

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Wednesday, March 22, 1967

Page 1

Caneel Bay, Virgin Islands

I woke late with Lynda close by in the next bed. And the first thing I was aware of was that the tree outside of the window was still -- the wind had ^d laid, the sky was still gray. The two days of stormy weather that had kept Lynda from coming were past. And when I had coffee on the little porch downstairs, Bess and Noble assured me that the sun would soon be out.

I am like a miser counting my little stack of hours, painfully aware that half of them are gone but gloating over those that remain. And Lynda is here to spend them with.

At 11:00 we left for ^{Cruz} ~~Cruise~~ Bay and boarded the Caneel Bay Mary with Captain Smith for a day of Island hopping -- our destination, Norman Island in the British Virgins -- and our route leading us through Sir Francis Drake's passage past Big [?] ~~Patch~~ and Little [?] ~~Thatch~~ and Tortola. We've certainly covered a lot of the same ground, Sir Francis and I -- widely separated from ^{Reyes} ~~Reyes~~, California to the Virgin Islands in the Caribbean!

Soon the sun came out and it was a day of white sails and blue water, with Lynda Bird and I lying on deck getting a sun tan, and the pelicans and sea gulls wheeling above us -- making our way between the volcanic Islands with the surf whitened on the rocky shore. It was the time for the Century plants to bloom. They are fifteen, even twenty, feet tall. And now they are turning yellow like a giant ^{de} ~~can~~ labra. And there were huge pipe-organ cactus, and some that looked like a devils pin cushion with a red-raised center. Desert plants and jungle growth side by side -- cactus and mango

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Wednesday, March 22, 1967

Page 2

trees -- are one thing that amaze me. Another is the absence of man. He's here but he's only really brushed it ^{at} these Islands. Occasionally we saw the stone ruins ^{of an} old sugar mills, and occasionally a house on a white crescent beach or high upon the cliffs.

Past noon we reached Norman Island, got our snorkeling gear, lowered the dinghy, and Noble and Bess and I paddled over to the caves. These were supposed to have been used in the days of the pirates to hide treasure in. And it's easy to imagine as you glide into the cool darkness, that they might have hoisted a chest up onto some ledge where it would be out of sight. But the only treasure we saw was a most remarkable coloring of the rock. Golds and pinks and reds I was familiar with, and the green might have been from copper. But orchid I never saw before -- sort of a garish, translucent orchid -- a lavender.

It was getting darker, and up ahead it was jet-black and we heard a bat screeching, so we turned and paddled out. In the sunshine, we put on our snorkeling outfit and slipped over the edge into the world of enchantment with great round domes of brain coral and spreading formations of antler coral and column coral like cathedral spires. And here and there, sea fans waving in the water -- purple and green and greenish yellow. There were the denizens I knew well -- the blue head rass with its collar of blue and white and black around it's neck and the four-eyed butterfly fish. Noble told us its enemies think it's going to swim one way when it sees these eye-like spots on the tail, and it's really heading the other. Beautiful blue tang, often four or five of them together. The repulsive lizard fish that looks like a serpent lying on the bottom,

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Wednesday, March 22, 1967

Page 3

but when you approach him, he flashes away with surprising speed. Noble said he can't swim far though. An angelfish in many varieties. The queen-angel -- loveliest of all, ~~The~~ green and blue and yellow, almost phosphorescent. And the French angel in his black and yellow convict stripe. And the little jewfish -- midnight blue with tiny spots of brilliant blue almost like phosphorescent lights.

Suddenly Jerry pointed down, and there on the floor of the ocean was what appeared to be a big old pot. Probably iron and overgrown with moss, no doubt dropped there from some pirate's ship. Noble swam down and touched it. It was quite soft and malleable in his hands. He surfaced and said that ^{it} was a basket sponge.

So much for the frame of mind of looking for pirate treasure. We saw a lot of sergeant-majors following each other in formation -- their stripes making them the easiest to recognize. Parrot fish swam by in every hue of blue and green and yellow -- almost two feet long, some of them, though distance is very deceptive under water. You have only to look at your neighbors foot or your own hand.

As we swam with the coral formations, we all looked for sea urchin -- one of the few dangerous things in these beautiful waters. They ^{have} ~~are~~ long black spines capable of inflicting very severe pain, though Norman could swim down under, scoop one up with his hands, guarding it safely underneath and you could watch it walk very slowly on its bottom spines, progressing across his hand.

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Wednesday, March 22, 1967

Page 4

Once close to the coral reef, I saw the most outrageous looking fish, a puffer -- quite bloated and angry looking and most amusing. And several times the goat fish, colored with a fringe of pinkish red spines.

When we were tired, we climbed up onto the Caneel Bay Mary and had our lunch, an enormous assortment of roast beef and cottage cheese, delicious water melon ^{and} ~~thing~~ preserves, turkey and crab meat and shrimp and lots of fruit. But no pound cake which must be one of the specialties of the

X Rockefeller ~~quesine~~. Lynda remembered it from Jackson Lodge.

I've done everything here I wanted to, except lose weight.

Whenever I raise ^{my} eyes to these volcanic hills, I was appalled at the audacity of man in trying to turn them into sugar cane plantations. They are so steep and rocky and mostly so thickly wooded, almost all second growth. Only a few big trees like kapok and banyan were left when the slaves cleared the slopes and built the rock terraces.

I asked Captain Smith what he remembered. He told us that one mill was still in operation when he was a boy. He's 77. He said he went to work for 20¢ a day and everybody worked hard. But he said, there was lots more rain then. I wonder if it's true that everything you planted grew.

After lunch we started up again. We were going to complete the circle of St. Johns Island. We stopped at Reef Bay for some more snorkeling -- a great wide circle of white sand. There were four people sitting on the beach. We slipped into the water and looked down. Here it was quite shallow. The water below me dappled with sunshine with the beautiful white sandy

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Wednesday, March 22, 1967

Page 5

bottom, rippled by the waves.

Once up close to the rocks, we saw a school of yellow gr^aunt -- hundreds and hundreds of little yellow fish that I swam right among though I never touched one.

And once I saw three fish that were as transparent as egg white -- thin and long with only their head and eyes clearly marked.

Here there was grass on the floor of the ocean, but it looked like grass waving in a meadow and not at all like the huge gargonium around Norman Island or Cinnamon Bay, a ²turtle which looked like huge bushes of tubulur^a fronds. But it was really made out of tiny animals.

No other day had I seen anything as big as the pompano -- thin, spade-tailed. It had swum along beside me on my first day in. He looked about three feet long and two feet across. It was probably about two-thirds that big.

And close to the rocks this morning, I had seen quite a few large fish, yellow, apparently two feet long which Norman had told me were baby jew fish.

I got tired and walked out on the lovely white sand -- very soft to my feet. Bess went over to talk to the people on the beach. Later she told me that there was a couple who worked for VISTA, running a Head Start school.

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

Wednesday, March 22, 1967 WASHINGTON

Page 6

We landed back at Cruz Bay, bounced home in the jeep along the corniche road and walked under the ^{Gauguin}~~Bougainville~~ at the Rockefeller's house as the sun was getting low.

I got a good tall drink and went up to Lynda Bird's room -- she stretched out on her bed. And we talked and talked for fully two hours, watching the sun sink behind St. Thomas and the heavens fill with a bank of gray clouds. The last rays of the sun turned them pink and for a glorious half hour we watched them fade. And then a great, brilliant evening star came out. It's brighter here than anyplace I remember. It was the longest, best talk I've had with Lynda in years, about her job, her future, George, the problems of marriage, his career and military service. Very much about herself.

It was after 7:00 when we went down to dinner -- just the three of us. This is perfect, just right, for a time, for no other way would I see so much of Lynda.

Another time I would like to come here with three or four couples. Somebody for me to play bridge with and walk through the woods with, and soft-spoken, sweet natured people for Lyndon.

After dinner, Lynda went walking with Mike, and I went to bed with my book ^{by}~~and~~ Tom Wolff, "Look Homeward Angel". I have finished the "Reavers" with a completely new feeling about William Faulkner -- his talents still gloriously intact, but expanded to include humor and wholesome people. I had dipped into "A Girl Like I" by ^{Anita Loos}~~Nita Loos~~, but found it too brittle and light.

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

Wednesday, March 22, 1967

WASHINGTON

Page 7

The moon was full and the setting perfect. I could ask no more of my days here, unless it were Lyndon. And only then if he enjoyed it as much as I do.