

Terrible November

*A young widow
brings meaning
to tragic chaos . . .*

Days

Only one person has managed to pierce the black pall of horror and unreality that has gripped the Nation since last Friday.

It is Jacqueline Kennedy, the President's widow.

Mrs. Kennedy has borne herself with the valor of a queen in a Greek tragedy.

Shock alone might have explained her dry-eyed composure. But Mrs. Kennedy has moved with more than the mechanical compliance that sometimes overtakes people in appalling circumstances.

EVERYTHING SHE HAS DONE seems to be a conscious effort to give to his death the grandeur that the savagery in Dallas was calculated to rob it of.

It has been as though she were trying to show the world that courtesy and courage did not die in Dallas last Friday, nor the tradition that was personified by her husband, struck down in brutal irrelevance.

She agreed to his burial in Arlington National Cemetery rather than in Boston, so that he would belong to the Nation and his death would not in the end have the stamp of a local tragedy.

She has overwhelmed White House aides with her meticulous attention to the melancholy arrangements that have had to be made. She designed herself the memorial cards for his requiem mass. She suggested that she should receive the foreign dignitaries who had come from so far away to pay him last honor.

FROM THE MOMENT she arrived back in Washington, erect and composed, wearing the blood-stained clothes of the infamous day in Dallas, she has imparted meaning and order to the chaos around her.

She has not wanted anything to be lost on the world.

She brought her two children to the Capitol yesterday.

If she wanted them to see, however imperfectly, what their father meant, she also dramatized to the world and the evil people in it that a young father had been slain as well as a President.

It was, with the irony that has marked this entire episode, approximately the moment when her husband's suspected killer was being murdered in a Dallas police station.

She took 6-year-old Caroline by the hand and led her to the flag-covered bier, knelt and kissed it and returned to her place.

She again came to the Rotunda with her brother-in-law, the Attorney General, at 9 o'clock in the evening. She looked intently into every face she saw in the throng. She walked down Capitol Hill and stopped to talk to a group of nuns.

THE CROWD WAS, as a matter of fact, rewarding her heroism with a heroism of its own. They waited hour after hour in the cold evening. They complained only when interlopers crossed the many intersections between them and the Rotunda.

The line stretched for many blocks and remained long after the rudest calculation proved there was no hope of entry. They waited with good humor and camaraderie. Seven blocks from the Capitol dome stood a young man with a guitar. One of the seven children of a man



in his neighborhood carried the guitar case.

Once, reminded that the President's favorite song had been "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home," they sang it through. Then they did "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."

A young mother coping with 5-year-old twin boys, said she would wait all night to go in.

A bespectacled Negro said simply, "It's the last, least thing I could do for him."

A WOMAN WHO HAD JUST had a foot operation, stood clutching a tree on the sidewalk. "I hope I can make it," she gasped, "I wouldn't do this for anyone but President Kennedy."

There were students from Syracuse, a couple from New York, a boy from Toronto, and everywhere the crowd was punctuated with the black and white habits of sisters, out long after their bedtime, poignantly recalling a recent Kennedy quip that while bishops and monsignors were always Republicans, sisters were inevitably Democratic.

Inside, four young sailors performed a last act that was perfectly in the Kennedy style. One by one, they halted before the exact center of the casket, squared their white caps and executed their best salutes for their fallen Commander in Chief.

It is just what this young woman, hitherto celebrated for her beauty and elegance, has been doing in her own way in these black days.

The funeral had that special Kennedy touch . . .

Of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's funeral it can be said he would have liked it.

It had that decorum and dash that were in his special style. It was both splendid and spontaneous. It was full of children and princes, of gardeners and governors.

Everyone measured up to New Frontier standards.

A million people lined every inch of his last journey. Enough heads of state filed into St. Matthew's Cathedral to change the shape of the world.

The weather was superb, as crisp and clear as one of his own instructions.

His wife's gallantry became a legend. His two children behaved like Kennedys. His 3-year-old son saluted his coffin. His 6-year-old daughter comforted her mother. Looking up and seeing tears, she reached over and gave her mother's hand a consoling squeeze.

The procession from the White House would have delighted him. It was a marvelous eye-filling jumble of the mighty and the obscure, all walking behind his wife and his two brothers.

There was no cadence or order,

the pulpit and read passages from the President's speeches and evoked him so vividly that tears splashed on the red carpets and the benches of the Cathedral. Nobody cried out, nobody broke down.

And the Bishop read a passage the President had often noted in the Scriptures: "There is a time to be born and a time to die." He made no reference to the fact that no one had thought last Friday was a time for John Fitzgerald Kennedy to die—a martyr's death—in Dallas. The President himself had spent no time in trying to express the inexpressible. Excess was alien to his nature.

The funeral cortege stretched for miles. An old campaigner would have loved the crowd. Children sat on the curbstones. Old ladies wrapped their furs around them.

The site of the grave, at the top of one slope, commands all of Washington. Prince Philip used his sword as a walking stick to negotiate the incline.

His brother, Robert, his face a study in desolation, stood beside the President's widow. The children of the fabulous family were all around.

Jacqueline Kennedy received the flag from his coffin, bent over and with a torch lit a flame that is to



burn forever on his grave—against the day that anyone might forget that her husband had been a President and a martyr.

It was a day of such endless fitness, with so much pathos and panoply, so much grief nobly borne that it may extinguish that unseemly hour in Dallas, where all that was alien to him — savagery, violence, irrationality — struck down the 35th President of the United States.

,but the presence of Gen. de Gaulle alone in the ragged line of march was enough to give it grandeur. He stalked splendidly up Connecticut Avenue, more or less beside Queen Frederika of Greece and King Baugouin of Belgium.

The sounds of the day were smashingly appropriate. The tolling of the bells gave way to the skirling of the Black Watch Pipers whose lament blended with the organ music inside the Cathedral.

At the graveside there was the thunder of jets overhead, a 21-gun salute, taps, and finally the strains of the Navy hymn, "Eternal Father Strong to Save."

He would have seen every politician he ever knew, two ex-Presidents, Truman and Eisenhower, and a foe or two. Gov. Wallace of Alabama had trouble finding a place to sit in the Cathedral.

His old friend, Cardinal Cushing of Boston, who married him, baptized his children and prayed over him in the icy air of his Inaugural, said a low mass. At the final prayers, after the last blessing, he suddenly added, "Dear Jack."

There was no eulogy. Instead, Bishop Philip M. Hannan mounted

What we shall remember . . .

He brought gaiety, glamor and grace to the American political scene in a measure never known before. That lightsome tread, that debonair touch, that shock of chestnut hair, that beguiling grin, that shattering understatement — these are what we shall remember.

He walked like a prince and he talked like a scholar. His humor brightened the life of the Republic. While striving for his great office, he had often concealed his amusement at the incongruities of life, lest he be thought not only youthful but frivolous as well. When safely ensconced, he saw no reason to hide his wit. It glinted at every press conference. It informed his private utterance. Shown his latest nephew in August, he commented, "He looks like a fine baby — we'll know more later."

One day he strolled onto the porch outside his office and found an old friend admiring the garden. The lawn was a source of unreasoning pride and constant concern to him; the flowers, while he was uncertain of their names, pleased him. He indicated the tangle of petunias and ageratum and said dryly, "This may go down as the real achievement of this administration."

His public statements were always temperate, always measured. He derided his enemies — he teased his friends. He could be grave, but not for long.

When the ugliness of yesterday has been forgotten, we shall remember him smiling.