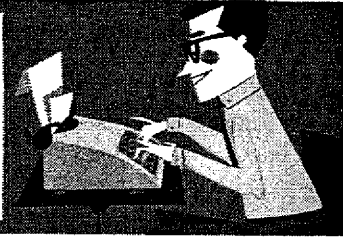


Top of My Head



The Death of a Husband

LET IT BE SHOWN for the record that I have been on the side of Jacqueline Kennedy, and against Harper & Row Publishers, *Look* magazine, Gardner Cowles, William Manchester, Dell Books, Cowles Communications, Harold Matson, Inc., and, while I'm at it, Bennett Cerf and the war in Vietnam.

The book that was written by Mr. Manchester is titled *The Death of a President*. To Mrs. Kennedy it is the death of a husband and she feels she is entitled to some sensitive editing. And so do I. Usually, meddling in professional writing by nonprofessionals is repugnant to me. The work of a reputable author and historian—and Mr. Manchester seems to be that—should ordinarily remain inviolate. But in the case of Jacqueline Kennedy there shouldn't have been the slightest hesitation to give the lady her way.

To a nation which in these times stands in such depleted image around the world, so misunderstood in some places, too well understood in others, so beleaguered, so protested against, so invited to go home, even in places where we do battle to secure freedom, the figure of Jacqueline Kennedy rises majestically to bathe us in a protective and hallowed light.

To whom else can we point and designate our Ambassador to communicate to a doubting world our virtues, our aims, and the mutual cultural and peaceful development for which we strive? Dean Rusk? Robert McNamara? *Look* magazine?

Once this nation was graced by the presence of a great, great lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, who found universal acceptance, and was able to keep aglow faith in our country through her work in the humanities. Now, in a lesser degree of course, but representing a fresh breath of youth, so appealing to the protesting young around the globe, stands the smiling, soft-spoken Jacqueline Kennedy.

Not a Statue of Liberty perhaps, but a Statue of Quality, of Gentility, of Culture, of Beauty, of Style and Grace. A lady to whom John Fitzgerald Kennedy often referred as he spoke before the multitudes in his travels abroad:

"I know you've all come to see Jackie," he said.

And she stood, and smiled, and spoke

in native languages, and was much admired.

To such a lady, it seems to me, our publishers owe, at the very least, the courtesy of some editing of a manuscript which seems to offend her sensitivities. Some distant history will one day print and embellish the harshness of political life. Let the vivid details of what she said and did through this tragedy of bereavement, surrounded by men who had a political duty to perform, be held off till a day when time will have blunted the sharp pain of agonized memory.

Let this story now wrap the death of her President in some of the privacy she so desperately seeks. It was very little to ask by one who gave a young husband to her country. And a widow's mite to offer in return.

This is the gallant young wife—remember? She who stood in veil of black, clutching a little boy and girl each by

the hand, as the body of our President passed in last, mournful review, and wrenched the hearts of a world witnessing a dignity and valor above the call.

It is our good fortune to have in Jacqueline Kennedy a strain of America too mutedly trumpeted by our good-will ambassadors. Let no one point derisively at us for not evaluating her worth.

On this note I must relate a small and shabby conversation overheard in a coffee shop downtown. It will demonstrate how closely we must guard against losing the universal appeal of this young woman.

Three NYU students sat close by at the counter where I drank my coffee. There were two college girls and a young man. They were solving the ills of our world by reducing everything to its lowest capsuled denominator.

When the name of Jacqueline Kennedy crept into the conversation, the young man impatiently and offhandedly said, "Oh that's the Marilyn story all over again."

My instinctive reaction was to rise and send a swift left hook crashing to his jaw. But he was so tall, so wide, so lithe. The two girls were not too frail, either. One I could have handled. But I wouldn't embarrass Mrs. Kennedy with the headlines: JACQUELINE KENNEDY PROTECTOR SLAPPED DOWN BY GIRL STUDENT.

—GOODMAN ACE.