



# **Kick Kennedy: The Charmed Life and Tragic Death of the Favorite Kennedy Daughter**

*Barbara Leaming*

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Kathleen 'Kick' Kennedy was the incandescent life-force of the fabled Kennedy family, her father's acknowledged 'favorite of all the children' and her brother Jack's 'psychological twin.' She was the Kennedy of Kennedys, sure of her privilege, magnetically charming and somehow not quite like anyone else on whatever stage she happened to grace.

The daughter of the American ambassador to the Court of St. James's, Kick swept into Britain's aristocracy like a fresh wind on a sweltering summer day. In a decaying world where everything was based on stultifying sameness and similarity, she was gloriously, exhilaratingly different. Kick was the girl whom all the boys fell in love with, the girl who remained painfully out of reach for most of them.

To Kick, everything about this life was fun and amusing--until suddenly it was not. For this is also a story of how a girl like Kick, a girl who had everything, a girl who seemed made for happiness, confronted crushing sadness. Willing to pay the price for choosing the love she wanted, she would have to face the consequences of forsaking much that was dear to her.

## Kick Kennedy: The Charmed Life and Tragic Death of the Favorite Kennedy Daughter Details

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# **From Reader Review Kick Kennedy: The Charmed Life and Tragic Death of the Favorite Kennedy Daughter for online ebook**

## **Gina says**

"Kick" Kennedy is the often times forgotten daughter of "American royalty" Joseph Kennedy and Rose Kennedy. Kathleen "Kick" Kennedy Cavendish was, as you might expect, born in Massachusetts in 1920, the 4th child of the Kennedy clan. She was especially close to her favorite brother, John, who would one day be U.S. President.

However, this book focuses more on her time in England during WWII. Her father was appointed Ambassador to the United Kingdom, and there Kick came into her own. She was named "Debutante of 1938" there, and made many lifelong friends. It is quite sad that her lifetime was short as she was a brilliant, if little known, member of the Kennedy family.

In 1939, war was on the horizon and the Kennedys returned to the US, despite Kick's pleas to remain in the UK. Her father thought it was much too dangerous. In 1943, she found a way back, in service to the Red Cross. Having gained her independence from her family, she also began to pull away from their strict Catholic beliefs.

While in the UK, she met and married her first husband, Lord Hartington, in 1944. He was killed by a sniper while in service in Belgium only 4 months into their marriage. Eventually, she met and fell in love with the 8th Earl Fitzwilliam. As he was in the process of divorcing his wife, the Kennedy family was greatly distressed as this went against their Catholic beliefs. Her mother threatened to disown her and cut her off financially if she continued the relationship.

Upon learning that her father would be traveling to Paris, Kick decided to meet him there to plea for his support with regard to her desire to marry again. On May 13, 1948, she and Fitzwilliam were traveling to Paris when their plane encountered a storm and eventually crashed, killing them.

In a final act, Rose Kennedy refused to attend her daughter's funeral. Her father, however, attended.

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## **Janice says**

A bunch of name dropping about someone who aspired to be British hierarchy and had a tragic death

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## **Cheri says**

While this is a good biography of Kathleen "Kick" Kennedy, the more interesting aspect, for me, was reading about daily life in England, during a time of so much change, historically, politically, and socially.

It shouldn't be surprising to anyone that Kick was drawn into the world of the aristocracy, she was, after all,

a Kennedy. Between her family connections and the dreams of an 18 year old girl involving dukes and duchesses, castles and a titles, an entitled life, a titled life in England became her new dream.

Torn between her family in the states, the object of her heart's desire in England, her Catholic beliefs and his Protestant upbringing, Kick Kennedy's story made for a quick and captivating read.

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### **Myrna says**

This non-fiction book chronicles Kathleen "Kick" Kennedy's life from 1938-1948. The author did an outstanding job researching Kick's love of Britain, love life, religious conflicts, politics of the time, WWII, and other personal challenges. Ultimately, it's a tragic coming of age tale. This is a sad, sad story. I wonder what could have been....should have been....we will never know. Highly recommended in hardcover for the pictures and for WWII and Kennedy aficionados.

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### **Rarity Manor says**

Interesting although tedious at times account of an ambitious social climber. If there was any depth to this young woman, the author failed to give examples. It appears that Kathleen Kennedy was determined to live in one of the great houses of Britain. After the Cavendish heir was killed, she moved on to a Fitzwilliam. Had she lived, she would've seen all the wasteful excess of that aristocracy she longed to dominate disappear before her eyes.

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### **Jennifer etheridge says**

The book begins with an unnamed source whose identity isn't revealed until the final pages. Leaming chronicles a changing Britain through World War II and its immediate aftermath, as the country's mood changed from isolationism and appeasement—in line with the position favored by Ambassador Joseph Kennedy—to a patriotic engagement with the Nazis, which found many sons of the British aristocracy serving and dying in the war, to an aftermath that saw both Churchill and the aristocracy challenged by a populist surge. This book mainly examines the romance between a feisty debutante and Billy Cavendish, heir to a prestigious dukedom. Marrying Billy would give Kick an identity, wealth, and power independent of her family, but it would also mean crossing her family by marrying outside the Catholic Church. True love weathered those challenges, but the war ended Billy's life a month after they wed, The young widow tried to figure out her life without becoming a duchess (a future she seemed to miss as much or more than her late husband), she made a surprising choice that would further alienate her family and result in her early death. The most beautiful, passionate and spontaneous of all the Kennedy children. Born to wealth and power in Boston, she defied her rigid, loveless and unforgiving mother to marry an English aristocrat -- only to lose him in the carnage of World War II. After the war, Kick drifted aimlessly for a time, sleep walking through elegant London parties until fate threw her in the path of a dark, divorced nobleman even more desirable than her late husband. Scandal resulted, and in the flight to freedom Kick lost her life. It was a tragic accident that hinted at years of heartbreak to come for the glamorous Kennedy clan. But Kick's story is fascinating, spell-binding and true!

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### **Jill Meyer says**

Barbara Leaming tends to write good biographies, but this one, "Kick Kennedy: The Charmed Life and Tragic Death of the Favorite Kennedy Daughter", is not particularly good. Leaming begins her bio in the late 1930's when Kick has moved to London with her family. Her father, Joseph Kennedy, had been appointed Ambassador to the Court of St James, and the family is moving en masse, but in stages, to take up life in London. But there is no preface, no explaining who Kathleen Kennedy was. Not a bit about her life before the move, besides some information about her brothers, Joe Jr and Jack. While I have read numerous biographies of the Kennedys and knew exactly who Kathleen Kennedy was, if you're don't know much about the family, Leaming's book will not be helpful. The rest of the book is basically a recitation of names and titles, with only cursory info about those people. Leaming's writing is amateurish and I really can't recommend you waste time and money on it.

I was a bit amazed at the quality of this book as I've read most of Leaming's previous biographies and thought very highly of them. Oh, well...

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### **Randee says**

i don't know what happened because I read and reviewed this a couple of months ago. My guess is that I failed to hit save when I finished my review. I found this to be interesting and well researched by the author. She was JFK's closest sibling (the age difference with Bobby probably being a factor when they were kids.) So, JFK lost his older brother and sister, Joe and Kick, in plane crashes and his older sister, Rosemary, to a lobotomy all before he was even in his mid 20's. That is heavy duty and explains a bit to me why JFK seemed like an insensitive player as an adult. I did not know much about this sister, but even reading about her life makes me realize that there is definitely a pattern in the supposed 'Kennedy curse.' They brought a lot of it on themselves...no leanings towards safety and prudence for them. Still, it's a shame and Kick seems like she was a down to earth, courageous person who most likely would have had a lasting legacy if she had lived. Along with Kennedy information, there was a lot of interesting information about WWII from the English perspective.

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### **Saturday's Child says**

Unlike my other recent read about Kick Kennedy, this is her story told from her adult years just after she arrived in England. It was a worthwhile read but I'm glad it was not my first encounter with her story, as it did not provide much detail of her younger years.

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## **Andie says**

Kathleen "Kick" Kennedy was considered the fun loving, charmed sister of the Kennedy clan. The favorite child of her father Joe, Sr., she pretty well got her way in whatever she wanted to do, and when her father got posted to London as the Ambassador of the Court of St. James, she began to cut a wide swath through English society. She married Billy Hartington, the Duke of Devonshire's heir, only to lose him to World War II after barely a month of marriage. Then, after the war, she had an affair with the heir to the Earl of Fitzwilliam, only to die with him in a plane crash in 1948.

This book is a picture of an aristocratic life that was effectively destroyed in the political aftermath of World War II, but one that Kick Kennedy was inexorably drawn to. In her quest for this charmed life, and her disregard for the teachings of the Catholic Church, Kick alienated her mother (and many of her family) forever. Only her older brother, Joe, came to her wedding to Billy Hartington and none to her funeral. In fact, at the end of her life she was claimed by the Devonshires, not the Kennedys. In the end, this is a sad tale of a wasted life.

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## **Amy says**

I have started and stopped with this book, more than a few times.

Yesterday, I decided that this book was at the "do or die" stage for me. I either had to continue on or not read it. I ended up skimming most of it and reading the details that I found really interesting.

I am not surprised that Rose and Joe did not approve about Kick's relationship / marriage to Billy Hartington. They were both very controlling and this was something they could not control, even though they tried their damndest!

I also was not surprised when reading about Kick's relationship with Lord Fitzwilliam. All of the Kennedy's have always gone after and gotten what they wanted, no matter what.

Although this book is about Kathleen "Kick" Kennedy, I do wish we would have learned more about what exactly became of her and Billy's friends (family) after Kick's death. We do know a little based on what was written at the beginning of the book and in the Acknowledgements.

For me, this was somewhat interesting information, but presented in an uninteresting way.

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## **Diane L says**

### **Don't buy the kindle edition**

This book about Kathleen Kennedy--who died at the age of twenty-eight-- is further truncated by the author's omission of her childhood prior to her family's moving to London. No mention of her schooling or

relationships with siblings (except that she was close to brother Jack), no childhood friends or classmates, no analysis of how she became the young woman she became. And, at least in the E book, not a single photo. This is not a good sign in a biography. The book is too short, offers no insight into anything, has no photos. Seriously, I knew as much just from reading about JFK's youth as I did upon finishing this. What's to recommend? If you're interested in Kick Kennedy, there has to be another biography that offers a little more.

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## Ashley says

I've been reading this book for the past few weeks now and have finally finished it. I found it interesting throughout and think it took so long for me to get through this relatively short (~300 page) biography because I knew it would have a tragic ending. Yes, it's exciting, and in its way romantic, to read about a young American woman cutting a swath through upper-crust British society, buoyed by optimism, spirit, and a real interest in others that in turn seemed to make them interested in her. It was like Evelyn Waugh, minus the acerbic, jaded (and okay, much more witty) people. **So** many parties! **SO** many.

Of course, in the back of your mind, you know that it's short-lived at best. Page by page things grew more bleak and I started to run through, in my head, all the terrible things I knew were coming. Hence my lackluster desire to finish.

Melissa, in the past, has had to hear me talk about my wish for a Kick Kennedy biography and I was very excited when I heard that one was being published! Kick Kennedy had a very short but interesting life and came of age amongst some of the most fascinating people of the 20th century, during what I consider the most interesting part of the 20th century--WWII. Her father, Joe Kennedy, was the ambassador to Britain in the late 1930's and early 1940's and she herself made a huge splash on the London debutante scene when she had her debut in society.

I think it was an interesting tack for the author to take--to focus mostly on Kick's decade or so in London. The book would have really benefitted, however, from a closer look at her earlier, more formative years. Also, I do think there's a lack of context in this book. So much of it was just a relating of events and excerpts from diary entries and letters. There was very little narrative and analysis, which was disappointing to me. Though everything cleaved together well enough and made sense, there wasn't always much meaning to extract from the book. Of course, a lack of meaning is something most of us can ascribe to our own lives. But it is the job of the biographer, in my opinion, to take the disparate threads of a person's life and tell a story of clarity and meaning.

I'm so indecisive though. A part of me *is* glad that the details about her life and times were sort of left for the reader to make of them what they would.

At the end of the day, I'm very glad that this book was written and I learned a lot more about Kick Kennedy than I already knew.

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## Paul says

Before I read this book, I had no idea who Kathleen (Kick) Kennedy was, only that she was a sister of JFK who had died in her twenties. After reading the book, I found myself upset over what a loss she was to the

world and what she could have done with her life.

Kick Kennedy died in a plane crash in France, months after the death of Joe Junior, whom the irredeemable Joe Senior had hoped to make president someday. These two deaths marked the first in what would be a melancholy string of them for the Kennedy family, and would give rise to the narrative of “The Kennedy Curse.”

Kick Kennedy, who became the Marchioness of Hartington upon her marriage to Billy, the Marquess of Hartington, originally came to the U.K. in a whirl of excitement and glamour and fell deeply in love with Billy Cavendish (later the marquess). She was the toast of London, and several of the men in the circles she traveled were in love with her. She was the only debutante in her circle that discussed politics with men. At this point I really admired her.

What follows may be a contrarian view, but after Billy was killed in the war, his considerable inheritance and lands fell to his younger brother, Andrew. At this point, Kick was naturally bereft with grief, but she also came to the realization that part of what she had liked about Billy had been the future glory of her inheriting the status of Duchess of Devonshire, along with the wealth and standing in English aristocratic society that came with it. “So much of her relationship with Billy had taken place in the imagination,” the author says. When Billy was killed and the system of primogeniture conferred what would have been his inheritance onto his brother, Kick was reduced to the Dowager Marchioness, with an empty title, no money, and no property. She had no chance anymore to become, in her words, “a woman of influence.” At this point I ceased to have sympathy with her.

She had saved her virginity for her wedding night with Billy (who unfortunately took several days of the honeymoon to “figure out how to do it,” in her words). But a few months after Billy had been killed, Kick, after doggedly giving speeches and holding a salon in her new apartment in London unthinkably started to have an affair with a married man (who DID have both title and property) named Peter Fitzwilliam. Fitzwilliam was a gambler, womanizer, heavy drinker and father of no small number of illegitimate children. He was also heir to a dukedom of considerably more wealth than that of Devonshire. He was still married when he and Kick started their affair.

I found the idea that Kick, who had truly been in love with Billy, could so rapidly become infatuated with Fitzwilliam, and eventually plan to marry him, to be an abhorrent turn of ambition and a purely opportunistic political move.

As it happened, just as she and Fitzwilliam were planning to reveal their wedding plans to old Joe Kennedy, they were both killed in the crash of Fitzwilliam’s plane in France. Even after that event, Billy’s brother, the new Marquess of Devonshire, rushed around to all the major newspapers in London with the ridiculous claim that Kick and Fitzwilliam had just happened to run into each other in France, of all things (who could have guessed such a coincidence?), and squelched public news of their affair.

The Kennedy family, either through paralysis or continuing disapproval, did not attend the funeral, except Joe Senior, who made a pass at Billy’s 22-year-old sister.

In the end, I felt that the greatest loss to the world was Kick’s potential. It’s conceivable that she could have been the first female Kennedy to hold public office in the U.S. Ultimately, reading this book is a sad experience, probably akin to reading a book about Jim Croce, James Dean, or Buddy Holly.

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## **Judy says**

This was a first-rate biography of a woman, her family, her times, and the untimely deaths of some she loved and herself. Kick was charmed and beloved, and Leaming takes us on the path to her marriage and independence from her parents.

This biography gave a detailed look at the social lives of the upper class in England and the U.S. as World War II loomed closer and closer. Against that backdrop, Kick struggled with her love for Billy, who was not Catholic and therefore not approved by her parents. By the same token, Billy came from a staunch Episcopal background, complicating matters even further.

Also portrayed in detail was the double standard of those times. Men were allowed much more freedom than women. It was interesting to read about a time when the military and political lines were barely blurred, and the world seemed a lot smaller. As an aside, I was fascinated to learn more about the relationship between Kick and her brother Jack.

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