Cabinet than had ever joined together before in a single mission overseas. Secretaries (of State) Dean Rusk, (of Treasury) Douglas Dillon, (of Interior) Stewart Udall, (of Agriculture) Orville Freeman, (of Commerce) Luther Hodges, (of Labor) Willard Wirtz. Press secretaries Pierre Salinger and Robert Manning, White House advisers Walter Heller and Mike Feldman had all chosen that relaxed moment of politics and foreign affairs to fly to Japan for a meeting with that country's cabinet. Now, without instructions, but knowing the government required them, they were speeding home as fast as jets could thrust them.

At the Pentagon the military machinery stood at global readiness. On the news of assassination, the Director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had immediately, suspecting a coup, warned all of the nine great combat commands of the United States, which girdle the world, to hold themselves in readiness for action. One of them, on its own initiative, sirened its men to Defense Condition One, or combat alert. Within half an hour the command was called to order and restored to normal readiness. In Pennsylvania, state troopers sped over the roads to throw a guard around the farm of Dwight D. Eisenhower lest assassination be planned for him, too.

Across the nation and across the world, no patrol flickered: no submarine was called off station; no radio operator reported a failure of monitoring or communication; in Vietnam the war went on. At the White House, where the housekeeping administration had taken the occasion of the President's absence to redecorate and repaint his office, service personnel continued to replace his furniture and rehang his paintings as if he were not dead. The Military District of Washington drew from its contingency files the fully elaborated plans for ceremony and procedure at the death of the Chief of State. Nearly all that night a group of seven scholars in the archives of the Library of Congress were to research every document on the funeral rites of Abraham Lincoln in 1865, so that historic tradition might be joined to the formal military plan. Sometime in the next few days the machinery of the Accounting Office, turning by itself, brought in its final results too, crediting John F. Kennedy, President, with pay up to November 22nd, 1963, for service performed, and paying him that day for precisely 14/24ths of a day's work, death being assumed as 2:00 P.M. Washington (Eastern Standard) time, rather than 1:00 P.M., Dallas time.

There is a tape-recording in the archives of the government which best recaptures the sound of the hours as it waited for leadership. It is a recording of all the conversations in the air, monitored by the Signal Corps Midwestern center "Liberty," between Air Force One in Dallas, the Cabinet plane over the Pacific, the Joint Chiefs communication center and the White House communications center in Washington. The voices are superbly flat, calm, controlled. One hears the directions of

"Front Office" (the President) relayed to "Carpet" (the White House) and to the Cabinet above the Pacific. One feels the tugging of Washington seeking its President—tugging at the plane, requiring, but always calmly, estimated time of take-off and time of arrival. One hears the voices acknowledge the arrival of "Lace" (Mrs. Kennedy) on the plane; one receives the ETA—6:00 P.M. Washington. It is a meshing of emotionless voices in the air, performing with mechanical perfection. Only once does any voice break in a sob—when "Liberty," relaying the sound of "Carpet" to the Pacific plane, reports that the President is dead and then Pierre Salinger's answering voice breaks; he cannot continue the conversation, so that the pilot takes the phone and with professional control repeats and acknowledges the message, as he flies the Cabinet of the United States home in quest for leadership of the government of which they are so great a part.

So, too, in uncertain quest for direction and purpose stood the rest of the government of the United States on the apron at Andrews Base, a shifting, tearful, two-score individuals, all masterless, no connection between them, except the binding laws of the United States, until Lyndon Johnson should arrive and tell them in which direction he meant, now and in the next year, to take the American people. Out of that direction would come the politics of 1964—except that, whichever way he went, he would have to start from the politics of the man now being borne, dead, to this city.

No bugle sounded taps, no drum beat its ruffle, no band pealed "Hail to the Chief" as John F Kennedy returned for the last time to Washington, the city where he had practiced the magic art of leadership.

It was seventeen years earlier that he had arrived there from Boston; and in the years since, his arrivals and departures had come to punctuate the telling of American history. When he arrived, the door of the plane would open and the lithe figure would come out to give that graceful wave of the arm which had become the most familiar flourish in American politics. There would follow then the burst of applause, the shouts and yells and squeals as he tripped down the stairs with the quick, light step that was his style.

He came this time in silence.

The faint shrill of distant jets, the sputter and cough of helicopters, the grunting and grinding of trucks on the base, the subdued conversation all made the silence even larger. A quarter moon, trailing a shawl of mists, had just made its appearance in the sky when Air Force One, the Presidential jet, silently rolled up the runway from the south. It had paused at the far end of the field to let Robert F. Kennedy come aboard. Now the pilot in his cockpit had sensed the hush—skillfully he stilled his motors, so that the plane glided surprisingly into the total