



“You Give Me Strength”

Date: 1963-12-02

Conversation: K6312-01-24

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Jacqueline B. Kennedy

Start Time: 14:42

Duration: 02:02

Place: Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: In their first recorded conversation on the Johnson White House tapes, President Johnson spoke with former first lady Jacqueline B. “Jackie” Kennedy ten days after the assassination of President John F. “Jack” Kennedy.

Jacqueline B. “Jackie” Kennedy: Mr. President?

President Johnson: I just wanted you to know you are loved and . . . by so many and so much. I’m one of them.

Kennedy: Oh, Mr. President. I tried—I didn’t *dare* bother you again—but I got [Kenneth P.] Kenny O’Donnell over here to give you a message if he ever saw you. Did he give it to you yet?

President Johnson: No.

Kennedy: About my letter?

President Johnson: No.

Kennedy: That was waiting for me last night?

President Johnson: Listen, sweetie, now the first thing you got to learn . . . you got some things to learn, and one of them is that you don’t bother me. [*Kennedy chuckles.*] You give me strength.

Kennedy: But I wasn’t going to send you even one more letter. And I was just scared you’d answer it.

President Johnson: [*speaking over Kennedy*] Don’t send me anything. Don’t send me anything. You just come over and put your arm around me; that’s all you do. When you haven’t got anything else to do, let’s take a walk. Let’s walk around the backyard—

Kennedy: Oh!

President Johnson: —and just let me tell you how much you mean to all of us, and how we can carry on if you give us a little strength.

Kennedy: But you know what I wanted to say to you about that letter? I *know* how rare a letter is in a president's handwriting. Do you know that I've got more in your handwriting than I do in Jack's now?

President Johnson: Oh . . . what—well . . .

Kennedy: And for you to write it at this time and then to send me that thing today of, you know, your Cape [Kennedy] announcement and everything.

President Johnson: I want you to just know this: that I told my mama a long time ago, when everybody else gave up about my election in '48—

Kennedy: Yes?

President Johnson: —my mother and my wife and my sisters—and you females got a lot of courage that we men don't have. And so we have to rely on you and depend on you, and you got something to do. You got the President relying on you, and this is not the first one you had. So there are not many women you know running around with a good many presidents. So you just [*Kennedy laughs*—you just bear that in mind: you got the biggest job of your life.

Kennedy: “She ran around with two presidents.” That's what they'll say about me. [*Both laugh.*] OK, anytime.

President Johnson: [*Makes kissing sounds.*] Good-bye, darling.

Kennedy: Thank you for calling, Mr. President.

President Johnson: Bye, sweetie.

Kennedy: Good-bye.

President Johnson: Do come by.

Kennedy: I will.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: ““Lyndon Johnson and Jacqueline Kennedy on 2 December 1963,” Tape K6312.01, PNO 24, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [The Kennedy Assassination and the Transfer of Power, vol. 2, ed. Robert David Johnson and David Shreve] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014—). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/9020019>

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Full information about this conversation: ["You Give Me Strength"](#)