

Mrs. President

Abigail Adams hangs laundry in the East Room

Make sure this gets the sun!
Let's put this drafty room to use,
It's time to give our sheets a public audience.
I'd rather air the clean than dirty laundry here,
We've had our share of mud on sheets
This Presidency. Politics need sunlight,
Same as underdrawers and petticoats!

Congress is always working on the rights of Men
But let this laundry remind them of the Ladies
And the constant work we do:
We need to have our representation too
Stains need scrubbing. So do laws.

Every Woman knows best where their shoe pinches.
If Men are fool enough to dare decide
What hurts or heals our own foot, well then!
We in charge of laundry will not be bound
By any laws in which we have no voice or benefit.

There'll come a day we'll have the vote
And Men shall learn the hard way what we will,
And will not, give. Till then, Sirs,
Learn about the lives of your wives,
And keep your slippers clean.
We'll do the same.

Besides, it all comes out in the wash!

The White House Squeeze – Dolley Madison

It's called a squeeze--
The pull of wine and cheese
To bring disputing parties
To the dining table. Invitees
Must squeeze together
No matter whether
They were at each other's throats,
Tugging on each other's coats
The day before on congress floor
My party's not to settle scores
My squeeze is not about affiliation
It's about the way we love our nation

United we'll sup on potato soup
As one we 'll dine on Virginia ham
Undivided we'll partake on candied yam
But absolutely no political coup
If you want to be invited back
For cinnamon cake and vintage cognac

Feel free to network and negotiate
With those who've drunk and ate
As long as you follow the white house rules
We love to serve but we don't suffer fools
No buttonholes allowed tonight
No fracas, duel, or other fight
"Bipartisan," if you please
The secret of the white house squeeze

So, cheers to you, bon appétit, and fill your plates
Each bite unites our united states.

The Dress

MARY TODD LINCOLN tries on the famous ribbon dress.

What makes me happy is this dress
Designed by my very own sorceress,
A dress that casts a spell, each curve and contour
Built for me, making most of my allure,
Each bespoke ribbon adding more, not less
To the strange appeal of Presidentress.

This Civil War tears us all apart
But I refuse to mourn today.
You dress me in the most delightful way!
First Ladies have it hard
There's no choice but to be on-guard.

And then to lose my boy to tragedy,
Poor Willie – he was not even twelve!
It was hard, HARD, to watch him die
To lose one's son is to lose oneself,
You lose your faith in Humankind,
It's enough to make you lose your mind!

But when I wear this dress
The faith returns, the grieving ends,
Know that beauty will find a way,
Honor Willie – and all the Willies who give
Themselves to the Blue and Grey –
And put myself into a happy trance.

First Ladies must not wait for storms to pass:
We are duty bound to wear our chosen dress
And – no matter how hard it rains – to dance!

A Cup of Tea: Eleanor Roosevelt

Text by Oliver Mayer

Eleanor Roosevelt in 1960, has tea with a young female of color.

I do so love a steeping cup of tea!
The quiet joys of life are very nearly free:
A fireside chat with someone dear to me
Restores my faith in humanity.

Civil rights are harder fought,
Freedom's as much caught as taught; Our
nation's Bill of Rights ought not
Be trampled, sold, or bought.

Careful, Dear, don't burn your tongue!

I worry for the future of the young:
Depression, war, now boycotts and unrest,
Our nation always ever on the brink
Will we fail the acid test?
Will our freedoms grow or shrink?

But now the threat is grown at home,
In Alabama, the seeds of wrath are sown;
Segregation's spleen is back in Mississippi,
The Dunces of our Confederacy.

Gain the equal blessings of our Posterity
Or not? Freedom just for folks like me,
Or does the Bill of Rights include you too?
Why is the answer so very overdue?

Liberty's hard to locate on a map. Freedom
Doesn't have to be at all, unless we make
It our priority. We Shall Overcome
Only if we never stop, for Heaven's sake.

Whenever I feel faint, about to falter,
Whenever the fight seems too much for me,
I take tea. My heart is like this bag of tea:
Can't tell its strength till it's in hot water.

Oh well! Our freedom's never free,
Take heart, my dear, and drink your tea.

That Little House: Laura Bush

Laura Bush stands in the Oval Office. A book in her hand. She opens, reads, recites – although she knows the words by heart.

“There was only the enormous empty prairie
With grasses blowing in waves of light....
And the great blue sky above it... and birds flying
And singing with joy because the sun was rising.”

She holds the book to her chest: “Little House on the Prairie.”

This book’s never left me, never will --
Perhaps because I come from plains --
Enormous sky where the wind blows free
Baking sun on empty space everywhere
As if no one before had ever been there.
You never truly leave a place like that.
Even here on Southern end of Northeast sprawl
With tidal flats submerging the National Mall
And hardly any sky that isn’t wet,
I still feel Midland in my blood,
I know most people are mostly good,
And I found my voice or it found me.

I will speak on women’s rights,
And children’s, and the right to read.
My Midland Texas Library Card --
Single most precious thing I ever owned –
Gave me that certain unalienable right
Called education. My legacy? An open heart.
I learned that teaching 2nd Grade --
Comes in handy when Congress acts like kids.
When their meltdowns go off the charts
I just say "Bless their little hearts"

Half-pint taught me sure enough
How to persevere when things get rough.

I think the White House is rather on the prairie
Exposed to the wind and the rain,
When things get tough and make life scary.
If it weren't for books, I'd be frozen to the bone
But as long as we have books we're not alone.

(reads, recites)

"They left it lonely and empty in the clearing
among the big trees, and they never saw
That little house again."