

# “BY GOD, I CAN BEAT THAT SON OF A BITCH”

**IN SEPTEMBER 1961 PAT BROWN** hunkered down in front of a television set to watch an announcement he did not wish to hear. Richard Nixon, the former vice president of the United States and a man who had come within a hairbreadth of winning the Oval Office, was standing before dozens of reporters and cameramen in the Statler Hilton Hotel in Los Angeles. The state government in Sacramento, Nixon declared, was “a mess.” California’s government was too big, its crime rate too high, its economy too sluggish. As for the “amiable but bungling man who presently is governor,” he was incapable of finding the solutions. So Richard Nixon would take the job. He would run for governor of California in 1962. Republicans, Nixon vowed, would “beat Pat Brown to a pulp.”<sup>1</sup>

The would-be pulp watched with dread. Brown’s first term had featured an ironic combination of policy successes and political setbacks. His achievements—the water project, the new college campuses, the tax increase that helped to pay for it all—were more deeply appreciated with the passing of time. The failures, by contrast, were immediately obvious. His debacles in dealing with the death penalty and national politics had left many Californians believing their governor a weak and vacillating figure, the amiable bungler described by Nixon. Nearly a third of voters thought Brown was doing a poor job. Even among those who approved of his work, more than half were unable to cite anything specific as a major accomplishment.<sup>2</sup>

Polls suggested Brown would lose to Nixon badly, and that was not the worst news. At least Nixon was a national figure. The governor's numbers were little better against far weaker opponents. He trailed former Gov. Goodwin Knight, who was contemplating a comeback. He was tied with San Francisco Mayor George Christopher, a local figure. Most ignominious of all, the governor polled only five points better than William Knowland, the man he routed so easily in 1958. Knowland was out of politics, yet one in five Californians said they did not know how they would mark a ballot in a potential Knowland-Brown race. The cold fact was that with less than fourteen months to election day, the governor was the most unpopular major politician in California.<sup>3</sup>

Brown's self-confidence was a fragile thing in the best of times, and as he watched Nixon's announcement, his courage gave way completely. Frightened that he might be on the losing end of a rout, Brown called key Democrats and told them to find someone else to carry the party's banner against Nixon. Brown had spent his life in the pursuit of political office. Now, cowed by bad circumstances and a bold opponent, he was ready to quit.<sup>4</sup>

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In many ways Nixon cut a daunting figure. Born and raised in Whittier, east of Los Angeles, he had been elected to Congress at thirty-three, to the Senate at thirty-seven, to the vice presidency at thirty-nine, an age when Brown was still in his first year as San Francisco district attorney. Politically, he was said to be brilliant, knowledgeable, strategic—and ruthless. Many people in California politics hated Nixon, especially his fellow Republicans, but nobody thought him a boob.

Brown first met him in 1950, on a hot day in Bakersfield when both were campaigning, Nixon for the U.S. Senate and Brown for attorney general of California.<sup>5</sup> From the beginning, Brown got glimpses of Nixon as a schemer. Later in the same campaign, both men found themselves in Sacramento at the same time. They met at the Senator Hotel, and Nixon proposed a pact. If Brown avoided an endorsement of Helen Gahagan Douglas, the actress and congresswoman who was Nixon's opponent for the Senate, Nixon would refuse to endorse Brown's Republican opponent in the attorney general's race. Brown was already keeping his distance from Douglas, who was well to his left politically, but he found Nixon's proposal slick. He offered a characteristically noncommittal answer, and the two men went their separate ways.<sup>6</sup>

Two years later, Brown watched on television as Nixon, accused of having a slush fund, gave his famous Checkers speech, invoking the family dog as emblem of his honesty and preserving his place on the Republican ticket. Brown was not convinced. He found the vice presidential candidate reminiscent of the con men he had prosecuted as district attorney.<sup>7</sup>

In 1955 came one more troubling episode related to Nixon. Brown met with Goodwin Knight, then the governor, to discuss water issues. When they finished with those matters, Knight began discussing Nixon. Knight said he believed Nixon to be, as Brown later remembered it, “one of the most dangerous men in the world.” Nixon had double-crossed Knight twice, and the state’s other major Republicans—Warren, Knowland, and U.S. Sen. Thomas Kuchel—had been treated the same way, Knight insisted. The vice president, Knight said, was “the worst man imaginable for the presidency of the United States.” It was a surprising moment, a Republican sharing such confidences with a Democrat, and about a man who was next in line for the most powerful job in the world. Brown was accustomed to the rough-and-tumble of politics, but Knight’s comments struck him as noteworthy. The next day in his office, Brown dictated a memo, intended solely for his confidential political files, describing his conversation with Knight and noting carefully the time and circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

At the time Nixon posed no immediate threat to Brown, for they played on different stages. Nixon spent the 1950s in Washington, Brown in Sacramento. That changed in November 1960, when Nixon narrowly lost the presidency to John Kennedy and suddenly snapped into focus as a potential rival for Brown. Within days of the election Brown’s new chief of staff, Hale Champion, was urging the governor to find a friendly congressman who could push for an investigation of a potentially juicy scandal, a large loan to Nixon’s brother from the reclusive tycoon Howard Hughes. A public inquiry would be nice, Champion said, “just to keep Nixon off balance.” The Brown team also squirreled away a film on Nixon provided by the Kennedy campaign. “We may need it in 1962,” Champion wrote.<sup>9</sup>

Nixon was less certain about his future. Depressed after the loss to Kennedy, he decided to return home to California. Nixon and his wife, Pat, opted to build a new home in Los Angeles, and while construction was completed she and their two daughters remained in Washington. Nixon moved into an apartment on Wilshire Boulevard, in part because he had taken a job with a California law firm and in part because solitude allowed him to lick his wounds in private. Alone and happy about it, he settled into a routine of TV dinners and work but soon found politics drawing his at-

tention. On a speaking tour in spring 1961, he focused mostly on international issues but insisted he had no plans to run for president again. By summer speculation was rampant that Nixon would return to politics even before the next presidential election. The rumors said he would seek California's governorship.

For Nixon, the attraction was not the job but the potential. By the early 1960s California's sheer heft—it was home to almost one in every eleven Americans—meant that the governors of today might be the presidents of tomorrow. New York had once held that status; stints in Albany had put Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt on the path to national prominence. In the postwar world it was California's turn. Every presidential election since World War II had featured a Californian on the Republican ticket: Earl Warren as the vice presidential nominee in 1948 and then Nixon three times, in 1952 and 1956 as Dwight Eisenhower's running mate and in 1960 as his own man. In 1964 the GOP's nomination would be wide open, and there were those in the party who believed that a short turn as governor would prove a useful interlude for Nixon, keeping him in the public eye and reestablishing his reputation as a winner. Eisenhower felt that way and wrote to his former vice president to say as much. Winning election as governor would "offset to a large extent the razor-thin margin by which you lost the presidential race," Ike wrote. And it would still allow Nixon to seek the presidency in 1964.<sup>10</sup>

Nixon hesitated. He was writing a book. He did not especially want to be governor of California. His wife was adamantly opposed to another campaign. But the decision could not wait forever, and so finally, in September 1961, he sat down with his family to discuss the issue. There was little doubt where Nixon's inclinations lay: He was a political animal to the bone. But family sentiment prevailed, and, at least by Nixon's account in his memoirs, he decided to skip the race. Upstairs in his study, he was drafting a statement to that effect when his wife appeared. Drained and stressed, Pat Nixon told her husband that she would support whatever decision he might make. She reversed what she had said only minutes before and promised that she would join him on the campaign trail. "You must do whatever you think is right," Nixon remembered her saying. "If you think this is right for you, then you must do it." Nixon threw out the draft speech announcing that he would not run and began working on the statement of candidacy that would cause Brown such trepidation.<sup>11</sup>

Attacks of self-doubt may have been common in Brown's psyche, but usually they were also mercifully brief. So it was with his anxiety over Nixon's announcement. The governor regained his equilibrium quickly—fellow Democrats helped by insisting that he was their man—and returned to the realization that he loved being governor too much to quit. To insiders, that was no surprise. Deep down, he always wanted to hang on to the job as long as possible.

Barely a week into his first term, Brown had been talking about a second. At his first cabinet meeting, he said he was trying to limit public appearances during his first six months in office, when the legislature would be in session. "As soon as that is over, I will start campaigning for governor again," he added, only half-joking.<sup>12</sup> In the years since, nothing had changed his mind, and once he recovered from the initial shock of realizing that his opponent would be a former vice president, Brown launched into a reelection training regimen.

The first goal was physical. He went on a diet, swearing off potatoes and cocktails. For exercise, he and Bernice played golf every morning—up at 5:00 A.M., then eighteen holes quickly, carrying their own clubs. The result was the loss of almost twenty pounds from his customarily roly-poly frame. Second, for a less corporeal brand of rejuvenation, he spent three days in silent retreat at a Jesuit center south of San Francisco, giving him "the chance and the peace for prayer and spiritual awareness." Last—and least needed, given Brown's familiarity with his state—was a week spent with staff at the desert home of a supporter. Isolated from meetings and distractions, the governor boned up on issues. Two staff members were assigned to play devil's advocate and argue with whatever position Brown took, the better to prepare him for the hurly-burly of a campaign.<sup>13</sup>

Preparations were needed at home too. Given Nixon's reputation as a Red-baiter and a rhetorical brawler, the Browns expected a tough, perhaps vicious, struggle. Kathy, now fifteen and the only child remaining at home, might find more shelter in a private boarding school than the public high school she had been attending in Sacramento. So Pat and Bernice sat down with Kathy in the Governor's Mansion and explained they thought it best if she switched to a Catholic school in Monterey. They heard no objections—Kathy was ready for a new challenge—and in fall 1961 she headed off to a new life. Pat and Bernice looked ahead to a year that featured one old constant of their lives, campaigning, and one new circumstance: For the first time since the earliest months of their marriage more than three decades before, they presided over an empty house.<sup>14</sup>

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Looking ahead, Nixon knew he faced a fundamental disadvantage. By 1962 Democrats outnumbered Republicans in California by more than a million. To win in the fall, Nixon had to broaden his appeal and reach across party lines. Doing so required that he distance himself from the right wing of the state's Republican Party, especially the conspiracy theorists of the John Birch Society. Named for an American soldier killed in China ten days after the end of World War II, the fiercely anti-Communist Birchers were at the outermost fringe of reason. The group's founder, Robert Welch, had taken to declaring that Dwight Eisenhower was not merely a weak-willed moderate—a view held by many Birchers—but an active and knowing agent of an international Communist conspiracy. The former president, Welch maintained, was guilty of treason.

But Nixon had to be careful. He needed to separate himself from Welch's nuttiness without completely alienating conservative Republican activists, who formed the grassroots of any GOP campaign. That was made more problematic by the presence of a conservative opponent in the Republican primary, a state assemblyman named Joseph Shell. Young and handsome, Shell was square-jawed conservatism in the flesh. He had captained the University of Southern California football team to the Rose Bowl in 1939, married his college sweetheart, served as a pilot in World War II, gotten rich in the oil industry, and won election to the assembly in a special election in 1953. After the 1960 census, Democrats redrew the boundaries of his Los Angeles legislative district so that it was far less favorable to a Republican. Faced with a nearly impossible reelection bid, Shell decided instead that he might as well go down fighting for a big prize, so he ran for governor.<sup>15</sup> Shell's candidacy complicated Nixon's. If Nixon moved toward the center too far and too fast, Shell would provide a haven for disgruntled conservatives.

The issue came to a head at the annual meeting of the California Republican Assembly, an independent group whose endorsement was a prize sought after by GOP candidates. Hoping to distance himself from the Birchers without alienating them, Nixon offered a resolution denouncing Welch but not the group as a whole. Instead, he demanded that Republicans leave the John Birch Society only if Welch was not expelled. It was a nice idea. Given his connection to Eisenhower, Nixon had to denounce Welch in some fashion, but he also needed the support of the society's members, many of whom thought Welch too extreme. But Shell sensed an

opportunity to win conservative hearts, and he condemned the Nixon proposal. It was no business of the convention, he insisted, if people were involved with outside organizations.

The Nixon forces pushed the resolution through committee, but on the convention floor its fate seemed in doubt. Nixon agreed to modify the measure so that it merely denounced Welch, without any mention of whether Republicans should belong to the John Birch Society, and it passed easily. The full convention endorsed Nixon for governor, although Shell did well in the voting.

In a sense Nixon had accomplished his purpose, authoring a resolution that derided Welch and his ludicrous conspiracy theories about Eisenhower. Democrats would face a tougher task portraying Nixon as an extremist. But the incident revealed the depth of bitterness and discord in the Republican Party. The convention's final session was snarling and combative, and at the end the moderates and conservatives were as divided as ever. When one middle-of-the-road delegate insisted, "Let's get one thing straight: We are all opposed to communism," members of the Birch contingent laughed derisively.<sup>16</sup> Patricia Hitt, then a member of the Republican National Committee and an ardent Nixon loyalist, said that if somehow Shell won the primary she would campaign for him in the general election out of solemn partisan duty, but that after giving a pro-Shell speech she would have to go to the ladies' room and vomit.<sup>17</sup>

Nixon was never in danger of losing the nomination; he was too big a name for that. But at the June 5 primary, Shell managed to beat him in seven counties, and statewide the challenger took a third of the Republican vote, a portion big enough to suggest a serious split in the party.<sup>18</sup> Two weeks later Nixon and Shell met at midnight at the home of Henry Salvatori, a rich Republican businessman who would later play a critical role in the rise of Ronald Reagan. Shell agreed to endorse Nixon, but the hard feelings festered. Months later, just before election day, conservatives grew so displeased with Nixon that they mounted a write-in effort for Shell.<sup>19</sup>

The primary results offered no great solace to Brown either. He had no serious Democratic challenger, but more than one hundred thousand Democrats wrote in either Nixon or Shell, compared to only a handful of Republicans who voted for the governor. Fortunately, reassurance was at hand. Earlier in the year, a newspaper editor who was a friend of Jack Burby, the governor's new press secretary, had asked if Brown would make a joint appearance with Nixon at a statewide editors' meeting sponsored by the Associated Press. By traditional norms of campaign management, it was far

from obvious that Brown should participate, but Burby urged that he do so. Burby knew that Brown's years of constant one-on-one politicking had left him with a remarkably personalized view of the world. To take the measure of an opponent, Brown had to meet him, shake hands, inhabit the same room, sense the reaction of those around him. Yet nothing like that had occurred with Nixon. To Burby's thinking, the joint appearance would give his boss a chance to sum up Nixon personally and, Burby hoped, to find him wanting.

The plan worked. At the editors' meeting, Brown was charming and friendly, yet substantive and experienced in discussing the state's big issues. To Brown's ears, Nixon sounded grim, almost bitter, using his speech to criticize the press, an odd choice given the venue. The governor knew he had done well and thought his opponent had come off poorly. Afterward, he and Burby walked out to a waiting car. As soon as they got in, Brown reached across the seat and joyfully whacked his aide on the thigh. "By God," he exclaimed, "I can beat that son of a bitch."<sup>20</sup>

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In July, with the indolence of summer sapping interest from the race, Brown found time for some travel. Much of it was for pleasure, although as always there was politicking too. Washington came first. On the morning of July 5, he played golf at Burning Tree, the course that had once been favored by President Eisenhower. In the afternoon, he went to the White House, where Kennedy offered detailed pointers about debating Nixon, even discussing whether Brown should use notes.<sup>21</sup>

He returned to Sacramento but soon was off again, this time for four days of hiking, fishing, and swimming in Kings Canyon National Park, a vast area of the Sierra Nevada south of Yosemite. Brown made a side trip to the General Sherman, a great redwood reputed to be the world's largest tree.<sup>22</sup>

But the highlight of the summer's sightseeing may well have been a weekend at Wyntoon, the Hearst family estate near Mount Shasta. Like most things connected to William Randolph Hearst, Wyntoon was a fanciful world unto itself. The McCloud River ran through the estate's fifty thousand acres of forest. The main buildings were three four-story mansions: Cinderella House, Fairy House, and Bear House. There was a swimming pool, of course, but also stables, a croquet court, and a huge stone lodge, called the Gables, with a dining room for sixty and a private movie theater. As a guest of the Hearsts, the governor enjoyed the weekend amid such

splendor, and when he got back to the office used the excuse of a thank-you note to George Hearst Jr., then running the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, to make a carefully crafted pitch for the paper's support. "I sometimes get discouraged when members of the Republican Party say that the Democratic Party is anti-business," Brown wrote. "Certainly, there are some who are socialistic or even worse, but the average Democrats in California government . . . are people who realize that only when business makes money and employs people and pays good salaries do we have the sources of taxes that permit us to do the things government should do in a great state like California."<sup>23</sup> Nobody knows if the entreaty did any good, but the paper stayed neutral, a surprise for a paper that typically backed Republicans.

Summer vacation over, the Browns made their annual fall move to Los Angeles and readied themselves for the heart of what the governor predicted would be the toughest campaign of his life.<sup>24</sup> It was already going well. Nixon, it turned out, had entered the race at precisely the wrong moment. Through spring and summer 1961, as Nixon was deciding whether to run, California was suffering the aftereffects of a brief national recession. The state's unemployment rate was higher than it had been since Brown took office. When he announced his candidacy, Nixon cited joblessness as "most important of all" among California's problems. Then that fall, just after Nixon jumped in, things began to improve. By the time Brown returned from his romp at Wynton and jumped into the fall portion of the 1962 campaign, the unemployment rate was a full percentage point lower than the year before, and falling. The nation's economy as a whole had surged into an expansion that would last the rest of Brown's tenure. The entire time Nixon was out on the hustings urging a change of leadership, Californians' pocketbooks were getting fatter.<sup>25</sup>

It would have taken a mighty challenger to overcome such obstacles, and, at least that year, Nixon was not the man. For one thing, too many people did not believe he wanted the job he was seeking or would keep it if he got it. Nixon insisted from the day he entered the governor's race that he would not seek the presidency in 1964, but voters refused to take him at his word. After all, Nixon had once vowed he would not run for governor, then changed his mind.<sup>26</sup> Polls found that 40 percent of voters thought Nixon was "very likely" to abandon the governorship midterm and run for president, and the Brown team was happy to foster the impression. "It is obvious that our job," noted one strategy memo, "is to keep alive the belief that Nixon's real goal is the presidency."<sup>27</sup> Only minutes after Nixon announced his candidacy, the Brown campaign issued a nicely quotable statement sug-

gesting the opponent's ulterior motive: The former vice president had decided to "enter a contest he tried to avoid, seeking an office he does not really want, under a four-year contract he does not intend to fulfill."<sup>28</sup>

There was something disingenuous about the claim. Brown had promised in 1958 to serve a full term as governor and then almost immediately after winning the election launched a fleeting bid for the presidency. But in political terms that was ancient history, and in any event Nixon's fellow Republicans—some of them potential 1964 competitors—were happy to join Brown in implying that the former vice president might have something up his sleeve. Before Nixon's announcement was in the papers, Oregon Gov. Mark Hatfield was telling reporters that Nixon might still run in 1964. The next day New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller said the same thing.<sup>29</sup>

Even Nixon inadvertently dropped hints that his dreams remained elsewhere. When he declared his candidacy, he said not that he longed to be governor but that he wanted to be in public service and that governor of California was the most interesting job he could hold, "next to being president of the United States."<sup>30</sup> At a rally in Sacramento later in the campaign, he said that he would win because he wanted to take power from government "and give it back to 180 million individuals," although of course that was the population of the entire country, not the state he supposedly wanted to govern.<sup>31</sup>

An excess of ambition was not the only thing that made voters wonder about Nixon. Often they simply did not like him. When pollsters asked people for their thoughts about both Brown and Nixon, they got strikingly different answers. Complaints about Brown dealt mostly with policy: too much spending, taxes too high, capital punishment. The only personal trait cited frequently was indecisiveness. The list of common complaints about Nixon was a far more intimate indictment: He was a dirty campaigner, offensive, aloof, opportunistic, and hot-headed.<sup>32</sup>

The result was that one candidate had many friends, the other many enemies. When a Brown operative surveyed the northern coast in preparation for a gubernatorial trip through the area, he reported back that the publisher of the *Eureka Times-Standard*, a major paper in the region, had been charmed by a recent phone call from the governor. The man was a Republican so committed to the GOP that he kept an autographed copy of Nixon's new book on his desk, but he had been going around town for days taking every opportunity to mention, "Pat called me," and then recounting the conversation in detail. A hundred miles inland, in Redding, the editor of the *Record-Searchlight* remembered that ten years earlier Nixon had

visited the town and criticized the paper's political coverage without reading the stories in question. The sting was so deep that the Redding editor still bore Nixon nothing but enmity. The lesson was easy to see: Pat Brown made people like him; Richard Nixon had a knack for the opposite. Harry Truman once told Brown that he should never mention Nixon's name. "Let him go to hell on his own hook," the former president said.<sup>33</sup>

Nixon's supporters recognized their man's weakness. Toward the end of the campaign, at a big Nixon fund-raising dinner where Eisenhower spoke, a Nixon backer presiding over the event announced, in an almost unbelievable gaffe of candor, that too many people had been saying, "I don't like Nixon, but I don't know why."<sup>34</sup> Maybe Nixon sensed the issue himself. Years later, writing his memoirs, he thought about Brown and noted, with what must have been envy, that the governor was a politician "whom no one particularly disliked."<sup>35</sup>

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Nixon's lead—the cushion that encouraged him to run and nearly scared off Brown—shrank from the day he announced his candidacy. Back in summer 1961, when Nixon was deciding what to do, his margin was a stunning 16 points. Then it was 10 in the fall, then a meaningless 2 points by February 1962. In April, with only weeks until the primary, Brown finally pulled ahead for the first time.<sup>36</sup> The governor held his lead through the summer, but there was cause to worry. A month before election day, both sides faced the Russian roulette of politics, a televised debate.

Debate negotiations had dragged on for weeks. At the Associated Press meeting earlier in the campaign—the event that gave Brown a boost of confidence—the two men had simply given speeches in sequence, with no questions from reporters or each other. Nixon had pressed hard for another encounter, this time a true debate with the candidates interrogating one another, or at least facing unpredictable questions from journalists.

Brown feared a true debate. He knew Nixon had been a college debater, and the old insecurities of a man who had never attended college came rushing back. What was more, Brown had seen Nixon debate during his first bid for Congress, in 1946, and had thought him dangerously clever. Against such a foe, the governor thought he would lose. But he also felt obliged to meet Nixon head-on. If he ducked a confrontation altogether, voters might think him cowardly, and cowards do not win elections.<sup>37</sup> So the two sides struck a deal: one debate, televised live, with questions from

journalists but no direct exchange between the candidates. It was to be held at another meeting of newspaper editors, this one sponsored by United Press International, at San Francisco's Fairmont Hotel, the grand address atop Nob Hill that was so often the site of Brown fund-raisers.

Both men began with opening statements, brief and polished and predictably dull. The action came, as everyone expected, when the editors started asking questions of the candidates. The greatest excitement boiled down to just two moments, both of them instances when Nixon, who believed it was easier to attack a position than to defend one, confronted Brown.<sup>38</sup> Early in the question-and-answer session, Nixon was asked if he supported the reelection campaigns of two California congressmen who had admitted their membership in the John Birch Society. He replied that he was endorsing no congressional candidates. Then, hoping to turn the tables, he faced Brown and asked if the governor supported two liberal state legislators "who helped to lead the riots against the Committee on Un-American Activities when it met in San Francisco."

The rules specified that the candidates were not to query one another, but Nixon's question actually offered Brown a great opportunity. The protests to which Nixon referred had occurred in 1960, when Berkeley students and other young people objected to the committee's hearings at San Francisco's City Hall. To break up the protest, police used fire hoses to wash the students down the building's marble steps, and they dragged away others by the hair. It seemed to many liberals that the misconduct had been more on the part of the authorities than the demonstrators. But regardless of opinions on that point, Brown had an opening: Nixon simply had his facts wrong. The two lawmakers he referred to were not present when the trouble occurred. The previous day and at a different location, they had given speeches objecting to the committee hearings, but they were never at City Hall and had nothing to do with the so-called riot.

Wisely, Brown noted that the question was against the rules but said he would answer it anyway. But then he missed the opportunity to catch Nixon in a straightforward factual error. Either the governor did not know the legislators' whereabouts on the day of the committee hearing or he forgot, so he simply said that he did not always agree with the two lawmakers but thought they did "excellent" work and knew that they had led the fight in Sacramento "for the blind and the lame and the aged." He said he supported them "unequivocally."<sup>39</sup>

It was a notable exchange, but a few minutes later the fireworks got louder. Tom Braden, the publisher of the Oceanside paper and a Brown ap-

pointee to the state Board of Education, asked Nixon if he thought the old loan from Howard Hughes to Nixon's brother had been "morally and ethically" proper. There had long been rumors about the loan. Nixon had been vice president at the time. Collateral for the loan was skimpy—a piece of property owned by Nixon's mother—and there seemed to be some evidence that Nixon himself must have been involved in securing the money. One of the documents had been signed by his mother in a Senate office building in Washington, D.C., for example. Given the massive defense contracts that fed the Hughes empire, the matter raised serious questions. Had the vice president, for example, offered any special treatment to Hughes's companies in return for a friendly loan to the Nixon family?

But the rules restricted inquiries to matters of current public policy, not personal issues, and the moderator ruled Braden's question out of order. Nixon saw an opportunity amid the attack, however, and dramatically insisted that he be allowed to answer. He ran through the details of the loan, declaring that Brown "and his hatchetmen" had been spreading rumors about the story. The governor was guilty of a cowardly ambush, Nixon said, because he had been accusing Nixon of wrongdoing "privately" and "slyly." With growing indignation, Nixon went on: "All the people of California are listening on television. The people of this audience are listening. Governor Brown has a chance to stand up as a man and charge me with misconduct." Then he turned to face Brown directly: "Do it, sir!"

Across the stage, standing at his own podium, Brown was dumbfounded, as if he had been caught with a clean punch to the jaw. Nixon was glaring at him, waiting for an answer. Brown started with a flat denial: "I have said nothing about it to anyone whatsoever." Then, perhaps realizing that what he had just said was neither truthful nor believable, he immediately backpedaled.<sup>40</sup> He conceded that he might have mentioned the Hughes loan "in casual conversation from time to time," a comment that drew titters from the crowd.

It was a weak response, and standing there beneath the klieg lights of television, Brown thought to himself that he had been badly hurt. As he left the stage, it seemed that the governor's fears had come true. He had suffered the worst of the debate, failing to point out Nixon's inaccuracies and then contradicting himself about the loan.

But later that night, after flying to Hollister to give a speech, Brown watched the debate replayed on television and suddenly felt buoyed. Brown thought that Nixon seemed mean, overaggressive, too nasty. Brown's answers might have won few points with debating judges, but voters like their

leaders to be friendly, decent fellows. Sitting in front of the television set—the exact place and posture in which most Californians would have experienced the debate—Brown was reassured to think that, if nothing else, he came across as the nicer man.<sup>41</sup>

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Out on the trail Nixon could get no traction. He tried the old conservative broadsides—taxes too high, regulations too restrictive—but big government was not yet the enemy for Californians. He fell back on the Old Faithful of his career and argued that Brown did not know how to deal with the threat of Communism, but the day of the Red scare in California was fading fast. Hugh Burns, the conservative Democrat who was president of the state senate and chairman of its Un-American Activities Committee and who had not always been a friend to the governor, declared that no new anti-Communist laws had been enacted while Brown was governor because none were needed.<sup>42</sup> Besides, the Nixon campaign seemed almost absurd on the topic. At the rally where he announced his candidacy, cheerleaders led the crowd in chanting “Nixon is blue hot!” so as to avoid the use of the word *Red*.<sup>43</sup>

Then in the final weeks the campaign went deeper in the gutter. It had always been an aggressive fight—on both sides. Brown personally instructed his staff to plant hostile questioners at Nixon events<sup>44</sup> and kept on his payroll a prankster named Dick Tuck, a Brown aide with a flair for mischief. Tuck became a legend in politics, in part because his brand of gamesmanship seemed funny and clever rather than nasty, but he was still a burr in the side of his opponents. Once during a Nixon campaign stop in Chinatown, Tuck arranged to have people there holding a big banner in Chinese, ostensibly to welcome the Republican candidate. Neither Nixon nor any of his aides had any idea what it said, but the candidate dutifully posed in front of it. Only when a Chinese supporter rushed up did they learn that the banner read, “What About the Hughes Loan?”<sup>45</sup>

Toward the end the tricks got dirtier. Democratic voters began receiving postcards from something called the Committee to Preserve the Democratic Party in California. The cards claimed that extremists had seized control of the Democratic Party and that Brown and his fellow candidates were in league with the left-wingers. It was a fake, orchestrated by Republicans rather than Democrats. Nixon campaign officials later admitted they were behind the ruse.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, Don Bradley, Brown’s campaign manager, had dispatched

Democratic workers to visit Republican offices and collect whatever extremist material was being distributed so that Democrats could then accuse the Republicans of pandering to the far right.<sup>47</sup> On one such hunting trip, the Democratic troops found some GOP offices distributing a booklet titled “California Dynasty of Communism,” a play on the initials of the California Democratic Council. The booklet featured a picture of the governor bowing slightly, his head down and hands together, as if in supplication. On the facing page was a picture of Khrushchev, as if Brown were showing subservience to the Soviet leader. In fact, the picture of the governor had been carefully cropped. The uncropped picture showed that Brown was greeting a young Laotian woman who, on an official visit, was greeting him the same way. Khrushchev, obviously, was not there at all. Nixon had repudiated the booklet, but Democrats claimed that it was being distributed at Republican offices.

Another pamphlet, this one titled “Pat Brown and the CDC,” also began appearing. In this case the picture showed the governor applauding joyfully, but it was another cropped shot. The full picture showed Brown applauding a little girl who had made her way onto the assembly dais despite the leg braces she wore because of polio, but in the Nixon brochure the girl was gone, and the picture was placed in such a way that it appeared Brown was applauding the idea of admitting the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations. The CDC had in fact endorsed that idea, but Brown had opposed it for years. H. R. Haldeman, Nixon’s campaign manager and later his White House chief of staff, admitted that the Nixon forces were behind this pamphlet, and he defended the use of the picture. It was “illustrative” of the governor’s stands, he said.<sup>48</sup>

The Nixon campaign answered with its own charges, alleging that Democrats were distributing two pamphlets that falsely claimed the former vice president was anti-Semitic and a crook. The Brown camp, for what it was worth, denied any connection with the pamphlets. Both sides traded lawsuits, and although they got restraining orders prohibiting the distribution of some materials, they knew the legal action was largely a stunt. The election would be over before a court case could work its way fully through the legal system.

The specter of dirty tricks played on Brown’s mind, however. One morning he awoke in a motel room and realized through the blur of fatigue that there was a woman in bed beside him. His mind leaped instantly to Nixon’s hardball reputation, and he assumed in horror that the Republicans had somehow slipped a girl into the room to cause a scandal. He braced

himself for the flashbulbs of news cameras, but then remembered that amid the exhaustion of a campaign schedule, he had forgotten one critical fact: Late the previous night Bernice had flown in and met him.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the voters were as affected as the governor. Anti-Communism may have faded as an issue, but the idea that the governor of California might bow to Khrushchev was too much to take. As the anti-Brown pamphlets began to appear, Nixon enjoyed a burst of momentum. It soon became apparent that the debate had helped too. Brown may have concluded that he seemed the nicer man, but voters were telling pollsters that Nixon enjoyed the best of the exchange.<sup>50</sup>

Just as Nixon got rolling, another boost: a visit by Eisenhower, who remained immensely popular. The former president never liked Nixon, but now he came through for his old subordinate. "I can personally vouch," Ike told a Nixon fund-raising dinner crowd at San Francisco's Cow Palace, "for his ability, his sense of duty, his sharpness of mind and his wealth in wisdom."<sup>51</sup> One Nixon aide recalled Eisenhower's traditionally tepid support and griped, "If he'd only given that speech two years ago, Dick Nixon would be president today."<sup>52</sup>

In the wake of Eisenhower's visit, poll takers hit the streets again. The results were released in mid-October, with less than three weeks left in the campaign. The pamphlets and the debate and the former president had taken their toll: Brown's lead was down to just three points. Among those people most likely to vote, the race was tied.<sup>53</sup>

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Three days later, a Monday, the campaign changed dramatically—along with the rest of the world. President Kennedy announced that he had ordered a naval blockade of Cuba to halt the importation of Soviet nuclear missiles. Brown rushed back to the Governor's Mansion from his temporary residence in Los Angeles and then at the end of the week headed to Washington for a meeting of nine key governors on civil defense issues. Interest in the California campaign, keen before the missile crisis, faded. Kennedy's support surged—people rallying round the flag—and by extension so did support for incumbents everywhere, especially Democratic ones. Politically, the Cuban Missile Crisis was good news for Brown, bad news for Nixon.<sup>54</sup>

Still, neither man stopped campaigning. In fact, the rhetoric on both

sides only grew more heated in the final week. Nixon claimed that the state's civil defense programs were inadequate and that Brown was trying to "hoodwink the people of California into a false sense of security"—emotionally charged accusations with the world at the brink of nuclear war.<sup>55</sup> Brown, who was always a tougher campaigner than people gave him credit for, finally blew up at Nixon's insinuations that he was soft on Communism, including the pamphlets with the misleading photos. "I know you're not going to let this fellow get away with this thing," Brown told one crowd. "We're going to retire him to private life where he belongs." Getting a little carried away, Brown even insisted that he was "every bit as good of an American as Mr. Richard Nixon and a whole lot better." Three days later, the governor called his opponent "a man without heart, a man without feeling for the people."<sup>56</sup>

On November 5, the day before the election, Brown awoke to find the morning papers containing the final poll. It was good news. Brown was ahead by seven points overall, four among people who were likely to vote.<sup>57</sup> After his one brief downward blip—the poll three weeks earlier that had suggested a possible tie—he had rebounded. With both candidates sprinting toward the finish, Brown was back in front with a solid lead, exactly the position he had held for most of the campaign.

The last day was a whirlwind. Brown flew the length of the state, from San Diego to Eureka, then turned around and retraced half his route back down to San Francisco. In all, he gave eleven speeches in eleven hours. At the last one, he spoke to twenty-five hundred people at an outdoor rally in his hometown and predicted a victory. Then, confident but exhausted, he went home.<sup>58</sup>

Characteristically, Nixon spent the final day in lonelier circumstances, canceling his scheduled appearances and instead preparing himself for a final statewide television broadcast that night. Even with the practice, he botched the big moment. In a Freudian slip that only reinforced lingering doubts about his vow of disinterest in the White House, he said at one point, "When I become president . . ." He caught himself and started over, only to stumble again: "governor of the United . . ."<sup>59</sup>

On election day, both candidates rose early so that they and their wives could be photographed voting. The Browns played their traditional election day round of golf—Bernice winning as usual—and then flew to Los Angeles. They were renting a house there to use during the campaign, but as a kind of staging area that night they took the Presidential Suite at the Sheraton West, where they got together with friends to have dinner and

await the results. It was a large and jovial party: From room service they ordered tournedos of beef for eighteen.<sup>60</sup>

Across town at the Beverly Hilton, Nixon dined alone on a pineapple milkshake and coffee. He had spent the day in his office, and although that evening he was in surroundings similar to Brown's—Nixon too was in the Presidential Suite—his experience was much different. Much of the time he remained alone, recording his thoughts on a yellow legal pad as the night wore on. "Only God & people know who is winning," he wrote at one point. Then a little later: "This race will be 50½–49½ somebody will win by a noze—only hope my noze is longer." (Apparently he spelled *noze* that way as a personal joke.) When the first returns arrived, he thought he was ahead but noted, "No trend as yet." With time, however, it became apparent that things were turning against him. In county after county, he was running well behind his 1960 performance, when he carried California only because of absentee ballots counted the next day. Brown's margin was growing too big to overcome. Late that night, on his yellow pad, Nixon summed up in one word his chances to be elected: "Never."<sup>61</sup>

At about midnight Nixon encountered his press secretary, Herb Klein, and declared that he was ready to concede. Klein talked him out of it. They went over the numbers one more time, and while they agreed that the odds were long, it was by then too late for a concession speech to make the morning papers. Some conservative areas remained uncounted, so Nixon decided that he might as well wait until the next day on the outside chance of a miraculous comeback. Klein went down to the press room and told the fatigued reporters that there would be a news conference at 10:00 A.M.<sup>62</sup>

While Nixon was talking with Klein, Brown's motorcade was heading from his hotel over to the Hollywood Palladium, a Big Band–era ballroom where Democrats had gathered for the traditional election night party. The governor knew that things were running in his favor, but he remained a little cautious. Leaving the hotel, he claimed to be carrying two statements, one declaring victory and another that he refused to describe but which presumably was noncommittal.<sup>63</sup>

He arrived at the Palladium and spent some time working his way through the big crowd. By the time he reached the dais it was nearly 1:00 A.M., and all doubt was gone. The lead was well over 100,000 votes and growing. Eventually the margin would grow to almost 300,000 votes—not a rout but a good solid victory. "I want to tell you," Brown told his cheering supporters, "I'm re-elected governor of California."<sup>64</sup>

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It had been an emotional night for everyone. At her boarding school in Monterey, the nuns let Kathy Brown stay up past curfew, listening to the radio for the returns. Somehow she concluded from the early tallies that her father had lost. She sneaked down to the phone booth in the dormitory hallway, called his hotel, and, in tears, told him that she still loved him and thought he was a great dad. He told her that it wasn't over and tried to buck up her spirits, but she wasn't cheered until two nuns tapped on her door later in the night and, handing her a cupcake with a lone candle, said that her father had won a second term.<sup>65</sup>

Not even a teenager, however, could match the inner turmoil that gripped Richard Nixon in those hours. After losing the presidency of the United States, he had disregarded the fervent wishes of his wife and spent more than a year running hard for an office he did not truly want—all thanks to his own grinding ambitions. Now it had come to nothing. Just two years after winning his party's presidential nomination, he had been rejected for the governorship of his home state. Losing the state election after losing the presidential race was, he said, "like being bitten by a mosquito after being bitten by a rattlesnake."<sup>66</sup>

By the time he went to bed, in the wee hours, Nixon was gloomy and drained. When he emerged from his suite the next morning he was in no better shape, perhaps worse. He had gotten little sleep. His appearance was haggard. He was unshaven. His eyes particularly showed exhaustion. By some accounts he had been drinking.<sup>67</sup> The defeated candidate and his advisers huddled, and it was quickly decided that Nixon was in no condition to make a statement. Klein, the press secretary, would face reporters, reading the candidate's congratulatory telegram to Brown and answering a few questions. As this was going on, Nixon would slip out a back door of the hotel and be driven home.

What happened next is a little unclear, for the recollections of participants vary. Some people claimed that Nixon, watching Klein's news conference on television, was bothered by what he considered the reporters' impertinence; others said he was goaded into making a statement by distraught supporters. Whatever the details, Nixon decided he would face the press and rushed downstairs. He suddenly appeared onstage and took the podium from Klein. From the first words, it was clear that his talk would be a doozy.

He started off aggressively, intimating that the people to whom he was speaking—people who took pride in fairness and objectivity—took great joy in seeing him lose. “Now that Mr. Klein has made his statement,” he said, “and now that all the members of the press are so delighted that I have lost, I would just like to make a statement of my own.” Switching gears, he tried to be gracious, saying he had “no complaints” about the press coverage of the campaign and praising Brown. Then, back to grievance: the governor had called Nixon heartless and a bad American, while Nixon had defended his opponent’s patriotism, comments he said had gone unreported by the press.

“I want that—for once, gentlemen—I would appreciate if you would write what I say, in that respect. I think it’s very important that you write it—in the lead, in the lead.” He singled out Carl Greenberg of the *Los Angeles Times* as the one fair reporter at that newspaper, embarrassing Greenberg, whose stories had been, like those of most reporters, impartial. Moving on, Nixon rambled through other topics: his pride in his volunteers, the national election results, Cuba, the proliferation of defense contracts in California.

Then he began to close. “One last thing,” he said, and added that he planned to take a vacation and spend more time with his family. Again he said, “One last thing,” and noted that people had asked him “about losing in ’60 and losing in ’64.” (This was yet another Freudian slip about the presidency.) “The answer is that I’m proud to have run for governor. . . . [Voters] have chosen Mr. Brown. I can only hope that his leadership will now become more decisive.”

Then for the third time: “One last thing.” He said he thought the reporters looked “a little irritated” by the beginning of his talk and hinted that perhaps this was due to a misunderstanding: “My philosophy with regard to the press has really never gotten through. And I want to get it through.” That opened the psychological floodgates, and Nixon’s bitterness toward the press poured out. Reporters could write what they like, but, he said, “I wish you’d give my opponent the same going over that you give me.” He complained that his recent gaffe—“governor of the United . . .” —had been reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, but a flub by Brown the same day had not been. Then came what appeared to be a stunning declaration of retirement:

I leave you gentlemen now and you will now write it. You will interpret it.  
That’s your right. But as I leave you I want you to know, just think how

much you're going to be missing. You won't have Nixon to kick around any more, because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference. . . . I believe in reading what my opponents say and I hope that what I have said today will at least make television, radio, the press first recognize the great responsibility they have to report all the news and, second, recognize that they have a right and a responsibility, if they're against a candidate, give him the shaft, but also recognize if they give him the shaft, put one lonely reporter on the campaign who will report what the candidate says now and then. Thank you, gentlemen, and good day.

He stalked away, pausing once he was out of earshot of the reporters to tell Klein, "I know you don't agree. I gave it to them right in the ass. It had to be said, goddammit. It had to be said."<sup>68</sup>

To be fair, a few of Nixon's comments had been kind, others at least truthful. Brown had indeed said that Nixon lacked a heart. In a moment of foolish exuberance he had also claimed to be a better American than his opponent. Brown was a tougher campaigner than people thought, but in that moment he was offering little more than rash and unnecessary insults.

But the bulk of Nixon's talk was a sad performance. Given the tone and contents, it was easy to forget that he was there to give a concession speech. Rather than graciousness, he offered rambling belligerence. It was spiced with the famous Nixon paranoia, which by the end of the 1962 campaign was running at a high pitch. A few days before the election a Nixon staff member overheard Richard Bergholz, a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* whom Nixon disliked, place a phone call to Brown's press secretary. There was nothing suspicious about that—reporters call campaign officials all the time for countless reasons—but the Nixon campaign, including the candidate himself, was swept up with the feeling that Bergholz might be a spy.<sup>69</sup>

More important, Nixon's critique of the campaign was plainly inaccurate. His entire talk, not to mention his parting comment to Klein, reeked of bitterness toward the press, as if Nixon were a wronged man, the victim of vicious journalistic criticism. In fact, Democrats in California had struggled for decades against the fact that most of the state's major newspapers favored Republicans, both in the news sections and in the editorial pages. In the 1940s and 1950s, almost all California papers covered politics with ham-handed prejudice, touting their own candidate and virtually ignoring the opposition. For years Nixon had benefited from this. In his early career, he was for all practical purposes the creation of the *Los Angeles Times*, then as avidly Republican as any newspaper in the country. On the editorial

pages, the *Times* remained a Nixon supporter during the gubernatorial campaign. One of the ironies of Nixon's screed was that the paper he attacked so vigorously had endorsed him.<sup>70</sup>

It was true that by 1962 political coverage on the news pages had begun to change, nowhere more than at the *Los Angeles Times*. Otis Chandler, the scion of the family that owned the *Times*, had taken over from his father and vowed to improve what had always been one of the worst newspapers in the country. But that change resulted not in an anti-Nixon prejudice but in an almost pathological fairness. Editors at the *Times* had announced that they would measure the stories on Nixon and Brown throughout the campaign, ensuring that both men received equal coverage. Day after day, the paper ran one story on Nixon, one on Brown, both of almost precisely equal length, sometimes with headlines of exactly the same size. Nixon, coddled for years, was stunned by the sudden neutrality. He praised television coverage as particularly fair, when the truth was that KTTV, a Los Angeles station, had aired so many commentaries favorable to Nixon and critical of Brown that the Federal Communications Commission ordered the station to provide Democrats with more time. Standing before the reporters on that weary postelection morning, Nixon was annoyed, not because the *Times* and other newspapers had covered the campaign of 1962 unfairly, but because he yearned for the pro-Nixon bias of a bygone day. In many respects the 1962 gubernatorial campaign was the first time in California history that a political race had been covered in a reasonably evenhanded way. Nixon's complaints looked and sounded like sour grapes.<sup>71</sup>

His supporters knew their man had come off poorly. Standing next to him on the stage, Klein desperately tried to think of some way to stop the proceedings, but could not. Had it been a prize fight, he noted later, he would have thrown a towel into the ring and led Nixon back to the locker room. After the debacle Klein drafted a statement for Nixon saying his remarks had been "inappropriate and ungraceful," but it was never issued.<sup>72</sup>

Like Klein, Brown thought Nixon had disgraced himself. The governor watched it all on television and felt sorry for his defeated foe. Still a young man by the standards of national leaders, Nixon seemed to be throwing away a promising career. A gracious defeat might have left open other paths, but instead Nixon had chosen to go down in ugliness and vitriol. "That's something that Nixon's going to regret all his life," Brown told Bernice as they watched it. "The press is never going to let him forget it."<sup>73</sup> To reporters, Brown said the former vice president might have a political future. Privately, his view was different. The day after the election the president

called to offer congratulations, and the two men mused over Nixon's political obituary.

"God, that last farewell speech of his!" Kennedy said.

"Wasn't it terrible?" Brown responded. "I don't see how he can ever recover. . . . This is a peculiar fellow. . . . I really think he's psychotic. He's an able man, but he's nuts."<sup>74</sup>

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If it was a low point for Nixon, it was the opposite for Brown. At fifty-seven, he was at the top of his world. Despite mistakes, his first term as governor had been, on balance, successful beyond all hopes. On his watch, California had done more to address its ceaseless growth than during any similar period in its history. University campuses had been built. Schools had been opened. Roads had been laid. Air pollution had been targeted more aggressively than in any other part of the country. The social programs that provided a safeguard for California workers—unemployment insurance and workmen's compensation—had been strengthened. To pay for it, Brown had had the guts to raise taxes and had seen it pay off. The economy was roaring along. Most important, California's Gordian knot of public policy—water—had been untied, the legislature and the voters convinced to approve a massive project that would ensure water for farms and homes for decades to come. It was an accomplishment that had eluded all of Brown's predecessors.

Voters had confirmed the success. In successive races, Brown had defeated two of the country's most famous Republicans, the former majority leader of the U.S. Senate and the former vice president of the United States. He was the "Giant Killer," a nickname first used after his rout of Bill Knowland and set in stone by his defeat of Nixon. In winning reelection, Brown was certain he had not merely beaten an ideological opponent, he had ended the career of a shady figure, a "bad man" hunting for power.<sup>75</sup> The governor's old hero Adlai Stevenson wrote him a note the day after the election and expressed the pervasive sentiment that Brown had done the country a favor: "Everyone has you to thank."<sup>76</sup> Better still, the victory was not only grand, it was individualized. Brown won with the handiest and most natural weapon, his personality. A fundamental friendliness and a boundless infatuation with his state had always been the twin cornerstones of his demeanor. Now in the greatest political battle of a long career, the nice-guy smile and the California enthusiasm had served as two of his best weapons,

for he was running against a man who possessed neither. For Pat Brown, 1962 proved to be the perfect campaign because he was facing the perfect opponent.<sup>77</sup>

In the wake of victory, few obstacles remained. No Republican threats were standing. Knowland was history. Knight was washed up. Nixon was a bitter loser dishonored by his own lack of grace. In the twentieth century, Brown was only the third California governor elected to a second term, and the first Democrat. In the legislature, his party's margin of control was bigger than ever. In the most dynamic state in the most important country in the world, Brown was supreme.

But the problem with summits is that they are deceptive places to stand. The exaltation generated by the view overwhelms the hard reality that there is nowhere to go but down.