

# SAVING JFK

BY W. GREEN

## -Chapter 1- The Time Machine

Zak Newman reached ground zero. His pulse raced. Nervous, excited, surfing a wave of anticipation. Alive in the moment, he loved the feeling. He looked down. His right foot rested on a mottled bronze plaque embedded in the concrete. Gingerly, he used his boot to clear away sticky spider webs laced with dead leaves and bugs: *The Chess Corner. Donated by the University Club of Mystic Heights. 1976. Celebrating America's Bicentennial.* He thought of the “good old days” as he read the engraving. Knee-high weeds overran the people-sized game board, raggedly defining the edges of its paint-peeled, cracked concrete squares. Massive World War II memorial columns supported a classical stone entablature that ringed the game grid. It was an imposing, almost foreboding enclosure. Standing in the middle of the chessboard, Zak looked about warily and then fixed his gaze downward, imagining his destination directly below—Dr. Currant’s secret underground bunker. Was he ready to travel time? Too late now to debate that.

A hot summer breeze brushed his face, whistled through the memorial colonnade, and slid down the cliff edge, stirring the waters below. In the distance, a couple of small sailboats bobbed about in the blue of Smuggler’s Cove. His mind drifted. It was a scene from one of the photos in the Mystic Heights Historical Museum. A half-century ago, this place, known then as Mystic Memorial Park, with its scenic view and surrounding woods, was a favorite camping spot for the local residents. But no one camped out anymore, and few people ventured into this now desolate, weather-beaten forest. Across the protective waters rested the quiet town of Mystic Heights. A low, early evening sun raked across the colorful roofs in a shadowy play of light and dark. The gold-capped, faceted cupola roof of Randall Tower, the science building of Cordwell University, and the tallest structure in the town reflected sunlight into his eyes. He gave up his squinted gaze and checked his watch: 19:11. There was no time for second thoughts. He had four minutes to get in position.

Although he had not seen either Emma or Ethan, he knew that each had stood on this same chessboard the previous two half-hours. His thoughts focused on finding his place. “F3—white horse,” he muttered to himself. He wished he had arrived a few minutes earlier. He knew he didn’t have much time. He had to be on that square in three minutes. He focused on the chessboard. It was difficult to know one side from the other. Decades ago, white and black chess pieces had identified the two sides, but eventually, hungry people stole them for the scrap metal. With thirty seconds to go, Zak took his position on what he hoped was the G1 square. He jumped two squares up and then hopped one square left, positioning his feet to ensure he was in the exact middle of the square as Dr. Currant had stipulated. He checked his watch: twelve seconds to spare. He waited. The *TimeTravelle* was about to transport him to its secret location—thirty feet straight down into A.C. Currant’s laboratory. Zak knew using the time machine was the only way to enter the bunker, but he would have preferred the old-fashioned way, a few flights of stairs and a door. No such luck, he thought. Sweat rolled out of his pits and down his sides. He glanced at the bay again. The little boats skimmed the water. Except for the screaming of a gull circling above, all was quiet.

Then he felt movement. He couldn’t tell if he was moving. Or maybe the world was moving—it was like riding in a subway tunnel. Images flashed along on either side. A persistent hum coursed through his ears. No panic—no pain—but nausea crawled up his gut. His knees knocked with the rush of fear-released adrenaline. Seconds, minutes, or hours may have passed. He had no real idea. He was lost in time and space. Then the floor came up abruptly and whacked his feet. The impact shook his body. Everything stopped. He ran his hands over his face and rubbed his eyes. He was breathing rapidly. His heart beat in his ears. Then, faintly, as if in the distance, he heard the laughter that grew louder with each new breath. Bright lights clouded his vision. He fought to activate his senses.

“Welcome, time traveler Zak. You have arrived. You look pretty good considering that you just dove through thirty feet of solid granite.”

Zak recognized the rich, baritone voice of his friend Ethan. He looked about and smiled sheepishly. “*Echale ganas!* I made it.” He gazed about and found the Twins, Ethan and his sister Emma, along with Jacques Dufour and A.C. Currant, standing in a semi-circle in front of him.

“Have a seat, Zak. Something to drink? I’ll bet you need it,” said Dufour as he handed him a glass of ice water. Zak sipped. Still frazzled by his recent strange transport, he gazed blankly at his beverage benefactor. Dufour was a wisp of a man who spoke each word clearly, cleanly, and with only a slight hint of an accent. But Zak remembered it had taken the better part of his senior year at Mystic Heights High School to feel comfortable listening to the French-born American history teacher as he attempted to explain the intricacies of *The History* to a class full of semi-comatose, hormone-filled teenagers. “Face it,” Zak had spouted off one day in class, “*The History* is boring...it’s a religion. All doctrine...no fun, no controversy, no anything. It’s like when everyone’s parents went to church back at the turn of the century...boring.” He held that opinion until about six weeks ago when Dufour asked: “What if we had a time machine and we could travel back into history to witness it?” This one question seemed to ignite the sleeping students in robust discussion, contemplation, and second-guessing of *The History*. Zak and “the Twins,” as everyone called them, pushed the topic in and after school, resulting in a series of events leading to their meeting today in Currant’s underground lair.

“All right. Everyone’s here. Let’s move along.” Zak slid aside, and Dr. A.C. Currant took control, as usual. He was a tall, straight-backed, thin man with salt and pepper hair. His face was delicate yet handsome, deceptively placid. He wore a wide, white smile that captivated those around him and relaxed their defenses. He was accustomed to having things his way for more than seven decades. Friendly and personable, thought Zak, but always in charge.

“Back to the past. Everyone knows Thomas Arthur Vallee killed the President in Chicago on November 2, 1963.” A.C. Currant punched out the words staccato. “Three quick rifle shots...one to the lung, one to the heart, and one to the head, and John F. Kennedy was dead.” He placed his gun-barrel-simulating finger on his chest and his temple as he itemized the former President’s wounds. “The question is, what do *we do* in 1963? We will only have a maximum of twenty-eight days to complete our mission. After that, the *TimeTravelle* turns into a pumpkin. And when that happens, we will be roadkill on the highway of time...ready to be scooped up by the time cops. I say we take a quick look at this JFK thing. Have a little fun. Maybe do a little sightseeing. And return home.”

As Currant paused to catch his breath, Zak looked at his long-time friend who had remained, throughout Currant’s monologue, seated serenely in a lab chair like a leopard in a tree. But even when still, Ethan Callan-Wright’s body language spoke of action. His solid face and wavy, sun-streaked hair gave him the look of a well-traveled mariner older than his seventeen years. Zak sensed he was about to pounce. Ethan jumped out of his chair. Expanding to his full commanding height, he glanced at his sister Emma, then at Zak and Jacques Dufour, before returning his eyes to Currant, waiting a moment before speaking. “No disrespect, Doctor, but we’ve beaten this one into the ground. Emma and I talked to our father. He says there will be enough time to get settled into the time zone and figure out what really happened to JFK...at length. He says we should do an extensive investigation of the crime. And I think Warren Wright’s opinion trumps your opinion regarding the feasibility of this whole operation.”

“Warren Wright...the great detective.” Currant laughed lightly. “I know he’s your father, but he works for the government. He’s a crippled government hack now. How valuable can his opinion be?”

Emma Callan-Wright squirmed in her chair in the corner of the gray, concrete-walled laboratory bunker. Unlike her twin, she had straight, raven-black hair, pale skin, delicate features, and an elegant, calming presence. Her green eyes narrowed as she cleared her throat. “That’s not a fair assessment of our father, and you know it. He worked for the FBI for eight years and fourteen years as a private investigator...when that kind of position existed. He was the best. He has a wall full of awards and commendations.”

A.C. Currant circled the lab. His ever-present crisp, starched, white jacket rustled as he walked about. He looked up at the ceiling as if he was acquiring direction from a higher being. Then he shook his head gently from side to side as he walked up to Emma. She sat poised, waiting for a response. Looking down at her, he maintained a smile as he spoke. “OK. My apologies, Miss Callan-Wright. You are correct. Your father’s current bureaucratic

berth is not a true reflection of his former skills. The world is changing...generally not for the better...and it isn't easy to retain one's greatness."

"Like you, Professor?" Jacques Dufour stroked his koala bear beard and smiled.

"*Touché*," Carrant muttered, then said something unintelligible under his breath before continuing. He walked into the *TimeTravelle*—the intersecting double-arched metal structure that dominated the room. Carrant stood under the bridgework and spread out his arms Christ-like. His outreaching fingers waved in the air between him and the downward legs of the metal arches. He stood on one of the jump blocks, a rubberized, textured platform directly below the center of the arch, and looked at the four people seated before him. His face appeared radiant, almost demonic, in the rainbow-like sparkle light that beamed off the highly polished surfaces of the massive device. "I invented the *TimeTravelle*." He stretched out the last syllable with great emphasis, lacing the name with a Francophilian tinge, adding unnecessary gravitas. "My humble import may be questioned, but the *TimeTravelle* is the greatest invention in the history of the world." Like words from an old pulpit preacher, his bold proclamation echoed off the concrete walls.

Emma glanced at Ethan and smirked every time Carrant squeezed out the words "*TimeTravelle*."

Simultaneous with Carrant's pronouncement, Zak Newman spun around on his lab stool. "Hey, Professor, aren't you afraid your shouting will be heard by *MOM*?"

Carrant stared at him, his face offering pity on the cognitive limitations of Zak's cranial capacity. "Aren't you afraid your pretty boy body is going to fly off that spinning stool? Think about it...eighty inches of steel-reinforced concrete walls, floor, and ceiling. Electronically swept every five minutes. Physically accessible only to those who can operate the *TimeTravelle*. Your *MOM* is out there scraping information off toilet room walls. She's digging around in your neighbor's garbage. She's interviewing children on the playground, plying them with candy to get them to reveal their parents' every indiscretion, every wayward thought, every strange delusion. But she cannot penetrate my dreams, my world, my greatness." He leaped off the platform into their conversation circle with surprising grace for a seventy-three-year-old. "We are isolated here. We are in this place only. Well, in this place and in the distant past, when we use the *TimeTravelle* to go to such a place...we are free from the ever-present, super-nosy, busybody, nauseous nanny-state. Feels good, doesn't it? Feels like 1955 again. Sunlight and fresh breezes flapping crisp white linens hung out to dry." He paused for a moment, his eyes rising toward the ceiling as he seemingly connected to a lost moment of his youth. "Screw *MOM*! Let's get on with it."

"So let's take a vote. Who's for going back to 1963?" asked Dufour. "Before you raise your hands... I know this was my idea originally. But remember, I brought it up as a thought problem in history class. At that time, it was just an idea...a way to explore history...a way to gain a different view of the JFK assassination. Now, thanks to Professor Carrant and his remarkable device, we can turn this thought problem into reality. We can go back and witness history. As you know, these are dangerous waters. Any challenge to *The History* is heresy. It is..."

"We know that, Mr. Dufour," interrupted Ethan. "That's why we need to do it. You're the history man. You know things took a wrong turn beginning with JFK's death in Chicago in 1963. Something happened." Ethan looked out across the room before resuming. "Something changed in the world when they blew his head off. And I don't care what's found in *The History: Our Past*, which I know is a *sacred text*." He rolled his eyes. "We've got a chance to see what *really* happened. I'm not convinced that this one guy, Thomas Arthur Vallee, just happened to get a job in that warehouse at just the right time. And in just the right place so he could do the nasty. I know about opportunity knocking. I know he was the lone gunman. But let's just assume for a moment that he had help. Maybe the 'how and when' of his quick execution by the cops was just lucky. Maybe, but..."

Zak set his water glass down on a nearby table. "Don't forget all the changes that happened because JFK died. History changed. The Cuban Invasion. The death of Castro. Twenty years of war in Vietnam. The Johnson impeachment, and everything else. We have to go. We owe it to ourselves. Maybe if we find out the truth, the truth will set us free."

Emma Callan-Wright got out of her chair. At five foot nine, she was a full head shorter than her twin brother but physically imposing nevertheless. Zak always said she got the looks—and the brains. At this moment, she gave

Zak a look of disgust. "I'm surprised at you, Zak. Think about it. We're talking about possibly changing the course of history. If there is a real mystery, maybe it's one we don't want to solve. Changing history is a dangerous business. You might not even be around if we tweak it too much, Mr. Artificial Womb Baby #6297. How do you know what will happen if we go back and snoop around and make changes?"

"I thought you were an adventurer, my lady. Maybe you should get into a wheelchair like your father," said Currant with a smile.

"Don't be obnoxious," she said as she glared back at him.

"Zee vote..." suggested Dufour, in tension, his voice regressing to a natural French accent. "Who 'ezz for going?"

The four males raised their hands quickly. Emma looked at each, squishing her lips, then slowly raised her hand and smiled. "Don't worry, I'm in. 1963, here we come. But let's be very careful not to squeeze the goose of time too hard. He might just bite our hand and change everything."

Zak looked at Ethan. He was smiling, too, but to Zak, he had the look of a man who wanted to goose the goose.

A.C. Currant held a clipboard before him and checked the notebook chart. "OK, kids. I've got a to-do list that won't quit. We've really got to study the customs, clothes, clichés, and citizens of Chicago in 1963. We'll need old money. We'll need old technology. We need to train on the *TimeTravelle*. We've got *mucho* work to do."

Ethan ran up the ramp of the *TimeTravelle* device, stood on a jump pad, and spun around, facing his audience. "Will this baby work, Doc?"

Currant smiled with a boyish grin. "Sonny boy...we will have the time of our lives."

"Right. But have you time-traveled with it?"

Currant seemed flustered. "Well. Technically, no. But it has performed perfectly for physical transfer, and the computer runs for time travel have gone like clockwork. No pun intended." Currant chuckled at the sound of his own words. "I'm certain it will work perfectly. After all, I designed it." He smiled broadly and extended his hands, palms up as if to end the discussion.

"So what you're saying is that it's untested, and the four of us are test dummies?"

"Well, I would call us all 'pioneers'...."

Ethan sucked in deeply and then exhaled. "OK, Doc. It's your funeral too."

"Please, Ethan. Skip the melodrama. It will work. And remember, I was alive in '63. The *TimeTravelle* will get us there. I'll keep us from making stupid mistakes. Dufour will stay here and monitor *The History* for any disruptions. You can do your junior detective digging. Your sister can worry, and Zak can eat some of the finest fast food ever cooked in the best greasy spoons in Chicago. This will be fun, my friends. It will be a gas."

## **LOG of Zak Newman**

### **June 26, 2028: 22:13**

*I have been told my handwriting is very legible, as it should be since I have been practicing this skill my entire life. In a way, I am a 21st-century monk. I can make my pen produce writing on paper, which, like the typical monk's efforts in the Middle Ages, can be read only by a small minority of the populace. For me, it is simple to decipher the swirls, dots, and slashes that form the letters, words, and sentences. But for most, such writing looks as quaint as Chinese sinographs—very interesting but meaningless. I can thank my mother (the wonderful surrogate provided by the A.W. beta program) for this skill. She started my longhand career when I was two years old. How she knew what was coming, I'll never know. But she knew, and I was given this unique skill. Thanks to her, I can write a log in private. My thoughts are mine to myself—so long as I successfully keep the log hidden from MOM. She, our government within the government, has, of course, forbidden the recording of these thoughts. It's probably verboten*

*just to think them, but this log is now an unimportant and minor transgression since we have decided to time-travel to the past using A.C. Carrant's astounding device. I will never know how he can keep that thing a secret while every written, spoken, or imagined idea of every person in the country is captured, cataloged, copied, and coded. Still, he is a certified genius, or so he says. We'll find out how smart he really is once we begin our voyage across time.*

*I can't say enough bad things about MOM. She has location-revealing nano-implants delivered into the bloodstreams of unsuspecting children when they are immunized against disease; mind-control devices force-feeding mental poison to the masses; monitoring cameras and microphones in every inch of public space; police armed with sound detectors able to listen in to "private conversations" from a half-kilometer distance; and sensing devices including X-ray machines in every police cruiser that identify every license number, every occupant, and everything and anything in a person's vehicle.*

*MOM is like a nasty, nosy dog with very bad breath—totally invasive, always in your face, everywhere and nowhere, sniffing about without reason—just an annoying pest that will never leave you alone. She always claims to be working in everyone's best interest, but nobody wants her, and nobody likes her—she's a bitch. I've been told that many years ago, people and politicians discussed MOM's limits. Some suggested that a government's role should be to maintain a free flow of ideas and accomplishments by protecting the people from outsiders or insiders who would interfere with the American Dream, as it was then called. But after a while, MOM poked her wet nose into everybody's life—according to her, to help "them" because they could not possibly help themselves. She became nosier and nosier, and she kept improving her senses of smell and memory until, like a good coon dog, she could even identify a person with an unwanted idea from her doghouse on the moon. She created IfraGuard, a stoolie program that allowed children to rat on their parents. Eventually, people stopped talking about ideas that MOM might not find acceptable. People speculate that within the last few years, she has perfected her ability to read minds at will from a distance just to verify that no one is contemplating doing anything, which would upset her plans. This long-distance mind-reading could be just a wild rumor, but I notice more people humming to themselves as they walk about in public. Maybe they're trying to stifle their thoughts. After all, if you don't have a thought, it can't be read. As A.C. said so boldly—in the safety of his underground bunker: "Screw MOM!" I hope her mind-reading machine isn't focused on me right now. She wouldn't like my misty misgivings about life in America in the year 2028—nor my longing to taste the freedoms of the past via the TimeTravelle device. Everyone has reasons for going back in time. A.C. wants to prove his genius, and Ethan wants to solve the mystery of JFK's death. I think Emma wants to keep Ethan out of trouble and maybe—just maybe—straighten out this screwed-up world we live in by gently tweaking the past. And for me, MOM has made life thoroughly boring, predictable, and confining. I just want to swim naked in the wild river of time. End 06-26-28*

## -Chapter 2- **Creating a Legend**

Ethan's eyes scanned the refrigerator's interior, finally resting upon the jar of natural strawberry preserves that his father had brought home from his recent travels. He loved the *real* rather than the *artificial*. The combination of the preserves over some rough bread and a cup of hot coffee provided him a satisfying breakfast. It was a quiet morning late in June. On this clear day, the low morning sun cut through the kitchen windows and reflected brightly

off the crisp white tile floor. He mulled over the texture and taste of his toast as he stared blankly at the small quiet pond and two ducks drifting in the blue water. Tiny birds flitted about the tree branches of the surrounding still misty woods. His mind drifted like those ducks. Even though he was seventeen, his father still provided treats, like the strawberry preserves, as if he were a little boy. Ethan warmed to this thought as he downed the last bite. The motorized stair-chair sounded the arrival of his father, Warren Wright. He assumed it would be at least a couple of hours before Emma made her morning appearance. Since school let out for summer break, she had returned to her natural sleeping mode—late to bed, late to rise. “Morning, Dad,” chirped Ethan. “Looks like a good one, doesn’t it?”

His father rolled into the kitchen. A skilled operator of the latest *gyromobe* device, he brought the machine to a neat stop in front of the coffee station. Then, he activated the caffeine delivery by pushing his screen icon, a tiger, which immediately yielded one large mug of steaming black coffee. With his first sip, he sighed. “Good stuff. Can’t live without it.”

“You got me hooked,” said Ethan. “Coffee,” he sipped, “is every detective’s elixir.” He smiled. “How are you feeling today, Dad?”

His father retained solid masculine looks, black hair smattered with gray, and one of the few mustaches in the country. His upper body was muscular, but his lower body was a withered wisp. Wright looked up from his cup, “Not bad...not bad at all...better than dead,” he muttered, almost to himself. He brushed back his hair with his free hand and shook his head gently from side to side.

Sensing his father’s angst, Ethan thought about the terrible night five years ago when the news arrived that the detective had been wounded by a bullet to his lower back. He endured a series of complex surgeries, and only his powerful will to live allowed him to survive what should have been a death blow. Ironically, the shot that paralyzed him came from an off-duty policeman who just happened by at the moment Warren Wright was about to capture two very desperate criminals. The old cop was trying to help when one of the men pulled a gun. In response, the cop fired several shots. One found its mark in the bad guy, but the other hit the detective. This tragedy appeared to be, at least in the public’s view of Warren Wright, only a bump in the road of his spectacular investigative career. But his field investigations were over now. *Gyromobe*-bound, he contented himself with ideation, conceptual thinking, and data analysis for the government’s domestic security division. His days of working *out there* were long gone, and, as he often remarked, the days of private super-sleuths were dead and gone too—dead as his limp legs.

“We’re leaving in two days,” said Ethan.

“Are you ready?”

“Well, thanks to you, we got to use the talent of one of the finest forgers in the country....”

“Retired forger.”

“Right. I know Longwell served his time, and I know he was doing us a favor because you asked him to. Anyway, he did a great job on the documents. A ton of research. Take a look at these.” Ethan grabbed a portfolio off the kitchen counter and retrieved a passel of documents. He handed them to his father one by one. “Driver’s license, library card, Social Security card....”

“Hey, I remember these,” his father said with a smile. “These things actually paid off for a while until the government gave up the pretense in 2015. Thankfully your grandmother got a few bucks out of it before it went bust.”

“Right. But this will be hot stuff in 1963. Here. Check it out. It’s a membership card for Emma...the Frankie Avalon Fan Club. He was a singer.”

“Don’t remember him. Must have been something, though. Fan club?” Wright shook his head.

“We’ve got bus passes and school IDs for Emma, Zak, and me. We’re using ‘Springfield Heights High School’...not ‘Mystic Heights’...to conceal our true residence. Longwell created several pieces for Dr. Currant also...Rotary Club. Diner’s Club. This is the best, a voter’s card. Now that’s something I’ve never seen before. Apparently, people could vote if they had this piece of cardboard.”

“Well, at least they thought they were doing something by voting,” said his father. “We haven’t had an election based on popular vote since 2016. You were just five years old then...a little too young to play the game. After that fiasco of an election, they gave up and instituted the VIP...voter implant project...nobody could vote without the implant. Cut down on the voter fraud. Cut down on the voters too. Anyone with half a brain and enough money to support themselves took a pass. The rest are the electorate. As if it mattered. At least they make it look good every four years. They vote, get their public aid, and nobody tells them who to vote for...the computer sorts through that process.”

“That’s why I thought this card was so neat,” said Ethan. “All the adults had them in 1960. And took them very seriously. They voted, and their votes must have counted. Not like today. I read that Kennedy was a dark horse, but he still got elected.”

“Right. That was great until somebody blasted his head off. That’s the way they did it in the old days. Wrong guy gets elected, thinks he has the power of the people, and boom...off with his head.”

Just then, Emma waltzed into the kitchen barefoot with tussled hair. She wore a red terry robe with her name emblazoned across the back like a professional athlete. “Let me guess...JFK. Right?” she said as she began to dig about in the refrigerator.

“You’re up early,” said Ethan.

She ignored his comment. “Juice and a banana. ‘Breakfast of Champions.’”

Ethan smiled and replied, “Well, I see you have done your 1963 homework.”

Warren Wright looked puzzled.

“Wheaties. Everyone ate them for breakfast in 1963,” she said. “They don’t sell them anymore, of course.” She shrugged her shoulders. “Heck, they don’t sell much boxed cereal at all now. I guess that ended when the milk supply went south. Too much radioactivity per glass, right, Dad?”

“Right. A flurry of big quakes destroyed one nuclear plant too many. Just another thing. Too bad. I enjoyed a glass of milk and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich when I was young. But you are correct, my little buttercup. Once the cow milk turned into *nuke juice*, that piece of farming history died...along with thousands of people and a whole lot of cows.”

“So, Sis, are you ready for the big road trip?”

“Stop that!” she sputtered.

“What?”

“Don’t call me Sis.”

“Come on, Sis...”

Emma ignored her brother and turned to face her father. “Dad. Make him stop. I mean it.”

Warren Wright looked up at Ethan and spoke, his voice lowered, “Ethan. Enough is enough. You two have a rough month ahead of you. You better make amends.”

Ethan leaned over and gave Emma a noisy kiss on the back of her head. “I’m sorry, Si...”

She turned around and glared at him.

“Emma,” he said. “No more ‘Sis’...at least while we’re time-traveling.”

She relaxed and smiled. “OK. Truce. *Little brother*.”

Ethan nodded. “Fifteen minutes older, my dear twin.”

“Right, and years wiser.”

Mr. Wright watched the sibling settlement with apparent amusement. Then Ethan saw him focus his view on the window. He turned back and locked in on Emma first, then Ethan. They both sensed the change in his attitude. Wright refilled his coffee cup and asked the two to follow him. Crossing the dining room, they entered the study in the center of the house. Without any windows and walls paneled in solid oak, Ethan always thought it felt like the inside of a wine barrel. He knew those walls were lined with lead sheets, Kevlar, soundproofing, and electronic neutralizing equipment activated when someone entered the room. It was the only secure, safe, isolated room in the house. In fact, it was purposely constructed as a *safe room*. His father asked him to close the two sequentially

operating doors. Swinging in the heavy outer door, then the equally ponderous inner door, Ethan's eyes settled on his father. He knew that look. His father was very concerned about something. "What's up, Dad?"

"I don't want you to speak about time travel. The topic is potentially dangerous. You and I know that the government has unofficially banned using time travel devices. Over the past ten years, they've confiscated and destroyed many machines." He tightened his face. "I saw a *bee* outside our kitchen window."

"A bee?" questioned Emma. "Like a honey bee?"

"No, Emma," said Ethan, "a bee like a government mini-drone." He looked back at his father. "You sure, Dad?"

His father nodded. "Yeah. It was one of those little flying snoop machines. You can never tell what they're up to. Maybe it was just passing by. But it did hover for a few seconds in the window while you two were fussing over Emma's nickname. I'm concerned."

"What," said Emma, "do you think they know that we're going 'back door'?"

Mr. Wright steeped his hands in front of him and tapped his fingers together. "You know—I have resources inside and outside the government. I have no information to speak of. I just know how things work. The government will do anything to put an end to time travel. They're so afraid of upsetting their apple cart of control that they will overcorrect in this area."

"So?" asked Ethan.

"So. Don't raise the topic between yourselves...even in the *privacy* of this house. Don't assume anything. Just be cautious. You'll be on your way in two days, and while you are gone, I'll be watching your files. But you must be careful on your trip. Don't do anything that will change history. They have ways of detecting changes...even relatively small ones. Dr. Currant has assured me that his device is isolated and designed to create the minimum backwash in operation. He doesn't believe anyone has or will detect its use."

"Dad, he told us there wouldn't be any trouble," Emma spoke with authority, but Ethan detected some doubt in her voice.

"I know. I had a long talk with him. I agree. Things will be fine if you walk lightly on the path of time and don't wander into the woods stirring up the animals. Just observe. Aside from Ethan's quest to be at the scene of the JFK crime, you should have a great time living in 1963. For one thing, there won't be any *bees*."

"Just 'honey' and 'bumble'," offered Emma.

"And 'spelling'," said Ethan with a smile.

"R-i-g-h-t," said Warren Wright as he spun the *gyromobe* and rolled over to his desk. "Now I have work to do, and you two must start packing."

The Twins left their father and dashed upstairs. In Emma's room, they spread out the clothes they had purchased at secondhand shops. Emma grabbed an outfit and said, "I'm going to change into this one. You try out one of yours, and I'll meet you in the hall for a fashion show."

Ethan scooped up a pair of chinos, a madras shirt, argyle socks, and a pair of penny loafers and left the room. In a few minutes, they regrouped in front of a large mirror in the stair hallway outside their rooms.

Emma, wearing a white blouse with a Peter Pan collar, a cardigan sweater, a schoolmarm skirt, and white cotton socks with white tennis shoes, viewed herself in the mirror. She held a book tucked under her arm as a prop. "I'm not sure about this look. What do you think?"

"Well, I guess you look like those old yearbook photos. But there's something out of place." He thought for a moment. "Your socks."

Emma feigned offense. "What is wrong with my socks? They look authentic to me."

Ethan chuckled. "They're not rolled down. The '63 kids will nail you on that."

Emma sat on the bench in front of the mirror and adjusted the tops of her socks. "Well, I think this looks stupid. How about now?"

"Stupid or not, that is the look." He studied her, gazing up and down. "Not bad," he said. "You'll have all the lettermen chasing after you when we get to Chicago."



“The lettermen?”

“Jocks, athletes, BMOC.”

Emma rolled her eyes and smirked at him. “I know. Big Men on Campus. Well, you look like one of Jerry Lewis’s nerdy movie characters. What did they call them then? A dork. Right, you look like a dork.” She laughed. “Dork...dork...dork. Ethan is a dork.”

Ethan was unperturbed. “You’re really getting into the part. You’ll make a perfect 1963 teenage girl. Pimples and all.”

Playfully, she tossed the book she was holding at his head. He ducked as it flew by and landed harmlessly on the floor. Doing an impromptu tap dance, he commented with a smile, “Pretty quick for a dork. Right, *Sis*?”

Hands on her hips, she glared at him. “Dork!” she trumpeted as she strutted back into her bedroom.

A.C. Currant entered the inner sanctum, Warren Wright’s safe room. “Reminds me of my laboratory. Nice and quiet,” said Currant. “I guess your employer trusts you quite a bit.”

Wright rolled into the room on his *gyromobe* and secured the doors behind him. “They trust me. As they should.”

“Where are your two overgrown munchkins?”

Wright smiled. “Upstairs. Trying on their costumes, I would guess. You all set?”

A.C. relaxed into a heavy leather chair and set his feet on an ottoman. “It’s a cinch for me. I’ve got family albums and memories. As a matter of fact, I have some business suits that I wore forty years ago. They still fit. Yes, sir, I’ve been keeping the old body in shape all these years, just waiting for this opportunity.”

Mr. Wright rolled around the large room, nodding his head.

“Nervous, Warren?”

Wright pulled to a stop in front of the physicist. “Sorry, A.C., but I am concerned about the Twins. This trip could be dangerous. Many things could go wrong. Just the concept of operating in the past is problematic, but add to that the whole JFK thing, along with Ethan’s aggressive attitude....”

Currant tossed his arms out in a stretch and smiled at the detective. “So if it’s so dangerous, why send them?”

Wright rubbed his chin with his thumb. “You’ll need their youth, strength, and skills, and I need your help, A.C., Not just to keep Emma and Ethan out of harm’s way...but for me. I have a favor to ask. A big one.”

“Knew it was coming.” He smiled. “What can I do for you?”

“Just a small thing. I want you to play ball.”

Currant smirked. “Metaphorically?”

“No. The real thing. At 9:12 a.m. on October 31, 1963, at the northeast corner of Clybourn Avenue and Southport Avenue in Chicago, I just want you to catch a little red ball. Don’t worry. It won’t be hard hit. Just an easy grounder. Just be there and stop it. I’ll give you the exact location, so you won’t have to be much of a fielder. Can you do that?”

“Is that it? How about some explanation?”

Wright shook his head. “No. The less you know, the better. But it’s important that you complete this assignment. Extremely important.” Wright rolled his *gyromobe* around so that he faced Currant squarely. “Agreed?”

“For you, Warren. As a friend. If it makes you happy. I guarantee I will catch the little red ball. Just like Frank Malzone.”

“Who?”

“Third baseman. Boston Red Sox. I used to follow the Sox even though I lived in Louisiana. They were my mom’s team. Helluva franchise.”

“Could he catch a ball?”

“With the best—three Gold Gloves.”

“Fine.”

“You know,” said Currant, “given that we’ll be time travelers, some people might ask me to place a bet on a horse. And then bet the winnings on an unknown hot stock of the future and just have me bring back a stock certificate worth millions. But you...”

Wright smiled. “I don’t need the money, but I do want you to catch that ball.”

“OK, Sherlock. You got it. Red ball.” Currant rose from his chair. “Anything else?”

“Just take care of the Twins and Zak. You are the adult in the group. Right?”

A.C. Currant laughed. “Some might doubt it. But I will watch over your teenage treasures. I’m kind of fond of them myself, you know. Especially that Emma. She’s a handful, that one.”

“She is. And she has a great head on her. Listen to what she says. And don’t mention this *red ball* thing to the kids, OK? This is just between you and me. Man to man.”

“My lips are sealed,” said Currant, adding a zipper-closing hand movement across his mouth. “Mmmm...” Currant made sounds as if he could no longer speak.

“Right... You’re the adult in the group,” said Wright, rolling his eyes.

### **LOG of Zak Newman**

**June 28, 2028: 10:37 (Day 1 of time travel)**

*We’re somewhere below the war memorial, in the concrete confines of Dr. Currant’s timeworks, which he calls “Home,” waiting to go “back door,” as we say in the time-travel business. “Back door” is fine with me. I have no interest in going “front door,” as things can only get worse in the future. I would say we are comfortable but apprehensive. The air in here is fresh and cool. Today there’s only a hint of subterranean moisture, and I haven’t seen any critters. Currant is fussing with his gear, and the Twins are discussing the future, or should I say the future “past.” Jacques Dufour is not with us now. He will remain at his post in the school, ever vigilant, evaluating The History (MOM’s official bible of the past) and the unofficial Flitter (opinions, comments, and theories from unidentified rogue electronic sources that can be received by those highly modified and illegal black-market computronic devices). So, when we return, Professor Dufour can tell us what impact, if any, our little trip in the TimeTravelle has had on the world. I hope things will be better for our efforts, but only time will tell.*

*Dr. Currant spent the first hour explaining some of the basics of life in the early 1960s. He has purchased quite a few rare gold and silver coins and about ten pounds of common gold coins dating back to the beginning of the 20th century. Since he is a registered numismatist, he is allowed to make such a transaction without causing a fuss with MOM. These, he will exchange for dollars once we arrive. We’re familiar with the idea of dollars. They’re similar in concept to the exos we use today, except they are paper, not electronic. But understanding the smaller coins is a challenge. The pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, and half-dollars are what Dr. Currant calls “pocket change.” For my money, carrying these coins around will only create holes in my pocket. I actually like our decimal system of today, although very few transactions involve transferring a part of an exo. A single exo doesn’t buy much, and part of an exo buys even less. But A.C. assures us that these nickels and dimes will have some pretty hefty purchasing power in 1963. He’s also bringing some cut diamonds. These, of course, are synthetic. Today, diamonds are just another commodity, like wheat or oil, because of the low cost of creating them. According to Dr. Currant, experts today can’t tell the difference between the real and the synthetic. Synthetic stones are cheap now, but in 1963 diamonds were very valuable and only available in their natural state. They’re small, easy-to-carry, concentrated wealth, and they’ll be no problem to sell to the right buyer, says Dr. Currant.*

*So we have our money and our clothes. I'm dressed as a "good boy" in 1963 terms. Clean-shaven, no sideburns, cloth—not leather—jacket, a nice shirt with a collar, tan pants, white socks, and black leather loafer-style shoes. Ethan and Emma are similarly attired, and Dr. Currant is wearing what he calls a "business suit." It has a blue jacket and matching pants of a natural material. At least I don't have to wear one of those "tie" things. Currant is wearing a red- and gray-striped one around his neck like an ornamental noose. I must admit he looks rather dignified (looks can be deceiving). But I do hope he fools the people at the coin shop because we're not going very far if we can't get some of those old-fashioned dollars. I'm not really worried, though, because Dr. Currant has a way with words. I believe he can talk his way in or out of anything and find a way to make a profit while he is doing so. Such skills will be useful in Chicago. Thanks to Mrs. Elliot's English class last year, I can still remember the first few lines from another wordman from a hundred years back in time. Sandburg's Chicago poem.*

*"Hog Butcher for the World, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler; Stormy, husky, brawling, City of the Big Shoulders: They tell me you are wicked, and I believe them, for I have seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys. And they tell me you are crooked, and I answer: Yes, it is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again."*

*Sounds like the story of the JFK shooting. Bon voyage. On to the Windy City. End 06-28-28*

### -Chapter 3-

## Field Trip to the Windy City

Except for the contemporary yellow safety goggles, their garb was all 1960s. The four travelers stepped up onto the circular grated metal platform. They stood at their assigned places, backs against the slightly slanted cold steel slabs, each located at one of the four quadrants of the perimeter ring of the *TimeTravelle*—Emma East, Ethan West, Dr. Currant South, and Zak North. Four old-fashioned suitcases and one paisley cloth valise were positioned in the center of the circle. There was nothing to do now but stare at each other and wait. Emma and Ethan locked eyes. He could tell his sister was nervous. She wasn't into advanced technology, and the *TimeTravelle* was undoubtedly on the cutting edge. He offered her a comforting smile. She returned a fleeting flash of teeth, but he could tell she was agitated. He looked at Zak. Now there's a guy who's looking forward to this experience. He looked like a five-year-old on his first trip to an amusement park. And Dr. Currant wore his trademark "shit-eating" smile. His eyes roamed the metal structures above as he surveyed his invention, obviously enjoying the moment. Although everyone had used the machine several times to travel from the chessboard in the war memorial to the underground bunker, a voyage of about thirty feet, none had traveled in time. For the past few days, Ethan had mulled over the concept of flying through time to Chicago, Illinois, in October 1963. Just thinking about it was exciting. Finally, something big was happening. Life was taking a turn toward the great unknown. He was confident and mentally prepared. His father had given the Twins their marching orders: take no unnecessary risks, observe, but don't interfere, and keep A.C. Currant focused on the project.

Ethan heard a soft humming sound that seemed to swirl around his head like a swarm of gnats. In seconds the pitch and volume of the sound increased to hornet level. Currant said the time-shift experience would be much different than the space-shift into the bunker.

"It's set to initiate at noon," shouted A.C. Currant, his voice bellowing against the surging whine of the *TimeTravelle* device. "Do not move! Or you may leave some of your body parts behind." He laughed.

Ethan shook his head at Currant's joke and looked at Emma. She looked apprehensive. For the next sixty seconds, the machine was alive. Green, red, and blue laser beams shot in front of the travelers, knifing into the

spaces between them. Sounds of liquid chemicals rushed through the network of pipes below them. An annoying cracking sound repeated overhead. In total, it was a furious cacophony. He shouted across the steel circle to his sister, “1963, here we come!” At that moment, he lost sight of her. Time-shift really was different...this was his last thought in 2028. It was as if he was being blown through a tuba of time.

An intense swooshing sound attacked his ears. First, everything went black. The only light was a steadily strengthening white dot in the center of his vision. But as he glanced to his left, then to his right, he saw things, events, and people coming into focus and evaporating just as quickly. The little white dot of light in front exploded into a hot blast of luminosity that temporarily blinded him despite his protective goggles. All went black. For a moment, he thought that he had died. Then he felt something on his face like the gentle warmth of the sun tempered by a light breeze. He opened his eyes, reached up, and removed his goggles. He wasn’t dead, but he was transformed in some manner. More than confident now, he felt totally empowered. He looked out past the concrete chessboard and the peristyle marble columns, down the green grass of the hill, beyond the cliff, over the waters of Mystic Bay. The distant bell of Randall Tower called out melodically twelve times, announcing noon on October 29, 1963. Ethan looked about. Like him, the three others were absorbing the transformation process and easing their minds into the past.

Directly across, Emma removed her goggles and shook off the effects of sixty-five years of travel in less than two minutes. “That was something,” she said, the words sticking in her throat.

Zak trotted into the circle center. Wearing a big smile, he spun around with his arms extended. He signed three times. “*Hijole!* That was incredible.”

Dr. Currant appeared somewhat weak-legged before gathering his senses. He looked around, nodded affirmatively, and laughed aloud. “I told you it would work. The *TimeTravelle* works. I knew it. We made it. Now grab your suitcases, and let’s start walking.” He glanced at the clock on Randall Tower. “It’s 12:06. We’ve got to get down into the town center quickly. I don’t want anyone to associate us with the memorial. We’ll keep that secret to ourselves. Let’s go. March.”

The Twins, Dr. Currant and Zak, each grabbed a suitcase, with Ethan handling the heavy valise. It was a crisp, sunny, late October day in Mystic Heights. As they walked down the hill, Ethan took in the view. A collage of white clapboard buildings jutted above and between the rust-colored late fall foliage, with only the gold-capped Randall Tower providing a marker above the trees. The serrated treetop edge, which met the rich blue waters of the Atlantic, gently undulated in the wind. Memorial Drive, a two-lane gravel road, wound its way down the hill, penetrating the tree line just west of the water. The tall teen led the travelers along the half-mile walk. By the time they reached the heart of Main Street, they were visibly tired. Currant had sought and received several rest breaks on the trek, but now he seemed to gain strength as they ambled along the tree-lined seaside boardwalk. Ethan gazed at the familiar buildings housing shops and offices on the other side of the street. They looked the same yet different because all the occupants had changed from those he knew from 2028. For some, he had no idea what they sold: dry cleaners, 5 & 10, Army-Navy? Emma gave him a look as they passed something called a hosiery store.

“Selling hoses?”

Currant jumped in. “Stockings, my girl. Nylon stockings. You don’t have any, do you? We’ll have to buy some before we catch our train. You won’t be well-dressed or authentic without a pair of nylons.”

Emma’s eyebrows lifted, and she rolled her eyes. “Whatever you say, Doctor. I hope they don’t itch.”

“And when we get to Chicago, you have to start teasing your hair,” said Currant.

“Teasing?”

“Don’t worry, that won’t hurt either. It will only make your hair look a little stiffer,” said Currant. “Believe me. All the girls were doing it in 1963.”

“Anything else?”

“We’ll see. It’s been quite a while for me. But if something comes up, I’ll pass it on,” said Currant.

“Don’t kill yourself. I’m already feeling weird.”

It was just after noon, and the townsfolk were on the move. As pedestrians passed the group, they stared at the time travelers, obviously interested in these newcomers to Mystic Heights.

Currant's memory of an earlier time must have been working because he unerringly directed the group up a side street leading to a small rare coin shop tucked into a two-story building fronted by a stone-paved courtyard. A sign on the glass storefront read: *Rich Coins, Est. 1944*. Ethan was pleased they had arrived at their destination. As he passed the heavy bag filled with coins to Currant, the three teens dropped onto a sidewalk bench. In a short time, they heard the sound of a tiny bell ringing as the coin shop door opened and closed.

Emma, seated in the middle of the two boys, quietly commented, "How quaint...a little bell signals his entry. Strange, isn't it?" she reflected. "It's Mystic Heights, but it's not our Mystic Heights."

Zak nodded and, now using sign language, replied, "*Very strange.*"

Ethan, who had no trouble understanding the silent message, laughed. "Zak, I know what you mean. Like an old girlfriend who moved out of town and returned one day to reconnect. She looks just like before, maybe a bit older, but she has a whole new group of friends that she talks about incessantly, and her makeup seems different...not in a good way, and you notice that one of her eyes is larger than the other."

Still somewhat dazed from their time-travel experience and tired from their walk, Emma, Ethan, and Zak gazed absentmindedly at the world around them. Bulky, ancient, brightly colored automobiles—Plymouths, Oldsmobiles, Packards, and Fords, looking like metallic water buffalos swaying, dipping, and exhaling foul gases—cruised the street before them. An open-topped auto full of teenage boys and girls squealed around a corner. The driver honked his horn, and the girls in the back seat laughed and shouted unintelligibly. On the other side of the street, a red and white striped barber pole rotated in a clear glass tube attached to the shop front. Nearby, a young mother carried a baby wrapped in a small blanket. She trailed behind her young son, who scratched his way noisily along the concrete walk, skating on metal-wheeled contraptions attached to his shoes. Overhead, a piston-engine passenger plane droned on, cutting through a few lazy clouds as it climbed over the bay heading south. "You're right, my friend. This is Mystic Heights, but it's not our town," said Emma.

Suddenly, Dr. Currant popped into their view, smiling broadly. He handed the valise to Ethan. The old scientist was animated as he spoke. "It went very well. I know enough about this town to sound halfway intelligent regarding *recent* events. I told them I was just visiting my nephew and his new bride. Cashing in the coins to buy them a belated wedding gift. No forms to fill out. No identification check. No cameras in the ceiling. Just two older fellows doing business. I know now why I fantasize about these times. Living is easy." He patted the top pocket of his suit coat lightly. "I can't flash it now," he said, "but we have over two thousand dollars American to play with. Let's get a couple of pairs of nylons and hop a train out of town."

The 20th Century Limited blew through a grade crossing at 100 miles an hour. In its wake, a trackside tornado of loose papers, leaves, and dust swirled. Three powerful New York Central diesel locomotives hugged the banks of the Hudson River. They rumbled west into the sunset, pulling a train of rolling stock capped by an elegant, round-backed observation car. Zak Newman stared out the rear window, watching tracks, ties, and telephone poles vanish into the darkening eastern sky. The drumbeat of the wheels and rails locked him into a daze.

"Calling Zak ... are you there?" asked Ethan. Slowly Zak turned back to Emma, Ethan, and A.C. Currant, who sat facing each other on the curved, high-backed, blue and gray banquette. "Join the party."

Zak returned and slid in next to Emma.

"We're lucky," said Emma. "This is a great way to travel. And we've got the observation car almost to ourselves."

"Except for those two young couples," said Currant. He studied them for a moment. "I'll bet they're on a double-honeymoon holiday. Judging from their uniforms, they're soldiers. Maybe they're headed for the Army-Air Force football game. It wouldn't be too early to get into the Windy City, have a little fun..." Currant's eyes again darted off to the young couple and back, "see the big city, watch the big game, and head back to the hotel for some relaxation." He looked at Emma for a reaction. He smiled wickedly when she blushed.

A Pullman waiter walked down the aisle carrying a tray full of drinks. The Twins and Zak grabbed their Cokes, and A.C. Currant gathered in his Black Label scotch-on-the-rocks tenderly as if it were a baby bird. Currant paid the man, delivered a tip, and said, "Thank you, George." The African-American waiter grimaced, nodded politely, turned, and left.

"How did you know his name?" Emma asked.

"Didn't," said Currant, sipping his drink like it was a sexual experience. "People always called Pullman porters 'George' ...after George Pullman, the man who invented the sleeping car. A bit crude...but authentic. Or maybe it's 'authentic redneck.' Anyway...you can bet that waiter believes we are of this world."

"Not nice, Doctor," said Emma. "By the way, remember we should not tell anyone we're from Mystic Heights High School. We don't want them tracking us down. We're from *Springfield* Heights. There are hundreds of 'Springfields' out east."

"You got it," said Currant. Then he pulled a tiny silvery toy car from his coat pocket and tumbled it around in his palm like a worry stone.

"What's that?"

Currant smiled. "My lucky charm. This was a gift from the Benz people. 2017 coupe, an exact but miniature replica."

"You're a little old for toy cars, aren't you, Doctor?"

"Maybe, but I know just the person who would really like this."

"Who's that?"

"A little friend." He had a strange look on his face. He picked up his drink and raised his glass. "Cheers, my friends! Or should I say my delightful field trip students?" He took another sip and smiled broadly. "Ah. I love the old days. Can't get good booze like this anymore. I'm looking forward to the football game. Hot dogs, beer, a rousing college marching band, and pretty blonde cheerleaders. Ah...the pageantry of it all...Soldier Field...100,000 spectators...you can't beat it. That will be fun, don't you think?"

"Well, it wasn't too much fun for JFK. He never made it," said Ethan. "Once they made that slow left turn off the expressway ramp onto Jackson, he was a sitting duck for a sniper."

Currant shook his head. "Always on duty? Take a break. Enjoy the view."

"I'll bet Thomas Vallee was hated by everybody," said Emma, ignoring the inventor's pleas for pleasantries. "And I'll bet they were all happy to see him killed by that cop." She took a sip from her Coke and then looked at the glass. "You know, Dr. Currant, you may be right. Even this Coke tastes better than the stuff we drink today." She paused and then took another sip. "Yep. What do you think, Zak?"

Zak held his glass up in a mock toast and nodded in affirmation.

"Zak. Are you OK...not talking?"

Zak signed, "*Just a short-term problem. I'll become a better listener.*"

"You'll make it, Zakaroo," said Ethan. "I'll fill the verbal void. Let's get back to our boy Vallee. This guy *was* hated by everybody. He did it. But they hated *the way* he did it."

"It was brutal," said Emma.

"You're not kiddin'. First shot missed the target. Killed a little girl. Her mother standing behind her, took the same bullet. But she lived. Two nuns were hit with the next shot...or shots. The cops said it blasted through one nun's habit and blew an ear off the other." He shrugged his shoulders. "That made no sense. They were holding a banner that said 'Catholics for Kennedy.' One at either end...at least three feet apart. How does one bullet fired from the front hit two people three feet apart when they're standing side to side facing the shooter? Unless another sniper was shooting from the side."

"*The History* says..." Currant interjected.

"Screw *The History*. It's wrong. Everyone agrees Vallee's M1 rifle fired eight shots max without reloading. We've got two nuns, a little girl, her mother, and three bystanders who took bullets. And a street sign ten feet in the

air with a bullet hole. *And* JFK caught three. That's at least nine or ten—not eight. And maybe some missed shots to boot.”

Currant looked at Ethan and shook his head lightly. “This is old ground, my friend. You'll see. You won't be able to prove anything. One way or the other. Lots of bullets. Lots of witnesses. But no consensus. That's typical of these events. Fear and panic and shock and disbelief. But nobody can agree on what happened. *The History* tells the official story. Take my advice. Don't get too wrapped up in your theories. Thomas Arthur Vallee was the lone gunman...and a vicious one at that.”

Emma nodded. “It was a vicious crime. First, he shot JFK twice in the chest. One of them went right through his heart, killing him. But Vallee fired again and hit JFK dead center in the forehead. His head just exploded. Brain parts rained down on the crowd. All those schoolchildren watching. It must have been terrible.”

“We don't want to see that, do we, Zak?” A.C. looked at the boy and took another sip of his scotch. “Man, this is good stuff.”

Zak shook his head.

Currant continued, “We'll stay clear of the action. Some place that's safe. Sadly, JFK's a dead man, and nothing can change that.”

Currant's attitude greatly irritated Ethan. He raised his voice. “You're wrong about that. JFK doesn't have to die.” The two soldiers and their wives stopped their conversations and took notice of the four time travelers.

The others looked at each other blankly. Then Emma spoke out loudly. “You're right. JFK doesn't have to *fly*. He could take the train to the game.”

Currant chimed in. “Just like us. I understand he loves train travel...”

Ethan glanced at the two couples. They seemed to have lost interest now and resumed their own conversations. His sister had pulled his butt out of the fire again. “Thanks, Emma.”

She gave him that “you should be” look.

A.C. whispered, “That was unwise, Mr. Wright. Please watch yourself in the future.”

Ethan nodded, realizing he would watch himself. He would be more careful with his words. But he would not be stopped. He not only wanted to witness history but desperately wanted to change it. He vowed to himself that he would save JFK.

### **LOG of Zak Newman**

#### **October 31, 1963: 8:48 (Day 3 of time travel)**

*We arrived in Chicago after decades of time travel and a full day of train travel. Today is Halloween. I think we were lucky because if we had any sartorial miscues, they didn't arouse suspicion, given the variety of strange outfits worn by the natives. I see plenty of wax lips and vampire teeth. We spent the day recovering from our trek in our new home base—a big, old, majestic hotel. It's in a good location. Downtown, in the Loop, as they say, and not far from the assassination site, about six blocks to the west. We're located on Wabash Avenue in the midst of the diamond center of the city. Dr. Currant has already traded in some of our diamond stash for cash. We should have plenty now. We have two rooms. Unfortunately, I am sharing one with Dr. Currant. I woke up late this morning, and he's not in the room. He said he might be out this morning. Maybe he's getting some coffee. I could use some.*

*Since Currant does not understand sign language and I was not permitted to bring my Voicenator, I am graced with his nonstop monologues in all waking hours. Sensing his vibes tells me he cares little about the Kennedy assassination. He is simply along for the ride. He really enjoys playing present in the past. Of course, he is the only one of us who was alive in 1963, and so, in a way, he is going home—back to his past—while the Twins and I have entered a new world entirely foreign to us. No amount of reading,*

*studying, or contemplating could prepare us for this moment. It is, in fact, wonderful and awful to walk in the world before one's existence. It is terribly freeing knowing that you have no responsibility to this world. You have no future. You are not a part of this world. It's much like taking a trip to another land to which you bring all your anticipation of delight and leave behind (at least temporarily) all your responsibilities. We're here to experience and enjoy. I acknowledge our responsibility to the future to be careful with our words and deeds (even Dr. Currant is very serious about this). Other than that, I see this as a great, exciting, once-in-a-lifetime experience.*

*For the Twins, it is different. Ethan is here to make an impact on the future. He has a bug up his butt about the assassination. No matter what he says, he would love to be the man who saved JFK. And Emma is here to keep Ethan out of trouble. I hope she succeeds because if we can maintain our cover, we can return another time again to a different place in history. This would be the best use of the technology of our time. Other than that, our modern American technology is only useful to keep others in the world from destroying us or the economy. And this same technology that "protects" us denies us the right to be truly free. Our every movement is watched, cataloged, calculated, and calibrated. This is not a life—it is a life sentence in a zoo called USA. So, I'm happy to be a time traveler back in Chicago on Halloween 1963. END 10-31-63*