

The Day the Budget

Sixth in a Series

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I never dreamed I would become so deeply embroiled in the economy measures of the White House. But it seemed to be my fate.

What really hurt was the feeling that now I represented to the President just a big dollar sign. I valued my wonderful relationship with him, and I wanted him to associate me with the good things in his life, not his headaches.

My battle with the President's budget—or, should I say, his wife's—became so serious that I would take the long way around in the White House halls to avoid meeting him. I just couldn't stand the reproachful look on his face.

In July, 1961, I had been obliged to report to the President that Jackie's personal expenses for the second quarter of the year had totaled about \$35,000. Almost half went for clothes.

The amount we had sent to one couturier alone—Givenchy of Paris—stands out in my mind: over \$4,000. I haven't forgotten that because at the time it occurred to me that I could dress for years on what Jackie had spent in this 3-month period with Givenchy.

Jackie seemed to be a compulsive buyer.

She had the habit of checking the newspapers, for items—big and small—from the department stores. She would tear out ads as she read the paper and ask me to order for her from the "Mary B. Gallagher—Special" account.

It came as no surprise when Evelyn Lincoln called me one day with a message from the President. I can't remember her words exactly, but the call came right after I had delivered the most recent statement of expenses to him. He blew up.

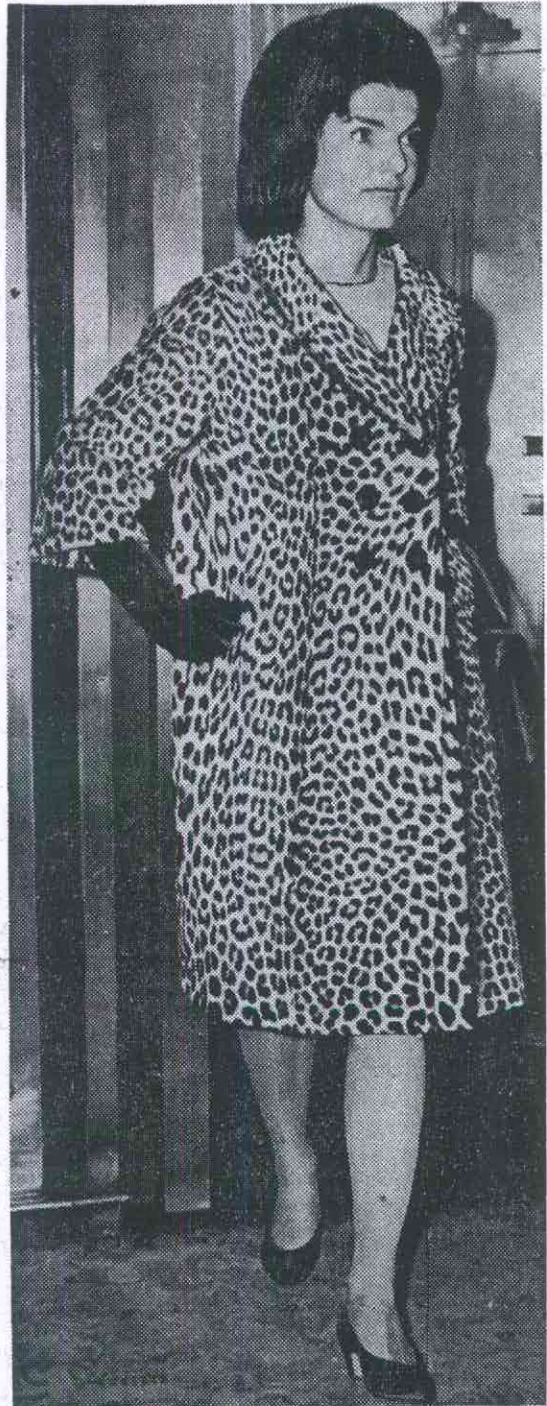
For a while after that Jackie seemed to become unduly meticulous: I found myself itemizing such trivial things as powder puffs from Julius Garfinckel's—\$1.13.

On the evening of Nov. 15, as Jackie and I came to the end of our working session in the Treaty Room, she inquired about her personal bills. As usual, I simply reached for the black-leather three-ring binder, which told all, right down to the final penny.

She spot-checked a few items, asked a few questions—and told me to leave the book with her to look over more carefully that evening.

The following morning, it suddenly became quite apparent that the President had taken a look at the "Black Book," too! As I waited for the elevator on the ground floor, three quick buzzes sounded, indicating that the President was on his way downstairs.

As the elevator door slid open, however, I faced Jackie instead, with JFK close behind; he looked as serious as I had ever seen him. Jackie practically leaped at me. "Oh, Mary, thank God you're here!" she said. "Jack's going to get Carmine Bellino after me."



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Jackie in her Somali leopard.

He was a long-time friend of the Kennedys and, among the clan, was commonly known as the "figure expert."

But even with the President's watchful eye upon her, Jackie couldn't be completely constricted. In October,

Runneth Over

1961 she told me to ask Ted Kahn, of Ben Kahn Furs in New York, to come to the White House with a selection of fur coats. The coat incident had started as an economy move, too. Jackie planned to trade in one of her old mink coats, and Kahn, a former Harvard classmate of the President's, was going to allow her a good price for it. He arrived, heavily laden, on Dec. 5.

Then came the big decision. Mink or leopard? Jackie couldn't make up her mind. She called the President over from his office to help her decide. She liked the rare Somali leopard, but of course it was much more expensive, too. It was also a fresh idea for her wardrobe. Jackie modeled the various coats, and the President immediately chose the mink.

But, Jackie ended up with the Somali leopard.

It was about two weeks later when Jackie picked up the budget once again!

She wanted presents for the children, coming in from various admirers, to be scanned to see if they could be used as Christmas gifts for her children and (her sister) Lee's.

This, in itself, was unusual, because gifts to the White House were ordinarily sent to charitable organizations.

Jackie asked that the kitchen use every bit of food sent as a gift to the White House. And she wanted the mail room not automatically to send food gifts to orphanages any longer.

But the suggestion that really staggered me—whether she meant it in dead earnest or tongue-in-cheek, I don't know—concerned her private parties or other occasions where guests might leave glasses, wander off, and order another drink. She instructed Anne (Lincoln) to tell the butlers to refill those glasses that looked relatively unfinished and didn't have lipstick marks on the edge. Jackie said to pass them around again—even if a few people got hepatitis. Jackie really had a way of getting her point across, and sometimes I would chuckle inside at the straight face she kept when she said something like this.

I don't think I'll ever forget the day I walked into Jackie's bedroom and found her propped up in bed, looking at a picture catalog for trading stamps! She beamed when she saw me. "Oh, Mary, do you know what I've just learned from Anne Lincoln?" she exclaimed. "You know all the food we buy here at the White House? Well, she told me that with the stamps the stores give us, we can trade them in for these marvelous gifts!"

For the first time I came to see Jackie as an "average American housewife"!

Alas, after I battled with the Annual Statement of Expenses for 1962, I was forced to report to the President that Jackie's spending had not lessened over the previous year. Her total expenditures for 1962 came to \$121,461.61—against \$105,446.14 for her first year at the White House.

It always amazed me that Jackie spent more in a year on family expenses than the President's salary of \$100,000.