



Instant Classic

REVIEWED BY CARYN JAMES

Mona Lisa in Camelot

How Jacqueline Kennedy and da Vinci's Masterpiece Charmed and Captivated a Nation
by Margaret Leslie Davis

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JACQUELINE Kennedy never pandered to the American public. That attitude might cause her to be labeled elitist today, but in the vastly different, not-so-distant years when she was first lady, she was adored for her elegance and artistic taste. Davis's lively, behind-the-scenes slice of Kennedy history describes Jackie's role in orchestrating the 1963 exhibition of the *Mona Lisa* at the National Gallery of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was arranged as a personal loan from the Louvre to the Kennedys. The story takes us through delicate negotiations, which began with a whisper from

Jackie to French culture minister André Malraux while he was visiting Washington, where she had honored him with an impeccably sophisticated state dinner (she wore Dior; they drank Dom Perignon).

Davis creates vivid portraits of John Walker, director of the National Gallery, and Madeleine Hours, of the Louvre's scientific lab; Hours thought that sending Leonardo da Vinci's fragile masterpiece across the Atlantic was a terrible idea. She and Walker fretted over every detail, especially transportation (it seemed safer to send the painting by sea than by air, but what if the ship sank?) and security (surveillance cameras were primitive). Jackie would nudge things along when necessary, with a personal call or an irresistibly charming note.

With her astute sense of symbolism and public relations, Jackie understood the importance of the deal. It would, as Davis says, "lift the image of America abroad," proving we were not a nation of yahoos. And it would enhance our country's appreciation of great art; the crowds who flowed past the *Mona Lisa*, almost two million strong, included many people who had never visited a museum before.

Davis captures the breathless approach that newspapers and magazines of the day brought to the story, sometimes sounding a bit awestruck herself. But the book is also a potent reminder of how effectively Jackie Kennedy championed the arts, how shrewdly she played her role as first lady and how far away her cultural Camelot now seems.

Mona Lisa in Camelot (\$24.95), out in November, can be preordered at amazon.com and bn.com.

CARYN JAMES, formerly a film and culture critic at the *New York Times*, is working on two nonfiction books. She is the author of *What Caroline Knew*.

by our

CONTRIBUTORS



1 THE SHINIEST JEWEL

by Marian Henley (SPRINGBOARD)

This memoir, in graphic-novel style, is a moving and funny look at romance and parenting. On the cusp of 50, the commitment-fearing author questions why she has yet to marry the wonderful man she has dated for seven years; also, her desire to adopt a child overwhelms her. By the end, the family comes together—better late than never.

2 GOLDENGROVE

by Francine Prose (HARPER)

The life of a 13-year-old girl named Nico is transformed by tragedy when her college-bound sister, Margaret, drowns in a lake. At the same time, Nico is drawn into a confusing, sexually charged relationship with her sister's boyfriend. Prose long ago proved herself a master of satire; in her latest novel, she's equally adept at plumbing the depths of adolescent grief.

3 I SEE YOU EVERYWHERE

by Julia Glass (PANTHEON)

The complex bond between sisters is the focus of Glass's third novel, which follows the Jardines—sensible Louisa and the younger, charismatic Clem—over 25 years. Told in their alternating voices, the complicated relationship is filled with resentment, as when Louisa seethes enviously over Clem's role as "devil-may-care adventuress." This is a story of the exacting, often painful toll of familial love. —C.C.

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