

'I Really Won't Be

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Twelfth and last in a series

At 8 p.m. on July 2nd, as Ray and I sat in the kitchen enjoying a cup of coffee with our friends, Mary and Peter Kosak, the White House phone rang. I reached for the pad and pencil expecting, as usual, to take a few quick notes from Jackie.

But this was a message that was to engrave itself on my mind instead.

After greeting me with the usual "Hi, Mary, this is Jackie," her message began, "You may have already guessed, but I want you and Mrs. Ann Lincoln to be among the first to know that I am planning to move to New York . . ."

From this, I assumed she would soon tell me more about her future plans for the rest of her staff and me. I did not press her for details. When she finally mentioned the work that would be involved in her move, I immediately assured her, "Well, you know me. I'll be right there as long as you need me."

Ray and the Kosaks were, of course, a bit curious. As I told them the news, I commented, "But, you know, there's something about that call that bothers me—something that Jackie has left unsaid."

I couldn't pinpoint it—there was just a strange feeling I had.

The next morning Jackie called early from the Cape and dictated with normal fluency. Then she paused, and I waited for her words.

"I suppose by now you've read the newspapers about my move to New York," she said.

"Yes, Jackie," I answered, "I have, but . . ."

"Well," she announced, "since my life is all changed now and my staff will be located in New York, I guess I really won't be needing you any more after September first."

I was speechless!

"Mary, are you there?" she asked.

I could hear her, but I could make no response. After a few seconds, I replied weakly, "Oh, yes . . . yes, Jackie, I'm here, but would you mind repeating that again, please? I'm not sure I understood . . ."

Finally, I mustered, "Well, Jackie, if that's your decision . . ." I could go on no further.

"Oh, now, Mary," she came back, "don't get huffy . . ."

I explained that I didn't mean to be "huffy" at all. It was just that, after my long, close association with the

Kennedy's, I'd never expected this kind of announcement when it came time to let me go—that I just didn't know, really, what else I could possibly say.

"Yes, I know," she said a bit more understandingly, "it's all very sad. But it would be just too impractical to try to operate between New York and Washington, dictating over long distance.

And that was it. I could only remain silent, listening almost in a stupor.

"We'll still be close," she continued, and if ever I can do anything for you, let me know." From that, she went on to mention that Provi wouldn't be going to New York, either.

Actually, moving to New York had been the very least of my desires and expectations. But I had hoped and expected that, when the time would come for Jackie to announce she no longer needed me, it would be in a warm, face-to-face manner.

Then, in the final touch, Jackie asked whether I would be in Washington for the summer to help with her move.

Needing You Anymore'

"Have you had your vacation yet?" she wanted to know.

"No," I answered, "there's been so much work to do, I haven't had time even to think about a vacation."

"Oh, great!" she exclaimed, "could you plan to take it later, then? I'll let you know when to start moving my things . . . but I really think you should be all finished by September first."

"Jackie," I offered resignedly, "as I've always told you, I'll be here just as long as you need me . . . to the very last day."

I will never forget the day it finally happened. My diary records:

Thursday, September 10, 1964: 4:00 p.m. — JBK called—in town just for day, packing, etc.—"so depressing"—wanted to say goodbye—"Please remember all the happy days. Come up to N.Y., bring your boys up to the Fair, have them see Caroline & John. You and Mrs. Lincoln come up to a play now & then, look me up at the apt. Do keep in touch. Sending gift to you—will have S.S. Agent bring it over."

Upon replacing the receiver, I suddenly felt the pangs of this final parting. I wished that Jackie could have given me her gift in person.

At 10 a.m. on the 11th, it was Muggsy O'Leary who appeared at my front door to deliver Jackie's gift to me. And because the bearer was one of the Kennedy family's oldest and most trusted friends, I couldn't possibly have been more honored. I opened the box with the greatest care.

There, in a small, black velvet case, was a most exquisite round gold brooch with many turquoise chips. It was lovely, and so very precious for what it represented.

The accompanying message on a white card edged in black, embossed with the Kennedy crest, read:

September 1964

For dear Mary—

Please accept this with memories of so many happy days—and my deepest affection always

Jackie

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