



Is she trying as hard as she can not to be noticed? Jackie's friends say "no."

(Editor's Note: This is the last of a series on Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis)

By Susan Sheehan

New Yorker Magazine Writer

Jackie's Not

STATES-ITEM

as Press Shy as

JUNE 11, 1970

THIRTY-THREE

She Pretends

It's easy to conclude, as Jackie's critics do, that she can't be bothered seeing any one person too often because she has such a wide choice of interesting people vying for the pleasure of her company, and that she likes to add to her already-exalted value by making herself scarce, and that she has a horror of being bored. True, her friends say, but a little too easy, and in any case only part of the story.

"Jackie's very uptight emotionally," a friend says. "Everyday life is really more of a burden to her than it is to most of us. Just as she can respond to the dramatic occasions but can't bring herself to deal with ordinary happenings, she isn't up to close friendships, with the weekly phone calls and lunches, the effort and the intimacy they entail. Jackie is capable of being capriciously, intermittently involved with people but she can't sustain anything."

Jackie's acts of friendship take the form of touching letters (several recipients of these letters, which are usually penned late at night, have remarked that she can put lovely sentiments on paper that she could never express in person) or carefully-chosen gifts. "Jackie's better at bestowing presents than presence," one friend said.

ONE REASON Jackie seems to favor solitude is that she is very moody. The many friends who see her semi-annually at social gatherings have been spared her black moods but those who have been around her for a sustained period of time have been exposed to them.

"One day, Jackie would stop by my desk and talk to me for half an hour," a former White House secretary remembers. "The next day, she'd look right through me as if she'd never seen me before."

The sad Jackie sometimes sleeps all day, cancels appointments, keeps people waiting for her, flies off the handle at inconveniences, and sallies forth on non-stop shopping sprees—as if buying 12 of everything that she didn't buy six of might help to dispel her life-weariness.

The happy Jackie, as friends tell it, is a "nature child" who loves larking and throws herself at life with the longing-to-be-free-abandon of the bird that she once claimed she wished to be.

Jackie's girlish charms have understandably endeared her more to men than to women, but men and women concur that Jackie's wit and candor are among her strong points.

ARTHUR KROCK, the retired New York Times

columnist, who has known Jackie for over 25 of her 40 years, says that "even as a nubile girl, Jackie could hold her own in banter with Noel Coward." In a city that is distinguished neither by its humor or its forthrightness, she went on saying whatever came into her head.

In the spring of 1960, when John F. Kennedy was campaigning against Hubert H. Humphrey in the Democratic presidential primaries, Catholicism was a major issue. "I saw Jackie at a dancing party in Washington that April," Krock recalls, "and she laughed and said to me, 'I think it's so unfair of people to be against Jack because he's a Catholic. He's such a poor Catholic. Now if it was Bobby I could understand it.'"

During that long-ago and far-away election year, 1960, a number of reputedly knowledgeable Democratic politicians were grateful that Mrs. John F. Kennedy was pregnant and thus, with her record of miscarriages, unable to do much campaigning. A former debutante of the year who read Proust and rode to the hounds would be a liability, they calculated, in a nation where the anti-social register, anti-Proust, anti-fox hunting vote was deemed sizable.

A MISCALCULATION. In 1960, the country was affluent, peaceful (the first American combat death in Vietnam was a year in the future), optimistic, and, as the always-perceptive Norman Mailer diagnosed, bored.

"There was a charm this other short summer of 1960 in the thought a young man with a young attractive wife might soon become president," Mailer has written. "It offered possibilities and vistas; it brought a touch of life to the monotonies of politics, those monotonies so profoundly entrenched into the hinges and mortar of the Eisenhower administration."

Jackie came to public notice at a time when the country was in the right frame of mind for glamour. After 15 years of the homespun and matronly Bess Truman and Mamie Eisenhower, it was a novelty to have such an ornamental creature as First Lady. Mrs. Middle-Class America revelled in her rarefied pursuits and copycatted her bouffant hair-do and elegantly understated clothes as best she could.

As long as John F. Kennedy was alive, it was fine for Jackie, who had never feigned an interest in world

affairs, to play a comparatively frivolous role.

Many of the country's hopes and dreams came to be associated with John F. Kennedy. When he was shot down, these hopes were transferred to his widow, whose dignified conduct on those four terrible days in November led many people to perceive that this decorative finishing-school product had content as well as style. Style had sufficed during JFK's lifetime, but after his death it was required that Jackie become an ambassador, a senator, a political kingmaker, or a do-gooder (like Florence Nightingale), i.e. a serious person, a public figure in her own right.

PUBLIC disenchantment with Jackie set in and the press turned on her when she kept on being herself. Despite her heroic qualities, she was a finishing-school girl and not a public figure—the best of her kind, but still of that kind.

With her remarriage to Onassis, the slurs on Jackie's political and social noninvolvement increased. Now everyone wanted her to join the Greek underground resistance movement, or at least distribute free milk to all the needy babies in Athens, or at the very least speak out publicly against the Athens junta's repressive ways. "If Jackie follows the sentiment attributed to John F. Kennedy, what's happening in Greece isn't nice," a friend observes, "but if her husband is satisfied with the regime from a business point of view, how can she attack it? What comes first? You have to remember that Jackie is a woman who believes in pleasing her husband so in her scale of values, there's no doubt. Expecting Jackie to attack the Greek colonels is the equivalent of having expected her, when John Kennedy was president, to have spoken out against the Bay of Pigs."

While Jackie didn't precisely seek fame, say by running for the presidency on her own, she obviously enjoyed fame once it was hers, although she was quick to complain about the limelight. One of her first statements after the election was, "It's really frightening to lose your anonymity at 31." She has bewailed her lack of privacy so often over the years that even her closest friends have told reporters that they recognize a classic

example of "The lady doth protest too much" when they hear one.

JACKIE would like to have everyone believe that she would be happiest if her photo never again appeared in a newspaper, that her nature is Garboesque, that she is trying as hard as she can not to be noticed, and that she takes no interest in the stories that are written about her.

Not so, say her friends. She is very interested in articles and books about her, even before publication (she has been known to propose photos she wants to see in a book and to point out those she doesn't care for). After publication, she may send a note to the author of a Jackie-piece she has liked, or request the original of a good photo for her scrapbooks.

Her concern with her image was apparent during her days as First Lady (photos showing her smoking were forbidden) and later: It was considered a most revealing slip of the tongue when she remarked, at the time of the Manchester affair, "Anyone who gets in a fight with me will look like a rat unless I run off with Eddie Fisher."

Friends agree that Jackie isn't Greta Garbo, that if she wanted her privacy as badly as she says she does, she could find a way to get more of it, and that, like everyone else, she is pleased by the favorable publicity and displeased by the unfavorable.

CONSIDERING the fact that Jacqueline Bouvier

Kennedy Onassis isn't a woman of independent accomplishment like Mary McCarthy, Florence Nightingale, Eleanor Roosevelt, or Greta Garbo, but is instead a beautiful and complex woman with an interesting combination of personal qualities who has married two powerful men, the attention paid to her seems almost grotesquely out of scale.

Last month, three major Jackie-books were published and the latest issues of half the magazines on the newsstands seem to contain Jackie-pieces, and no wonder: A recent survey shows that whenever a piece about her appears in a magazine, that magazine's circulation goes up 5 per cent. The magazines that publish these Jackie-pieces also note an increase of 5 per cent in letters-to-the-editor beginning, "Don't you think it's about time to stop publicizing and propagandizing our Jackie?"

There seems to be no accounting for our obsession with Jackie and our concomitant embarrassment with that obsession. For now, my only answer to a tiresome question I have been asked a lot lately — "Why are you writing a piece about Jackie?" — is "Why are you reading this?"



"U.S. Needed Glamour"