

* * CAPOTE, THE DALAI LAMA OF THE CAT PACK,
LATCHES THE KENNEDY POSITION IN A PHRASE.
LOYALTY TO CLASS PRECLUDED CRITICISM.

9/73
GALLERY

with one another. But it's really a very disparate group. You have brilliant and enlightened businessmen like Bill Paley, artists like Noel Coward and Cole Porter, intellectuals like Henry Kissinger. The group transcends political and ideological and national differences.

GALLERY: A kind of international elite?

CAPOTE: Yes, I suppose so, but an elite of merit, not birth or social position.

GALLERY: It still sounds rather snobbish.

CAPOTE: Well, I *am* a snob, but not the kind you mean. In any society, you'll always have an elite of the talented and creative, whether they're recognized or not. I'm not an egalitarian in that sense; no greater lie was ever uttered than the line in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal. They should, of course, all have equal opportunity, and it has nothing to do with class or race; I've known black Alabama sharecroppers who have more intelligence and wisdom in their little finger than the entire British aristocracy. But intelligence is a profoundly unequal endowment, and despite the good intentions of the founding fathers there remains an unbridgeable gulf between the Jeffersons and Paines and the Jukes and Kallikaks. So to the extent that I believe in a natural aristocracy of the gifted, I suppose I am a snob. But it has nothing to do with money; I could live equally well in a furnished room in Cincinnati or in a Venetian palazzo; what *not* stand in the mediocrity of the middle-class suburban split-level with the two-car garage and the barbecued souls. That would be hell. And that's why I choose my friends on the basis of intelligence and sensitivity, not money or titles.

GALLERY: For many years now you've numbered the Kennedy family among those friends. What do you think has accounted for this mutual affinity?

CAPOTE: Well, I can only answer for myself. I've always liked and respected the Kennedys I've known, and admired their wide range of interests and talents. I didn't really know the President that well, but I came into closer contact with Bob and Jackie and her sister, Lee. Robert Kennedy was a neighbor of mine here in New York, and we'd see each other often. The last time was just about a week before his death; it was seven in the morning—he was always a very early riser—and we were both walking our dogs. He was just off for the final leg of the California campaign, and he was very optimistic about victory. He was obviously exhausted, but he still had that tremendous vitality of all the Kennedys. And then a week later, after he'd won the primary, I was awakened by a call from a friend at about three in

the morning. "Have you heard the news?" she asked, and then told me Bobby had been shot and it looked very bad. I sat through the night by the radio, still finding it hard to believe. I was supposed to be on the funeral train from New York to Washington, but I was too ill to go. A friend of mine, someone extremely close to him, said later: "It was such a hot day. Sweltering. And there was the grave waiting in the grass under this great cool green tree. And suddenly I envied him. Envied him all that green peacefulness. I thought: Bless you, Bobby, you don't have to fight anymore. You're safe."

GALLERY: Was Bobby's assassination a hard personal blow for you?

CAPOTE: It was for me, and it was for the country. You just have to look around you to see that.

GALLERY: Do you believe Ted Kennedy is aiming for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1976?

CAPOTE: I have no idea. If he really does want the nomination, of course, I don't see anyone around in the Democratic party who could stop him. Muskie and Humphrey are yesterday's newspaper, McGovern is dead as a door-nail, Jackson's constituency is too narrow, and poor George Wallace is not only unacceptable to the party's liberals but just in too bad shape to ever make a serious race. I know many of Ted's family would prefer him not to run because of the sheer physical risk, but Bobby faced the same threat of assassination and decided to go ahead anyway; he was quite aware there were guns between him and the White House but he wouldn't allow that to influence him, and Teddy would probably feel the same if he really wanted to run and thought he had a good chance. It would be an ugly campaign of course; an issue like Chappaquiddick dies hard in the public imagination, and a lot of people would be working hard to keep it alive and virulent.

GALLERY: Do you see much of Jackie Kennedy?

CAPOTE: We run into each other fairly often.

GALLERY: Has she ever expressed any bitterness about the rapid change in public opinion after her marriage to Onassis?

CAPOTE: No. It's true of course that there is this whole love-hate affair between the American people and all the Kennedys, not only Jackie. You saw it with Ted right after Chappaquiddick, when his hordes of sycophants turned into Madame Defarges overnight. And much the same thing happened to Jackie after she married Onassis. Of course, people hate to see their myths shattered. The popular consciousness had created an image of Jackie as a

kind of eternal virginal widow-mother, maybe a surrogate repository for all their grief and guilt over the assassination, and then suddenly she reveals she's a flesh-and-blood woman after all. But that kind of misplaced sentimentality is understandable enough, and I don't think it bothers her very much. The public has always been fickle towards its darlings, but ole Jackie will survive.

GALLERY: Has she appeared happy since her marriage to Onassis?

CAPOTE: I don't think she's ever been happy; as long as I've known her she's been by nature a melancholy person.

GALLERY: Even before Dallas?

CAPOTE: Yes, but that certainly didn't help!

GALLERY: Many critics of the Warren Report have argued that Lee Harvey Oswald could not have been the lone assassin, contending there was a well-organized conspiracy to kill the President. Did you ever hear any of the Kennedys speculate about this?

CAPOTE: No, they would never raise the subject. Understandably enough their attitude was, and is, that John and Bobby are dead and nothing can bring them back. All this paranoid conspiracy theorizing is just bullshit as far as I'm concerned. Of course, it's also an easy way for a lot of human vultures to make a quick buck.

GALLERY: And yet after the Martin Luther King murder you advanced a "Manchurian Candidate" theory of assassination, speculating that so-called "loners" like Oswald and Ray could actually be manipulated behind the scenes by unknown puppet masters.

CAPOTE: Well, that's precisely what it was, speculation. I was suggesting that men like Oswald or Ray or Sirhan or Bremer are sociopaths filled with such random violence and resentment that they become like loaded guns, and it's not impossible that they could be cocked and aimed and fired by more rational and sinister forces. That does remain an abstract possibility and I felt at the time it was worth discussing, but so far I've seen no evidence to bear it out. I think what you really have here is what I would call The Tyranny of the Nobody. Men like Oswald are ciphers, empty vessels, who can only assume an identity of their own by robbing someone else of *his* identity. And what better target than the Kennedys, rich, charismatic, powerful, and glamorous—everything these nonentities are not and could never be. So they shoot them down with a cheap mail-order rifle or a "Saturday Night Special" pistol and instantly they achieve the identity of their victim—and immortality as well. It's a kind of vampirism, actually, both psychic and physical; like the witch doctor

* THE NOTORIOUS 'EMISSARIES' PHRASE!