The Lion and the Legacy

Senator Edward Kennedy’s diagnosis of brain cancer, in May 2008, touched off an extraordinary medical battle—and a veiled rivalry over who might succeed him as symbolic head of America’s fabled dynasty. Would it be R.F.K.’s oldest son, Joe; J.F.K.’s daughter, Caroline? Or the senator’s second wife, Victoria? In an excerpt from his new book, EDWARD KLEIN reveals the family’s shifting dynamics, the confrontation that led Caroline to drop her political bid, and the triumphant, grueling winter of the last Kennedy brother.
I started as a fairly typical day for Ted Kennedy. Early in the morning on Saturday, May 17, 2008, his Portuguese water dogs, Sunny and Splash, bounced into his bedroom and woke him up. Groggy but obliging, Kennedy swung his legs over the side of the bed and, struggling against age and gravity, lifted himself to an erect position—or as nearly erect as his old bones would allow. He threw on some warm clothing, then headed out the door into the chill, salty air for a stroll on the beach with the dogs.

In front of the Kennedy compound, he lobbed a tennis ball into the water, and Sunny dived in after it. Suddenly he felt his jaw tighten, then noticed his left arm became numb. Dear God, don’t let me go like Dad, he later recalled thinking. He had a horror of having to spend his last years in the same condition as his paralyzed father, Joseph P. Kennedy, fully conscious but imprisoned in a useless body. According to one family friend, he fell to the sand and realized he could not move. The dogs reacted with frenzied yelps and barks, and several workmen, hearing the commotion, came running to the senator’s aid. They carried him back to the house and summoned Victoria Reggie Kennedy. When Vicki saw her husband’s condition, she let out a scream. Then she phoned 911.

At 8:19 a.m., the dispatcher at the Hyannis Fire Department received an emergency call from 50 Marchant Avenue in Hyannis Port. The famous Kennedy address set off frantic alarms, and within minutes help arrived. Paramedics lifted the overweight senator onto a gurney, hooked him up to oxygen, and slid him into the back of an ambulance. The ambulance and a police cruiser raced down South Street to Cape Cod Hospital.

“Vicki Kennedy knew in a split second that whatever was happening was grave,” reported Lois Romano of The Washington Post. “As the wife of one of the most iconic and admired politicians in modern history, she also knew it would play out in public. Knowing the media would be tipped off in minutes because of [her] 911 call, Vicki Kennedy worked her cell phone at her husband’s side. Before the ambulance pulled up, she had arranged for the Senator to be transported from the Cape to Massachusetts General Hospital, called his Senate staff to put in place a crisis management team, summoned family members and notified his closest friends.”

In the emergency room at Cape Cod Hospital, the doctors examined Kennedy for almost two hours and concluded that he had suffered two seizures, little electrical storms in the brain, rather than a stroke, which kills brain tissue and can lead to permanent paralysis. He was put back into the ambulance for the three-minute trip to Barnstable Municipal Airport. There a twin-engine medevac helicopter was standing by, ready to airlift him to Boston.

In less than half an hour, the chopper touched down on the roof of Massachusetts General, where Dr. Larry Ronan, the senator’s longtime primary-care physician, was an internist. By late afternoon Kennedy’s condition had stabilized, and immediate family members began to arrive at the hospital. The senator’s daughter, Kara, who had been battling lung cancer since 2003, flew up from Maryland. His son Teddy junior, who had lost a leg to cancer as a child, came from Connecticut. His younger son, Patrick, who suffered from a plethora of health problems, ranging from asthma to a non-cancerous tumor that had been removed from his spine, flew in from Washington, D.C., where he served as a congressman from Rhode Island.

Soon a dozen or so members of the extended Kennedy family circle—the senator’s friends, aides, political associates, and hangers-on—were all crammed into the hospital room, and the atmosphere in his V.I.P. suite began to resemble that of an Irish wake or, perhaps more accurately, one of those medieval paintings that depict the death of a great prince. Should it come now, the senator’s death would not be sudden and violent, like those of his three brothers—Joe junior in a plane accident during World War II, Jack and Bobby at the hands of assassins. Rather, it would be like those “good deaths” during the Middle Ages, which were performed, in the words of the French historian Georges Duby, “as on a stage before many spectators, many auditors attentive to every gesture, to every word, eager for the dying man to show what he is worth.”

The Question of Succession

In that solemn setting, almost the first thing on everyone’s mind was who would lead the Kennedy family after the senator was gone. Since none of his children appeared to be up to the job, the first person who had to be considered a serious candidate was Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the well-known conservationist and the third of 11 children born to Ethel and Robert Kennedy. Bobby junior suffered from a vocal disorder called spasmodic dysphonia, which causes involuntary movements of the muscles in the larynx. It gave his words a tight, strangled sound and might have hindered his effectiveness as a family spokesman. More important, Bobby junior had devoted his life to the Riverkeeper organization and other environmental causes, showing far less interest in strictly political issues.

Bobby junior’s eldest sister, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, once described by Time magazine as “the most promising of the next wave of political Kennedys,” had gambled her big chance by losing her 2002 bid for governor of Maryland. What’s more, it was hard to imagine Kathleen as head of the most prominent Catholic family in America after she had been picked for her pro-choice and pro-contraceptive stances.

That left three Kennedys from three different branches of the family as the most likely heirs apparent: Robert’s oldest boy, Joseph Kennedy II; Ted’s wife, Vicki; and John’s daughter, Caroline, the last living member of the Camelot family.

The senator was particularly fond of Caroline. With her thick reddish hair, uninflected speaking voice, and tomboy manners, Caroline resembled Ted’s sisters more than she did her mother, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. And Caroline’s biting wit and cool demeanor reminded Ted of his brother Jack. At 50, Caroline was

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OF ALL THE KENNEDY BROTHERS, ONLY TED HAD LIVED LONG ENOUGH, IN THE WORDS OF THE IRISH POET WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS, TO “COMB GREY HAIR.”
at loose ends. Her children—Rose Kennedy Schlossberg, 19; Tatiana Celia Kennedy Schlossberg, 18; and John Bouvier Kennedy Schlossberg, 15—no longer required her constant attention. There were rumors that her marriage to Edwin Schlossberg, an interactive-media designer, was strained, but friends said that Caroline and Ed were more or less content with their marital arrangement.

Since the death of her brother, J.F.K. Jr., Caroline had become a more visible public presence. She'd helped raise tens of millions of dollars for the New York City public schools. She'd recently made a joint appearance with her uncle Ted at the annual Profile in Courage Award ceremony, at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where her mere presence was enough to stir nostalgia for Camelot. An intensely private person, Caroline had been press-shy most of her life, but she'd largely overcome that affliction during her numerous campaign appearances for Barack Obama. Many people thought Caroline was deeply ambivalent about politics. And perhaps she was. However, she was also devoted to her family's tradition of public service.

Political ambivalence hardly described the attitude of Victoria Reggie Kennedy, who was only three years older than Caroline and the second serious contender for family leadership. The daughter of a Louisiana judge, Vicki was a lawyer. Her marriage to Ted, 16 years earlier, had been a political statement in itself. "When Ted married Vicki, everything changed in his personal and political life," said a Kennedy-family lawyer. "She gave him purpose and focus. He has said many times that she saved his life, and he means it quite literally."

The senator was unaccustomed to introspection when it came to his feelings about Vicki. So many people in his family had been taken from him, he said, that he wondered "whether I'd ever really become as attached and committed as I have to Vicki." He added, "She has made an enormous difference in terms of my own happiness."

Ted's view of Vicki bore a striking resemblance to his idealized version of his mother, who also came from a political family. And, indeed, in many ways Vicki filled the role of the all-controlling Rose Kennedy. Vicki helped the senator clean up his image when she married him, and she had been on his case ever since. She had been instrumental in transforming Ted from an agitated, fretful, fugitive figure with much to hide to a more fully developed human being.

"[Vicki] helps prep him for talk shows, works on his speeches and played a pivotal role in his decision to endorse Barack Obama, whom she's been helping court Catholic votes," wrote Lois Romano in The Washington Post. "Her political skills and grace are such that there has been quiet speculation that she could succeed her husband in the Senate one day."

The hospital room throbbed with undisguised rivalry between Vicki and Joe Kennedy II, the third serious contender for the mantle of family leader. Notorious for his short temper, Joe descended on the hospital wearing his signature custom-made cowboy boots. He was the oldest male Kennedy of his generation, a birthright he never let his siblings and cousins forget. Years earlier, when Teddy junior had contemplated running for the seat in the Eighth Congressional District of Massachusetts, once held by his uncle Jack, Joe Kennedy II was "pissed," according
to a family friend, that his younger cousin would even consider running without first consulting him.

In the end, Joe claimed the congressional seat as his own. In 1986 he was elected to the first of six terms and might have gone on to become governor of Massachusetts if he hadn’t been sidelined by scandal. First, his former wife, Sheila Rauch Kennedy, wrote a book accusing him of trying to bully her into having their 12-year marriage annulled by the Catholic Church. Then it was revealed that his brother Michael, his campaign manager, was having an affair with his family’s teenage babysitter. Joe withdrew from the 1998 gubernatorial race and, for the time being at least, from active politics. Since then, he had kept his name politically alive in Massachusetts by running the Citizens Energy Corporation, a company that delivers low-cost heating oil to the poor.

Of all the members of the extended family, Joe had been the most vocal in his opposition to his uncle Ted’s marriage to Vicki. “Joe led the campaign against Vicki, openly mocking her and generally acting as though she was little more than a servant,” said a friend of the Kennedy family who was present in the senator’s hospital room. “Everybody else took their cues from Joe. He was always the ringleader, who decided who was good enough and who wasn’t. It had been that way since they were all kids.”

“Joe vied with Vicki over who was in charge,” said another family friend. “He ordered a larger flat-screen television be delivered to them so they could watch the Red Sox game, and called out to [the restaurant] Legal Sea Foods, ordering a feast of lobster, clams, and shrimp. Mass. General is used to the Kennedys’ bluster, but this got over the top. The senator has a very serious, probably life-threatening condition, and his family is throwing a party. The combination of so many famous faces and all the merrymaking disrupted the entire floor. Patients as well as staff were crowding around, trying to get a glimpse. One of the head nurses stepped in and spoke with Joe, who told her in no uncertain terms to mind her own business.”

The commotion grew louder as more Kennedy-family retainers squeezed into the already overcrowded hospital suite to pay their respects to the ailing senator. “The elephant in the room was the notion of succession,” recalled one. “The question was: Who was in line to take over for Ted, not just, or necessarily, in his Senate seat but as head of the family? There were a lot of very strong characters in that hospital suite, and they are all fiercely competitive. Vicki is seen by all as an interloper, and she is deeply resented by Ted’s children and many of the nephews. Joe, who sees himself as the only serious heir apparent, particularly loathes her control over his uncle and hence the family. Joe inherited his father’s ruthless gene. He is nothing if not aggressive. And anybody who tries to get between him and Ted’s Senate chair is in for a fight.”

“In addition, Joe has long resented Caroline, whom he views as haughty. Caroline is far and away the richest member of the clan. After all, she inherited money from her grandfather, her father, her mother, and her brother. Her fortune is a source of unbridled envy and a favorite subject of teasing by Joe and his brothers—a mild annoyance that Caroline sloughs off with an arch half-smile.”

“But against the backdrop of Ted’s sudden deterioration, Caroline’s cousins are suddenly looking at her askance, apparently wondering if she is considering declaring herself the heir to Ted’s throne. And Joe is suspicious and envious of the way Ted fawns over Caroline. He doubtless worries about how much influence she has over him. The strangest thing was how Caroline, Joe, and Vicki avoided making eye contact with one another, as though the flying daggers would wound. There is no doubt that what Joe fears most is Ted surviving but being physically and mentally incapacitated. That would let Vicki rule in his name for God knows how long.”

Brain Surgery

Within days of Ted Kennedy’s seizure, a dozen media trucks were staked out in front of Massachusetts General Hospital. The senator’s spokeswoman sent a statement to the assembled reporters saying that doctors had found a tumor on his left parietal lobe, a section of the brain involved in aspects of speech and the ability to understand the written word. A preliminary biopsy identified the tumor as a malignant glioma, an incurable brain cancer, and further tests showed that the senator had the most aggressive form of the disease—one that had an average survival period of fourteen and a half months. “It’s in a bad spot in his brain,” said a New York neurosurgeon who had treated many similar cases. “In the senator’s age group, it’s usually incurable. I’m not aware of anyone over the age of 65 who has survived. I’d give him no more than six months to live.”

Doctors’ predictions about such matters are notoriously inaccurate. In any case, the senator was determined to soldier on. Upon his release from the hospital, he told a group of reporters that it was unlikely that he would be up to racing his 50-foot Concordia schooner, the Myra, in Cape Cod’s annual Figawi competition on Memorial Day weekend. However, he sailed the Myra in the final leg of the regatta, making the 20-mile voyage in 2 hours and 28 minutes and coming in second in his division.

“It felt great to be out there today,” Kennedy said. “It’s always a good day to go sailing.”

At first, brain surgery did not appear to be a viable option. “The tumors have these tentacles,” Dr. Julian Wu, a neurosurgeon at Tufts Medical Center, in Boston, told the Cape Cod Times. “It’s kind of like an octopus. You might be able to take out the body [of the] octopus, [but] there might be little tentacles that grow back.”

The senator had a good deal of experience dealing with cancer. When his son Teddy junior was diagnosed at the age of 12 with bone cancer in his right leg, Kennedy consulted a group of specialists on the boy’s treatment. After Teddy junior’s leg was amputated, he received two years of an experimental form of chemotherapy. When the senator’s daughter, Kara, had what some surgeons deemed inoperable lung cancer, he invited a group of experts to discuss her case. They advised surgery, and Kara was still in remission five years later. And so, once again, the senator convened a meeting of experts, a so-called tumor board.

“The meeting on May 30 was extraordinary in at least two ways,” wrote Lawrence K. Altman, M.D., the chief medical correspondent of The New York Times. “One was the ability of a powerful patient—in this case, a sezon of a legendary political family and the chairman of the Senate’s health committee—to
summon noted consultants to learn about the latest therapy and research findings. The second was his efficiency in quickly convening more than a dozen experts from at least six academic centers. Some flew to Boston. Others participated by telephone after receiving pertinent test results and other medical records.”

At the meeting, opinions were divided over the benefit of surgery. According to the Times’s Altman, “Some neurosurgeons strongly favored it; two did not.” Among those opposing surgery was Dr. Raymond Sawaya, chairman of neurosurgery at Baylor College of Medicine and the M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, both in Houston. Dr. Sawaya believed that, because the cancer was spread over a large area, most of it could not be eradicated.

However, Dr. Vivek Deshmukh, director of cerebrovascular and endovascular neurosurgery at George Washington University Medical Center, told The Washington Post he would recommend that the senator take his chances with the scalpel. “The treatment that has been shown to make the most difference as far as survival is removal of the tumor,” Dr. Deshmukh said. “Surgical removal carries the greatest benefit in terms of extending his survival.”

And so the senator’s medical adviser put in a call to Dr. Allan H. Friedman, co-director of the Preston Robert Tisch Brain

tumor center, at Duke University. The 60-year-old doctor was considered by many of his colleagues to be the Mozart of brain surgeons. He was preparing to take off for a long-planned conference in Canada when the medical adviser reached him at the airport. He told him that Senator Kennedy had agreed to have his cancerous brain tumor removed surgically, and they wanted the best neurosurgeon in the country to perform the operation.

Three days later, on Monday, June 2, 2008, after Dr. Friedman clipped a small area of hair from the senator’s head, Kennedy was wheeled into the operating room where he was to undergo a procedure called “awake surgery.” Dr. Friedman reminded the senator that his physician assistant, standing on the other side of the anesthesia curtain, would ask him questions or ask him to perform certain tasks to ensure that the doctor did not cut into parts of the brain responsible for language, movement, or vision.

The senator was heavily sedated for the first part of the surgery. Dr. Friedman made an incision and pulled back the scalp to expose the bone. He drilled a hole smaller than a dime in the skull and then inserted a second, larger drill bit. After enlarging the hole to a little more than three inches in diameter, he used a scalpel to cut through the dura, the layer of tissue covering the brain. It was at this point, after the senator’s skull had been opened, that the anesthesiologist awakened him, and Dr. Friedman began to stimulate the brain with an electrode.

“If the stimulation of the electrode causes any changes in task performance, we know that we touched an important part of the brain,” Dr. Ania Pollack of the University of Kansas Hospital, in Kansas City, told Reuters. “We mark that spot, and we know we cannot injure it. That is called cortical mapping.”

Peering through a high-powered microscope and using a computer system to help him navigate the brain, Dr. Friedman began to expose the tumor. Then he used high-frequency sound waves and heat to dissolve the cancerous tissue and remove as much of the tumor as possible. It was unlikely, however, that the doctor was able to get all the cancer cells.

Nonetheless, Dr. Friedman was pleased with the results, and he announced that the surgery had “accomplished our goals.” Combined with radiation, chemotherapy, and brain-cancer drugs, the procedure was expected to allow the senator to survive for at least several months. Left unsaid, however, was an inescapable fact: the malignant tumor was already growing back.

Ted’s first few weeks at home in Hyannis Port were a harrowing experience. His doctors started him on chemotherapy treatments, and for a while he was so drained of color and vitality that he looked as though he were at death’s door. But he was an old hand at wrestling with the Angel of Death. His three brothers, a sister, and two nephews had all died violently; he had barely survived a plane crash that took the lives of two people; one of his sons had lost a leg to cancer; his daughter was a lung-cancer survivor; and, of course, Ted bore responsibility for the death of a young woman many years ago.

Despite these dreadful experiences (or perhaps because of them), he refused to succumb to self-pity and despair. As the hellish chemo treatments proceeded, he regained his buoyant and cheerful disposition. To everyone who came to visit him, he had one message: he couldn’t wait to get back to campaigning for Barack Obama.

There were days when he felt well enough to be wheeled down the wooden pier of the Hyannis Port Yacht Club for a look at the Mv. Ninety-four-year-old Benedict Fitzgerald, who had served as Rose Kennedy’s personal attorney until her death, happened to be on the pier on one such day, and he reeled back in shock when he recognized the frail figure in the wheelchair.

“It was clearly going badly for Ted,” Fitzgerald said. “I have a lot of happy memories of that beach. Many happy days with members of the Kennedy family over the years, dating back to when Joe Kennedy bought the place, in the 1920s. But this was one of the saddest days. When Ted is gone,” Fitzgerald add-
ed, “the house and all those memories will be history. Rose wanted to turn the place over to the Benedictine monks before she died. I drew up the legal papers for her on my front porch. But when Ted found out about it, he ripped the thing in half. There was no way he was going to have the place turned into a monastery.”

**Fighting Back**

On Sunday, July 6, 2008, Harry Reid, the Senate majority leader, talked on the phone with Vicki Kennedy about whether her husband was well enough to travel to Washington and make an appearance on the floor of the Senate. Just two weeks before, a vote on a critical Medicare bill had fallen one shy of the 60 needed to break a Republican filibuster. Ted’s “aye” would tip the balance. Reid made it clear that he wasn’t pushing, just asking.

No one in Hyannis Port wanted Ted to go, not his children, not his doctors, and not Vicki, the person who ultimately decided such matters. But as Ted gained strength, he decided to overrule them all. On Wednesday, July 9, he traveled to Washington in virtual secrecy; few of his colleagues outside the Democratic leadership knew of his plan to make a surprise appearance. He did not want to give the Republicans time to plot a counter-strategy.

Just after four o’clock in the afternoon, he showed up at the north wing of the Capitol, accompanied by Vicki. Word quickly spread, and the hall began to fill with press photographers. For years, newspapers had had Ted Kennedy obituaries at the ready, figuring that, if his compulsive eating and drinking did not get him, some nut with a gun might. But he had defied the odds. Of all the Kennedy brothers, only he had lived long enough, in the words of the Irish poet William Butler Yeats, to “comb grey hair.”

And now, like some apparition, he had come back to the Senate, where he had managed to accomplish more than his brothers John and Robert. He was the second-longest-serving member in the Senate, after Robert Byrd, of West Virginia, and the third-longest-serving ever. His colleagues on Capitol Hill—even those who heaped scorn on his liberal agenda—referred to him as “the lion of the Senate.” They predicted he would go down in history as one of the chamber’s greats, up there with Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun.

Proud of his mastery of the Senate, Ted no longer regarded himself as a runner-up in history because of his failed attempts to win the White House. “I feel the Senate is where the action is,” he once explained, “where the great issues of war and peace, the issues of human rights, and the problems of poverty are being debated. And, with certain important exceptions, you really can get a vote there on important matters. I would say the Senate is the greatest forum for change in our country and in the system. It’s the forum that I very much want to be part of and have some influence with.”

There were those who would deny him that role. They still viewed him as a relic of the past, a tax-and-spend liberal, an overweight, debauched politician who had left Mary Jo Kopechne for dead at Chappaquiddick; who had been caught making love to a beautiful luncheon companion on the floor of La Brasserie restaurant in Washington, D.C.; who had appeared as a prosecution witness in his nephew William Kennedy Smith’s lurid rape case, in Palm Beach—who, in short, was beyond hope of salvation.

However, this caricature was woefully out of date. It had been more than 15 years since his name had been linked with any scandal. And it had been even longer since...
Ted Kennedy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 126 he had given serious thought to running for the White House. As a result, he had ceased being a paramount threat to the Republicans. He was no longer the politician so memorably described by the late Republican National Committee chairman Lee Atwater as “the man in American politics Republicans love to hate.” In recent years the senator’s most clamorous critic had fallen silent, or had been drowned out by those who believed that he had atoned for his sins. The person who best captured this merciful view of the senator was the late political writer Murray Kempton. “In the arrogance of our conviction that we would have done better than he did in a single case [i.e., Chappaquiddick],” wrote Kempton, “we exempt ourselves from any duty to pay attention to the many cases where he shows himself better than us.”

And so, on this fine summer day, it was fair to say that Ted Kennedy had not merely survived long enough to comb gray hair but had prevailed. He was the greatest lawmaker of his age, a trusted member of that small fraternity of men and women who guided the course of America’s destiny.

As his wife and his niece Caroline watched from the packed Senate Gallery, he was escorted onto the Senate floor by his son Patrick, the congressman, and his friends Senators Barack Obama, John Kerry, Christopher Dodd, and Harry Reid. His unheralded appearance caused an instant sensation. Dozens of his colleagues rose to their feet and let out whoops of delight.

He “stirred the normally staid chamber to a rousing ovation and moved many colleagues to tears,” reported The New York Times. “Looking steady but flushed … Mr. Kennedy was quickly surrounded by Senators who could barely keep from overwhelming him despite cautions to keep their distance because his treatments have weakened his immune system.”

The Jewish Daily Forward could not contain itself: “There may be no better example … of how complicated human beings can be,” wrote Leonard Fein. “Ted Kennedy is very far from saintliness. There have been times when his life has seemed a shambles, earning disgrace. Yet even then, in the summer of his life, as surely now, in its winter, he was a lion. It was Martin Luther King who asked to be remembered as a drum major for justice, for peace, for righteousness. If that were so, he added, ‘all the other shallow things will not matter.’

“Ted Kennedy: A drum major for righteous indignation.”

A hard frost set in early on the Cape in the fall of 2008, and Vicki Kennedy feared that the bitter cold would hasten the demise of her desperately sick husband. “A number of things were going wrong,” said a family friend. “Ted was determined to get in every last sail on the MYV, but even he had to admit that the weather was foul. The nasty weather depressed him, because he considered every day that he was forced to stare at the sea from his porch to be a bad day, and his days were dwindling quickly.”

Ted went back to drinking, according to a close acquaintance. Although Vicki tried to keep him away from hard liquor, he had many friends in Hyannis Port who felt sorry for him and saw no harm in sneaking him a bottle or two. Vicki’s father, Judge Edmund Reggie, suggested that they ship the MYV to South Florida and move there for the winter. The judge had a friend who owned an estate in the Miami area, on Biscayne Bay, which he had been trying to sell but had had to having trouble unloading in the depressed real-estate market.

The move was quickly arranged. The MYV was shipped south on a flatbed truck. Several boxes of photographs and Kennedy memorabilia followed. Office space was rented near the Biscayne Bay property so that the senator could set up quarters for a small working staff.

In the days leading up to Ted and Vicki’s departure from Hyannis Port, Ted wandered around the house, gesturing at photos of family members, most of whom long dead. “It was as though he was familiarizing himself with the faces of those he’d soon be rejoining,” said a family friend. Ted also made a point of saying good-bye to everyone who worked in the Kennedy compound. A lot of these people had been with the Kennedys for years. “I’ll be back in the spring,” he told them, but there wasn’t a great deal of conviction in his voice.

From Vicki’s point of view, the move to Florida served a dual purpose. The warm weather would be easier on Ted’s delicate health, and the relatively isolated location of the estate meant that only a handful of people would have access to him. In Florida, Vicki was able to keep Ted under tighter control than she could in Hyannis Port, Washington, or New York, where nearly everyone was Ted’s friend and most had never cottoned to Vicki.

The weather that winter in Florida turned out to be wracked—cold and gloomy—which meant that Ted couldn’t go sailing as often as he wanted. When he was trapped indoors, he stayed in touch with John McDonough, his chief health-care-policy adviser, who was aiming to get a Kennedy-crafted health-care bill on the floor of the Senate before the Fourth of July recess. Ted also worked on a longstanding oral-history project that would eventually be housed in the proposed Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate, in Boston. He was a first-class anecdotalist, and when a particular story out of his past caught his fancy, he would make three copies of an audiocassette and send them to his children.

Caroline’s Choice

There has been a Kennedy in the Senate for nearly 50 years, and Ted wanted to extend that run for another 50 years,” said a longtime family adviser. “He felt it was very important to have a Kennedy in the Senate after he was gone, and when Hillary [Clinton] announced she was leaving the Senate to become secretary of state, Ted thought that Caroline should take her seat. He put it to Caroline almost like a last will, and Caroline felt that she couldn’t let her uncle Teddy down.”

The family adviser who provided this insight into Ted’s and Caroline’s thinking had a unique set of credentials that allowed him to speak with authority about private Kennedy matters. He had been an intimate of the Kennedys since the early days, and he was still in touch with family members, including Ted and Caroline, as well as Caroline’s three children, Rose, Tatiana, and Jack.

In early December 2008, Caroline phoned David Paterson, who had replaced the disgraced Eliot Spitzer as governor of New York, and expressed her interest in the Senate seat that would be vacated by Hillary Clinton. Paterson had the sole authority to name Hillarv’s successor, but since everyone from New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg to President-Elect Barack Obama supported Caroline’s bid, she was considered to be a shoo-in for the post.

However, the new governor didn’t seem as impressed by the magical Kennedy name as everyone else, and he let Caroline twist slowly in the wind. While he dithered over his selection, Caroline launched a listening tour of upstate New York that turned into a political disaster of major proportions. “During a series of meetings with the New York press, one of which was record and is now being admired on YouTube in all its inelegant awkwardness, the daughter of President Kennedy was vague, unconvincing and displayed a potentially ruinous verbal tic,” reported the correspondent of The Times of London. “In one sequence, lasting two minutes and twenty-seven seconds, Ms. Kennedy, fifty-one, revealed that she had inherited none of the eloquence, energy or charisma associated with other members of America’s foremost political dynasty: she used the phrase ‘you know’ no fewer than thirty times.”

In early January 2009, Caroline was finally granted a face-to-face interview with