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1967

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24

Christmas Eve, 1967. Certainly there will never in my life be another Christmas Eve like this. I had asked the operator to wake me about 4:15.^{PM} I phoned to see if Lyndon was on schedule. He would be in about 4:45. I slipped downstairs about 4:30. Lynda was there. She let Chuck sleep because he was still recuperating from his cold and Luci and Patrick were there. We had been told when the plane touched down at Andrews and about 5:00 the helicopters settled to the ground on the White House lawn. The fastest, longest, hardest trip of any President of the United States was at an end. ~~He~~ We all rushed out and took turns hugging and kissing him. He was buoyed up on the wave of excitement. A few hours later when I read the Sunday paper, there was the map of the world, his path in arrows and headlines around the world in four and one-half hectic days. Lyndon B. Johnson has become the first American President ever to travel around the world while in office. He circumnavigated the globe in four and one-half days. It began on Tuesday noon as a mission to attend memorial services for his friend and supporter, the late Prime Minister Harold Holt of Australia, ended with a visit to Thailand and South Vietnam, a conference in Karachi with Pakistani Mohamed ^{Ayub Khan} ~~Ali Khan~~ and the late night meetings in Rome. He had been in the air sixty and one-half hours and had covered

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twenty seven thousand three hundred miles. There were two hundred members in the party, two of them had had heart attacks, and the last long day had begun in Thailand before sunup and ended over the Atlantic on the way to Washington.

We went up to Lyndon's room, but it was quite impossible to go to bed so we sat around and talked and talked for nearly two hours while Lyndon had his tea and I coffee, about the trip, the family of Harold Holt, who would succeed him, Ed Clark, his stop in Vietnam, surprise-- at least to me--visit with ^{Agnes Kahn} ~~Ann Kahn~~, our old friend, and much, much about the Pope, partly because of Luci's and Pat's presence and partly because the Pope interested Lyndon. It always intrigues me-- this unlikely affinity of interest in many successive Popes on the part of this Protestant Texas politician and yet it all sounded good. He was riding high. It satisfied a deep inbred desire to show his respect and friendship for a dead friend, and he hoped by his presence to give evidence of his special feeling as Commander-in-Chief for those troops, ^{he} and had also struck a blow for peace by meeting with the Pope. It was a tour de force like no others. He brought us presents. We looked at some of them and then just a few minutes before seven, Luci and Pat said they were going to Mass and he said, "I'll go with you." I was not about to, so in the reverse order of what seemed fitting, he went out to Church with the children and I went back to bed.

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I woke up about ten. Lyndon had gone to his office. Juanita was there, ever faithful. He brought her and Mary and Barry Beck back to lunch, but we were hopelessly off schedule and did not see our usual quota of TV shows on Sunday.

In the afternoon Harry McPherson and the Valentis and Secretary Rusk came in. Lyndon worked on the resumé of his trip, combined with a Christmas message to the Nation. It was televised down in the theater and then all of the photographers tramped up to the second floor and we did Christmas pictures in front of our Christmas tree in the Yellow Oval Room, with Patrick Lyndon and Yuki, standing by Marietta Brooks' red velvet Christmas stockings that hang on the ^{Mantel}~~mantel~~ below George Washington. They tell the story of our lives from Karnack to the University, the Capitol, and Luci and Lynda and the White House. Lyndon's and mine were our Christmas presents, and Patrick Lyndon's-- his "being born" present, Lynda and Chuck's their wedding present and they are a real work of art. Of course, the particular accent was Lyndon's with Patrick Lyndon or Yuki, but the feeling that pervaded the whole day was that familiar one that always happens, no matter how much the preparation or organization or planning during the twenty-four hours before the Christmas tree, only this time it was all concentrated into even fewer hours. Lyndon was sending Marie scurrying in one direction to wrap additional packages. Ashton had come down. He was checking out the clothes with

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her that he had bought for his girls, me, Lynda, Luci, Marie, Juanita, Mary Slater, and no sooner does he give one than he has to see it modeled at once, and he is absolutely delighted if it looks pretty and the recipient likes it. ~~We~~ We decided to have the Christmas tree right before dinner and about six o'clock all was in readiness, packages piled high. I had put both the paintings of the Texas Landscape by Bill Hoey and The Little Girl in the Yellow Hat--it looks like a French impressionist--under the tree for Lyndon and for Luci I had Carmen curlers, a sweater for Chuck, a sweater for Pat--they hope to go skiing between Christmas and New Year's and for Lynda an early edition of Huckleberry Finn.

About six o'clock we were gathered--just the family and Marie Fehmer, ^{so} ~~so~~ felicitously watching over Lyndon's pile, with her pad and pencil. Lyndon always appoints himself Santa Claus, but he likes to see it work fast so he called on Patrick to help him. More and more Patrick just naturally moves as his companion and helper and I watch it with pleasure. And, of course, all eyes were on Lyn to see how he would like the tree and the toys. As a matter of fact, he liked anything he could get in his mouth and he was not particularly interested in the tree.

First, Lyndon gave me a yellow wool dress, ~~and~~ jacket by Geoffrey Bean, which fit beautifully, and Lynda and Chuck gave us a beautiful album of their wedding pictures, and Luci a funny verse told me that their gift

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couldn't possibly be brought to Washington and I would have to wait until I got to the ranch to see it and if it didn't turn out to be a cherished gift, she hoped it would at least be a family joke.

There was an envelope of Savings Bonds from Lyndon, but, alas, the many good things that we get to eat year after year from old friends, the pecans from the Porter Agnews, the dates from Jacqueline Cochran, candy and smoked turkey and grapefruit from hosts of friends--some of them have done it for twenty years--we no longer receive. We just get the notice that it has been sent and we write a nice thank-you letter and the Secret Service, in performance of duty, destroys the food. I cannot blame them. I can only bewail the waste. Occasionally something is sent to Ashton Gonella and she brings it in her own hands to the kitchen and we do eat it.

We unwrapped presents and exclaimed and showed and sank knee deep in tissue paper and bright colored wrappings and ribbons. It was after eight o'clock when nearly everybody was finished. I still had a bench piled high ^{with gifts} so we went into dinner, Lynda and Chuck and Luci and Pat, Sam Houston and Marie and Lyndon and I. Luci gave a full and beautiful blessing and our Christmas had reached its peak.