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Jackie with Secret Service man after Mass in 1961.

Day in Dallas

Tenth in a series

© 1969 by Mary Borell Gallagher and Frances Spatz Leighton from "My Life with Jacqueline Kennedy," published by David McKay Co., Inc.

In Houston, a motorcade took us through the city to the Rice Hotel, arriving around 5 p.m.

Jackie was scheduled to join the President at a dinner at the Coliseum in honor of Congressman Albert Thomas, and I was to see that her clothes were ready. "See to it that I'm ready about 15 to 20 minutes ahead of time," she had told me before we left.

Soon, Jackie was completely ready. As I checked her from head to toe, I glanced at my watch and had reason to be even more proud. She was ready ahead of time!

In Jackie's bathroom, a general state of disarray met my eyes. It was incredible that all these jars of cream, bottles of lotion, various cosmetics could be put into use for just an overnight stay!

One suitcase though comparatively smaller in size,

was the most important. Used for holding Jackie's cosmetics, it had been uniquely designed—with many separate little compartments—bottom, top, and sides; a tricky folding pattern opened and closed it. After shifting and re-shifting, I was proud of solving the puzzle of where everything went. It had been an almost impossible task.

Finishing up her breakfast, Jackie went into the bathroom and, after a few seconds, came out again, asking rather dejectedly, "Mary . . . where's my make-up?" I stared blankly at her.

"Oh, Jackie . . . I've packed it away . . . I thought you had it on already!"

She smiled and said, "Thanks, anyway . . . but I haven't!"

It would be impossible to calculate the number of people that had turned out to see the Kennedys along the motorcade.

From the open windows of the bus, we waved back to the happy, cheering people outside—but, little did we know, for the very last time. Within seconds, the crowds were running wildly, scattering in all directions. A bit farther along, a policeman was struggling to reach the top of a steep, grassy embankment. His gun was drawn—as if in pursuit of someone.

Suddenly, then, a man rushed by, crying out, "The President's been shot!"

For the next minute or so, we just remained speechless—standing in the crowd—and again these striking words reached us.

We raced toward the hospital; nothing was ever more important than what we could learn when we reached there.

The door of the operating room finally opened—and Dr. George Burkley came out, making his way directly to our little cubicle.

He whispered softly that arrangements must be made immediately for our flight back to Washington "while I arrange for a coffin." Direct and to the point, I overheard the word and it stunned me!

"Dr. Burkley . . . did you say 'coffin'?" I gasped. "Yes," he said, "and please try not to change your expression . . . but I'd like it now if you would go over and stay with Mrs. Kennedy."

Nothing had ever been so difficult for me. I knew I had to do it, and somehow I did.

While standing there, I was handed Jackie's pillbox hat and couldn't help noticing the strands of her hair beneath the hatpin. I could almost visualize her yanking it from her head. I was also given her handbag.

I was the first to board the plane after Jackie, and I can still see her now as she sat in the little compartment, facing the coffin directly in front of her.

On the bed lay one of Jackie's glove. No longer spotlessly white and soft as it was that morning; but now completely blackened by her husband's blood, dried and stiffened to the actual shape of her hand as she had removed it, finger by finger.

It rested on a newspaper, which carried the large, bold, headline: "DALLAS WELCOMES JFK."

Picking it up as gentle as possible, I carefully wrapped it between several layers of clean tissues and carried it as discreetly as possible to Secret Service Agent Clint Hill, asking that he see that it was put in a safe place until he could turn it over to Mrs. Kennedy.

When we landed at Andrews, Evelyn (Lincoln) and I were asked to escort Jackie from the plane after the lowering of the coffin.

However, in the next instant, there came from behind

us a startling voice: "Jackie . . ."

The voice and the accent were so much like those of the late President, I quivered. Then I suddenly realized that it was his brother, the Attorney General. He had boarded the plane at the other end as it touched ground.

Quickly he made his way toward us, and Jackie cried out, "Oh, Bobby . . ."

Evelyn and I stepped backward as he took her arm.

Close to midnight I prepared to leave the White House. Stopping on the way out to say "Goodnight" to Jackie, I asked, too, that she please try to get some rest. She expressed her thanks, then quietly made one last request for the morning. "Please pick up several pairs of black stockings for me and a long black mourning veil for the funeral on Monday."

As we parted, she said, "Goodnight, Mary . . . and please stay strong for just a few more days . . . I need you now more than ever."

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