



Bob Considine

Jackie's Letter Is a Restorative

The final passage of the last installment of "The Death of a President" in Look Magazine is worth the tedious journey through the rest of the material.

It is Jacqueline Kennedy's previously unpublished letter to Nikita Khrushchev written on Dec. 1, 1963, one of her last days in the White House. She has never been back. The letter is irrelevant to the rest of the installment but it easily stands on its own merit.

It reveals the Jacqueline Kennedy millions watched and marveled at throughout the punishing ritual of the state funeral, a woman of incredible poise in the face of her demolished world.

First off, she thanks Khrushchev for sending Anastas Mikoyan to the funeral, and she concludes the letter asking Khrushchev to thank his wife for the tears she shed at the American Embassy in Moscow after signing the book of mourning.

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BUT WHAT makes the letter unusual and restores the widow's luster and dignity — after William Manchester's seamy passages that preceded it—is her clear-eyed assessment of the world and its peril.

"I send it (the letter) only because I know how much my husband cared about peace, and how the relation between you and him was central to his care in his mind," she wrote. "He used to quote your words in some of his speeches — 'in the next war the survivors will envy the dead.'"

"You and he were adversaries, but you were allied in a determination that the world should not blow up. You respected each other and could deal with each other. I know that President Johnson will make every effort to establish the same relationship with you."

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AND THEN this intuitive thought:

"The danger which troubled my husband was that war might be started not so much by the big men as by the little ones. While big men know the need for self-control and restraint — little men are sometimes moved by fear and pride. If only in the future the big men can continue to make the little ones sit down and talk, before they start to fight."

The letter comes as a welcome relief at the end of an installment filled with pathos, lint-picking, the author's almost feminine preoccupation with picayune frictions, injured feelings and soap opera rhetoric. (Was Bobby purposely late for LBJ's first cabinet meeting just so his entrance would interrupt the new President's remarks?)

Hear Bob Considine on KGO Radio (810) Monday through Friday at 5:50 p.m.