

MEETING LBJ

In 1967, my parents were invited to lunch at the White House. Needless to say, they were thrilled. Lady Bird Johnson was a real theater lover and had seen Mama's current Broadway play, *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*. Lady Bird had come backstage and was extremely warm and gracious. Still, Mama was surprised and delighted when the engraved invitation to a luncheon arrived. Even though she wasn't a fan of President Johnson, an invitation to lunch with the president and first lady was an event.

She shopped for weeks for just the right outfit. Mama found a simple, dark brown dress at Bonwit-Teller. It had rhinestone buttons on the sleeves and it was elegant, tasteful and not too flashy. She also bought a pair of white gloves. Even though my mother wasn't exactly the white-glove type, this was proper, formal etiquette for the period. She called a friend who was a diplomat and asked a few questions about protocol. For instance, should she keep her glove on when she shakes the president's hand or should she take it off? It was determined it would be best if she removed the glove to go through the receiving line and then replace it.

As she was about to meet LBJ, she became terribly nervous. Those butterflies had a strange effect on her.

"How do you do, Miss Heckart?" President Johnson said.

"Well, Lady Bird came to my matinee two weeks ago. Where were you?" she replied.

Putting on his best politician's forced smile, he said, "Well ma'am, we were havin' a little problem with the Russians that day. I had to go to a summit meeting. I'm sure sorry I missed it."

Heckart shot him a disappointed look that seemed to sear him like a pig on a spit.

All during the luncheon, he kept looking at her out of the corner of his eye.

As they were getting ready to leave, LBJ ran up to my mother and said, "Miss Heckart, I think I could make it to the evening show on the twenty-sixth, would that be all right with you?"

"Thanks, Mr. President," she said. "That'd be just fine."

God forbid LBJ should lose a single constituent.