

WHD

Friday, January 10, 1969

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Friday, January 10th was one of the great days in the White House. It began early; breakfast at eight and then desk work and then to the swimming pool--how I have loved and used this place! And then to Mr. Per's for a shampoo and set.

Desk work these days is happily sprinkled with pictures for autographing. Because the end of our Administration is near at hand, people in the government, people in the White House, old friends far and wide are sending in a picture they have long had to be autographed, or asking for one. Always before me is the memory of Lyndon's long and rather close association with President Roosevelt and the very few that we had at the end of the eight years he had known him. And so I am glad to.

At one o'clock there was a luncheon that Bess had suggested. Mr. Hoving, the President of Tiffany's, who had fought the battle of the White House china with us was coming for a quiet lunch with me and of course I had insisted Bess come too--she had been the real general. Our enemy had been trying to turn an idea of mine into an elegant reality worthy of the White House, and of Tiffany's, and I hoped of the Johnson Administration. It turned out to be a formidable enemy. All of the service, save only the dessert plates, had made a well acclaimed, highly satisfactory debut last May. They had taken their place at White House dinners, and in the China Room along with Roosevelt's and Lincoln's and Wilson's. The dessert plates remained

a sticky problem that we hoped didn't come out in somebody's column while we worked earnestly how to solve it. The upshot was that every piece had to be hand painted and that in the 1960s was a very slow and expensive process. Tiffany's on the contract price was going to lose considerable money. Bess had ably, gently, toughly, in her most ladylike manner upheld the White House side of getting them done beautifully. How glad I am that she was dealing for me--I never could have done it! Mr. Hoving had come through in a completely gentlemanly, perhaps privately rueful, fashion. Yes, Tiffany's would see that they were hand painted, in approved design and carried to an elegant completion. And so I went in to meet Mr. Hoving with an attitude composed of apology, gratitude, and keen interest because of all the things I had heard about him.

He proved to be a delightful luncheon companion. That treadworn phrase "man of the world" fitted him most aptly. We talked about the process of vermeil, or rather he talked. He told us how in the days of the French Kings, Louis XIV and XV, it had been made by using mercury, I think it was, and after many painstaking years, the workmen would go blind. Then he described the new process and how it had become the very popular thing today. He spoke casually, authoritatively, of other Administrations, whole decades of them. Obviously he was a very strong Republican. I think we had between the three of us a sense of smirking satisfaction that the difficulties of the dessert plates had been a well-kept secret for eight months in this town that loves such tidbits and it would be months before the plates are finally here, if ever.

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Our lunch was in the Lincoln Sitting Room, the table spread by the window facing the monuments. And we used china from various Administrations, a small pleasant conversation piece for such knowledgeable people as Mr. Hoving.

And then in the middle afternoon there were two other bits of goodbye business. First, down to the State Dining Room for a picture with the Tour Office: Bruce Thomas, Joe Bruno, and all the tour officers and White House police who have escorted through this great house, at times of ordinary duty and probably at times of outrageous inconvenience to them--besides a never ending general public, my own groups of friends from home, or friends from the campaign trail, or from my trips, or my Alabama cousins, all the stream of houseguests. We stood in a half moon and Bob Knudsen was the choreographer and he snapped picture after picture and someday I will autograph them, with warmest appreciation, to people who have given happiness and exciting memories to so many in this house.

Next I went back up to the Yellow Oval Room for tea with a group of Independent Agency Wives--about eight ladies. Jeanne Deason was the only one I knew well. They were bringing to me a little piece of petit point, a presentation from their organization, a charming goodbye gift. We spent about thirty lively minutes together and then I worked briefly at my desk with Carol Carlyle on tonight's dinner--our goodbye to our official family--the Cabinet. Then recorded and then talked to Harry Middleton about our film project and then around four o'clock

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into the Lincoln Bedroom for a two hour sitting with Robert Berks the sculptor, who is doing my head. I took a batch of mail in and signed it and worked with Bess on lists and the last parties.

It's been a thoroughly interesting experience getting to know Mr. Berks and his wife. He is a tall craggy looking man with bright warm eyes and a beard chopped off square at the end that somehow reminds me of Hammurabi. They are both on very good terms with life--he loves his house on the tip end of Long Island, an extraordinary rural sounding place within just a few miles of New York City. He had interesting little bits to say about people whose heads he had done, David Dubinsky and Einstein, and Bobby Kennedy, whom he said he saw as a wounded eagle--his head will be dedicated in the courtyard of the Justice Department in just a few weeks.

He's really seen our family under all sorts of circumstances! He's done two heads of Lyndon whose sittings were in the West Hall which is so much like Union Station that I withdrew to the Lincoln Room. At my last sitting Lynda Bird came in and demanded my attention about how to go about buying or renting a house. She had just had the news that Chuck would be stationed here! I am delighted. She was beginning to think about it although she couldn't do anything final until Chuck is back and sees houses. Also Luci came in with the full description of her plans to go and see Patrick in Formosa and of all the shots that she's getting in preparation, Cholera and so forth. They are no more inhibited in front of strangers than two kittens, but they too, I feel liked both Mr. and Mrs. Berks. He left shortly after six.

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I went in and lay gratefully on the bed and made a series of calls to Dr. Hurst, who is a houseguest here for the last time, and Joe Mashman who is here with his wife and daughter--to welcome them and suggest things they might want to do on their sightseeing trip. And then a little desk work with Ashton and Bess. It was a symptom of busy days at the White House--doing two things at once--that is, lying down to rest while I keep busily phoning or signing mail or going over seating charts or guest lists. What a gloriously busy time it's been! And then Mr. Per for a hair comb and then into my pink gold dress from Thailand and it was time for our dinner for the Cabinet.

I was there early and eager--I love them--and they were there, every one of them, and Hubert and Muriel in whose honor the dinner was being given. For me it was an evening highly charged with emotions--with a desire to drink it all in, to remember it all, the feeling of the specialness of every guest. There were Dean and Virginia Rusk, Clark and Marny, and Georgia and Ramsey, Marvin and Marion looking more beautiful all the time, and Stew and Lee (I told him I wanted to get together with him and talk about the Advisory Committee for the National Parks to get some briefing on it), and Orville and Jane, C.R., Bill and Jane Wirtz, and Wilbur and Eloise Cohen, our bridge playing friends the Alan Boyds, Bob Weaver without Ella, who has been absent from all parties for weeks with an operation I think; and my all-time favorites, Henry and Trudye Fowler, who slipped into private life just a few days before Christmas--gratefully, their surcease well deserved.

And there were their replacements the Joe Barrs, and the Bob Woods, who had taken over HUD.

Lynda and Luci feel very close to our Cabinet. It meant a great deal to me to have them present. Lucinda came in, dressed in her "Petunia Pig" outfit, with some Dior pink knit tights, riding in her baby buggy or on her mother's shoulder surveying everybody with her big solemn eyes. Patrick Lyndon bounced in and out between everybody's feet--a menace to the hors d'oeuvres, and the ashtrays and any drinks that were momentarily deposited--always close to his grandfather. I had put out two portraits of ours at the end of the hall. Most of the Cabinet had seen them, but not all and they drifted down to look and came back with their various appraisals.

It seems to me that perceptibly Dean Rusk gets cheerier, his mood lighter, and his smile broader as the days go by. We had a delicious dinner--Chateaubriand Bernaise and ending with Souflee Grand Marnier. I was touched when Dean seemed as pleased as a little boy; "How did you know that that was my favorite dessert?" I do not put it past Bess for knowing.

Dinner became a very snowfall of menu cards being passed around the tables for autographs and even carried from one table to another. Alas, my nerve failed after I had carried it to one table, but the third I missed, but it is one of my most precious possessions--these dear names on the stiff white cards with the gold borders and the seal embossed at the top.

Everyone was talking of their plans, of where they would live next, of vacation trips in between, and Jane Freeman of getting everyone's address so she could "bring us all together," no pun intended, when some of us were back in town.

Before dinner, all the ladies had lined up on the yellow sofa and the surrounding chairs, our backs to the great monuments. Bob Knudsen had taken our pictures over and over, because few that I will take away will be this precious. Lyndon and all the men had gone to the Treaty Room, from which the ponderous red Victorian sofa had been removed, and they had all lined up underneath "Lincoln's Search for Peace" and there had had the last Cabinet picture made.

At the end of dinner, Lyndon made the first toast to Hubert, to Dean, to all the Cabinet. And then Dean responded. What a marvelous, eloquent flow of English he always has, and yet so simple. I know when Lyndon talks of Dean and his work his voice shifts into a deeper gear of admiration and enthusiasm. I think--it is not too much to think--I believe, that there is something of the same in Dean's response to Lyndon.

Then Hubert spoke, cheerful, even exuberant. He was not cast for the role of tragedy! I could not find myself feeling really sorry for him, even within a week after the election, so ready was he to embrace life. I looked at Lynda and Luci--I felt that Lynda was just holding back tears.

There are a very few times when I want to speak and this was one. I used Dickens' words, I think they are, "It was the worst of times,

it was the best of times," and spoke of the comradeship forged in working together on tremendously important problems and feeling you've made some progress--"it's a rare unequalled feeling, a once-in-a-lifetime thing, and we are fortunate to have known it, to have shared it with you, and we are grateful." I looked around the room and locked eyes here and there with some that I felt closest to and one or two that I had not always felt closest to and nevertheless had admired tremendously. For once I felt that I was speaking well and their response told me so.

But no, I was topped. Luci, in her tentative, little-girl way, asked if she could make a toast--charming, but I think it masked complete self-assurance. She spoke with freshness and truth. She said, "You have been working so hard that it's so people like me and Lynda, and even more Lyn and Lucinda, will reap the benefits of what you have done. So I want to say thank you for our generation and for those that are coming on." Everybody loved it--she was the star of the evening.

And then the ladies went into the Yellow Room to have coffee, the men stayed in the West Hall, and the evening came to an end a little before twelve.

To me, it had been a tender evening--every moment to be caught and remembered--separated from the stream of time by its remarkable uniqueness. And I think everyone of us must have looked over our shoulder for a parting glimpse of the Jefferson Memorial as we walked out of the Yellow Room.



But I had given a thought to the future too and had mentioned to quite a lot of the ladies over coffee that I hoped as they went through their papers they would keep in mind that the Lyndon Johnson Library wanted to invite the ladies of the Cabinet as well as their husbands to deposit their papers in the Library. There are so many of these women who have themselves pursued some vigorous program connected with this Administration's work: Jane Wirtz in trying to get work for the disabled and market their goods, Lee Udall in showing the work of Indian craftsmen to the Nation and trying to create more of a market for them, Margy McNamara in her time trying to get books into the hands of children in the ghettos. I want to make sure that their contributions will become a part of the whole story.

And so we hugged the last goodbyes at the elevator; the red coated Marine bandsmen folded up their instruments, the queenly Yellow Oval Room settled into quiet, and our farewell dinner for the Cabinet slipped into memory.