

JACQUELINE ONASSIS AT 45

Almost six years ago she married one of the world's richest men. He has given her a precious gift—privacy—but her life is not the fantasy of wealth and privilege that gossip has led us to believe

BY GLORIA EMERSON

She is, after all, not just the woman who looks smashing in blue jeans or a ruffled Valentino dress, who meets her husband for lunch in Paris, who this month might be on a yacht or in any of three different houses for a few weeks, and whose taste has always sent the rest of us spinning. She is not just the woman who has hairdressers come to her, or who had a cook in a Fifth Avenue apartment who said he quit because she likes cucumber sandwiches for tea.

Perhaps we are not a nation with a long or rich memory but rather a people who prefer to forget. But to think of her in just these terms—to see her life only as thrilling theater lived by the very rich—is to cheapen and cut off our own past.

What she is, and always will be, is the same woman who in that November of 1963 moved Charles de Gaulle to say: "She gave an example to the whole world of how to behave." He was a stern and unusually critical man, not easily impressed by the courage and comportment of others.

Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis will be 45 years old on July 28th. On each of her birthdays we stop and try to step a little closer. More is written. More is read. So much of what we think we have learned about her is not quite true. The world's most written-about woman keeps her silence and tells us nothing.

Recently she and I talked briefly on the telephone in New York. She often answers it herself. There is no social secretary or butler. A small point: Her voice is not really that of a

little girl. It is light and soft. She never mumbles or squeaks. It is not the voice of a babyish woman or one who tries to be cute.

She makes me laugh, for she can be mocking and witty. The day is so glorious I ask if she is going away. Her answer is such an ordinary one.

"When school is out," Mrs. Onassis says. There are the children, of course. Caroline, who is 16, is at a boarding school called Concord Academy in Massachusetts. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Jr., who goes to a private school in New York, is 13. Her answer is what my cousin or best friend would say if I asked them about summer plans. Their words would be "when school is out."

"What do you think her life is like now?" a friend of mine asks. This is a married woman who lives in the suburbs, doing the laundry of her four children as we talk. What she really wants to know is how much shorter is Aristotle Socrates Onassis. Is it two inches, or is it three?

My friend, as do many other women, sees Jacqueline Onassis in rooms with huge chandeliers, furs strewn everywhere, and all those hundreds of dresses hanging in a real room, not in closets but what Hollywood women call a wardrobe room. There is a private airplane, of course, since Mr. Onassis must surely own all those jets that fly for his company Olympic Airways.

None of it is true, of course. Yet my friend does not really want to hear that Jacqueline Onassis takes taxis, goes to the movies with friends,

refuses cocktail parties and big balls, makes lists of sheets—she likes linen ones—and spends huge amounts of time with her children. There is no private plane, no wardrobe room.

It makes my friend feel cheated. But I have nothing sensational to report. She has been married for nearly six years to an elderly Greek multimillionaire who travels constantly and whose age we do not know. He is 68, perhaps, or 74.

It would be foolish to pretend that Jacqueline Onassis has a run-of-the-mill life, worrying about grocery bills or rent. But the point is that she is not as removed from the realities as many people prefer to think. She does not choose to be. It was never her idea to imitate Garbo, to seek solitude, to raise a family apart from others. She remains curious and alive. One crucial reason is the children.

The Collegiate School, where John is a pupil, regularly holds meetings for parents and teachers that Mrs. Onassis rarely misses. No fuss is made over her. Once when she arrived other parents were wearing their names pinned on their chests. Another woman greeted her and said: "Why, Mrs. Onassis, you don't have a name tag on." They both laughed.

I cannot remember where I read it, but once she said that if you are a good mother it does not matter much what else you have done. It rings true. She has gone to baseball games, to children's movies, to school plays, as so many others do. Mr. Onassis is good with the children, I am told. They like him. / turn to page 110



JACQUELINE ONASSIS AT 45

• continued from page 91

My friend is taking the laundry out of the dryer and wants to know where the Onassises live. It is a question that fascinates her but not me. There are residences that they share, or own separately, or go to alone. Mrs. Onassis is rooted in a 15-room apartment at Fifth Avenue and 85th Street. The dining room has walls the color of coral. There are Louis XVI chairs for a table that seats eight. She does not entertain often.

Pictures of their father are in the children's rooms but nowhere else for, more than ten years after the death of President Kennedy, she is unable to see his face casually. There is a small country house in Peapack, New Jersey, an easy drive from New York, where riding and hunting and horse shows are as much a part of life as the trees and fields. It is a world she has known and loved since she was very small, up on

her own pony, and wanting to move. Yes, Caroline is that way on a horse, too.

There is a photograph of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis that hangs in the office of a close friend. It tells us much more than the hundreds of others where she is sitting still, or giving the wistful polite smile that seems a camouflage of feelings, not a measure of them. It is a picture of her riding very hard, perhaps about to jump, rising up, with the wind pushing back her hair and shirt. Her face is calm but very intense.

In the summers, she has Skorpios, a 500-acre Greek island in the Ionian Sea, which Mr. Onassis owns. They have a pinkish villa with a swimming pool. There are only three main bedrooms. The gardens delight and please her. She has begun to read books on flowers and their planting and arrangement out of doors.

She has not changed much since the days when she was First Lady, wanting the deadly, stiff clumps of gladioli and

snapdragons out of the White House.

The last question my friend asks is why she married again, and why *him*. I have no answer. Those who do would not explain. But she has always been drawn to men of power, of strength, who took the deepest risks and expected to win. He has also given her a huge gift. Call it privacy. He understands the need for it. No one asks Mr. Onassis how many shirts he owns, or how much money he has made. He has built the buffer zone, cushioning her from a curious world unable to ever stop watching that famous widow. Perhaps, too, he makes her laugh, or they enjoy each other, and he has stories to tell she has not ever heard. Perhaps he is a man she can lean on when she feels like it, but who lets her breathe and be alone when she needs that.

There is something wrong with lists:

The details they give can be hollow. To know, for example, that Mr. Onassis has a beautiful yacht called *Christina*, which is supposed to have two El Grecos, 40 telephones and antique silver, is not really to know what Mrs. Onassis thinks when she wakes up or wants to eat.

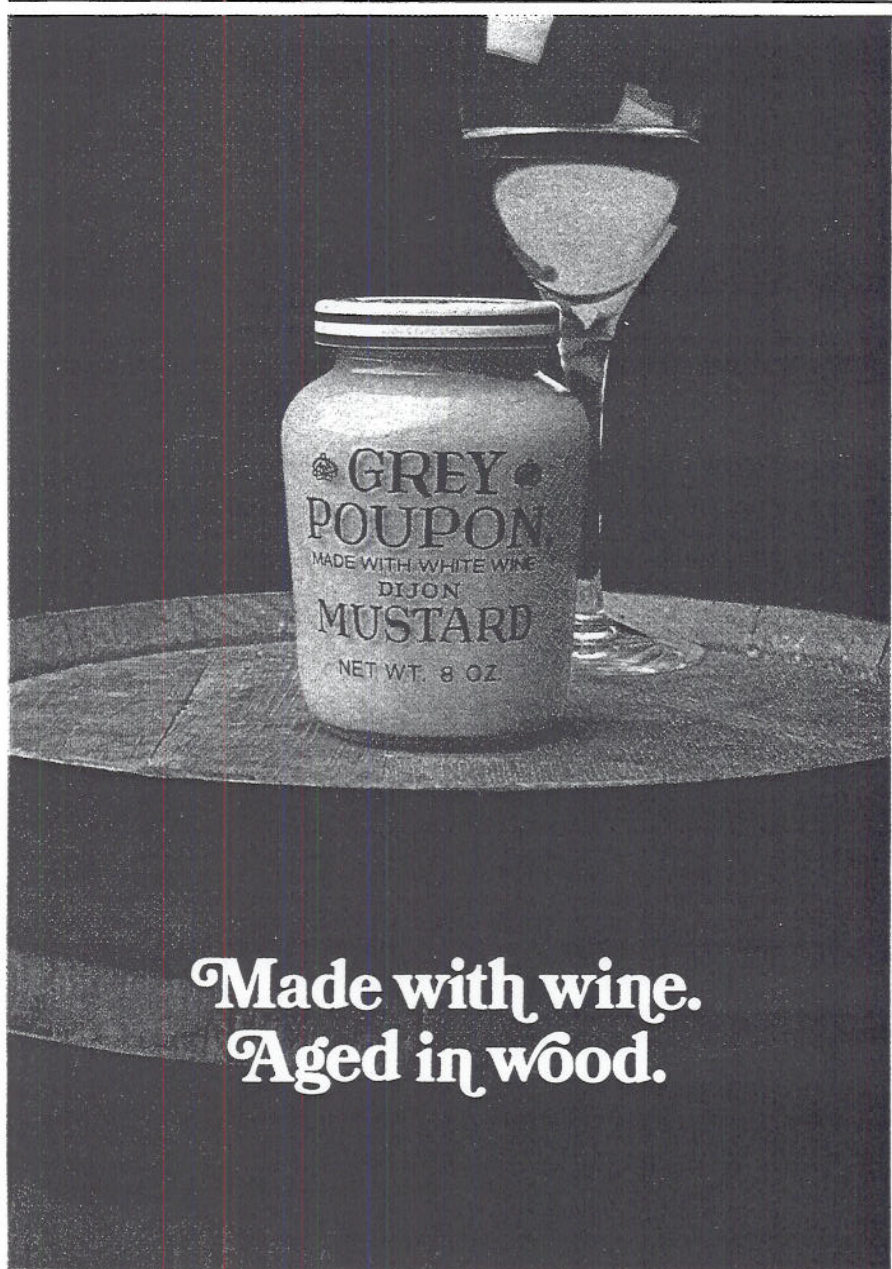
To be told that Mrs. Onassis goes back with the children to Hyannis Port, the homestead of all Kennedys, is only to guess at what memories can not be put aside and safely held down. Money cannot help with that. Friends say that she has kept the house where she and JFK lived, after Caroline was born, so that the children can go back every summer for the things she feels the young require: real roots and a mixing of the generations, the pull and push, the talking and sharing. Caroline and John have 26 first cousins who nearly always come pouring into Hyannis Port from all directions. They are of different ages, temperaments, needs and talents. There is a tribal tangle, ruled over by the grandmother, Rose Kennedy, who loves the commotion and contrasts and closeness. There are aunts and uncles, friends, pets, the sea and sun and the coming together of that huge clan whose history is so much a part of ourselves. Her children like it there.

Mr. Onassis, who is called "Ari" by his wife, has been to Hyannis Port where he charmed Rose Kennedy, but he would prefer to be on his island with his wife each August than on Cape Cod.

It is Caroline who now writes the verses and sketches. Her mother does not write or paint, which is too bad, for genuine gifts were once there. Once, when Jacqueline Bouvier was a young tourist moving through Europe in the summer, she filled up a sketchbook. Most of her friends were working their Kodaks, and perhaps seeing less.

There is no shortage of people who want to see her: the Kennedy men who have always kept in touch long after leaving Washington, the writers and artists whose company she once said she preferred to that of politicians, the Europeans who share many of her interests and tastes, the New York

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Made with wine.
Aged in wood.



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friends who are just as wealthy and well dressed, the school friends, the ones from Newport where she spent summers as a girl.

I do not think she sees many of them at regular intervals. Perhaps the person she has been closest to for the longest period is her younger sister, Princess Lee Radziwill, who is separated from a titled Polish businessman. The mother of two children, she has moved from London to New York. Once, when the sisters were very young and many men danced for their attention, there were stories about an animosity between them. Indeed, Jacqueline is supposed to have said once at a dinner party, Didn't Lee look better now that a mole had been removed from her face? I am not persuaded the story holds up but so much for sibling rivalry. The sisters are close, live a few blocks apart and see each other often.

There is always a photograph of Jackie wearing a new white raincoat or tying her scarf a different way. It tells us nothing more, yet a photograph of her sells more of everything: raincoats, scarves, newspapers, magazines, sunglasses. She is our national obsession who keeps her long silence, and curiosity grows. How much money does she spend every year? Does Caroline remember playing in her father's office or once telling the White House press corps that JFK was "not doing any-

thing—just sitting upstairs with his socks off"? Does her son, who was three when the President was buried, remember the funeral? What color is her bathroom? What is her Greek husband like, in every way? Is it true that she was never close to the Kennedy sisters? These are the questions that would be asked. She is wise to stay aloof. She is right to refuse to reply. It is not history we want so much as more good gossip.

Recently, when she was told of an article that mentioned what she owned or what it was thought she owned, Mrs. Onassis said scornfully: "All that junk." I do not know if she meant real possessions or imaginary ones. She sometimes speaks that way.

It is not to our credit that there were such howls and complaints when she married again. Finally, to silence her critics, Richard Cardinal Cushing, who had married her in 1953 and baptized the children, had to speak.

"Why can't she marry whomever she wants to marry, and why should I be condemned and why should she be condemned?" the Cardinal asked. So many Americans felt wronged. The comment of a retired, 70-year-old bookkeeper was not untypical. "I'm terribly disappointed," she said. "She could have done better. To us she was royalty, a princess, and I think she could have married a prince. Or at least someone who looked like a prince."

So that was it: He did not look like a prince. But even before her remarriage, there was a growing grumbling about the life she was leading, although the public could only guess most of it. Many Americans wanted her to lead antiwar demonstrations when Lyndon Johnson was in office, or to calm the Black Panthers, to give all her money to the poor and the old, or open a commune. But she was never a junior Eleanor Roosevelt, whose life was committed to social injustices and urgent causes. She was never elected to office. She had promised us nothing. But we wanted her to help us, to make things nice again, to make us feel less frightened. It would not do for her just to look pretty and pay attention to the children and go to the theater, you see.

There was a caption once, under a photograph in that chatty brash newspaper for the fashion world, that said: "The social butterfly has come down to earth."

On the April day that story ran, in 1968, she was again in black, again kneeling before a coffin, again the woman with the trembling face and eyes that told us too much. She was in the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, at the funeral service for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He had also been shot and killed.

A New York Times reporter, a man not given to the slightest exaggeration, continued

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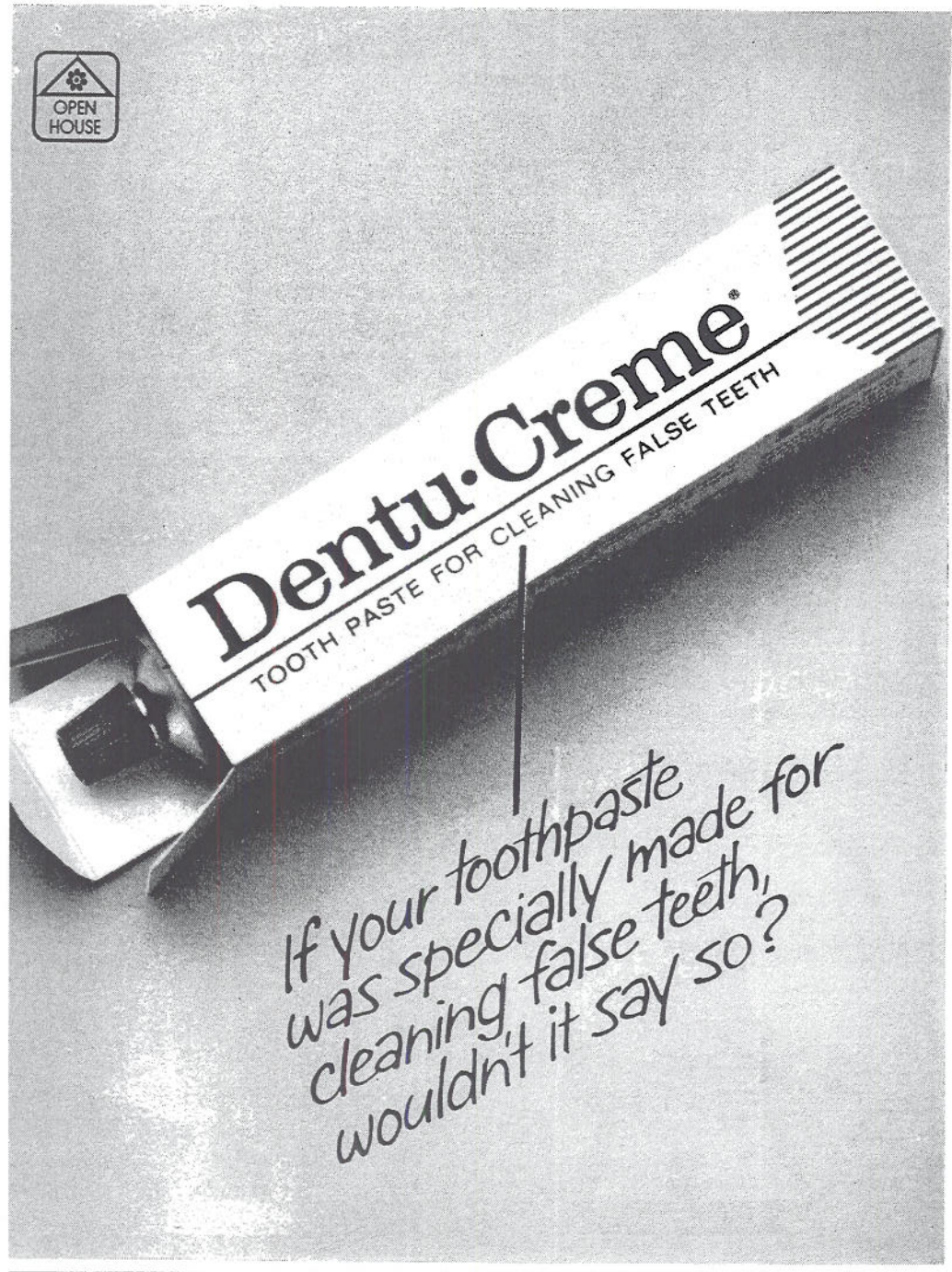


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wrote: "The crowd outside was overwhelming and Mrs. John F. Kennedy, widow of the President, was virtually lost from view as she was slowly escorted through the crowd. Despite the harrowing experience her composure remained intact."

It is an old story, to be sure, but which of us could have done better in that cruel and long decade? She had never chosen to be our heroine—although at times it could not have displeased her—but the penalty paid for being a legend is very high indeed.

There was not one unimaginable loss, but two. There are friends of the Kennedys who think that when Senator Robert Kennedy was shot on June 5, 1968, in Los Angeles, much died in this country, including something of them and something of her.

When she was traveling in Mexico in 1968, that restless and original woman

who cannot see too many ruins, it was noted that she wore heavy walking shoes to see the great remains of Uxmal, that she spoke Spanish, that she spent \$62 for souvenirs in a gift shop in Chichén Itzá, and much more. On Cozumel Island she was asked if she would help her brother-in-law campaign if he decided to oppose LBJ for the Democratic Presidential nomination.

Her answer told us very much.

"Whatever Senator Kennedy will do I know it will be right," she said. "I will always be with him with all my heart. I shall always back him up."

If Senator Edward Kennedy ever decides that he does want to be a candidate for the Presidency it is not likely that Mrs. Onassis, who has never campaigned in her life, would make speeches or public appearances. Her support would come in other ways.

A man in Cambridge who loved Robert Kennedy told me, without saying

so, the difference between the late Senator's wife, Ethel, and JFK's widow. When asked how she was able to bear the death of her husband so well, Mrs. Robert Kennedy said it helped her to think of "Bobby and Jack together again, in heaven." Although Mrs. Onassis has always been a devout Catholic, I do not think she could have ever put it that way.

Sandy Vanocur, a former NBC television commentator and a friend of the Kennedy family, described how disturbed Jacqueline Kennedy was on the flight, from Los Angeles to New York, bearing the casket of Robert Kennedy. She thought it was the same plane that had taken her husband's coffin from Dallas to Washington, D.C. It was not the same one, they told her.

If all else blurs and fades in our minds, perhaps we might remember how she felt that day, six years ago, fearing she was back on the same Boeing 707 and it was happening again.

An actress named Glory Van Scott put it the best way. She met the former First Lady backstage, with the other members of the cast, after a performance in February, 1969, of a play called *The Great White Hope*. "She showed us the world doesn't have to finish you off," the actress said later.

It did not. We should be glad. So it should not matter at all how she lives now, where she goes, what she spends. She was never a political animal, or a born and willing campaigner, who wanted to talk to Congressional wives, or go to teas, or do what the voters expected of her. She is free now to be what she wishes.

Both her critics and some friends, who never, never want their names used, have said that she really likes publicity as long as it is flattering and nice. I don't believe this. Once, in 1966, when she was visiting the Duke and Duchess of Alba during Seville's annual six-day Feria, the crowd of reporters was so thick and so demanding that she was obliged to face us. I carefully wrote down that she wore low-heeled black shoes with silver Pilgrim buckles, a Valentino white jacket and black skirt, and pearls. What I left out of the stories was the impression she gave of genuine shyness, an almost shrinking back from the crowds and cameras and shouting. She never did like being hemmed in.

Much happened in October, 1968. There was her wedding, which made us forget Vietnam, and we were glad to, and the problems of the students and the shaking in troubled cities. Nearly two years later, it was learned that Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson, a beautiful and useful historian, felt that she had lived most of her five years in the White House under the shadow of Mrs. Kennedy. In her memoirs, *A White House Diary*, Mrs. Johnson dictated her thoughts on the eve of the wedding.

"Remembering her eyes when last I had seen her at the funeral of Bobby Kennedy, I thought this complete break with the past might be good for her."

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Mrs. Johnson added that she went to sleep that night feeling "strangely freer" because of the wedding that would take place the next day on a Greek island.

Perhaps we always expected too much in those shiny, fatter years when the country seemed so much younger and more confident. There was such a sharp new glitter to her in the White House days: the First Lady who made her debut at Newport, who went to Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut, and Vassar College for two years, who studied at the Sorbonne and spoke other languages and read poets because she wanted to. What annoys people now—the habits and pleasures of the upper class—is what bewitched us then.

Her mail, which averages 40 letters a week, is answered by a school friend, Nancy Tuckerman, who began to work as her social secretary in 1963 and even now, although she is director of public relations at Olympic, stays in touch and helps in different ways. Mrs. Onassis does not comment on manuscripts or works of art sent to her, provide pictures of President Kennedy to schoolchildren who want them, give money to people who ask for it, accept invitations or let her name be used by organizations, boards of directors, task forces or charities. But she is often generous, kind and sensitive. It is probably just as true that she can be temperamental, impatient, too fussy, stubborn and sharp.

Her impulses are sometimes splendid and touching. Within two days after the assassination of the President, she wrote a note to Mrs. Marie Tippet, the policeman's wife who also became a widow on November 22, 1963. In the spring and early summer of 1971, she worked as a volunteer teachers' aide at a shelter for ghetto children on East 112th Street in Spanish Harlem, run by New York Catholic Charities, which cares for the children of drug addicts.

It was her idea and influence that helped open a textile factory, which uses African motifs and colors, in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area in central Brooklyn, once considered a degrading and hopeless place for blacks to live. The fabrics are now produced by Design Works, one of the projects opened by and affiliated with Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, in a move to provide not only employment but self-operated businesses to blacks in the community.

She let some of the fabrics be photographed in her dining room, with her Sèvres porcelain and 18th-century French furniture, to help Design Works. She went to a party in the Great Hall of the Metropolitan Museum where the cloths were hung on display in November, 1971. So did about 1,500 other people, some of them to see a collection of Design Works of Bedford-Stuyvesant and others to see her.

Perhaps it is not philanthropy at its most profound, but the spirit of caring is there, carefully directed and not



spilling, then stopping. If there is more, she will not tell. Almost all stories about her seemed to lead back to that peculiarly un-American passion she has for privacy. Once, not too long after she became Mrs. Kennedy, her husband showed me a book of illustrations for a story she had written. Dedicated to her stepsister Nina Auchincloss, it was a child's story about falling in love, growing up, getting married. JFK said to take it to New York to see if there was anyone there who would publish it. I made a few anxious calls to junior editors who did not see its charm. JFK had wanted to please her. But she was not delighted at all at his idea that the book might be published. It was not something she wanted seen or appraised or shared by outsiders. This must sound odd in a country where the national dream seems to be to be invited to appear on the "Today" show or to write a best seller or be interviewed by *Time*.

The last time I saw Jacqueline Onassis was in October, 1972, when she and her husband gave a party for 62 people in the Champagne Room at El Morocco. It was their fourth anniversary. I had been abroad so long the date meant nothing to me.

She wore a black top, a long white skirt and a heavy gold belt that looked Moroccan. I thought she had the smallest rib cage of any grown-up woman I had ever known. I asked if it was her husband's birthday but she only smiled and led me to him to say hello. He was sitting down but the huge, dark face was striking. It was, as they say, a perfectly planned party, with eight round tables covered in pale-pink linen, seating eight. There were pale pink and white carnations with small pink rosebuds in the centers of the tables. The Pol Roger 1964 champagne was very cold and good. There was a 1967 St. Emilion wine. I ate a lot. Princess Lee Radziwill wore

orange and was amused by Mike Nichols, the director, who had a cough that seemed to rise from his knees. Pierre Salinger made me laugh. Mrs. Amanda Burden looked pretty. Mrs. Sylvia Fine Kaye, wife of Danny Kaye, looked sympathetic, while Stephen Smith, the husband who manages the Kennedy family fortune, did not when I tried to say that Vietnam had stained and torn us. Then I remembered Kennedy men do not like mournful, loose talk, least of all from women like me who do not compress what they want to say. An important banking official gave a toast to the "bride and groom," words that made Lee Radziwill make the tiniest grimace. The party ended around one A.M. Mr. and Mrs. Onassis went downstairs to the nightclub with several friends. Most of the guests went home. I cannot explain why I was glad to see her again, giving a party like that. It told me that she was still herself, after all the years that had passed, and that she still wants the fresh flowers and the pink tables. There is nothing wrong with that. No one could want to see her become drab or dull.

Not many women I have known have been driven back upon themselves as she has. It is a long and hard journey none of us need envy. She is a survivor, someone who showed that the world couldn't finish her off, as the actress said.

Yet in 1972 the lawyer for a free-lance photographer, trying to sue Mrs. Onassis for preventing him from taking endless photographs of both her and the children, said a strange thing. It still bothers me. Mrs. Onassis' charm, marriages and life-style had made her famous, the lawyer said in court, since she represented the American dream. I suppose there are others who might agree and say that. The American dream. But it wouldn't be my description of her life. Not at all. ■