

1965

Sunday, May 2nd

I awoke early with that feeling of having scarce coin to spend, —
a day of my own[^] and wanting to make it stretch and use it well.

I went to church at St. Barnabas, taking Dorothy Territo and Simone Poulaine. For two reasons, really. I miss it -- I haven't been there the last two times I have been to the ranch. And then I wanted to see the planting.

I found the walkway lined with cedar posts, soon to be covered with a wisteria^a arbor and quite charming. But there is still much to be done, and they haven't set the value that I do on local plants -- the things of the country: ~~canes~~^{Ceniza}, retama, wildflowers that I find so enchanting.

I left in rather an ungracious hurry, because we must get to Jefferson by 12:30. Liz and her five charges, Isabelle, Wauhillaui, Winzola, Nan and Frances were comfortable in the living room, with tales of barbecue and bluebonnets yesterday. We rushed out to the plane, which turned out to be the N27W. On the way I briefed them about my two years in Jefferson -- the history, culture, air of the old town, and its revival through the hard work and imagination of the Women's Garden Club. Unhappily, I used the phrase that it reminded me in part of a scene from Tennessee Williams -- decayed gentility, threadbare charm -- but the great story is what the women

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have done to put it on the map, to give it a feeling of ^{being on the} march and a taste of success.

At the Marshall airport, to my amazement, there was quite a little crowd. I had only called Doris some time Saturday afternoon. Ruth was there, the Philip Baldwins -- little Philip with a red carnation bouquet -- a classmate from Marshall High School. We ^{Doris} ~~strided~~ to the Excelsior Hotel, and there the town really was assembled. Ruth Lester met me at the front door, flanked by all the members of the Pilgrimage Committee, Lucille Terry, ^{Francis} ~~Miss~~ Bennyfield, the Benny Moseleys. We toured the old hotel, built by a Mississippi steamboat Captain in the 1850's and in business ever since, still furnished almost entirely by original furnishings in rosewood and mahogany. Rococo Victorian, Napoleon beds, sleigh beds, Jenny Lind beds, one table almost identical to the bird's-nest table in the Lincoln Room in the White House. I signed the register that had been signed by two Presidents, Ulysses S. Grant and Rutherford Hayes, financier Jay Gould, and many notables. The hostesses were arrayed in crinolins of Civil War days, some old, all picturesque, and everywhere found memories of the two years I spent there.

The twin daughters of J. H. Bennyfield, pretty young girls of about 16 or so, Mary Lou Davis, to whose house I used to go to study,

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Gladys, who had worked at Tommy's wholesale grocery company, classmates Will Alice Rose and Nellie Ford -- even a relative of Lyndon's named Largent, whose family had moved from out close to Merkel. Sarah was with me throughout the visit, and Susan on crutches, looking pretty and sweet and thanking me for her stay in Washington.

We went to the two Presidential Suites and to the Lady Bird Room. There was the clock Daddy had given Mother for an anniversary present. I have lent it to the room and it sits on the petticoat table. And two lovely pink lusters on the mantel -- Ruth Lester had bought them with my donation. I am very proud of the room, really.

We rode out to Guarding Oak, Ruth's home -- she's the real moving force behind the Pilgrimage -- had a delicious light lunch in the back yard, and toured her house, where there are some jewels of antiques, among them a brass bed -- part brass, part Dresden -- of a type I never saw before.

We met a couple of gentlemen that could easily have been mistaken for Rhett Butler, toured the Knights' home across the street -- he was a great friend of Tommy's -- and then went to the Carlson's house. Here 91-year-old Mrs. Carlson lives in her grandfather's house, and the furniture has not changed since his day. Erect and aristocratic, she was wearing a dress made partly from the Battenberg lace of her wedding gown, a cameo at her throat. She was a wonderfully authentic picture of another day and time. Light and fragile, but very

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much alive, she talked about Miss Berniece and Miss Alice and Aunt Effie -- she had known her well and just loved to talk to her. How nice it was to hear someone who spoke about Aunt Effie!

The walls were hung with ancestors that I would have sworn were authentic. When I complimented the very old, very handsome piano, she said that it had come from New Orleans by river boat up the Mississippi and the Red River to Cypress Bayou, and so had the bed in which she was born, an elaborate Victorian one in the next room. There had been little change in a century, and my whole day was worth it for those few minutes spent with her, especially because she recalled Aunt Effie as though it were yesterday.

Then we left and drove to the home of ^{"Miss"} ~~Miss~~ Justa^a Ben^afield, where I had spent so many gay nights after the Germans at the Chesterfield Club. I would have a date with J. H. and several girls would spend the night with his sister Frances there. Frances was there, and Lorraine and Sybil^{il} had been in town -- I had actually passed Sybil^{il} while I was riding the surrey and thought I recognized her. I had gotten to say just hello to Walter Dolan, who is still teaching music. The old school had burned down, a new one had been built on the site.

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"Miss Justa's" home was very rococo late Victorian, outside and in. Here I said goodbye to Liz and the five newspaper women, trying to wrap up my day in a nutshell, hoping so much that it would do some good for the Pilgrimage for which I have so much admiration. For once publicity was a tool and not a burden.

And then, leaving it rather nebulous as to what my plans were for the next 24 hours, I drove off with Doris, while they headed for the airport to make a hurried connection at Dallas with the Washington plane.

Doris and I drove slowly to Karnack, getting the Secret Service to ride in another car, down ^{to uncertain} ~~uncertainly~~ and through the Park, which needs a real shot in the arm, Doris says, past the old brick store, quite dilapidated looking, a sad ghost, past the Moore's Iris gardens and Mrs.

^{Odon's} ~~Don's~~ old home, the postoffice (they need a new one), heard all about the plans for community development in Karnack -- cleaning and planting with flowers the little plot just in front of our store, the possibility of making a community center out of the store, the triumph of a new fire truck, the problems of the Rural Routes, and the building of the dam on Caddo, and finally wound up at Doris' house, to see her pride and joy, her grandchild, little Dudley, have a drink, meet with Hugh, and start

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out for Marshall. We drove past the Brick House. Spring is kind to it. It has a certain stateliness. With all this doing over of houses, it is the one I'd really like to take on in a scholarly fashion, with a good budget and a great respect.

We went to Dianne's house in Marshall. She had three friends there, all pretty, all beautifully dressed. Dianne's own home had been opened for a tour for the Belle Maison Club, proceeds to go to a hospital or to some charity. She is one of the sleek and affluent young ones of the community now, and life is stocks and bonds and golf and a fine-looking young son.

We went on to the Philip Baldwins, where Mertie and Philip and their four delightful children, and Winston, waited for us. Drinks, and good snacks, and talk about all the folks we knew. Mertie has a rare quality for making every meeting a party, and her children are growing up the same way. Her little boy was the center of attention, the loud lawn-mower toy drowning out the conversation at its height and nobody minding, least of all me, he was so funny.

I left early and was airborne by 8, with Dale Meeks in the ^{Queen}~~Queen~~ ~~air~~ for the LBJ Ranch. And then began, just after I reached home, the most important hour of the day. I saw what my husband had been doing.

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He had made a report on TV to the Nation on the Dominican Republic and the reason for the American presence there. I saw a twenty-minute news clip of it. He had a cold, he was obviously very tired, the teleprompter didn't work (I soon became aware), but with great earnestness, quite clearly and quite solemnly, he explained why we were there -- to save lives, to prevent a takeover by a communist regime that did not really represent the country but was dominated by outside forces. I felt a wave of sympathy -- what the last two or three days must have cost him in terms of sheer physical endurance.

But I remembered gratefully the way Doris had expressed it. She said, "I'm so glad he talks to us, he tells us what's going on." For over a month he's really been talking to the whole 190 million the best he knows how. If that has been a failure of the Administration in the last year, two years, or whatever, it has ceased to be a failure.