



These Few Precious Days: The Final Year of Jack with Jackie

By Christopher Andersen

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The *New York Times* bestselling author presents the most famous couple in the world in their last year together, answering lingering questions about this still-mesmerizing marriage.

“The days dwindle down, to a precious few . . .” —from “September Song,” JFK’s favorite

They were the original power couple—outlandishly rich, impossibly attractive, and endlessly fascinating. Now, in this rare, behind-the-scenes portrait of the Kennedys in their final year together, #1 *New York Times* bestselling biographer Christopher Andersen shows us a side of JFK and Jackie we’ve never seen before. Tender, intimate, complex, and, at times, explosive, theirs is a love story unlike any other—filled with secrets, scandals, and bombshells that could never be fully revealed . . . until now. Including:

- Stunning new details about the Kennedys’ rumored affairs—hers as well as his—and how they ultimately overcame all odds to save their marriage
- The president’s many premonitions of his own death, and how he repeatedly tried to pull out of his last fateful trip to Dallas
- Shocking revelations about how the couple, unaware of the dangers, became dependent on amphetamine injections, the real reason—according to his longtime personal physician—for JFK’s notorious libido, and how the White House hid his many serious medical problems from the public
- How the tragic death of their infant son Patrick led to an emotional outpouring from the president that surprised even their closest friends—and brought JFK and Jackie closer than they had ever been
- Touching firsthand accounts of the family’s most private moments, before and after the assassination

Drawing on hundreds of interviews conducted with the Kennedys' inner circle—from family members and lifelong friends to key advisors and political confidantes—Andersen takes us deeper inside the world of the president and his first lady than ever before. Unsparing yet sympathetic, bigger than life but all too real, *These Few Precious Days* captures the ups and downs of a marriage, a man, and a woman, the memories of which will continue to fascinate and inspire for generations to come.

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Editorial Review

Review

“The opening chapter alone is one of the most graphic, searing things I’ve ever read.” (Liz Smith)

"Breaks new ground in its portrayal of the president’s love affairs." (The Daily Caller)

“Andersen has a real track record when it comes to celebrity bios. . . . He looks at Jack and Jackie Kennedy during their final year, pondering aloud whether after all the triumphs and betrayals they still loved each other.” (Library Journal)

“Very intimate. . . . *These Few Precious Days* is not a mere scandal tell-all. . . . Andersen’s account carries weight.” (Bookreporter)

“Andersen digs beneath the surface . . . to examine the essential loneliness of both Jack and Jackie, both the products of privilege, both essentially abandoned, and both tough and independent.” (Kirkus)

About the Author

Christopher Andersen is the critically acclaimed author of seventeen *New York Times* bestsellers, which have been translated into more than twenty-five languages worldwide. A former contributing editor of *Time* magazine and longtime senior editor of *People* magazine, Andersen has also written hundreds of articles for a wide range of publications, including *The New York Times*, *Life*, and *Vanity Fair*. Andersen has appeared frequently on such programs as the *Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *Dateline*, *CBS This Morning*, *Extra*, *Access Hollywood*, *The O’Reilly Factor*, *Fox & Friends*, *Hardball*, *Larry King Live*, *E!*, *Inside Edition*, and more.

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These Few Precious Days

1



“Jack, Jack, Jack! Can You Hear Me?”

DALLAS

NOVEMBER 22, 1963

12:30 P.M.

She would always remember the roses. Three times that day before they got to Dallas, she feigned delight as someone presented her with the yellow roses for which Texas was so famous. “Only in Dallas,” Jackie said, “I was given red roses. How funny, I thought—red roses for me.” Soon, the backseat of their car would be

strewn with blood-soaked rose petals—a surreal image she would never be able to erase from her mind. But for now, as they basked in the noonday sunlight and cheers from the crowds that lined the streets, Jack and Jackie seemed happier—and closer—than they had ever been.

The forty-six-year-old president and his thirty-four-year-old first lady exchanged one final glance. And then, in an instant, it all ended.

The look on Jack's still-boyish face the moment the first bullet struck him in the back of the neck, severing his windpipe and exiting his throat, would haunt Jackie's dreams for the rest of her life. "He looked puzzled," she later said. "I remember he looked as if he just had a slight headache."

For a split second, Jackie thought the crack she had heard was the sound of a motorcycle backfiring—until she realized she was watching, as if in slow motion, the president's head begin to pull apart. "I could see a piece of his skull coming off," she recalled. "It was flesh-colored, not white. I can see this perfectly clean piece detaching itself from his head. Then he slumped in my lap."

Texas governor John Connally, riding in the jumpseat in front of the president, had also been seriously wounded. "Oh no, no, no," he yelled, "they're going to kill us all!" Connally's wife, Nellie, who with her husband was now covered with blood and bits of brain matter from JFK's head wound, looked back at the first lady. "I have his brains," Jackie said as she sat staring for a full seven seconds, "in my hands!"

The driver of the presidential limousine floored the accelerator, and the "sensation of enormous speed" gave Jackie a sudden jolt of adrenaline. It also nearly dislodged Secret Service agent Clint Hill from his tenuous perch on the rear step; ever since the first shot rang out, Hill, who had been riding in the backup car, had sprinted to catch up. He finally reached the president's Lincoln just as the third shot struck, spraying Hill as well with bits of bone and brain matter.

What Hill then witnessed along with a breathless nation was something Jackie herself would not remember. Numb with shock and panic, Jackie clambered onto the slippery trunk of the Lincoln. To many, it appeared that she was trying to reach out to Agent Hill and pull him onto the car. In fact, she was grasping for a large chunk of the president's skull. Terrified that the first lady would now tumble off the back of the speeding vehicle, Hill pushed her back into her seat as the shard from JFK's skull flew into the street.

With the 190-pound Hill now sprawled over her, trying to act as a human shield for both the president and the first lady, Jackie cradled her husband's shattered head in her lap. She pressed down on the top with her white-gloved hands, she said later, "to keep the brains in."

Jackie's head was down, her face only inches from the president's. She was struck by the "pink-rose ridges" inside his broken skull, she later said, and the fact that despite everything, from the hairline down, "his head was so beautiful. I tried to hold the top of his head down, maybe I could keep it in . . . but I knew he was dead." So did the crowds that lined the street. "He's dead! He's dead!" she could hear people shouting as the motorcade sped to Parkland Memorial Hospital.

Jackie clung to the slimmest hope that maybe there was life there still, a latent if quickly ebbing consciousness. "Jack, Jack, Jack! Can you hear me?" she whispered over and over into his ear. The president's blue eyes were wide open in a fixed stare. "I love you, Jack," Jackie said. "I love you."

Although she later said it "seemed like an eternity," it took just seven minutes before the car screeched to a halt outside the emergency room entrance at Parkland. Hill, a fellow Secret Service agent named Roy

Kellerman, and JFK's longtime aide Dave Powers were about to lift the president onto a waiting stretcher, but Jackie, still cradling Jack's head, refused.

"Please, Mrs. Kennedy," Hill said. "We must get the president to a doctor."

"I'm not letting him go, Mr. Hill," she said. "You know he's dead. Leave me alone." Hill understood what was happening: Jackie did not want the world to see the gaping crater in her husband's skull. Struggling to control his own emotions, Hill whipped off the jacket of his black suit and wrapped it around the president's head.

Jackie ran alongside the gurney as her husband was wheeled into the hospital; she held Hill's jacket in place so that it wouldn't slip to reveal the gruesome truth. "It wasn't repulsive to me for one moment," she said. "Nothing was repulsive to me, and I was running behind with the coat covering it . . ."

Incredibly, Jack had a faint pulse and was still breathing when he was admitted to Parkland Hospital, simply as "Case 24740, white male, gunshot wound." Inside Trauma Room 1 a team of doctors, soon joined by White House physician Admiral George Burkley, immediately began administering massive blood transfusions.

Suddenly two burly men in scrubs blocked Jackie's path and began trying to pull her away. "Mrs. Kennedy," one of them said, "you come with us." But Jackie had other ideas. Nine years earlier, she had been kept away from Jack when he nearly died following one of his back surgeries. "They're never going to keep me away from him again," she told herself then.

This time, Jackie was standing her ground. The "big Texas interns wanted to take me away from him," she later said. "They kept trying to get me, they kept trying to grab me." This time things would be different. "I'm not leaving him," she declared, softly at first. Then she raised her voice only slightly—but just enough to make the interns back away. "I am not leaving," she told them.

No one seemed to notice that during all this time, Jackie had her left hand cupped over something she held in her right. As Parkland's chief anesthesiologist, Dr. Marion Jenkins, stood outside Trauma Room 1, the first lady nudged him with her left elbow. Then, carefully, she handed Jenkins what the doctor could only describe as "a good-sized chunk of the president's brain. She didn't say a word. I handed it to the nurse."

One of the uniformed Dallas police officers who had escorted the motorcade offered Jackie a cigarette. She had always managed to conceal her heavy smoking habit from the press and never smoked in public, but none of that mattered now.

Ten minutes later, the same patrolman fetched folding chairs for the first lady and Nellie Connally, whose husband was being treated for his nonfatal bullet wounds in Trauma Room 2. The two women sat in total silence while Powers and White House Chief of Staff Kenneth P. O'Donnell paced the floor.

The night before as they were going to bed, Jackie had told her husband that she "hated" John Connally because he had been bragging about how he was more popular in Texas than the president. "I just can't bear his soft, weak mouth and his sitting there saying all these great things about himself," she complained. "It seems so rude. I really hate him." But Jack, who unlike Jackie never held a grudge, rubbed her back and tried to calm her down. "You mustn't say that," he told her. "If you start to say or think that you hate someone, then the next day you'll act as if you hate him. You mustn't say that about people." What struck Jackie about that moment, she recalled, was that he "said it so kindly . . . Jack never stayed mad at someone. Never!"

Powers, “too numb” to say anything himself, choked back tears at the sight of Jackie sitting in her gore-splattered pink wool suit. Staring straight ahead, she periodically brought the cigarette to her mouth, revealing that the president’s blood had stained her white kid gloves a deep crimson.

Suddenly she was gripped by the possibility that Jack might survive. “Maybe he isn’t dead,” she thought. “He’s going to live!” After all, Jack had cheated death at least three times during their marriage. Of course, if he survived this time, he would be severely brain-damaged. When a stroke left his father, Joseph P. Kennedy, partially paralyzed and unable to speak, Jack let Jackie know in no uncertain terms where he stood. “Don’t ever,” he told her, “let that happen to me.” Now faced with options that were far worse, Jackie began bargaining with the Almighty: “Please, don’t let him die. I’ll take care of him every day of his life. I’ll make him happy.”

The moment of self-delusion passed as swiftly as it came. She didn’t want to be sitting in a corridor waiting; Jackie wanted to be at her husband’s side. She got up and headed for Trauma I, only to encounter the hulking presence of head nurse Doris Nelson standing in the doorway. Nelson grabbed Jackie by both shoulders. “You can’t come in here,” she said.

“I’m going to get in that room,” Jackie replied firmly. Admiral Burkley came out of the room and offered her a sedative. “No,” she said without hesitation. “I want to be in there when he dies.”

Burkley relented. As they pushed through the swinging door into the trauma room, Jackie witnessed the medical team’s final, futile effort to revive the president. The floor was covered with Jack’s blood. Looking up from the operating table, chief surgeon Dr. Malcolm Perry shouted, “Get her out of here!”

“It’s her prerogative,” Burkley argued. “It’s her prerogative.”

“No,” Perry shot back. “She has got to leave. Mrs. Kennedy, you must leave.”

For the first time that day, the preternaturally cool Mrs. Kennedy lost her temper. “I will not leave,” she said. “It’s my husband. His blood, his brains, are all over me.” Then, as Perry returned to his work, Jackie dropped down on one knee and said a brief, silent prayer. When she got back up, the front of her skirt was drenched with blood from the floor.

At 1 p.m., Dr. Jenkins pulled a white sheet over Jack’s face while another member of the medical team, Dr. Kemp Clark, was given the onerous task of informing Jackie that the president was dead. “Your husband,” he told her, “has sustained a fatal wound.”

Unable to speak, Jackie mouthed two words in response: “I know.”

The room fell silent as Jackie walked up to Jack’s body. She scanned the length of the operating table, and noticed one of his feet was sticking out, looking “whiter than the sheet.” Instinctively, she took the exposed foot in her hand, knelt down, and gently kissed it.

What happened next stunned everyone. Jackie pulled the sheet back to expose Jack’s face and shoulders. His eyes were open, she later said, “and his mouth was so beautiful.” According to Dr. Jenkins, Jackie then began kissing Jack again—starting with his exposed foot and then, through the sheet, slowly, deliberately, working her way up. “She kissed his foot, his leg, thigh, chest, and then his lips.” During this entire process, Jenkins recalled, “she didn’t say a word.” The process had left everyone in the room “feeling as if the wind had been knocked out of us. It was the most moving thing,” Jenkins said, “any of us had ever seen.”

Father Oscar Huber had rushed to the hospital from nearby Holy Trinity Church and now feared he might pass out at any moment. Steeling himself, Huber stepped up to perform the last rites. Another physician guided Jackie's hand to her husband's under the sheet, and she held it while Father Huber anointed the slain president's forehead with holy oil and bestowed the Apostolic Blessing in Latin. When he was finished, the priest dabbed the oil with cotton, then tried to conceal it from Jackie when he realized the swab was drenched in the president's blood.

She returned to the hallway and settled back into her little folding chair with a cigarette while orderlies washed Jack's body so it could be placed in a bronze coffin for the trip back to Washington, D.C. aboard Air Force One. A nurse materialized with a cold towel, and Jackie held it to her forehead to keep from passing out. "You must make sure," she told O'Donnell, "that I get in there before they close the coffin. I must see him."

O'Donnell led Jackie back into Trauma Room 1 just a few minutes later. There was still blood on the floor, but Jack's pale skin had been wiped completely clean. Four orderlies carefully lifted the president's naked body off the table and slowly lowered it into the coffin lined with white satin.

She was struck by how Jack, who had always seemed so much larger than life, now seemed "so small and fragile." She also noticed that, as one of his longtime physicians had pointed out, the left side of his body was smaller than the right. "The left side of his face was smaller," said back specialist Dr. Janet Travell. "His left shoulder was lower, and his left leg appreciably shorter"—a congenital condition that may have been the root cause of his lifelong back trouble.

Jackie's eyes widened as she began tugging at the white kid gloves that were now caked with her husband's blood. Finally, one of the policemen there stepped forward to help her pull them off. JFK never wore a wedding ring, so Jackie slipped hers over the bare finger on his left hand. The ring was also smeared with blood, and a nurse stepped forward to quickly sponge off the ring and the president's hand. "It's the right thing to do," O'Donnell reassured her. (Almost immediately Jackie began doubting whether she could bear parting with the simple gold band she had worn for a decade. Later that night at Bethesda Naval Hospital, O'Donnell instructed Admiral Burkley to remove the ring from Jack's finger and return it to Jackie.)

Before the casket was closed, Burkley handed Jackie two blood-soaked red roses that had fallen inside the president's shirt after the bullets struck. She handed one of the bloody stems back to Burkley. "This," he told her as he held up the rose, "is the greatest treasure of my life."

It would not be until Air Force One was winging its way back to Washington with Lyndon Baines Johnson sworn in as the new president that she finally began to unravel. She was seated next to Kenny O'Donnell at the rear of the plane, just opposite the casket, when Burkley came back and asked yet again if Jackie didn't want to change out of her bloody clothes.

"No!" she insisted. "I want them to see what they've done. I want them to see what they've done."

Once Burkley had slunk back to the front of the cabin, Jackie and O'Donnell looked at each other and, O'Donnell said, "she finally lost it. For the very first time that day, she allowed herself to cry."

Jackie sobbed for a full ten minutes, her poignant cries audible to the other passengers over the whine of the jet engines. Regaining her composure, she turned to O'Donnell. "Oh, it's happened," Jackie said.

"It's happened," answered O'Donnell, who with Powers was a leading member of Kennedy's fabled "Irish

Mafia” of political cronies. Powers had already broken down several times in front of Jackie, but O’Donnell, whose eyes were red-rimmed from crying in private, struggled to hold it together.

“Oh, Kenny,” Jackie said, choking back her tears, “what’s going to happen?”

“You want to know something, Jackie?” O’Donnell answered. “I don’t give a damn.”

“Oh, you’re right, you know,” she said. “You’re right. Just nothing matters but what you’ve lost.”

“Well, I know what I’m going to do,” O’Donnell said. “I’m having a Scotch, and I think you would have one, too.”

Jackie’s drink of choice was champagne; as the daughter of an alcoholic with a special fondness for hard drink, she had always been wary of whiskey. She remembered that Jack preferred beer—Heineken—but when he did drink Scotch he always asked for Ballantine’s. “I’ve never even tasted Scotch before,” she told O’Donnell. “Now,” she added, “is as good a time as any to start.” Staring at what she later described as “that long, long coffin,” Jackie and O’Donnell both downed one triple, then another. “A lot of people were drinking,” LBJ aide Jack Valenti recalled. “But honestly, everyone on that plane was in such a state of profound shock and disbelief the alcohol seemed to have no effect.”

Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy was having lunch with guests at Hickory Hill, his Virginia estate, when FBI director J. Edgar Hoover called with the news that the president had been shot. Thirty minutes later, Clint Hill telephoned Bobby to confirm that his brother was dead. “Those poor children!” Bobby’s wife Ethel cried when he told her that Jack and Jackie’s children, Caroline and John, were now fatherless.

That afternoon five-year-old “Lyric” (Caroline’s code name; the president was “Lancer,” Jackie “Lace,” and John, “Lark”) sat beaming in the backseat of a family friend’s station wagon, headed for her very first sleepover. Behind the wheel was the mother of Caroline’s best friend. As soon as the terrible news blared over the radio she pulled to the side of the road. “We have a news bulletin,” the announcer said. “This just in—President Kennedy has been shot.” The driver switched off the radio and checked out her daughter and Caroline in the rearview mirror.

Caroline, her small suitcase at her feet and her favorite pink teddy bear in her lap, was still chatting excitedly with her friend. Maybe she hadn’t heard, the driver thought. But she had.

A black Ford sedan driven by a member of the Secret Service “Kiddie Detail”—those agents assigned to protect the president’s children—pulled up behind the station wagon, and soon Caroline was heading back to the White House (code name “Chateau”) in their car. The little girl gave the agent a quizzical look, grabbed her suitcase, and said goodbye to her bewildered friend. As the Secret Service car headed for 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, a passing driver spotted Caroline in the unmarked car and, having heard what had happened in Dallas, apparently assumed JFK’s daughter was being abducted. After a wild chase through congested rush hour traffic, Caroline arrived safely back at the White House.

Neither she nor her brother would be there for long. As soon as Bobby called Janet Auchincloss with the horrible news, Jackie’s famously meddlesome mother (Jack thought it hilarious that Janet’s children called her, or anyone, “Mummy”) made the unilateral decision to have Caroline and John brought to the Auchincloss house in Georgetown to spend the night.

Joined by their British nanny, Maud Shaw, John and Caroline were playing in the living room of their

grandmother's house when Jackie's sixteen-year-old half brother, Jamie Auchincloss, bounded in. "Uncle Jamie! Uncle Jamie!" John yelled as he dashed about the room playing with his toy helicopter. Jamie assumed his mother or someone had told them what had happened, but it quickly became obvious no one had. "I thought, 'Why tell her now?'" recalled Jamie, who got down on the floor and began playing with his niece and nephew. "Why not let her have a few more hours of blissful innocence?"

At one point, Caroline leapt to her feet and dashed into the kitchen for a cookie. What she saw was several Secret Service agents glued to the television set in the kitchen. One of the agents blocked the screen, but too late. When she came back into the living room, said Jamie, "Caroline's mood had changed. She turned very quiet."

On the ground at Andrews Air Force Base, Jackie was met by Jack's brother Bobby. It had been up to Bobby to break the news to all the family members, with the exception of Caroline and John. Jackie, overwhelmed with the day's events and obviously still in a state of shock, had said nothing about the children yet. Right now she was focused on staying at her husband's side. After Jack's coffin was loaded into a waiting hearse, she and Bobby slid in the back.

During the forty-minute ride from Andrews to Bethesda, Jackie recounted in vivid detail the events of the day. Once they arrived, she repeated the story for the small group that had come to offer her comfort: old friends Nancy Tuckerman, Martha and Charlie Bartlett and Tony and Ben Bradlee, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Jackie's mother, and her stepfather, Hugh D. ("Uncle Hughdie") Auchincloss II.

Making what Ben Bradlee called a "strangely graceful arc" with her right hand as she described how "that part of the president's head had been blown away by one bullet," Jackie moved trancelike from one stunned person to the next. All the while, Bradlee said, Jackie's eyes were "still wide open with horror." All listened in numb shock as Jackie, still "amazingly calm," as Bradlee put it, relived the day's events over and over again. "Even if you didn't want to hear it," Charlie Bartlett said, "you knew she had to tell it."

Perhaps even more startling was the manner in which Jackie turned the tables on those who had come to console her. Instead, she insisted on comforting them. "Oh Dave, you have been with Jack all these years," she had already told Powers on the plane. "What will you do now?" She asked the same question of her secretary, Pamela Turnure, the Jackie look-alike who had once been her husband's lover. And to her girlhood chum Nancy Tuckerman, just hired to be Jackie's social secretary: "Poor Tucky. You came all the way down from New York to take this job and now it's all over. It's so sad."

All the while, Jackie resisted any effort to get her to change out of her blood-spattered suit. She had often joked with her friends about her compulsive need to change out of her clothes if she saw even the tiniest spot. Now she wore her stained Chanel proudly. Martha Bartlett took her husband aside. "It's as though," she told him as they watched Jackie talk, "she doesn't want the day to end."

Janet Auchincloss was surprised, then, when her daughter suddenly turned to her and asked, "Where are the children?"

"They are with Jamie at our house," she answered.

"What," Jackie wanted to know, "are they doing there?"

Janet, who was used to making executive decisions on her own, nevertheless claimed Jackie had sent her a message from Air Force One saying she wanted the children taken to their grandparents' home.

There was no question in Jackie's mind that her mother was making it all up. "But," she said, "I never sent such a message." In fact, Jackie was anything but pleased that her mother had interfered with the children's normal routine.

"The best thing for them," Jackie said, "would be to stay in their own rooms with their own things so their lives can be as normal as possible." Janet realized she had made a terrible mistake. "Mummy, my God," Jackie added, her voice rising in anger, "those poor children. Their lives shouldn't be disrupted now, of all times!"

Jackie's remarks sent Janet scurrying for the nearest phone. Within minutes, Maud Shaw was bundling Caroline and John into a White House limousine for the ride back home. "I knew their lives had changed forever," said Uncle Jamie, who waved goodbye as the car pulled away from the Auchincloss mansion. "But then so had everyone's."



WHAT JACKIE WANTED FOR HER children that one last fateful night was something that she had struggled against formidable odds to achieve throughout her marriage: a happy, normal family life—or at least a convincing imitation of it.

This was not something either Jack or Jackie had known they were capable of achieving, or even wanted. In his scramble to the summit of power, Jack had scarcely proven himself to be a model husband. Jackie, living out her girlhood desire to be "part of a great man's life," had been willing to put up with Jack's faithlessness so long as she was not the object of public humiliation—and in the abiding belief that she was the only woman he really loved.

When she first set foot in the White House as America's first lady, Jackie could not have dreamed that this would be where she and Jack would come closest to fulfilling her dream of a happy marriage. "I said to myself, 'It will be such a goldfish bowl. With the Secret Service and everybody here, I'll never see my husband. It will ruin our marriage.'?"

Soon she realized the opposite was true. "I remember thinking, 'What was the matter with me?' It was when we were the closest," she said. "I hadn't realized the physical closeness of having his office in the same building and seeing him so many times a day." For all the soaring triumphs, soul-testing trials, and crushing tragedies that would befall them during this historic time, Jack and Jackie would finally bridge the yawning emotional chasm between them only within the walls of the White House.

"It was," Jackie said without hesitation, "the happiest time of my life."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Graciela Cook:

The event that you get from *These Few Precious Days: The Final Year of Jack with Jackie* is a more deep you looking the information that hide into the words the more you get enthusiastic about reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to be aware of but *These Few Precious Days: The Final Year of Jack with Jackie* giving you excitement feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in selected way that can be understood by simply anyone who read the item because the author of this book is well-known enough. This

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