

1965

SATURDAY, JANUARY 23

Saturday, January 23 began with the ring of the phone in the middle of the night at Camp David--about 3:00 A.M. It was, the moment I have long thought about but when it happened it wasn't bad. Dr. Burkley was on the other end of the line. He said Lyndon had been taken to the hospital. He had a bad cold, a severe cough that caused him to have pains in the chest and alarmed him. He described it as an infection of the trachea. He said Lyndon had given orders for me not to be notified until I woke up in the morning but he felt that I should know. Lyndon was at Bethesda, Luci was with him. He reiterated there was nothing to be alarmed about and insisted that I go back to sleep and he would call me in the morning, so I took a sleeping pill and amazingly did go back to sleep, leaning on Luci's presence to comfort and pet and reassure and also cognizant of what a flurry there would be with the newsmen if I got up at 3:00 A.M. and drove back in.

When I woke up Saturday morning I talked to Dr. Burkley and to Dr. Gould, who had come down from New York. They told me Lyndon had begun to develop a cold about 4:00 P.M. , had gone on with the meeting of the House and Senate Leadership, had skipped supper, had called the Doctor about 9:00 o'clock--Dr. Burkley--because his cough was becoming worse and his chest was irritating him. Dr. Burkley gave

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him some medication for the cough and sent him back to bed. And then, about 1:00 o'clock, he had waked up with the cough worse and pain in his throat and upper chest. In that vast museum, the White House, there was no wife, no daughter Lynda, no daughter Luci, but he sent word to call for Luci. She was out on a date. According to Luci, she was there in minutes and I know she loved being the one to take over and comfort. They took him out to Bethesda a little before 3:00 A.M. and George, poor George, set up a Press Room out at the hospital. The world outside Camp David was wrapped in fog and sleet, gray and silent. I set about packing and calling Lynda to get ready. I talked to Lyndon. He sounded rasping and hoarse and subdued but not alarmed. He suggested I might come in by helicopter, but when I asked the Secret Service, it wasn't possible because of the weather. Liz warned me over the phone that when I arrived at the hospital I better come in the front door because they wanted to take pictures and if I didn't they would assume that things were worse than they were. In other words, what they needed was reassurance and normality.

I was quite calm, not the least bit frightened and in a way thought maybe the Lord had laid Lyndon low so he could get some rest because he would never lie down on his own accord and take it. My cold made me feel like I was at the bottom of a well and half numb and my hair made me look like a poster girl for the Poverty Program,

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but I did the best I could with it, put on a hat and a smile, drove up to the front door of Bethesda. How many times have I driven up to the front door of Bethesda--really serious times--and this is not one of them. But never have I faced such a battery from sidewalk to door of flashing cameras and questioning reporters.

I tried to look normal and walk swiftly. It was a bit of the "rushing in the writhing and the tumbrel" feeling, and once inside and up to the seventeenth floor, and then into Lyndon who looked just like Lyndon, lying in bed quiet, subdued, I think somewhat sedated, but not the least bit frightened looking. I didn't want to add an extra germ so I just patted him and sat down and held his hand. He showed me the article about Luci by Helen Thomas as to how she was taking Catholic instruction, a fairly true and sympathetic story except that her interest in Catholicism had not begun with her dating Paul ^{Betz} ~~Batter~~ but when she was about twelve years old, long ago. Then when he was inattentive and half dozing, I left and talked to Dr. Gould and Dr. Burkley. Dr. Gould examined me. I made my decision to stay in a room on the floor right below Lyndon, left word with Jack and a Secret Service to call me whenever he was alert enough to want company. ^{HP} Dr. Gould examined Lynda too who has a perennial cold from about October to May, especially bad here lately, sent her home to bed at the White House. Dear Warrie Lynn, our comforter, wise beyond her years, said goodbye. She was going to catch the 5:00 o'clock plane and Luci, having fulfilled

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her role of nurse and chief family member from about 2:00 o'clock until now, and by now it was past noon, left to attend a luncheon at which she was the honoree given by the President of her class. I think her name is Marlene Johnson and ^{she is} also one of the top honor students of the school. She is a Negro, an interesting observation on today.

Lyndon had looked exactly like himself when I walked in although he was quiet and content to be quiet. The newspaper reports were good when I read them. I thought Dr. Burkley had handled it extremely well, just as few words as possible. To my surprise, Lyndon had seen the Press. "Leaning on his elbow over a steam-hissing vaporizer, Mr. Johnson answered the questions of a small group of reporters in a hoarse, sometimes croaking voice, for thirteen minutes. "I think I will lay off today," he quipped, but he added, "I wouldn't hesitate at all to put my britches on and go back to the office if anything had to be done."

All afternoon, I rested quite happily in bed, reading an accumulation of mail and newspaper clippings of the three big days and no call came from the floor above. Whenever I inquired I got the answer that he was dozing, that he was half asleep. He hardly woke up when they took his temperature or gave him some medication so I feel good, he is getting exactly what he needs most--rest, though in a way only the Lord could have insured.

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When my dinner tray came in, about the same time Dr. Young came in and said he was awake. So I quickly said, "let's take my dinner tray down there so I can have it while I talk to him." There wasn't much talking, but he was awake. He was watching the news report on the President's condition. Poor George, like a man pilloried, was being questioned by the reporters, rather cruelly I thought. He appeared very tired and groggy and his answers were slow. He does not meet them on the bantering quick quipping plane Salinger did or the air of assured confidence "you can take it or leave it" that Haggerty had, but I do not think he deserves their cruel attitude. Actually, he handled it rather well. Lyndon was quite silent, nodded his head when I asked him questions and after making it very clear to everybody that I wanted to be awakened if he needed company during the night, I went to bed.

It could have been a frightening day. It was a day I had expected and thought about, but it wasn't. My main feeling is that the Lord is giving him an enforced rest.

Gentle Dr. Gould, quite involved with us by now, said with a bright face just as I left, "his temperature is down to normal."
That's good news. He is just coming along fine.