



# ASK NOT

The **KENNEDYS** and  
the Women They Destroyed

*New York Times* bestselling author

**MAUREEN CALLAHAN**

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*The Kennedys and the  
Women They Destroyed*

**MAUREEN CALLAHAN**



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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

They were careless people... they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*



## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

**H**istory, to paraphrase the adage, is typically told by the victors. But what of the other side? This book tells the stories of women whose lives were upended by Kennedy men, but whose collective history has never been captured in total. In my attempt to do so, I relied on methods common to nonfiction writers and historians: years spent in archival research; original interviews conducted with surviving family members and friends; preexisting biographies, memoirs, personal journals, and contemporaneous news reports. All informed what I believe are the closest, most accurate approximations of their thoughts and feelings. I would often ask those closest to these women if my assessments sounded fair, and only those agreed-upon conclusions—those thoughts and reactions—are the ones you'll read here. Even the emotional fortress that was Jackie Kennedy Onassis shared her most intimate horrors with historians, relatives, and friends. What these women endured, I learned, is accessible, if only one looks hard enough. My subjectivity is, I believe, no less or more than that of any other historian drawn to their subjects.

## **PROLOGUE**

**T**his book is not ideological or partisan. It's about thirteen women and a piece of American history hiding in plain sight. Kennedy men have been valorized and lionized for nearly a century, but the women they've broken, tormented, raped, murdered, or left for dead have never really been part of their legacy.

They must be. None of this is history. As William Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." The Kennedys remain a powerful and frequently destructive force, both in our politics and our culture. As of this writing, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a prominent conspiracy theorist and anti-vaxxer who has made racist and antisemitic comments, is running for president of the United States. He has raised tens of millions from big donors, almost all based on legacy. He remains unbothered and unquestioned about the circumstances leading to the suicide of his second wife, Mary Richardson Kennedy, in 2012—a fragile woman whom he tormented toward the end of their marriage and in the lead-up to her suicide, cheating on her, cutting off her credit cards and access to cash, trying to forcibly hospitalize her, telling her she'd be "better off dead." He continues to smear her reputation, telling the press in December 2023 that yes, he had flown on the late pedophile Jeffrey Epstein's private plane not once, as he previously claimed, but twice, and that was only because Mary had a "relationship" with Epstein's chief procurer, the convicted child sex trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell—an assertion that several people who knew Mary well told me is impossible, given her character, her morality, and her devout Catholicism. RFK Jr. also, incredibly, has been given a huge pass for his false accusation that the savage 1975 sexual assault and murder of fifteen-year-old Martha Moxley was committed not by his once-convicted cousin Michael Skakel but by two teenagers from the Bronx, one Black, one mixed-race—teenagers he publicly named, endangering their lives. RFK Jr. wrote that one of the teens was "obsessed" with Martha's "beautiful blonde hair" and that both young men decided to go "caveman" on her.

Imagine anyone but a Kennedy leveling such racist, baseless accusations. The media would, rightly, be aflame with indignation. Yet all these decades later, the Kennedys benefit from a perverse double standard—in the press, in the justice system, and in the court of public opinion.

It's a double standard that is clearest and most insidious when it comes to the crimes that Kennedy men have committed against women and young girls. What was done to Mary and Martha are only two recent examples. Any victims who dare to fight back will find themselves confronting the awesome power of the Kennedy machine, one that recasts any woman, no matter how wealthy or famous or powerful, as crazy, spiteful, vengeful; a drug addict, a viper, a seductress. Whatever grievous harm a Kennedy man may have done to her, the message remains clear: She was asking for it. It was her fault.

Thus Camelot, that fairy tale of Kennedy greatness and noble men, still stands.

The late Ted Kennedy, vaunted "Lion of the Senate," drove off a bridge and left a twenty-nine-year-old woman to die in three feet of water—his passenger Mary Jo Kopechne, whose life

could have been saved. Yet that criminal act has successfully been transformed into “Ted’s tragedy,” an awful event that unfairly kept him from ever becoming president of the United States. Ted Kennedy served out the rest of his life in Congress and was given a statesman’s funeral with wall-to-wall news coverage, while Kopechne’s name was barely mentioned. He was memorialized by Ellen R. Malcolm, the founder of EMILY’s List, as “a true champion for women.” Cecile Richards, then-president of Planned Parenthood, lauded him as “a true champion of women’s health and rights.” Neither woman mentioned Mary Jo Kopechne.

This well-known drunk and serial sexual assaulter has been the glorified subject of two recent biographies, both by men: a two-volume treatment hyperbolically titled *Catching the Wind* and *Against the Wind*, respectively, by prize-winning author Neal Gabler, and *Ted Kennedy: A Life*, by prize-winning historian John A. Farrell. The latter describes Kopechne as “attractive but not gorgeous”—that observation, why?—before noting that she had the bad luck to be in a vehicle that passively “left the bridge,” as if, like the car in Stephen King’s *Christine*, it had a mind of its own. As if that car hadn’t been driven by a drunken Ted Kennedy, his driver’s license expired. As if Ted hadn’t sped down an unlit dirt road and careened off a small bridge with such force the car flipped and landed on its roof, the windshield smashed in.

Ted escaped. He left Mary Jo in that car upside down, forced to crane her neck at an awkward, painful angle as she struggled to breathe through a tiny pocket of air, surrounded by dark water, waiting for help that never came.

After the accident, guess who was at fault? Not Ted but his victim, Mary Jo, for being a single woman in this married man’s car late at night.

The Kennedys have a way of quashing anything or anyone—a book, a miniseries, an interview—that contradicts their golden image. They typically do this through power or payoffs. Caroline Kennedy and Maria Shriver personally lobbied the History Channel to kill *The Kennedys*, a 2011 miniseries that one family loyalist called “vindictive” and “malicious” in the *New York Times*, and were successful.

In one of the saddest ironies, even the most powerful Kennedy women would like this history erased. And such efforts have allowed this lie, this cancer in the American body politic, to further metastasize. It’s time to do right by the women and girls—and ourselves—by excising it.



Their stories are not told chronologically. Some women are paired throughout and some stand alone, but their unique experiences resonate in ways that link them across twentieth- and twenty-first-century America politically, historically, culturally, and socially. Some—such as Jackie Kennedy Onassis, whose life progressed along the path of modern American feminism, going from high-society debutante to First Lady to trophy wife to sexually liberated New York City career woman—will reappear; other girls and women have shorter stories, shorter lives.

Through deep reporting and interviews with many who have never spoken before, this book seeks to understand what being a woman among Kennedy men felt like over the years. I have taken some creative license here, but each of these stories is anchored by years of research. Many of these women are complicated; they, too, were attracted to money, fame, power—and that’s okay. We have made great strides in realizing that few girls and women ever make perfect victims. No one in these pages, despite what the Kennedys might have you think, deserved what happened to them. Not one deserves the stains on their legacies wrought, with great deliberation

and zero remorse, by the Kennedys. This book is intended as a corrective, a new take on some women we think we know and some we've never really met, neither in full nor in fact.

Think about this: Jacqueline Kennedy, a thirty-four-year-old widow and mother who held the nation together after narrowly escaping the assassin's bullets that killed her husband—who signaled to the world that America would not only survive this trauma but emerge stronger—was, upon her remarriage five years later, castigated as a whore who had sold herself to the highest bidder. That mantle hung over Jackie's fascinating, difficult, creative, controversial life until the day she died. A man would never have been so denigrated. What happened to Jackie would be unthinkable today.



The Kennedys remain very much with us. But what is the Kennedy legacy, really? How should we define it? Do the Kennedys deserve to remain a power center in American life and politics? Or should we relegate them to their inglorious past? If not, what should we now demand of any Kennedy who seeks power?

We can answer only by fully reckoning with how the Kennedys have brutalized women throughout generations. The pattern originates with the ruthless patriarch, Joseph P. Kennedy Sr., a financially and sexually rapacious man who fathered nine children. His path to power would be through his sons; his daughters were bred for marriage and babies, worthless as anything else in his eyes. Ever the overachiever, Joe committed two original sins. The first was political, and it would keep him from ever becoming president: his open admiration, as United States ambassador to the United Kingdom, of Adolf Hitler and his bloodless acceptance of the looming death of Western democracy. That was followed by his personal original sin: the unthinkable act he committed against his beautiful young daughter Rosemary, who suffered a fate worse than death. These are the poisonous roots from which all Kennedy misogyny and violence—psychological, physical, political, and personal—has flourished.

This book's title comes from the most famous line of John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you..."

"Ask not" has also forever been an admonition to women in the Kennedy sphere: Ask no questions. Don't ask for help or respect, for fairness or justice.

This book takes that as a dare. Ask not?

Let's.

—January 2024

**PART ONE**

**ICONS**

## **CAROLYN BESSETTE**

**T**he minute she said yes, she regretted it.

Carolyn could say that about so much of her life recently, but nothing felt quite like this. She was going against her gut, trying to keep her husband happy—really, trying to keep up appearances, their marriage at its most tenuous—by agreeing to fly with him in the small plane he was still learning to pilot, to a Kennedy wedding on the Cape. His flying was a point of pride for him and fear for her.

“I don’t trust him.”

Carolyn said this to family members, friends, the waitress at their favorite restaurant in Martha’s Vineyard. She didn’t think her husband had the patience, the diligence, the attention span, and, really, the humility to be a good pilot. To know when he shouldn’t get in the air. He was still a student, but he had so much hubris. He didn’t take his training seriously. He hadn’t banked nearly the hours in the air, in daylight and at night, to pilot alone. He would break the rules, sneak in solo flights when he was supposed to have an instructor fly with him, but not one person admonished him or threatened to take away his training certificate. Nope, it was just John being a Kennedy, a rogue and rebel like his father, risk in his blood.

“To Flight Safety Academy, the bravest people in aviation,” John wrote to his instructors, “because people will only care where I got my training if I crash.”

John thought it was funny. Carolyn did not. John, unlike Carolyn, thought there was no way he’d ever have an accident—even though he’d had a cast on his ankle for the past six weeks, having broken it in crash-landing a contraption called “the flying lawnmower.” He’d needed surgery on the ankle. John’s doctor had just removed the cast the day before, and even though John needed a cane to walk and would need months of physical therapy, he swore the doctor had cleared him to fly.

Not likely. But John was so confident. Overconfident, as usual.

Carolyn couldn’t fully blame him. No one said no to John F. Kennedy Jr., heir to Camelot, the only living son of the beloved slain president, with movie star looks and charm to match. “America’s Prince,” the media called him, and whenever John wanted to do something—to become a lawyer, start a magazine—hell, run for president of the United States, everyone knew that was coming—the answer was always yes. Sure, yes, of course Mr. Kennedy, and you know what? Let’s start you at the top of your field.

Sometimes, Carolyn would say no to John just to say no, to habituate him to real life. It always stunned him. When they first started dating seriously—after he had ghosted Carolyn, the formerly accommodating, easygoing Carolyn of a few years before—she recalibrated. She suddenly wasn’t so available. She wasn’t so understanding of his lateness, forgetfulness, entitlement. She was forcing him to realize that other people were important, too.

She stood him up once. This was before everyone had cell phones, no way for her to reach

John F. Kennedy Jr. as he sat in a darkening Broadway theater, all eyes on him and the empty seat next to him, to say she had to work late. Carolyn expected John to be furious with her, but it only made him want her more.

And Carolyn realized her superpower. She became the only woman in the world to tell JFK Jr.: *No, not okay, don't behave like that, I won't put up with it, say you're sorry, do better.*

*Don't take me for granted.*

And he got off on it. There was a picture that went around when they were going public, Carolyn on a boat in a thong bikini, John bent down in front of her, helping her into a wrap. That was their dynamic: Carolyn was the dominant, John the submissive. He liked to be bossed around by the women in his life. And Carolyn liked bossing him around. She got off on denigrating him, calling him a “fag” in front of her fashion friends, taunting him with the male model she kept on the back burner, her explosive temper keeping him unsure and on edge.

She should have known that her power over him would be fleeting.

---

He's under so much pressure, Carolyn's sister said.

It was 1997, and John's magazine, *George*, barely two years old, had gone from being one of the most successful launches in industry history to a spectacular failure, teetering on the brink of insolvency. Worse, no one read it.

John, as editor-in-chief and face of the magazine, not only didn't have the esteem of his publishing peers—he was a laughingstock, called the worst thing anyone could call him: Dumb.

It was a label that had plagued him since he failed the bar exam twice in his twenties—an exam he never wanted to take, forced by his mother to pursue a respectable career in law—tabloid headlines all over New York City screaming some variation of the same headline: “THE HUNK FLUNKS!”

When he did finally pass, his mother having arranged special circumstances for his third test and the esteemed Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau arranging a plum position for him, John's new colleagues were unimpressed. John would take his lunch hour shirtless in the park, playing football. His first case was prosecuting a robber who had fallen asleep while committing the act and was awakened by the cops.

JFK Jr., Himbo. He was painfully aware of his reputation. But he didn't seem to realize how his narcissism played into it.

*George*, meant to upend that image, was instead a failure on three fronts: commercially, critically, and as an intended triumph of public relations—one meant to give JFK Jr. the gravitas for a run for governor of New York or US Senate.

The most respected satirical publication of the age had, within months of *George's* launch, put John on their cover, chin resting on hand, brow furrowed as if in serious contemplation. The headline: “WHAT WILL HE THINK OF NEXT?”

The piece that ran in *Spy* magazine mocked his professional failures, beginning with his first business idea—a quixotic attempt to sell handmade kayaks that would somehow be mass-produced. That was followed by an ill-thought-out rent-a-dog scheme, inspired by the people who stopped John all the time when he was walking his own dog. Surely there would be a market, right?

It took Matt Berman, his business partner, to explain. *John*, he said, *they're probably not*

*stopping you because of your dog.*

John had to concede: Matt had a point. It was on to the next idea, one far more glamorous, high-profile, and unexpected—a magazine!

How hard, he asked, could it be?

John and Matt enrolled in a two-day course called “How to Start Your Own Magazine,” and despite their teacher’s warnings—most start-ups fail, and magazines about religion and politics are surefire losers—John decided to become the founder and editor-in-chief of a magazine that would mix politics and pop culture.

*How* was unclear. But no one—not his mother, not his longtime friend Jann Wenner, the founder and editor-in-chief of *Rolling Stone*, and certainly not Carolyn—could talk him out of it.

At his mother’s request, her friend Joe Armstrong, a former ABC News exec and magazine publisher, tried to offer John advice. Go slow, Joe said. Keep your plans to yourself. Learn the answer to every possible question you could get in a pitch meeting.

John sailed into those meetings without due diligence and met headwinds he’d never experienced or expected. One executive couldn’t believe John’s gall in asking for a \$20 million investment without being able to answer the most basic stuff. Such as:

Who was the magazine’s audience? What was the brand identity? Who would John hire to write? What stories would the magazine break? Who would make ideal profile subjects? Why would their as-yet-unnamed magazine be successful when political magazines, by definition, were small and lucky to break even? How would they attract advertisers once, let’s face it, the novelty of being associated with JFK Jr. wore off?

Carolyn knew all too well about that novelty wearing off.

John was like *Seinfeld*’s Bubble Boy, so coddled and spoiled that he didn’t know what he sounded like to others. He could be prickly and impatient and something of a brat, really. John didn’t live in the real world and never had; he lived on Planet Kennedy, where he was king, and his main experience was a feedback loop of awe at his looks, his lineage, his fame, his *politeness*.

He’s so down-to-earth—give him a gold star! That was the line on John, from waitresses to movie stars, paparazzi to presidents. But he wasn’t down-to-earth, not really. Anyone who knew him behind closed doors knew that.

Even his close friend Steve Gillon, an eminent historian, gave up trying to educate John on the realities of the Vietnam War and his father’s backroom decision to escalate troop levels rather than, as post-assassination myth had it, end American involvement.

Gillon had taught John, who’d previously failed a Vietnam seminar, at Brown. Still, Gillon was shocked when John informed him that he, as the president’s son, knew more about the war. The day after a tepid debate that saw Gillon stand down, John informed his former professor that one of his father’s prime Vietnam advisers, his secretary of defense, had weighed in.

“I talked to Bob McNamara last night,” John said, “and he said you are completely wrong.”

Gillon let it slide. What was the point?

John didn’t know what he didn’t know and was sure, as throughout his life, that others would take care of the details. So what if he was planning a political magazine devoid of a political point of view? That, he thought, would be its strength.

His mother, herself now a book editor, was doubtful.

“John,” Jackie asked, “is it going to be the *Mad* magazine of politics?”

By which she meant: Are people going to laugh at it? At you?



“John has never shown the slightest interest in the magazine business before,” Jackie told the journalist Ed Klein. “And he has no experience in journalism.”

But her skepticism was John’s fuel. No one doubted Jackie’s intellect, or his sister Caroline’s, and certainly not his father’s. Why couldn’t he be taken as seriously? Carolyn had tried to tell him: If that’s what you want, treat other people and things with the respect you crave.

But John’s habit of being careless with his own things and those of others was his defining character trait. Responsibilities were for other people, not him. He rode around the city on his bicycle and never locked it up. He spent thousands of dollars replacing bike after bike.

When it came to his public image, however, John was nowhere near as thoughtless. He was always in the tabloids with his shirt off, running out of the surf or playing touch football in Central Park, displaying his perfectly sculpted body. The truth was that John was a terrible athlete, totally uncoordinated. But he looked the part.

At the gym—any gym—he’d strip off his towel after showering and slowly, pointedly examine his genitals. This was well before the era of smartphones and social media, but John’s peacocking was innate: he presented himself as just another guy—no at-home gym to avoid the hoi polloi, no request for a private shower or bathroom—yet he was different, special, a rare specimen even among the protected class.

No one would ever have guessed he’d taken so many risks, had come close to death so many times in his teens and twenties. No one would have believed that the kind, humble, gorgeous John Kennedy had a habit of putting others in danger, too—most often his closest friends and girlfriends. Speeding, swimming too far out into the ocean, driving recklessly onto sidewalks or while high on pot, skiing in whiteout conditions, acting like an expert in all sports when really he was just an amateur—there was little John wouldn’t dare, and he bullied almost everyone in his life to be as wild as he was.

He’d nearly killed his first serious girlfriend, Christina, at least three times. John had met her in high school. Christina was part of his social set yet she was mesmerized by John’s mother, by the palatial apartment at 1040 Fifth Avenue, by the gravitational pull this awkward-yet-beautiful boy exerted and the unbelievable notion that *he* had chosen *her*. His emotional lability added an exquisite tension to their romance.

John’s moods could darken instantaneously, without warning. *Don’t talk to my mother, why won’t you walk with me in torrential rain, call her Mrs. Onassis, my ex means nothing to me.*

*Her? She’s just some stupid actress.*

*I’ve been bossed around by too many women.*

*If you won’t ski with me we’ll have to break up.*

*When I die, I want it to be sudden. Fast. Boom.*

---

Easter 1986. John’s aunt Lee had invited them to Acapulco, but John had another idea: roughing it in Jamaica and kayaking in the open sea.

John knew nothing about kayaking in the open sea. Neither did Christina, and this idea terrified her. She had badly broken her foot in February, and after a six-hour operation—his cousin Anthony by her bedside all night, John sending flowers but otherwise unable to tear himself away from whatever he was doing—her doctor had warned her: Nothing extreme. A shower, a bath, a gentle swim in a pool, nothing more. She was still on crutches. Kayaking was

against doctor's orders. John hadn't been able to bring himself to even look at Christina's foot, let alone hear about her pain. Telling other people to "suck it up" was his way of avoiding what made him uncomfortable.

Even Jackie had tried to encourage Christina not to go. She told her about hurting her ankle years back, when she was engaged to Jack and playing touch football, trying to fit in with all those rambunctious Kennedys. "That was the last time," Jackie said.

But as was John's way, he pushed and pushed Christina till he got what he wanted, and off to Jamaica they went.

"Nothing to be afraid of," he told her.

Sure enough, before they knew it, John and Christina were swept out to sea, the strong current pushing them quickly toward a giant boulder. Christina's poor foot would be broken again. Their kayak was about to split apart. John had forgotten to pack life jackets and the spray skirts that would keep water out of the kayak.

They were going to die.

And then, suddenly, a rogue wave. At the very last second they were lifted up and over the boulder, and when it was over, with both of them pushed to a beachhead and marooned, Christina sat in shock while John paced and muttered aloud to himself: "*Don't tell Mummy. Don't tell Mummy.*"

So much for the fearless John Kennedy.

The weird thing was the look in his eyes, like he was turned on. Dying, getting that close to it, was a high for him. No wonder the other near misses—almost smashing into a forty-nine-foot-long whale in Baja or kayaking straight toward the Staten Island Ferry or swimming far out into the ocean, way past shore—hadn't stopped him. If anything, they electrified him.

If he wanted to keep risking his life, fine. But why was he so insistent on risking Christina's? Why did he have to pressure other people into going along with his crazy ideas? Christina was a house cat, a girl who loved books and the theater. She was no athlete. But John told her: If she wanted to be his girlfriend, she had to do all the things he loved to do. Otherwise it would never work.

She tried. After all, there were any number of girls, a lot of them famous and glamorous and sexier and more beautiful than she, waiting in line to date JFK Jr. Even after John had asked her to share an apartment for a summer in DC, Christina had her misgivings. One day she made a list of what she didn't like about John:

*He doesn't always tell me what his plans are.*

*He can be tardy. He is a slob.*

*He is spoiled. He gets annoyed when he misplaces things and expects me to find them.*

But he had floated the idea of marriage. He teased Christina with a story about his recent visit to his mother, at her weekend home in New Jersey, and how she was so convinced John would propose that, John said, "she got some things out of the safe."

"What things?" Christina asked.

"Her engagement ring."

Would that proposal ever come?

---

After that near miss and their crash-landing on the beach, Christina refused to get back in the

kayak. She and John had come upon a group of fishermen who had offered to take them to the mainland the next morning, to share their food for dinner. Christina, for a moment, allowed herself to calm down. It would be okay.

No, John said. They would kayak back that night.

Christina was near tears. John was stubborn enough to go without her and leave her alone with these strange men.

“What if a wave hits us?” she asked John. “What if we capsize? I can’t swim in that.”

John brushed her off. “It’s our best shot,” he said.

What were they, in an action movie? Their best shot was waiting for these experienced fishermen who knew this water to sail them back. “No way we’ll wreck,” John said. “I know I can turn the ’yak.”

So off they went, exhausted and traumatized. John pushed off using his paddle, steering and counting seconds between wave breaks, but the swells were so much bigger than John had anticipated. The current was so strong. They were losing control.

Suddenly, they were underwater. Christina felt extreme pressure; the brace on her leg was going to burst. She opened her eyes and found herself looking up at a blurry ray of sunshine penetrating the deep. They must have been fifteen feet down. *This is it*, Christina thought. *We are going to die.*

Her paddle was swept right out of her hand. She watched it float away. Her crutches were gone, too. The weight on her bones was like concrete. Somehow, miraculously, the kayak spun and broke the surface, only to be pushed underwater by another sudden wave, then back up again. John was screaming instructions.

*Bail! Bail! Find the bailer now!*

The kayak was taking on water. Christina was crying.

“There is no bailer, John!” she exclaimed. “How could you not pack a bailer? We’re in the goddamn ocean!”

“Fuck, use anything! Use your hands!”

Her hands?!

She looked over at John, who was using a cotton baseball cap.

Later, years after his death, Christina was still unable to remember how they ever survived. When they finally reached land, John tied up the boat like nothing had happened. Christina was shaking.

“John,” she said. “We could have died.”

“Yeah, Chief,” he said. “But what a way to go.”

---

John had given Christina valuable information that day: He had a death wish. It was strong, in his DNA. She didn’t know if he was even aware of it, and she couldn’t allow herself to fully admit it to herself. John could be so tender with her, so sensitive. That was the John she could never leave. And so disasters kept happening.

On Martha’s Vineyard, John took Christina sailing one raw February night to a remote island. They camped at night and the next morning Christina saw the sign: “DANGER.”

He had brought them to a navy bombing test site.

When Jackie found out, she was furious. “You were with *Christina*,” she kept saying to John.

But nothing landed with him, not even his mother's anger. And lo and behold, later that very afternoon, John insisted Christina get on top of a Jeep while he spun it around at high speed, just for kicks.

Christina hadn't planned for this.

She was wearing a brand-new camel coat she'd just bought at Bergdorf's specifically for this weekend. It was the last one left, two sizes too big and way too expensive, but Christina loved it. Jackie would approve, and she wanted to impress Jackie—no longer Mrs. Onassis to her now. This was not the stuff of a genteel weekend with the refined Jackie O.

"I can't," Christina said.

John pushed. He leveraged her fear that this would be their last time together, having told her that he needed to see other women before he married her, then telling her that she was too good for him, that she had a calling—acting—and he did not, and that he needed to find direction on his own. Alone. But then she would hear and read about the movie star he was seeing, Daryl. John and Daryl were all over the tabloids.

But he'd always come back to Christina and sweep her off somewhere glamorous and talk about baby names.

"Flynn Kennedy," he said to her. "It's got a good ring. What do you think of Flynn?"

How could Christina say no to John in this moment? She wanted to but she couldn't. After all his hemming and hawing, his push-pull with her, he was once again talking marriage and babies.

*This will only work if you do the things I want.*

And so John lifted her up in her brand-new camel coat and put her on the roof of the Jeep and revved the engine, spinning it around, faster and faster, Christina laughing and clinging on for dear life.



He never really broke up with her. One of their last times together, on the Vineyard, John waxed rhapsodic about birds.

*Hawks mate beyond life, he told her. When the male finds his female, he flies in circles around her until he locks his talon in hers and they lock in a death spiral, crashing to the ground.*

Christina was sure he had made that up. True or not, it didn't really matter. John was telling her something else: *I'm too dangerous for you. For any woman, really.*



The line on John was short and spiky: *Momma's boy*. He did whatever Jackie told him: He gave up the dream he shared with Christina, acting, because his mother was grooming him for politics. Then he became a lawyer, but this bored him, and anyway John, with his ADHD and constant need for physical excitement, was unsuited for it. He drifted and dated a lot but everyone knew he would only marry a woman his mother approved of. Actresses, for many reasons, did not meet with Jackie's approval.

Daryl Hannah, whom John was seeing while still with Christina, was a movie star. Nothing softened Jackie's stance. It didn't matter that Daryl came from real money, or that the director of her latest blockbuster was married to Jackie's sister Lee, or that her family had deep connections