

1963

Saturday, November 23rd WHD

This was the day the President lay in State in the White House. It was a grey day, fitting the occasion.

I went down to the EOB to meet Lyndon and we went over to the White House and met the family in the Green Room. Lyndon marched past the President's body in the East Room. There was a catafalque in the center and on it the casket, draped with the American flag, and at each corner a large candle and a very rigid military man, representing each one of the services. There was some Catholic image at one end, I don't know quite what it was. It wasn't just a cross and that was the first of those three days that I was so reminded, so caught up in the thought that the Catholics have a pattern for everything -- a pattern for life, and a pattern for death.

The people there were, besides the family of the President -- the Cabinet, Congressional Leaders, Supreme Court, and White House staff. An air of quiet prevailed, an utter complete quiet that seemed to grip -- well, the country, I suppose, and certainly the surroundings where I was for the entire three days.

The Cabinet had been called back from half way around the world. They were on a plane on their way to Japan -- at least about four or five of them were -- when they were told that they should

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Saturday, November 23rd (continued)

come back. They heard the news in mid-air, reversed the plane, returned, and landed. There they were, standing shocked and sad-faced, filing past as all of us filed past, somewhat like automatons. There was black crepe on the chandelier.

After we left the White House, we went to a brief service at St. John's Episcopal Church, right across Lafayette Square, a sort of very high church -- a stern, rigid church -- but most fitting for the day.

And then we went on and -- what we did the rest of the day -- I don't know. I am sure Lyndon worked terribly hard. I just sort of collapsed with Luci.

They came in with a list of things that I must do immediately. Sell my house, possibly sell my business (KTBC), see about getting Lynda Bird -- (perhaps, if she would, maybe) -- and that would be a selling job -- to come back and live in Washington with us and go to school somewhere up here. There were all the million and one things you have to do -- just the simple things of going on living, if you are one of the ones that is going to go on living, while Lyndon was dealing with the very big business of making the country go on living.