

Comforting The President

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Ninth in a series

On JFK's birthday, May 29, a surprise birthday party was held at the Staff Mess, with Pierre Salinger and Jack McNally officiating, in turn, as emcees. But before the festivities began Jackie had thoughtfully arranged for a photograph of her husband to be taken with the two members of their household staff who had served them the longest—George Thomas and Provi.

At the party, I noticed that the President's hair had taken on reddish highlights, which gave him a new youthfulness, and I commented to myself that he was going to stay young in spite of birthdays—as long as he had a good barber.

In June, the President's mother had sent him some Johnson's mustard plasters for his back. The President had his doctors at the White House to prescribe for him—Dr. Travell and Rear Admiral George Burkley, to name but two—but like a dutiful son, the President did use the plasters and liked them. Jackie told Dr. Burkley that they weren't a cure of course, but they made the sore spot feel warm, which provided some comfort, at least.

Jackie was also now showing great concern for the comfort of the President. She asked Dr. Travell to do something about the President's reading lights in his bedrooms at Atoka and at the White House, his chair in the West sitting room, his chairs in his office, both by the desk and by his sofa, and the Cabinet Room and his bathroom. She said that the President read just about everywhere, and his eyes were "giving out."

Jackie was finally getting around to redecorating the President's office. She was going to surprise her husband with how beautiful and colorful his office could be. She was getting rid of his "tired" green rug and the green walls that had not been changed since the Eisenhower Administration. In their place would be Jackie's favorite white walls and a bright red "cheerful" rug. Then, there would be a comfortable grouping of chairs and sofas at the fireplace, where the President loved to sit with his guests.

October started with a little family incident that showed who was boss of the family. It was the day of her departure for Greece. Mr. Kenneth arrived from New York to do Jackie's hair. At noon, she was to accompany JFK to Union Station to greet Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia. Just before leaving the White House, the President came up to the living quarters from his office to see if Jackie was ready. By this time, Kenneth had finished with her hairdo and was in the sitting room on the third floor.

Apparently the President had taken one look at

Jackie's new hairstyle and decided that it was too sophisticated for the occasion. He asked Kenneth to change it—with what sounded like one of his natural quips, "What are you trying to do . . . ruin my career?"

In my mind's eye, I followed Jackie as she went aboard the fabulous ship Christina while all the ships in the harbor raised their flags in her honor.

It was, from all I could gather, a fantastic experience for Jackie, who not only loved the sea with a passion, but loved ancient artifacts. This trip combined both. She went "barefoot and windblown" in a speedboat to take a closer look at the coastline of the island of Lesbos. I was not surprised to read that even though she seemed carefree as a beachcomber, there were not one but two hairdressers on board ship to take care of the ladies' hairdos.

Of course I was interested when I read in a UPI account that Jackie "was accompanied by Onassis, one Secret Service man and two women who were not identified," when she went down the gangplank and into a car waiting to take them to the Palace of Minos.

(Jackie returned from Greece, and preparations were underway for the fatal trip to Texas. Mrs. Gallagher had been asked to make the trip with the Kennedy entourage.)

The White House chauffeur, the morning of Nov. 21, had me out to Andrews Air Force Base with minutes to spare before the President's and Jackie's arrival by helicopter from the White House.

When I boarded Air Force One, I caught sight of Evelyn Lincoln, and sat beside her. Instinctively, I found myself carrying out the order Jackie had given me that I "stick close to Mrs. Lincoln as though you are going along as her assistant. If anyone asks you your name, you can say, 'Mrs. Barell.'"

Later, I was in Jackie's bedroom with her when there was a knock at the door, and she asked me to see who was there. As I reached the door, it was opened by JFK, who poked his head through the opening as he held onto the knob. Jackie was in the adjoining alcove, brushing away at her hair and, when I told her that it was the President, she called out, "Yes, Jack, what is it?"

He stood where he was, calling back, "Oh, Jackie, just thought I'd check to see if you were all right."

Pressed for time, her hairbrush in mid-air, she answered impatiently, "Yes Jack, I'm just fine. Now will you just go 'way?" He closed the door and left.

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worked at Tiffany before becoming Jackie's social secretary.)

"Tell Tish," Jackie ordered, "that if it gets in the newspapers, I won't do any more business with Tiffany. If it doesn't, we'll buy all State presents there."

Except for the very modest earnings I was receiving as a "part-time" employee, Jackie had been good to me. She had sent lovely Christmas gifts—a beautiful pin, which had arrived at the Georgetown house for me, and a beautiful poinsettia which had been delivered to my house in Alexandria on Christmas morning, and which bore a tag, "With the deep appreciation of 'All the Kennedys.'" The pin had been accompanied by a card saying, "Merry Christmas, Mary, and lots of love, Jackie."

Yet, for all the joy that these two lovely gifts had brought to me at Christmas, there had been still another which I had received from Jackie a few weeks earlier, which had made me proudest of all—an autographed photo of her, the President-elect, and Caroline—such as we had used during the campaign—bearing by far the most significant and meaningful message:

"For Mary—what would we ever do without you!—Jackie."