

# Mary Tries to Get a Raise

Seventh in a Series

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Almost from the beginning, it was evident that my salary at the White House was ridiculous — \$4,830. When it had been arrived at, it seemed logical enough, of course, because I was to work only part-time—three days a week.

Now I was working fulltime, whether at the office or at home, and long hours at night.

I was honored, of course, to have the responsibility of working for the First Lady, but surely a salary to fit the job had to be granted.

By August, 1961, I started checking into the possibility of a salary adjustment.

My weekly net income was averaging less than \$75, while my expenses amounted to \$32 per week (transportation and baby-sitting). I requested a proper adjustment that would place me at a minimum level of between \$8,000 and \$9,000 annually.

Nothing happened. Jackie returned from the Cape, and the weeks ahead passed, busier and busier. So did the months, with no word at all—September, October, November, December.

April, May, and part of June, 1962, passed the same way. Meanwhile, I checked and found that in 1945 Mrs. Truman's secretary had been rated a GS-12, a rating which currently would pay about \$10,000. And here I was now, all of 17 years later, with my GS-6 (\$4,830)!

On June 28, I reminded Jackie again that no action had been taken. This time, she said she would look into the matter personally.

In mid-afternoon, I received a visit by Mr. West, the chief usher, which was most unusual in itself. As Mrs. Kennedy's emissary, apparently, he politely informed me that Mrs. Kennedy was arranging for me to get a raise in salary—to GS-8 (about \$6,000)!

"Mr. West," I said, "I'm sorry—but tell Mrs. Kennedy for me that I'm not settling for any Grade 8. I feel I'm entitled to a Grade 12, and that's what I'll accept—nothing less."

He left, agreeing to carry back my message. No more than a minute passed before my phone rang. It was Jackie, wanting to see me right away. She was alone in the Sitting Room, smoking a cigarette at her desk.

She immediately began discussing my salary, trying

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to convince me that it wouldn't be possible for the White House to pay me anything higher than a GS-8 salary.

She actually stamped the floor with her foot, trying to persuade me to accept the GS-8 offer. As she carried on, I could see her not as a First-Lady of the United States, but rather, as a child raising a fuss when she was deprived of having her own way.

I finally said, "I could go out anywhere right now and easily get a job that paid me three times as much."

Jackie's quick retort to this was, "Well, Mary, if it's the money you want!"

"No, Jackie," I replied, "right now, it isn't the money alone that bothers me any more—it's the principle of this whole thing." I wasn't about to relent in my position.

With a completely new twist, Jackie leaped to her feet, announcing that, inasmuch as I handled her strictly personal affairs, the Government couldn't be expected to pay me for that.

I simply said, "Well, Jackie, if that's the case, and if it'll make things any simpler, I'll agree to staying on the Government payroll now at GS-6, if you'll agree to pay me the difference between that and GS-12 by putting me on your New York office payroll."

I hardly had these words out when she retorted petulantly, "But then the money will be coming out of our pockets."

I agreed with her.

"Yes, Jackie," I said, "that's right—it would—but it



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## From \$4,830

would still be the same as when you were personally paying me before. You could afford to pay me then."

This apparently was about all that Jackie herself could take now. Her mood quickly changed, and she resigned herself to one last move. It was time for her to leave for her tennis game. I arose from my chair to walk to the elevator with her.

As I did, she put her arm around me and said, just as softly and sweetly as she could, "Oh, Mary, I know how hard you work for me. You're the only one who really knows how to take care of all my things, and I don't know what I'd do without you. But please, just go to Mr. West and tell him you'll settle for a Grade 8."

I was completely disheartened. I couldn't prolong this subject. I simply told Jackie that I never intended for her to become so upset and that, as she was leaving for Mexico, she should just think about her trip now and have a good time.

By October it seemed high time to make a last attempt with Kenny O'Donnell. I had to find out what the score was, and I sent him a "final" memo.

His response—after two weeks—was a note from his secretary, Helen Lempart, saying it wasn't in Kenny's bailiwick, and he suggested I discuss it with Evelyn Lincoln.

The very end of the proverbial rope—this was it!

I called Evelyn. She was sitting by my desk within minutes.

"Evelyn," I said, "unless definite action is taken by the end of this year, I'll just leave it to you and Kenny to explain to Mrs. Kennedy why I am not here when she returns from Florida in January."

On the 19th, two days later, I received word from the Payroll Office that "action is now being taken to adjust your salary."

It was Nov. 11, 1962, 15 months after my initial formal request for a raise, that I received the official "Notification of Personnel Action," covering title and salary.

<i>Position Title and Number</i>	<i>Grade or Level</i>	<i>Salary</i>
From—Secretarial Assistant	Unclassified (equiv. GS-6)	\$4,830.00
To—Secretary to the Wife of the President	(GS-11)	\$8,045.00

I learned later that the only reason I did not receive my full GS-12 was that "it would raise too many questions with the Civil Service Commission."