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# A Once and Future Queen: Jackie Kennedy and Her Kingdom

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# **A Once and Future Queen: Jackie Kennedy and Her Kingdom**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in

History.

By

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Under the mentorship of Dr. Michelle Haberland

## **Abstract**

The Kennedy Camelot was important to the American people and how we now come to view families in the White House. Jacqueline Kennedy was perhaps one of the most important characters in this story that was tragically interrupted. A historical figure not fully developed, Jackie single handedly created the beloved Camelot era and changed the way we view twentieth century America. Taking a deeper look into the private life of the most popular First Lady in American history in relation to the political rollercoaster that was the 1960s, new conclusions can be drawn about the Kennedy's Camelot and who truly reigned.

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## Introduction

“It was funny how the paparazzi could so easily capture her aura of mystery, yet her more beguiling ordinariness always eluded them.”<sup>1</sup>

First Lady Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy was not only America’s 1960s royalty, but the face of modern femininity and princess of America’s “Camelot”. Camelot is imaginary place for some, but it was the United States in the 1960s for others. Historically, Camelot was a legendary utopian society where King Arthur ruled, people were happy and taken care of, and there was joy. It was also the narrative that Jackie Kennedy used to design a new way for America to remember her fallen husband and their time in the White House. In Jackie’s famous *Life Magazine* interview with T.H. White, she describes exactly how she did so. White’s interview with Jackie is very detailed and discusses everything she remembers about that memorable day in Texas when her husband was assassinated. White’s interview paints a very different picture of Camelot.<sup>2</sup> Camelot was a favorite Broadway musical that John and Jackie enjoyed together, therefore she described it as a life they shared. This interview sets Jackie’s stage for the next decade. The lack of outward emotions would bring criticism as well as unwelcomed comments about her emotional control. What we see in this interview, ultimately, is a woman who went from one form of hell to another. Their marriage was no Camelot, but neither was experiencing his death. When a husband dies, people look to the wife to see how she will react. Will she crumble, or will she prevail? Jackie was a favorite from the

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<sup>1</sup> Kathy McKeon, *Jackie’s Girl* (New York: Gallery Books, 2017), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore H. White, “For President Kennedy: An Epilogue,” *Life Magazine*, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1963.

start and one half of the youngest, freshest couple to hold the White House. She was known for who she was by John F. Kennedy's side but also as a plain woman who possessed a certain kind of statuesque beauty and never allowed her emotions to be visible to the public. The trauma of the assassination transformed Jackie. She was a different person. Questions that have been asked begin with what did Camelot look like after the president was removed from the fairy tale? What was Jackie's role in Camelot before and after her husband's death? Once we understand that Camelot was a fiction, adapted and created by Jackie Kennedy to help secure her husband's legacy and create a place for herself in the world after her husband's assassination, it can be discussed that it never truly existed anywhere other than in the mythological story.

There are many important questions to answer and explore because Camelot was important to America, whether it was real or not. America still talks about the Kennedy's Camelot because it remains at the center of most people's understanding of twentieth-century America. It is because the story was interrupted. John F. Kennedy left behind the unfulfilled promises of a slain leader. Jackie was left behind in the wake for people to admire and she was all they had left of the beloved JFK other than the other Kennedy brothers. Because of this, how people viewed her before and after this tragedy is important. Her place in the public eye before and after the assassination is important to women's history as well as the backlash she received when the news broke that she was marrying Aristotle Onassis not five years after her husband's assassination. It is also important to compare these instances to today's society and how one would judge someone in these types of situations today. Also, pertinent to note is Jackie Kennedy's sympathy for the wives of other assassinated figures during this time such as Coretta

Scott King and sister-in-law, Ethel Kennedy. This pain stemmed from gun violence, an issue that has great relevance today.

Among the works that exist about any member of the Kennedy family, the family as a whole, or the Kennedy Administration, it is a more common theme to discuss the scandals and conspiracies. How many women John F. Kennedy cheated on his wife with and who they were, the politics behind Vietnam, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the Cold War are among the famous Kennedy topics. When Jackie is written about, she is dissected. Her childhood and early life as a young woman of the 50s and how wonderfully educated she was are things that are always mentioned. However, the inevitable end to her story in these cases is how she met John, how they fell in love, how she complemented his strengths and weaknesses, and how she supported him and stood dutifully by his side until that dreadful day. This is not to say that Jackie's role in the Camelot narrative is a topic never discussed when the Kennedy's are being analyzed, but Jackie is never isolated in these retellings. It is always examined how John or the Kennedy's as an entire family created Camelot and lived it. Jackie was a person without John. She was a Bouvier, a George Washington University graduate, and "... a woman above everything else." The history of Jacqueline Kennedy's public life has been told, but the history of Jacqueline Bouvier and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis remain shrouded in mystery, obscured by her public titles as First Lady of the United States, Senator Kennedy's wife, and Queen of Camelot.

Kathy McKeon's *Jackie's Girl* is an eye-opening memoir written by Jackie Kennedy's own personal assistant from 1964 to the mid-1970s. It is important to note that Kathy McKeon's book is a memory of her own life with Jackie, not a book about Jackie.

This is how she makes her strongest point. McKeon did not know Jackie before John F. Kennedy's assassination and had only become acquainted with the post-tragedy Jackie, and this is where she continuously describes what a privilege it was to be a part of what she felt was Camelot for a short time in her life. To McKeon, Camelot was wherever Jackie was. It was her lifestyle that continued to be fit for a First Lady and her life with her children and the Kennedy family. The author describes Jackie as being a very private person who expressed her grief in different ways in the authors presence. "The frozen half-smile the outside world saw in formal portraits and scores of magazines photographs of Jaqueline Kennedy never hinted at the girlish sense of humor I sometimes glimpsed in the privacy of her own world."<sup>3</sup> McKeon describes the early years when she is getting to know Jackie. She delighted in every moment because Jackie made her feel like a friend, not an employee. McKeon also described her first months with Jackie as a learning experience that elicited a range of emotions. Though Jackie and the author became close over the years, feeling much like sisters to one another, Jackie never pours out any feelings about John to her. McKeon describes the different ways Jackie would channel her grief and handle her loneliness. Jackie would often ask McKeon to stay late into the night to help her rearrange furniture just so she wouldn't have to be alone. McKeon also describes the moments that she knew for sure that Jackie would be okay, and that John F. Kennedy's death would not be the end of her. These moments mostly consisted of detailing how much Jackie loved to write letters and notes to people, whether they be to her own staff down the hall or to her sister in London. She thrived on keeping correspondence with the people she loved, and she was extremely close to John's family.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>McKeon, *Jackie's Girl*, 57.

<sup>4</sup>McKeon, *Jackie's Girl*, 77.

Jackie also loved to paint, travel, and entertain and McKeon recalls seeing her genuinely happy in these moments of fellowship with family and close friends.

Finally, the author describes the moment she knew she was where she belonged with Jackie, the moment that is most important to the thesis question from this memoir so far. McKeon talks about feeling at home with Jackie and the Kennedy family, but knowing that she will one day have to say goodbye to them and go on to live her own life “where I pictured myself raising a family of my own and someday telling my grandchildren the story of this enchanted bubble that held me, for a spell, right in the heart of Camelot.”<sup>5</sup> This conclusion to an exceptionally heartfelt chapter, compared to the ones before it, holds so much emotion from the author that genuinely reflects those of many Americans at the time. McKeon, like the rest of Ireland, watched the Kennedy presidency and the vibrancy of America from overseas and had, of course, heard the Camelot term tossed around. Coming to America and befriending and working for Jackie only after the assassination has the author at a disadvantage in terms of this research. McKeon only had the opportunity to view the Camelot idea for what seemed to be in John’s absence and not for what it had been described as before. To the author, Camelot belonged to Jackie and was very much alive because it was something she created as a result of the loss of her husband to maintain a sane day to day life. One would assume she may rethink this idea if she had known John and Jackie together. Being an Ireland native, McKeon was not exposed to as much of the popularity of American life and popular culture in the 1950s and 1960s, and this includes the creation of Camelot.

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<sup>5</sup>McKeon, *Jackie’s Girl*, 84.



*Camelot* was a Broadway musical favored by John F. Kennedy and his bride. She states in a Time Magazine interview, weeks after the president's assassination, that she and John often played the songs from the musical in the White House because they felt like it brought joy into the atmosphere of the White House that was otherwise very serious. James Piereson, an American scholar and author of *Camelot and the Cultural Revolution: How the Assassination of John F. Kennedy Shattered American Liberalism*, discussed his thoughts on Jackie and Camelot. Piereson argues that Jackie created Camelot in order to strengthen her husband's legacy and enhance imaginations about what could have been.<sup>6</sup> Though Piereson's arguments hold truth, his article makes it sound like Camelot was something Jackie created as a result of being hysterically upset and that the answers she gave in T.H. White's interview were irrational. John's death "shook the faith of Americans in their institutions and way of life."<sup>7</sup> This was a tragic event for the entire country and though his way of presenting his arguments were less than agreeable, this author sympathizes with Jackie's "coping mechanisms".

Another important contributor to this research is a famous Jackie Kennedy biographer, Barbara Leaming. Having written more than one biography about the famous First Lady's life before, during and after the White House, Leaming's 2001 book, *Mrs. Kennedy: The Missing History of the Kennedy Years*, makes the reader feel as if she is watching a real-time movie directed by Jackie herself. Discussed are those moments that no camera of the times could capture or even be allowed in the room. Leaming does an amazing job characterizing Jackie beginning in her early life during her parent's

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<sup>6</sup> James Piereson, "How Jackie Kennedy Invented the Camelot Legend After JFK's Death," The Daily Beast (November 12th, 2013). Accessed February 20th, 2018. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-jackie-kennedy-invented-the-camelot-legend-after-jfks-death>.

<sup>7</sup> Piereson, "How Jackie Kennedy Invented the Camelot Legend After JFK's Death".

separation and a lot of these happenings can account for why Jackie developed as she did, personality wise and mentally, why she married John, and even why she would stay by his side through the worst of scandals. Leaming's work provides a balanced mixture of public opinion and first-hand accounts to create a biography that reads like a fictional story but was all too real.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most credible and revealing insights into Jackie's life can be found in the archives of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston, Massachusetts. From Jackie Kennedy's personal papers emergest an abundance of evidence of gender discrimination, insensitive and harsh media reporting, but also evidence of how loved and beloved she truly was. Jackie kept every newspaper and magazine article that she could get her hands on about her or a member of her family because, no matter how much she liked to insist that it was not, public opinion was very important to her. It was enlightening to see how often she would type or write letters to people and keep the letters and cards that she received from others. After two days of sifting through her personal papers at the archives it was clear that Jackie was a very sentimental person, keeping everything from small notes her secretary left for her to each and every dress sketch that her French designer, Oleg Cassini, made for her. She was a woman of detail and saw her job as First Lady as just as important to that of any other cabinet member. Jackie Kennedy changed the way the role of the First Lady is perceived and valued.

Jackie Kennedy's story has been told many times and the details of her life have been laid out this way and that. People seem to think they know who she was and so she

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara Leaming, *Mrs. Kennedy: The Missing History of the Kennedy Years*, (NY: Touchstone, 2001).

may now be laid to rest as the historical figure that she was. Most of what has been written of her has left us with half a portrait of an important figure at the center of one of the most desperate moments in our nation's history and that portrait only presents Jackie in relation to her husband. Jackie has not been completely developed as a historical figure. This is especially true because we only know who she is because she married a man in 1953. What has not been assessed as well as it should be is who she is without John F. Kennedy, and at the same time, who she became because of him. The good, the bad, and the ugly all came as the result of his actions since the day they met. Even long after the president's assassination, Mrs. Kennedy was still Mrs. Kennedy and the mother of two Kennedy children. Would she still have been considered one of the most fashionable women in the world if she had never been First Lady? Perhaps the attention, instead, might have been focused on her sister Lee for marrying a prince? Growing up in a wealthy family, Jackie's childhood and early life were anything but picturesque and her marriage to John made it anything but Camelot. The life that Jackie Kennedy endured as a young girl, as a wife and as the First Lady may not have seemed as shocking for the time period, but it is truly disturbing to read about them today.

Her place in the public eye as well as the backlash she received when the news broke that she was marrying Aristotle Onassis not five years after her husband's assassination are important to women's history. It is also important to compare these instances to today's society and how differently someone in these situations today would be perceived. It is imperative to shed light on Jackie Kennedy's sympathy for the wives of other assassinated figures during these times of controversy, scandal and tragedy such

as Coretta Scott King and sister-in-law, Ethel Kennedy, relating this pain to the gun violence issues that are experienced today as well.

T.H. White's *the Once and Future King* inspires the title of this work. White's novel about Arthur's life and the turn of events that changes the way he is viewed is easy to compare to the Kennedy fairy tale. If we switch the main character from Arthur to Guinevere, how much does this change the tale? The characters, the setting, the events are all the same, yet the story would be so different. Perception and perspective are what tells the story every time.

## **Chapter 1: A Camelot History Lesson**

When you think of Arthur, the legendary British king, and Camelot, do you imagine a place in which you wish you could have existed? Camelot was a utopia whose story originated around the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The legend of King Arthur and Camelot dominate popular images of the Dark Ages and Medieval times. Camelot was not a place that was free of misfortune, but there was always a happy ending accompanied by beautiful weather year-round, bountiful crops and a hierarchy that was strong, honorable, and compassionate. Most importantly of all, Camelot was a myth. There is no historical evidence that supports its existence even though some historians have concluded that Arthur might have been based a real person, they have also pointed out that there was much imagination and story-telling in the earliest documents that mention King Arthur. Despite that evidence, many people choose to believe that the legend of Camelot was inexplicably a true story. No matter what side a person chooses to be on in a debate about

myths and legends, they can be compared to reality and factual history as well. However, it is important not to lose track of what is legend and what is real events. Camelot is now an interchangeable term that does not just refer to the legend but also to define something where many parallels with the legend can be found.<sup>9</sup>

Camelot, as discussed before, was a mythical place that is used in other arenas to imply a form of utopia. The Kennedy's never claimed to have a utopia, but they also never complained, at the time. To Jackie and John, Camelot was a Broadway musical that they shared a love for, and something special between the two of them. It is rather important to note, however, that it isn't until John's death that Jackie begins to use America's Camelot ideal to describe her personal life with her husband in the White House. In Jackie's famous *Time* magazine interview with Theodore H. White just weeks after John's assassination, she talks about how she and John often played songs from the *Camelot* musical in the White House when they were spending time together because it was something so unpolitical and was a breath of fresh air from the seriousness and chaos of their everyday life.<sup>10</sup> White quotes Jackie speaking about John's favorite line from the *Camelot* musical, "Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot.". Jackie describes that quote as being the epitome of her marriage and life with John. It is not surprising that she would describe her marriage in this way, even though she suffered greatly with him. Jackie Kennedy is not outwardly filled with grief during this interview. However, she explains that there will be other presidents, but there will never be another Camelot like theirs. Theodore H. White makes

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<sup>9</sup> Sarah-Jane Stratford, "Referring to JFK's Presidency as 'Camelot' Doesn't Do Him Justice", *The Guardian*, November 21, 2013, accessed on March 3, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/21/jfk-jackie-kennedy-camelot-myth>.

<sup>10</sup> Theodore H. White, "For President Kennedy: An Epilogue," *Time Magazine*, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1963.

an exceptional and strong argument for the existence of Camelot in the Kennedy White House because he has Jackie's permission and it is here that Jackie solidifies this ideal, but it all started with a song and ended with a death.<sup>11</sup>

The similarities between the original legend of Camelot and the Kennedy's Camelot are interesting because there are only a few. For the most part, these were two very different concepts. Camelot was a place where justice ruled, and no one could prevail against King Arthur. This was anything but reality for John F. Kennedy and his bride, or any Kennedy for that matter. The Camelot narrative distracts from the entire story that consists of so many elements of scandal, dishonesty and abuse. While it may seem that painting the Kennedy presidency into the story of Camelot romanticizes it, it can be argued that it actually hurt them more and John and Jackie both deserved better. When we hold people to such a high standard, they fail us because they are human. There is speculation as to whether or not Jackie created the Camelot story after John's death and subsequently created a fearless legend or if it was a world that society thought the Kennedy's lived in from beginning to end. The existence of the Kennedy's Camelot in general should be challenged.

Alan Jay Lerner's 1960 Broadway production of the Camelot musical was based off of T.H. White's novel, *The Once and Future King*, and was well received by audiences. So well received, in fact, that it won four Tony awards and went on to inspire a film adaptation in 1967. Starring Richard Burton, Julie Andrews and Robert Goulet, *Camelot* was an American favorite and so was the soundtrack album that would become

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<sup>11</sup> White, "For President Kennedy: An Epilogue".

an anthem for The Kennedy's.<sup>12</sup> Before Jackie would compare her marriage to the famous Camelot, John made it publicly known that the musical was one of his favorites because Alan Jay Lerner was a classmate of his from Harvard. After Jackie's declarations of what the production meant to her and the president, the musical and its soundtrack hit the charts again because of an audience that was appreciating it in a brand-new way. Though well received by audiences, some critics thought the show was too long and full of scenes that did not move the plot along. Others would say that the musical's success was solely based off of the association with the Kennedy's and this distracted from the fact that it wasn't quite as good as it could have been, in comparison to White's novel.<sup>13</sup>

The Kennedy's Camelot was ultimately a story about failed idealism. Our real-life King Arthur was slain, but not before his authority and integrity were challenged. The overall lust for power and acceptance and the inability to trust those around them was met with the demise of both Arthur and John. Once Camelot was associated with the Kennedy presidency, it was hard for anyone to ever remember it as anything else. This is a common example of how difficult it can be to teach history to students because it is not always clear what parts are the factual events and which parts have been romanticized. Romanticizing the history of Camelot only serves to fog the historical lens. Associating the legend of Camelot with the Kennedys obscures more than it reveals.

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<sup>12</sup> Susan Stempleski, "New York Philharmonic-Camelot", *Classical Source*, May 10, 2008, accessed on March 31, 2019, [http://www.classicalsource.com/db\\_control/db\\_concert\\_review.php?id=5838](http://www.classicalsource.com/db_control/db_concert_review.php?id=5838).

<sup>13</sup> Mark Robinson, "Broadway Musical Time Machine: Looking Back at Camelot", *Mark Robinson Writes*, accessed on March 29, 2019, <http://www.markrobinsonwrites.com/the-music-that-makes-me-dance/2016/9/1/broadway-musical-time-machine-looking-back-at-camelot>.

## Chapter 2: Jackie and John

It's 1961 and the fresh, young couple have taken the White House and America is hopeful for the future. A tasteful democrat with a prestigious background in military, degrees from Harvard and Stanford, and a family history in politics, John Fitzgerald Kennedy has stolen the hearts of the American people along with his relatively new bride who also happens to be well educated and unconventionally beautiful. John Kennedy was an impressive orator and knew how to capture America with his visionary speeches. While he was sometimes criticized for being weak, bendable and unexperienced, he was also loved and favored by millions of Americans no matter what mistakes he would make. However, it must be said that this president was never more loved than he was after he was assassinated after a little over 1,000 days in office. What was the appeal? The legend of John F. Kennedy grew each day after his tragic assassination. It was an interrupted story. A certain mystique plagued the Kennedy clan and a now hung over the broken and beloved family like a dark curtain. John F. Kennedy became all about the "what could have been" which would go on to inspire hundreds of books, memoirs, documentaries and interesting theories and opinions.

The 1953 marriage between Jacqueline Bouvier and John F. Kennedy seemed at first, to Jackie, a match made in heaven and just the ticket to release her from the clutches of her overbearing and emotionally abusive mother. Jackie knew that John had a reputation for being a lady's man, a natural charmer. It was his interest in her that was the surprise. Janet Bouvier verbally abused her daughter throughout her childhood, breaking down her self-esteem one insult at a time until it was almost non-existent. Jackie faced constant criticisms from her mother about her hair, eyes, over-all appearance and most



definitely, her intelligence.<sup>14</sup> A man does not want a smart woman, that was the message. Jackie's mother had completely convinced her that she was anything but desirable and never would be. This hatred almost seemed to come from Jackie's looks resembling those of her father, whom Janet had a deep hatred for. Because of the staggering mental abuse and her mother's constant attempt to make her believe that she held no feminine qualities, Jackie found her identity in books and quite enjoyed her years studying in France, where she felt like her intellect was welcomed and encouraged. John fell in love with Jackie because they shared a passion for history, poetry, books and music. With John, Jackie felt like her knowledge was not only appreciated, but complimented by him. He made her feel special and beautiful, and all that her mother ever said to put her down seemed to melt away. If America's most eligible bachelor could want her, then maybe the time she spent hating herself was all for not and she felt truly validated. With Jackie, John felt like more than just an attractive man with a good family name. He could revel in his true passions with Jackie because, for a change, this was woman who was not taken with him because of his looks or money, but a woman who was on his level, could challenge him and appreciated him for who he was in every aspect. Though elites in the inner political circle that the Kennedy's surrounded themselves with, men and women alike, commented on Jackie's appearance and made remarks about how she was not strikingly pretty and not at all John's type or usual pick, many others were blown away by her beauty. Her personality alone could charm a room and she definitely knew how to work one in the professional scene. It is very strange to read about these reactions of Jackie's new peers while knowing that she would go on to become considered one of the most fashionable

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<sup>14</sup> Leaming, *Mrs. Kennedy*, 8-9.

women in American history and an icon. While it almost seemed as if John agreed that Jackie was not his type physically, she was perfect for a senator's wife and was First Lady material.<sup>15</sup>

John and Jackie's engagement and the very beginning of their marriage was as blissful as it could be. However, it soon became clear, not long after the honeymoon, that John had no intentions of leaving his philandering days behind him. The only thing that changed was how careless he would become about it. Jackie was in denial for a short time about the infidelity. How could this be happening? Had she done something wrong, failed him like she thought she failed her mother? Still, when they were together, their time was well spent, and they enjoyed each other's company. They were an incredible team and Jackie hit the campaign trail with him time and time again. The American people loved her just as much as they loved him, and they especially loved to see them together. America's media began to acknowledge her as a bright, educated woman but considered it only a perk that complimented her beauty. In 1960, *Family Magazine*, celebrated Jackie's skills in painting and photography along with her exotic travels, fluency in French, Italian and Spanish. The fact that she had met and knew other congressmen personally was a central feature of the Family Magazine article. This article was an attempt to focus on Jackie and spark interest in the woman who was to move to the White House with the most interesting man in the country.<sup>16</sup> Jackie felt so lucky to have what she had in her marriage to John. She knew she had to keep him from rejecting her further and be the best wife she could be. Jackie sometimes thought that John was not

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<sup>15</sup> Leaming, *Mrs. Kennedy*, 29-30.

<sup>16</sup> *Family Magazine* News Clipping, 23 February 1960, Box 17, Press Files: Releases: 1961: February-July, Series 1.1.2., Pamela Turnure Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, Massachusetts, United States.

a faithful husband because she did not deserve for him to be so. Having a mother that convinced her at such an impressionable age that she was inadequate, Jackie was a self-conscious woman who did not see herself like America did.<sup>17</sup> Already stripped of any sense of pride or self-love at such a young age, Jackie had to accept what her and John's relationship would be. While there was no doubt that he loved his bride, John was raised to believe that this kind of behavior was not just acceptable, but normal. Scandal and hard times would fall upon them, but Jackie had unwavering support even through the knots that all of it put in her stomach and the betrayal she felt. Representing him as a wife and his better half, Jackie felt that her duty was to win the woman's vote for her husband. "The enormous women's vote has changed the political picture. They make up their own minds and once they have a certain feeling about a candidate," Jackie declared, "they have made their stand. This has been a big factor in changing professional politics."<sup>18</sup> Finding a cause for America amongst the madness is something Jackie became skilled at. Torn down by both her mother and by John, she decided that her duties were to be a striking, tentative and progressive First Lady and at least have that accomplishment to shield her against her mother's scrutiny and be John's partner no matter how he treated her. She had been defeated, and it was best to find ways to deal with John's infidelity and recklessness rather than fight with the man whom she felt made her important.

Though occasionally isolated and described by all her impressive qualities, this was all thanks to the man she married; the man who was bringing her to the White House with him. The saying goes "The woman behind the man..." which implies that where you

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<sup>17</sup> Leaming, *Mrs. Kennedy*, 7-10.

<sup>18</sup> Campaign News Clipping, 1960, Box 17, Press Files: Coverage: Articles: Campaign and Inaugural News Clips, Series 1.1.2., Pamela Turnure Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, Massachusetts, United States.

have a successful, appealing man, there is a woman he has to thank for helping him to grow and become that way and she is taking her rightful place, *behind* him. Most Jackie Kennedy narratives end this way, especially the ones told in the 1960s, whether it be pre or post assassination. “The Woman Behind the Man Who Might Become President”, one newspaper article began, even described her as the most beautiful of any candidate’s wife. Also, once again, noted for her exotic features, background in family money, modern style and the fact that her decisions to travel with her husband on the campaign trail made her relatable and it was observed that this would reach female voters. Although this article, and many others just like it, sought to praise, it ultimately expressed astonishment that a candidate’s wife understood politics, or doubted that she truly did,<sup>19</sup> and boiled the importance of her job down to laying out John’s clothes and making sure he ate well while on the trail. Making light of the insult to Jackie’s intelligence that was earlier commended, the article quoted a story that Jackie told about how important she felt it was that John get hot meals every day and that she even brought him food in one of Caroline’s baby dishes, with a cover, in order to keep it warm in route. This little story was enough to catch on with any 1960s housewife who was looking for a way to relate to the chic, wealthy heiress, “brainy aristocrat”,<sup>20</sup> and now potential First Lady.<sup>21</sup> As a woman of the 60s, Jackie’s role was to represent what John’s private life was like and it was to seem polished and pampered, yet quaint and relatable. She was to accentuate their

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<sup>19</sup> *Life Magazine* Campaign Article, August 1960, Box 17, Press Files: Releases: 1961: February-July, Series 1.1.2., Pamela Turnure Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, Massachusetts, United States.

<sup>20</sup> *Detroit Free Press* News Clipping, 28 August 1960, Box 17, Press Files: Releases: 1961: February-July, Series 1.1.2., Pamela Turnure Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, Massachusetts, United States.

<sup>21</sup> Campaign News Clipping, 1960, Box 17, Press Files: Releases: 1961: February-July, Series 1.1.2., Pamela Turnure Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, Massachusetts, United States.

wealth and privilege but not to boast. A feature in *Detroit Free Press* in 1960 went on a tour with Jackie of her and John's Georgetown home and described how elegantly it was decorated, crediting Jackie herself as the decorator and expressing admiration of her choices of fine art while maintaining a "home-y" feel. Jackie later dazzled the country with her infamous televised tour of the White House, giving America a glimpse of the style she was bringing into the home of the two youngest individuals to hold it. Shocked that Jackie was on television in the White House with no John in sight, America took to the enchanting First Lady who was willing to break social norms and put on a show with her sensually airy voice and glowing smile. With all that she was credited with and all that she was, Jackie's ultimate goal was recognized as "creating a serene and comfortable background for her husband and bringing up her daughter..." whether that be in Georgetown or in the White House.<sup>22</sup>

As we read and watch the continuous rise and fall of true happiness in Jackie Kennedy's life, is it fair to still consider the existence of Camelot? John was a trial by fire kind of man and while it was clear where he found pleasure, it is questionable whether or where he found happiness. Perhaps it was in his line of work that he was the most pleased, line of work in the same political world that Jackie would come to only tolerate because she came to associate it with all of the troubles in her private life. Why couldn't John be happy with his interesting and beautiful young wife and make America's Camelot real? The truth is that the political sphere is a dirty, merciless place that does nothing but take and give little back in return. It was also well-known that Jackie

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<sup>22</sup> *Detroit Free Press* Campaign News Clipping, 1 September 1960, Box 17, Press Files: Releases: 1961: February-July, Series 1.1.2., Pamela Turnure Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, Massachusetts, United States.

reminded John too much of his late, younger sister, Kathleen. He fell in love with the woman that came to stand in her place in his life. Jackie was witty, charming, the life of any party and the light in any room all while somehow managing to remain mysterious and reserved. John and Kathleen had a close bond as siblings and Jackie embodied all that Kathleen was to him. Joe Kennedy, John's father, also referred to her as such. Joe loved Jackie because she brought out the same playful banter in him and he made it no secret that he saw her as "a substitute" for his late daughter. Subconsciously, John sought to replace Kathleen in a wife, and this was the inevitable downfall to his marriage with Jackie. He loved all of the Kathleen qualities about her, but consequently could not be satisfied by her sexually.<sup>23</sup> John and Jackie shared a strong love, but the communication was broken along the way. Camelot may have found its home with Jackie and John, but it was in a constant state of reconstruction as it would continuously seek to replace the ones it kept losing.

### **Chapter 3: Assassinations & Truth**

It was the end of an era that seemed to have just begun. "My good right arm was my brother Bobby."<sup>24</sup> John F. Kennedy said this about his brother and Attorney General, never being able to predict that their role in politics would cost them both their lives. The front page of every newspaper was plastered with different variations of the same tragic headline, the President of the United States of America had been shot and killed. How

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<sup>23</sup> Barbara Leaming, *Mrs. Kennedy*, 28-29.

<sup>24</sup> Magazine Article, Interview with John F. Kennedy, Box SF64, Subject Files: Kennedy, John F. [Early Files, 1944-1960], Series 1.1.4., Nancy Tuckerman Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, Massachusetts, United States.

does a country, let alone a wife, process and cope with witnessing an event like this? Many prying tabloids would later report that Jackie took to drinking and pills due to post-traumatic stress as a result of her husband's death. But the private actions of a woman who had to remain in the public eye in grief after such a tragedy remain unknown. In a split second, Jackie was dethroned and all of the struggles she faced in her life before this day would seem to lose their importance. When stricken with grief, is it so preposterous to assume that a person would suffer from post-traumatic stress, need medical sedation of some kind, or even consider suicide? The 1960s was not a time that was accepting of mental illness. This added an additional burden, making it even more difficult for Jackie to put forth an image of a strong woman who was healing.<sup>25</sup> Even in his death, she was to represent him. Even in his death, she was not free of living in his shadow.

Not being able to outwardly grieve can drive a person mad. From the public's perspective, the grieving Jackie was observed as a woman who liked to keep busy more than ever before. The paparazzi spent their time capturing photos of her leaving her first home after leaving the White House, a lavish apartment on 1040 Fifth Avenue in New York, and being beside themselves over her mysterious lack of reaction to them.<sup>26</sup> Living day to day trying to avoid a sea of photographers and protect John Jr. and Caroline from the exploitation was hardly the hardest part of Jackie's new life as a widow and former First Lady. It was the late nights, after the children were in bed, that the body numbing loneliness would set in. When the home was still and lifeless, Jackie would often take to

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<sup>25</sup> Stephanie Nolasco, "Jackie Kennedy Onassis Dealt With Suicidal Thoughts Over JFK Assassination", *Fox News*, February 23, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/jackie-kennedy-onassis-dealt-with-suicidal-thoughts-over-jfk-assassination-went-through-tortuous-ordeal-before-her-moms-death-author-claims>.

<sup>26</sup> Kathy McKeon, *Jackie's Girl*, (New York: Gallery Books, 2017), 57-59.

rearranging rooms in her art filled apartment in order to combat the insomnia. She felt the need to move her beautiful pieces from one wall to another or one room to another, especially when she would purchase new ones and often sought the help of her assistants. Sudden bursts of energy at night that were filled with rearranging closets, cabinets and collections were frequent, as told by one of Jackie's personal assistants who was hired on to be her daily aid and to help with the children not long after the assassination.<sup>27</sup> If it was not constant home remodel, it was painting, letter writing, or trips to Cape Cod with the children that kept her in her right mind. Every summer, the entire Kennedy family would retreat to the Cape for a month's worth of horseback riding, tennis, tackle football with the cousins, and lazy days on the beach. This was likely the most normal life would feel for Jackie and especially the Kennedy children in the aftermath of John's assassination. Jackie often entertained while vacationing at the Cape. Some nights were intimate for the family. Joan and Ted Kennedy or Bobby and Ethel Kennedy would arrive with their children and stay late. Other nights could be an all-star attendance with the likes of former defense secretary Robert McNamara, Arthur Schlesinger, Chuck Spalding, and other inner-circle figures of the Kennedy cabinet. These nights brought out true happiness in not just Jackie, but everyone who suffered the same loss. These nights allowed Jackie to visit with the Camelot she so wished had been real and they were a reminder that a time that once seemed so promising was gone forever.<sup>28</sup> Even with these gatherings that filled the summers and made each day a little easier, the Jackie that loved the detail that went into planning a lavish party and to entertain guests of marvelous numbers was gone. Put under a microscope after the assassination, Jackie did not crumble publicly. The

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<sup>27</sup> Kathy McKeon, *Jackie's Girl*, 144-145.

<sup>28</sup> McKeon, *Jackie's Girl*, 131-133.



world was projecting their pain onto a woman who no longer wanted to be a public figure. Yet, her outward emotional strength seemed to help the nation heal as well. Tortured by anger, sadness and a long list of “what ifs”, Jackie still managed to take interviews with those who wanted to tell the story of November 22 and Camelot. Her greatest regret, as stated in an article for *Vanity Fair* by Barbara Leaming, was not collecting herself quick enough to recognize the first gunshot and pulling John down before the second.<sup>29</sup> Vivid memories of Jackie reaching for pieces of John’s head that flew to the back of the motorcade will forever be stamped in America’s mind as not only the day that Camelot died, but the day that paved the way for the tale to be born at all.

Many observers remarked that Bobby Kennedy would come take over as the metaphorical man of the Kennedy house. John was a fallen leader who was shot down when America felt that he still had so much to offer. Could Bobby Kennedy fill his brother’s shoes and bring America back to the kind of country that President Kennedy worked towards? Before Bobby had plans for America, he had plans for his family. Though larger dinner parties were held often at 1040 Fifth Avenue in New York and in the Cape, Bobby made it a point to visit with Jackie and his niece and nephew at least once a week. They ran to him, clung to him, knowing he was the closest thing to their dad they would ever have again. As noticed by those close to Jackie in those few years after the assassination, Jackie leaned on Bobby and he was more than willing to be what she and the children needed, platonically.<sup>30</sup> There was no doubt that Bobby had become a John substitute, and this was especially clear to Jackie’s personal assistant, Kathy

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<sup>29</sup> Barbara Leaming, “The Winter of Her Despair”, *Vanity Fair*, October 2014, <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/society/2014/10/jacqueline-kennedy-jfk-assassination-depression>.

<sup>30</sup> Kathy McKeon, *Jackie’s Girl*, 77.

McKeon, when she would hear Jackie threatening to “tell Uncle Bobby” when the children misbehaved.<sup>31</sup> There was much speculation as to whether their relationship ever became romantic, but there just is not evidence to support such a claim. This does not, however, excuse Bobby from being a serial adulterer against his own wife like his late brother. Jackie and Bobby’s relationship could be best explained as a mutual grieving process. They were feeling the same feelings and one can only imagine how comforting it was for Jackie to know that she had someone who understood the pain in its entirety.

Bobby’s slice of Camelot was an entirely different Kennedy era, the era of the proposed Civil Rights Act that John had plans to implement had finally been signed into law. Even so, America was rupturing into race riots and political turmoil.<sup>32</sup> With racial uprisings in Chicago in 1966 the Detroit race riots in 1967.<sup>33</sup> Bobby had announced his bid for the White House and the rest of the Kennedy family was along for the ride to support him even if it meant stepping back into the same political spotlight that they escaped from after John’s death. Assassinated in the same fashion as his brother on June 6, 1968, Bobby was gone, and America was in disbelief. Jackie, only just beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel of grief, was consumed by tragedy once again. Her focus, however, was not on her own emotions but those of her children, Bobby’s pregnant wife Ethel and Bobby’s ten children. John and Caroline lost another father, and Jackie, in a way, lost another husband. Although Bobby was not truly a replacement for John, his assassination certainly seemed to hurt just as much as it did the first time.

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<sup>31</sup> McKeon, *Jackie’s Girl*, 78.

<sup>32</sup> McKeon, *Jackie’s Girl*, 142.

<sup>33</sup> Will Mack, “1966 Chicago, Illinois Uprisings”, *Black Past*, December 17, 2017, accessed on March 30, 2019, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1966-chicago-illinois-uprising-1966/>.  
“Uprising of 1967”, *Detroit Historical Society*, accessed on March 30, 2019, <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/uprising-1967>.

Living life one day at a time and trying to help her children make sense of a world that wanted their family members dead was an exhausting feat. Suffering from post-traumatic stress of their own, the children learned that they needed to be protected because they likely were not safe. Reacting to the sound of flowers hitting the train window on the way to his uncle's funeral, little John Jr. was startled and exclaimed to Jackie's assistant, Kathy, "Kat, is someone shooting at us? Are they coming to get us next?". Heartbroken by his assumption, she reassured him that they were safe.<sup>34</sup>

Camelot claimed another life and the summers at the Cape that seemed to bring back the spark for Jackie were now full of painful memories that could not be escaped. If Camelot were real, what would the cost be to keep it? When it was not sadness that engulfed her, it was anxiousness and nervousness for Ethel and Bobby's children.<sup>35</sup> She did not paint, and she did not ride her horses. "These are unusual days, and this is no ordinary moment in history" is a phrase that seemed to reflect how the country was feeling in the wake of such an unbelievable act. Governor Ralph M. Paiewonsky spoke these words at the commencement of the Northfield School in East Northfield, Massachusetts. He spoke of Bobby the way many spoke of John after his death, by eluding to what could have been and what Bobby had to offer.<sup>36</sup> Scandal and negativity are forgotten when a man is gunned down, but this imaginary Camelot was losing its credibility, one life at a time.

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<sup>34</sup> McKeon, *Jackie's Girl*, 195.

<sup>35</sup> McKeon, *Jackie's Girl*, 196.

<sup>36</sup> Copy of Commencement Speech by Gov. Ralph M. Paiewonsky, 9 June 1968, Box SF79, Subject Files: Kennedy, Robert F: Memorial: Northfield School Commencement, East Northfield, MA, 9 June 1968, Series 1.1.4., Nancy Tuckerman Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, Massachusetts, United States.

## Chapter 4: Recovery and Onassis

Jackie Kennedy hit a new low in life with the loss of her brother-in-law who had become so central to her and her children's survival. While Bobby was alive, Jackie rekindled a relationship with her old friend, Greek aristocrat Aristotle Onassis. She was keen to keep the relationship from the public eye in an effort to protect Bobby's presidential campaign. But after Bobby was assassinated, Aristotle's arrival to New York could not have been timed better. No one close to Jackie sensed a spark of romance, except for maybe her sister, Lee, whom she told everything. One thing was for sure, plans had been made and Jackie could not be alone any longer.

Once again, Kathy McKeon provides the most interesting insights into how quickly Onassis swept into Jackie's life. She writes, "They relaxed in the living room with after-dinner drinks, then retired to their separate rooms each evening."<sup>37</sup> when describing Onassis' strange yet unremarkable stay in New York before the former First Lady and business tycoon's expeditious wedding. Onassis spent the rest of that summer trying to win over John and Caroline without much success. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1968, *Life Magazine* read "For the Beautiful Queen Jacqueline, Goodby Camelot, Hello Skorprios (Greece)". In this article, Jackie is constantly accused of leaving Camelot behind and being referred to as "the martyred Heroine of Camelot whose image was shattered when Jackie's social secretary broke the news...".<sup>38</sup> A woman who is once again being judged according to the man she has her arm around, Jackie seemed more delighted than she had

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<sup>37</sup> Kathy McKeon, *Jackie's Girl*, 201.

<sup>38</sup> Paul O'Neil, "For the Beautiful Queen Jacqueline, Goodby Camelot, Hello Skorprios", *Life Magazine*, November 1968, 19.

been in years. Paul O'Neil's spread about Jackie's second wedding for *Life* was both hurtful and harmful. On a page that showed Jackie surrounded by family and friends having a joyous time on the Greek island for the special occasion, O'Neil states that a queen is no queen without a king. As a result, O'Neil argued, Jackie had to find a new man to make her important again. He also suggested that this new union made America feel just as distraught as they had when John was assassinated.<sup>39</sup> While it was true that America had an overall negative reaction to Jackie's new marriage, a lot of this negativity stemmed from the societal norms of the 1960s and 1970s which frowned on remarriage. The backlash also focused on the fact that Jackie's second wedding took place less than five years after President Kennedy's assassination.

The *Life* article also suggested that Onassis only married Jackie because he was a collector of celebrities and that she would now be his greatest trophy.<sup>40</sup> To say that Jackie's union to Onassis was a publicity stunt was ridiculous, especially given Jackie's attempts to escape the spotlight after her husband's death. Still, the former Mrs. Kennedy had to foresee that her new marriage would bring a new kind of publicity that would not soon pass. *Life Magazine* wanted nothing more than to bash Jackie's choice and even sought to transform her public identity into that of a villain who absolutely had to have a man and be back at the center of attention, desperate for attention whether it be good or bad. Ironically, Jackie was written about in this light for remarrying after her husband was murdered, yet John was never similarly publicly chastised for his serial infidelity. The American media's assumptions of Jackie's intentions were insensitive and ill-informed. Of course, America hated to see their sweetheart go because every American

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<sup>39</sup> Paul O'Neil, "For the Beautiful Queen Jacqueline, Goodbye Camelot, Hello Scorpios", 20.

<sup>40</sup> O'Neil, "For the Beautiful Queen Jacqueline", 23.

that watched her rise and fall with the Kennedy administration felt like they had a claim to her, as we tend to do with people who live in the spotlight.

Jackie's choice to marry Aristotle Onassis was also a choice to be released from grief. Her need for peace and companionship and the desire to no longer be followed as the national symbol of a grieving widow are what influenced her decision. Onassis was a friend to Jackie and John, and it was a friendship that dated back to the beginning of their marriage. In that way, Onassis provided a level of comfort and understanding that only Bobby Kennedy could give her before. Jackie's own words on the relevance of her new husband to her healing, "Aristotle Onassis rescued me at a moment when my life was engulfed with shadows. He brought me into a world where one could find both happiness and love. We lived through many beautiful experiences together which cannot be forgotten, and for which I will be eternally grateful." She would, however, go on to outlive him as well.

### **Conclusion**

Whether she is studied as a wife, mother or as First Lady, Jackie Kennedy is multi-faceted. She was more than the woman who managed to sweep the most appealing man in Washington off of his feet, a grieving widow or an exhibit for the public. An analysis that places Jackie in the center yields a more complete understanding of the life of one of the most important historical figures of America in the twentieth century. Though Jackie is typically known by the important men that she accompanied throughout her lifetime, she was the center of each of those stories. John may have been Camelot's king, but only because Jackie described him in that light. To properly study Jackie is not

to study the men that created her, but the men she created. Revered as the most fashionable or the most appealing First Lady, Jackie Kennedy was a pioneer woman of American politics, popular culture, social life, and she was truly the puppet master the whole time.

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