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Monday, the Ides of March

I spent the morning clearing my desk with Ashton.

Today I am dieting. Endless cups of black coffee, one egg for lunch, and then I did sit down with Lyndon and Walter Lippmann, but for the conversation, not the food. I had a moment with Mr. West and Mr. Ketchum to discuss a letter from Mr. DuPont about a possible offer of a lovely Aubusson rug, <sup>from</sup> a Mrs. Hutton, for the Blue Room. We decided to accept it. We have already had to get alternates for the Red Room and the Green Room. This will make an alternate for Mary Lasker's in the Blue Room.

As the afternoon wore on, the tension began to mount for everybody in Lyndon's office, I am sure, and especially for those concerned with the speech. When I called Mary V. to ask if she would like one of the step seats in the Gallery I use, she said yes, indeed, she would. <sup>Her</sup> ~~Her~~ husband had worked until 6:30 this morning on the speech. The four Ministers with whom Lyndon has conferred -- Monsignor Higgins, Rabbi Miller, Reverend Carson Blake, and Reverend Spike, -- will be guests in my Gallery, and I was very proud that J. Edgar Hoover accepted to sit on the front row with me. I asked Diana -- civil rights is one of her big interests -- and Ramsey Clark and Governor Ellington

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and the Burke Marshalls -- he, so recently retired, pitched right back in to work when the crisis began to mount.

At six o'clock Lyndon was in his pajamas, but far from resting. The speech was being brought over to him a page at a time. He was going over it, scratching out lines, giving directions to Jack, who looked pale, harassed, his wonderful good humor almost at the breaking point. I could very nearly hear him groan whenever Lyndon marked out a line and wrote in something else.

This was still going on at seven o'clock, and he had to be on the stand delivering it at nine. It was some time along then that he said, "Let's close it up like we closed the one (I guess it was the State of the Union) where I talked about growing up in the Hill country. Let's talk about teaching the Mexicans in Cotulla, the first job I had after I got out of college." It had taught him a lot about what poverty and prejudice meant to a young person.

Thanks to Marvin, Bill, Jack, I can now divorce myself far more from these tensions than I could a few years ago. And Paul is there to lay out the clothes that I used to always take care of, and the operator gets people on the telephone.

It was 8:45 when I left with Lynda and Governor and Mrs. Collins. He has worked so hard as mediator all through the South. And Carl Rowan.

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The five of us went ahead of Lyndon to the Capitol and hurried to our Gallery, too late to see the pageantry of the entrance of the Diplomatic Corps, the Supreme Court, the Cabinet, the Senate.

As I entered, the Chamber rose to clap, and I was as pleased as a 16-year-old. Back home to the Hill, and the Chamber rising for me!

And then Fishbait Miller's stentorian voice announcing, "The President of the United States." And in came Lyndon, marching down that familiar aisle, accompanied by longtime comrades-in-arms.

This time as he stood at the podium I was not so aware of the aging Speaker and the ancient Senator Hayden behind him, because now we have a Vice President. I thought I could tell in the beginning he did not have the teleprompter. They hadn't made it in those last few hurried minutes, and the speech I held in my hand -- the copy of it -- came to an abrupt end two-thirds of the way through. I looked at the Press Gallery and I did not see them with copies in their hands. I suppose it simply did not reach them.

But the speech was good, and the delivery was great. I doubt that he had time to read it even once in the exact finished version. The best part about it was toward the end, "My first job after college was as a teacher in a small Mexican American school. My students were poor and often hungry, and they knew even in their youth the pain of prejudice.

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They didn't understand why people didn't like them, but they knew it was so -- you could see it in their eyes. I never thought then that I might be standing here. It never occurred to me that I might have a chance to help the sons of those students and people like them all over this country. And now I do have that chance, " -- and at that moment Lyndon's eyes narrowed to a slit and his voice got quite deep and powerful and almost belligerent -- "And I let you in on a secret: I mean to use it." I don't believe there was anyone in the Chamber who doubted him.

They gave him a rising ovation at this point. In fact, there were two rising ovations in the course of the speech. I don't believe I ever saw that before. There was, of course, one at the beginning and one at the end.

My eyes skimmed across the Chamber. The Democratic side was most generous in applause, the Republican somewhat slow, the hands of some rather like the flippers of a seal. The bellwether of the Southerners, dear Senator Russell, was not there. He's in Puerto Rico recuperating. And I did not see Senator Byrd. But in a row was Smathers, McClelland and Ellender, and I saw practically no response from them.

I liked especially the line about "those who ask you to hold onto the past do so at the cost of denying you your future," and I liked

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tying it in with the whole poverty program and the whole accent on education.

It was too long. It was about forty-two or three minutes. It would have been better twenty-five. And the delivery a bit slow. But all in all it was a magnificent speech, and the next day I was not surprised to see several newspapers and commentators called it "his finest hour," "his best performance," and such. The whole gist of the speech to me was concentrated in one sentence, recommending that those communities who wished to avoid action by their National government, to "open your polling places to all your people." The solution for them would lie therein.

And then it was over, and I said a very respectful goodbye to J. Edgar Hoover, goodbye to the ministers, and walked out waving to the Cabinet wives. And then we were in the Speaker's office with the leadership, The Attorney General, Senator Kennedy was there on a cane -- that is, Teddy -- nowhere did I see Bobby, ~~[nor did I miss him.]~~ There were pictures and congratulations, and then we started home.

Lyndon got in the car with us, and back on the second floor Governor and Mrs. Collins, Carl Rowan, Jack Valenti, Larry O'Brien, Dick Goodwin, and the Busbys and I had a drink and talked about the whole performance and the whole course of affairs. It's like coming down off the mountain -- intense strain and effort, putting everything into the performance, and then unwinding.

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Governor Collins left a \$75,000.00 a year job to take a \$25,000.00 one that alienated all of his old friends and would give anybody ulcers, but somebody's got to do it and thank goodness there are people in this Republic who will. He told us laughingly how a man who had been his barber for 30 years refused to cut his hair the last time he was in Tallahassee. His pretty little wife, so typically Southern, said, "Well, you'd better be glad he didn't get that razor in his hand, with you sitting in that barber chair."

It was, too, an evening for reminiscing about politics. Larry O'Brien talked about Mayor Curley of Boston, in whose campaigns he as a very young man had worked and his Father had worked. Dick Goodwin had known him, too. All of them thought it was a wonderful speech and wonderful delivery. One or two, perhaps, were concerned about the length. I was. Larry, I think, was more<sup>n</sup> "with us" than he has ever been, more genuinely admiring.

It was 11:30 by the time nearly everybody left, and we had a little tray for Lyndon, Larry, Dick, and one of the secretaries, Carol Welch. I have the feeling that tonight marks the end of a three-day comet, a sort of rising spiral of activity on Saturday morning, sparked by what I do not really know, perhaps just will-power. Saturday, Sunday, Monday, a crescendo of activity and effort, culminating in tonight. And now what

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can be done has been done, and we shall see.