night of the convention. JFK, Johnson, Symington, and Humphrey stand on a platform waving to delegates on the floor. Former governor Adlai Stevenson introduces JFK. After a few brief remarks, JFK launches into the powerful *A New Frontier*. Delegates, political dignitaries and members of the Kennedy family join in as Act II comes to a close.

Act III opens at a television studio for the first Nixon-Kennedy debate. Bobby gives last minute advice to JFK while Leonard Hall, Nixon's campaign manager, waits frantically for Nixon to arrive. Nixon enters and Hall likewise gives Nixon final advice. Nixon tells Hall that he intends to confront JFK on the issue of class. When Hall asks him to "drop it", Nixon refuses. JFK speaks first and tells why he is running for President. Nixon speaks next and tells the American people that, like JFK, he too is a man of style and class. To prove his point he reverses his jacket to one most often associated with that of a Las Vegas lounge singer and launches into *Trust Me* with disastrous results.

The campaign heats up as JFK and Nixon are seen delivering speeches. At the end of a busy day JFK enters a hotel suite and tells Bobby he's thoroughly exhausted. Bobby understands but exhorts him nevertheless to "give it a little more" since only two weeks remain before Election Day. Reminiscing, JFK tells Bobby how much he has learned the past year. Bobby thinks he's referring to the campaign, but JFK says that's not what he



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means and in *You're My Brother* tells Bobby how important he's become in his life. Bobby responds similarly in what should be an emotional highpoint of the play.

It's election night. Members of the Kennedy family and advisors are watching the results on television in JFK's living room. JFK enters and asks Bobby for a progress report. Bobby tells him that, although he has done well in the East, reports from the Midwest are not encouraging and that the last 28 electoral votes needed for victory may be

hard to get. JFK decides to go to bed and "find out with the rest of the country" whether he won or lost.

Hours pass and only Sorensen, O'Brien, and Schlesinger remain watching television. With the results known, they argue among themselves who should inform JFK. Sorensen chooses to do so and makes his way slowly up the stairs to JFK's bedroom. He then knocks three times and says, "Time to get up, Mr. President" (*Mr. President*).

It's January 20, 1961- Inauguration Day. JFK and Johnson prepare to take their oaths of office. First, Johnson takes the oath for Vice-President. Next, JFK takes the oath for President. He then moves to the podium and utters the most memorable words from his inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country" as spectators sing the refrain from *A New Frontier*.



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JFK and Jackie stand in front of a façade of the White House.

Jackie suggests that JFK repeal the 23rd amendment since she “will need more than eight years to get this place in shape.” They sing *First Family*, a song expressing their hopes and dreams for the incoming Kennedy administration. Jackie briefly leaves to put on a hat and coat similar to the ones she wore in Dallas, 1963. The façade of the White House is pulled back. JFK and Jackie begin walking together. A man enters and says, “Welcome to Dallas, Mr. President.” JFK and Jackie continue walking then stop as JFK clutches his throat, elbows outstretched, as he did during the assassination. He falls to his knees, Jackie bends down to comfort him, and the set goes dark.

Four figures emerge from the darkness: JFK, Jackie, Johnson, and Nixon. In *And So It Happened*, Jackie, Johnson, and Nixon tell JFK what happened to them and to the country following the assassination. Jackie tells (*sings*) about her remarriage; Johnson, the Vietnam War and his decision not to seek a second term; and Nixon about Watergate. Johnson and Nixon exit while JFK stands some distance from Jackie looking despondent. Jackie calls to him, JFK turns, and they exit together as the play ends.