

# 85 DAYS

## The Last Campaign of Robert Kennedy



by JULES WITCOVER



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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of the day, his [Kennedy's] hands and mine would be bleeding. Once, at the beginning, I told the Senator, 'I wish these people would be more courteous.' He answered, 'They're here because they care for us and want to show us.' After that, I never had any trouble adjusting to crowds. I found they wanted not just to touch a celebrity; they wanted to convey their feelings to him, and he accepted it for that. Sometimes when the going got rough in a tight situation, with all the shoving around we took, he would turn to me and say, 'Don't hurt anybody. Don't push so hard.'" There never was any doubt in the mind of anyone who saw Barry at work that his was a labor of love. Much later, he put the obvious into words: "I loved him intensely as a human being, and for his qualities. I was dedicated to see him through this. I wanted him to be President of the United States for the sake of my children and generations to come. It was not just a professional job with me. It was something my life qualified me for. This would be my juggler's gift. This is what I had to offer, and I wanted to give it." Throughout the swift, grueling campaign, no one gave more.

At the Salinas-Monterey Peninsula Airport on Sunday, a picket fence held back a particularly dangerous crush. Kennedy himself became so concerned as children below him were being smothered by mindless adults that at one point he raised his hands and said: "Sssh. Just be quiet for a minute. Just clear a path for the children." And he reached down and plucked a small girl from the crowd, holding her until the path was opened. He watched silently as the children were led out of danger, and then resumed shaking hands.

Back on the plane, Kennedy expressed concern about the kids, and asked why their parents brought them. But he encouraged this meeting the people, this touching; he did it with a kind of set determination, a resignation that it was all part of what he was and what he represented to them, in the past and in the present. He plunged into these mobs the way he plunged into icy ocean breakers. Nobody forced him, and he never hesitated, yet one always had the feeling that he had to steel himself for it; meeting people was never his strong suit, certainly not in small groups. At least with the mobs, none of the