1957

Eisenhower wrote to Swede briefly on November 24 and again on December 23, enclosing in the latter an invitation to attend the inauguration on January 21. Worried about Swede’s increasingly poor health, he wrote that “Mamie and I would like nothing better than to have you and Ibby come to Washington for as many of the festivities as you feel able to attend, but I don’t want honestly to urge you to do it since I know how tiring such a day can.” By the time of the inauguration, Swede was in Bethesda Naval Hospital for treatment of the chronic high blood pressure from which he suffered. He was able, however, to attend a private swearing-in ceremony for Eisenhower’s family and close friends—“except for our wedding day, it was the high point in each of our lives,” Swede later wrote.

Eisenhower received regular reports on Swede’s condition. “My underground sources tell me that you are getting along fine, although you have had a recurrence of those bad headaches that used to plague you,” he wrote on February 20. He wrote again on March 13, shortly before his departure for a meeting with the new British prime minister, Harold Macmillan, in Bermuda.
Dear Swede:

It is wretched luck that while you have been here in the hospital, I have myself been feeling so badly that I have just not had the energy to make the visit to you that I promised myself. I now understand that you are due to leave the hospital probably within a week—and of course I am delighted.

Meantime I have decided to seek the sun that so many people have recommended to me (by way of a ‘sea voyage’ of which I am sure you will approve). So these flowers will have to take the place of the conversation I hoped we would have. They bring you my hope that those headaches will soon completely disappear and that you will really be feeling better when you get back to Chapel Hill.

With affectionate regard to you and Ibby,

As ever,

By April the situation in the Middle East had been at least temporarily resolved—the Israelis had withdrawn the last of their forces and the canal had been opened to international traffic—and Eisenhower and Macmillan, meeting in Bermuda, had restored a degree of comity to strained Anglo-American relations. At home, though he only mentions it in passing, Eisenhower was embroiled in a disorderly battle to win congressional approval of his new budget, a campaign that he handled rather ineptly and that resulted in cuts of over $4 billion. Swede, meanwhile, had been discharged from Bethesda.
Dear Swede:

I cannot tell you how much I regret that a combination of bronchitis, work, and a trip to Bermuda prevented me from coming occasionally to the hospital to see you while you were here. I truly had looked forward to an opportunity for a couple of real visits.

There is one thing that I have found out concerning the relative rank of leaders. Every time you climb a rung, you become the boss of more people but you become likewise less and less the boss of your own time. You are constantly the slave of people, events and circumstances.

Today the weather is a mere continuation of all the vile experiences we have had since mid winter. To be cold, disagreeable and rainy in Washington on April fifth is almost unbelievable but it is absolutely true.

Recently I consented (I assure you in a weak moment) again to sit for a sculptor who was determined to make a bust of me. I resent even sitting for a painter in spite of the fact that I love to see a portrait develop and I am particularly interested in the techniques a true painter uses to get the effects he sees. But to sit for a bust to my mind is about the dreariest experience a man can have and it always takes longer than does a portrait. Having learned this lesson so clearly in the past, I do not know why I again fell victim to the arguments of the artist and one or two "friends(?)".

This morning I gave the sculptor an additional half hour and as I did so I began to ponder about people, particularly the Presidents, who have undoubtedly had the same experience in the past as I am now undergoing. Friends convinced them that they "owed it to posterity" to leave a likeness in bronze or marble and they, resenting every minute of the process, consented. Now, in 1957, I looked back, as I sat in front of the sculptor, and tried to evaluate in my own mind just what those individuals actually did for this generation.

I decided that the only bust that meant much to me was the famous one of Washington. Statues and busts of Lincoln were not made until after he died, if for no other reason than while he was alive he was far more vilified than admired. While here and there I have seen busts of other Presidents—even including a head of Truman—there is no single one of them that has ever provided me with any feeling of satisfaction, much less inspiration. All of which
convinces me that again I have sworn off sitting for sculptors for ever and ever, amen! So if in the future I ever write to you a new complaint on this score, please remind me that I am a weak, vacillating and easily swayed individual.

The Mid East continues to be the central factor in my thinking, in spite of the fact that the newspapers are trying to make the budget the most important item in the world today. If we could ever get a concession from Egypt that could to some degree satisfy Britain, France and Israel, I think I could regain what many people once regarded as a cheerful disposition.

The Bermuda Conference was very interesting and some day, when I have an hour or two completely to myself, I will try to give you an account of it. Macmillan is, of course, one of my intimate wartime friends and so it is very easy to talk to him on a very frank, even blunt, basis.

Right now I am off with Mamie to the farm, to be back on Sunday afternoon. The weather, as I said, is abominable, but at least it provides a change of scenery and we love the place—both its interior and the surroundings. I have had bad luck on the weather at the farm, illustrated by the fact that although I have had a skeet range there for well over a year, I have never yet fired a shot.

Give my love to Ibby and, of course, all the best to yourself, in all of which Mamie joins.

As ever,

P.S.: Of course I do most sincerely hope that those wretched headaches of yours have disappeared and that you are feeling much more like yourself.

Swede’s health continued to deteriorate. Though the stay at Bethesda succeeded in bringing his blood pressure down, the fierce headaches continued, and in late June he returned to the hospital.
24 June 1957
(Dictated 3:00 p.m.)

Dear Swede:

At this moment you are one of the mysteries of my office. We had clandestine information to the effect that you were entering Bethesda Hospital tomorrow. Inquiry at the hospital brings a report "We know nothing about it," so I will send this note to Chapel Hill in the hope that it will run you down somewhere along the line.

I am just about to take off for Williamsburg where I am to address the Conference of Governors. I have a very banal and colorless talk to deliver. While it expresses an obvious truth—that governors ought to concern themselves more with retaining states' responsibilities if they are to retain states' rights—this subject has been so often discussed that I feel like I am giving a lecture on the virtues of sunlight. Some of these speaking engagements become mere ordeals.

Of course if you are on the way here to the hospital, my office will know it before I get back and will probably have there a word of welcome to you.

I suppose it is those damnable headaches that are your present difficulty because you told me that your blood pressure situation was much improved.

These days find me riding the governmental merry-go-round at a dizzy pace. Abroad there are several problems that are immensely acute; for example Jordan, disarmament efforts, Russian propaganda, and the Korean situation.

At home, particularly here in Washington, the Budget governs the thinking, talking and action of almost every individual. Demagogues are having a field day with their particular venom being directed at "tight" money. This of course is one of the prices of prosperity. There is seemingly a much greater demand for money with which to expand than there is money.

Some people doubt that it is possible for a free government to live too long with continued prosperity. It looks as if we are having a chance to prove or disprove the charge. Possibly nations have some of the characteristics of the individual, and we know many individuals who stand poverty with good grace grow insufferable, and degenerate in character, the moment they experience any good fortune.
Enough of all this—one of these days I will try to write a letter characterized by a bit more coherence and good sense. Give my love to Ibby, and all the best to yourself.

As ever,

6/25/57

P.S.: Immediately after I left for Williamsburg, my secretary discovered that you had indeed been admitted to Bethesda. Following my previous instructions, she sent you a few flowers and this note, of course, I shall now have delivered there. Captain [Dale J.] Crittenden will keep in touch with your doctors and report to me. I do hope this time the doctors will find the cause of your difficulty.

By the summer of 1957, Eisenhower was engaged in a series of battles with congressional conservatives over the U.S. Status of Forces agreements and over foreign aid. The controversy over the Status of Forces agreements was precipitated by an incident in which an American soldier shot and killed a Japanese woman and was subsequently surrendered to Japanese authorities for trial. There was a move in Congress to revise all Status of Forces agreements so as to bar foreign criminal jurisdiction over United States military personnel, a move that was quickly squelched by Eisenhower's strong opposition.

He was less successful, however, in winning support for increased foreign aid. Although Congress had endorsed his call for a policy of economic and military aid to counter "Communist aggression" in the Middle East—the so-called Eisenhower Doctrine—it nevertheless slashed his requests for such aid by more than a billion dollars.

The growth of the civil-rights movement clearly troubled Eisenhower, to whom order and public tranquility were extremely important. Relatively insensitive to the plight of black Americans, he feared the passions that civil rights aroused among both blacks and white southerners. He believed that the decision in Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, had been a mistake, and he
refused to endorse it or to identify himself with the goal of desegregation. In his State of the Union address in January he had called for passage of a modest civil-rights bill. Though the bill was further weakened by Congress, it finally passed in August. The first civil-rights legislation in nearly a century, it established the federal Civil Rights Commission and strengthened, if only slightly, federal protection for voting rights.

Finally, he could not abide the disorderly processes of congressional politics. Congress was a warren of greedy special interests, he believed, and most congressmen were little better than demagogues. "We can't let just a popular majority sweep us in one direction," he wrote to Vice-President Nixon, "because then you can't recover." His faith in the Supreme Court was based, not on its particular decisions, with which he frequently disagreed, but on its role in providing "stability in a form of government where political expediency might at times carry parties and political leaders to extremes."

22 July 1957

PERSONAL

Dear Swede:

The fact that you had to remain in the hospital such a short time encourages me to believe that your condition must have improved definitely and rapidly. While I had hoped to get out to Bethesda some time when Ibby would be present, I am still delighted that you are not compelled to spend most of the summer in a hospital room.

Concerning my present situation, I think it is best described by merely saying "the grind goes on." I am repeatedly astonished, even astounded, by the apparent ignorance of members of Congress in the general subject of our foreign affairs and relationships. I realize that by this time I should accept, as a matter of course, Congressional reaction that seemingly reflects either this abysmal
ignorance or a far greater concern for local political sentiment than for the welfare of the United States.

I am sure that this second possibility is not correct so far as the conscious attitude of the average Congressman is concerned. In the general case each of them thinks of himself as intensely patriotic; but it does not take the average member long to conclude that his first duty to his country is to get himself re-elected. This subconscious conviction leads to a capacity for rationalization that is almost unbelievable.

In any event, right at this moment lack of understanding of America's international position and obligation accounts for the fact that we seem to be trying to make a national hero out of a man who shot a woman—in the back at something like ten to fifteen yards distance.

As quickly as this incident became a popular one in some parts of the isolationist press, it was taken up by dozens of Congressmen who "viewed with alarm" and were "shocked and distressed" at the injustice done to this great soldier and citizen.

We have even had a serious attempt made to force me to denounce our Status of Forces treaties. These treaties, as you know, are fair and just to Americans serving abroad and are the only means by which we retain jurisdiction in most offenses committed. Because they establish a reasonable jurisdictional balance between ourselves and the host country, they are at the very foundation of our defensive alliances. To denounce them would make us completely isolationist and force us to abandon practically every base we have abroad.

Of course there are people who believe that the United States would not only be secure but would greatly prosper by withdrawing into a fanciful "Fortress America." I say fanciful for the reason that any sensible man knows that there can be no such thing as security in isolation, no matter if our armed forces were multiplied three-fold.

This same unreasoning attitude is reflected in the constantly repeated effort in Congress to slash mutual security funds. Again and again I have explained to individuals and to the public that, as of this moment, our mutual security operations represent America's best investment. Through them we are able to keep down the direct costs of our own military establishment. More than this, we are increasing the consuming power of many friendly nations and
helping to build up future markets for our rapidly expanding productive capacity.

Last year our excess of exported goods over imported goods was something on the order of nine billion dollars. Subtract from this all of the funds that we currently send out to aid the military establishments and economies of our friends and we still have a comfortable surplus. It is quite clear that except for the funds we have spent in the past in order to give help to economies in Europe and in Asia, there would not be the purchasing power in a number of countries to buy from us.

Some people worry that the long range competitive position of the United States will be damaged if we help now to build up the productive capacity of others. Some day this might be a problem. But there are two main points to remember.

(a). If other countries improve industrially their standards of living will usually go up. This means that in the normal case their wage scales will begin to rise and eventually will come closer and closer to our own. Consequently we will still have the competitive advantage of our deeper experience in management, production and, we like to think, in inventiveness and imagination. In the meantime we will have expanding markets.

While you may argue that, in the case of Japan, increasing industrialization has raised living standards very slowly indeed, I think that as of today labor would be in a far better position in that country if their society had been a free one rather than a dictatorship.

(b). Before any of the underdeveloped countries can reach a position where they can export to others, on a competitive basis with the United States, many years must elapse and during that period their purchasing power will multiply rapidly. We, if we are wise, will share prominently in that increasing market. This applies to all of South America, Africa, and to portions of Asia, particularly in the Middle East.

All this, of course, is nothing but a by-product of a process which has as its principal purpose the strengthening of freedom and the gradual exhaustion of Communism in the world. I merely refer to it to express my belief that both in the short term and in the long term our mutual security program will advance our country’s best interests.
Undoubtedly I have written to you a number of times on the subject of "Civil Rights." I think that no other single event has so disturbed the domestic scene in many years as did the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 in the school segregation case. That decision and similar ones earlier and later in point of time have interpreted the Constitution in such fashion as to put heavier responsibilities than before on the Federal government in the matter of assuring to each citizen his guaranteed Constitutional rights. My approach to the many problems has been dictated by several obvious truths:

(a). Laws are rarely effective unless they represent the will of the majority. In our prohibition experiment, we even saw local opinion openly and successfully defy Federal authority even though national public opinion then seemed to support the whole theory of prohibition.

(b). When emotions are deeply stirred, logic and reason must operate gradually and with consideration for human feelings or we will have a resultant disaster rather than human advancement.

(c). School segregation itself was, according to the Supreme Court decision of 1896, completely Constitutional until the reversal of that decision was accomplished in 1954. The decision of 1896 gave a cloak of legality to segregation in all its forms. As a result, the social, economic and political patterns of the South were considered by most whites, especially by those in that region, as not only respectable but completely legal and ethical.

(d). After three score years of living under these patterns, it was impossible to expect complete and instant reversal of conduct by mere decision of the Supreme Court. The Court itself recognized this and provided a plan for the desegregation of schools which it believed to be moderate but effective.

The plan of the Supreme Court to accomplish integration gradually and sensibly seems to me to provide the only possible answer if we are to consider on the one hand the customs and fears of a great section of our population, and on the other the binding effect that Supreme Court decisions must have on all of us if our form of government is to survive and prosper. Consequently the plan that I have advanced for Congressional consideration on this
touchy matter was conceived in the thought that only moderation in legal compulsions, accompanied by a stepped-up program of education, could bring about the result that every loyal American should seek.

I think that some of the language used in the attempt to translate my basic purposes into legislative provisions has probably been too broad. Certainly it has been subject to varying interpretations. This I think can be corrected in Congress.

But I hold to the basic purpose. There must be respect for the Constitution—which means the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Constitution—or we shall have chaos. We cannot possibly imagine a successful form of government in which every individual citizen would have the right to interpret the Constitution according to his own convictions, beliefs and prejudices. Chaos would develop. This I believe with all my heart—and shall always act accordingly.

This particular quarrel is not completely devoid of some amusing aspects. For example, a violent exponent of the segregation doctrine was in my office one day. During the course of his visit he delivered an impassioned talk on the sanctity of the 1896 decision by the Supreme Court. At a pause in his oration I merely asked, "Then why is the 1954 decision not equally sacrosanct?" He stuttered and said, "There were then wise men on the Court. Now we have politicians." I replied, "Can you name one man on the 1896 Court who made the decision?" He just looked at me in consternation and the subject was dropped.

I suppose at the moment a problem of possibly even greater importance to us is the threat of inflation. Indeed it has passed the point of mere threat, as evidenced by the fact that in the last year we have had about a four percent rise in living costs. Since we had in the first three and a half years of this Administration succeeded in holding this rise to under one percent, the present situation shows that accumulated pressures are at last forcing prices up—or if you want to put it another way, the dollar down.

There are so many contributory causes to inflation that it seems to be idle to pick out any one as the real culprit. Nevertheless many people try to do this. One man will wail about the wage-price spiral. Another lays everything to government spending. Still another will blame unlimited consumer credit, while others find banking policies to be wholly to blame.
Actually all these factors and even more enter into the problem. Even worse, not everybody acts consistently. Again consider the Congress. Suddenly convinced that governmental expenditures were too high—which they are—Congress entered upon a great economy drive. This it did under the belief that this subject would remain popular for so long that no better record could be taken to the voter in the fall of 1958 than one of consistent voting against expenditures.

This drive was underway long enough to provide opportunity for speeches by almost every individual member of the Congress, but by the time the first round was over, some of the boys began to wake up to the fact that a good many pressure groups wanted to dig a little deeper into the Federal treasury. As a result, in the field of housing Congress insisted upon putting a billion dollars more in the authorization bill than the Administration had requested. On top of that, Congress is in the process of passing a pay raise for mailmen that will give them a twelve percent increase even though Congress is well aware of the fact that this will practically compel raises for the entire classified civil service. This vastly increases Federal expenditures. Worse than this, there can be little doubt that the industrial wage-price spiral would get a terrific upward jolt from any such action on the part of the Federal government. But in voting as he does the Congressman feels that he is winning votes for himself. So out the window goes his concern about the effect of government expenditures on inflation.

In the same way, I doubt that there is any Congressman who fails to realize that so-called cheap money likewise has a stimulating effect on inflation. Yet he is willing to expose the country to the ravages of inflation so long as he can make a showing that he is for “cheap money for the little fellow.”

I know that you will understand I am not criticizing all Congressmen. I am talking mainly about those who strive for the headlines by reckless and impulsive statements. Indeed in the normal case the average Congressman, when met individually, seems to be a perfectly logical and high-minded individual. It is usually when he gets to operating in the mass with opportunities for making rash and unwise statements that we gain such a bad impression of his capabilities.

* * *
This letter is far too long—you will be worn out with its reading. In any event, when I started my chief purpose was merely to express the great hope that you were improving as rapidly as your short stay in the hospital seemed to indicate you would. Everything between this paragraph and the beginning represents only the meandering reflections of an individual who has daily to use up more than a normal ration of his sense of humor in order to keep right side up. Possibly I am something like a ship which, buffeted and pounded by wind and wave, is still afloat and manages in spite of frequent tacks and turnings to stay generally along its plotted course and continues to make some, even if slow and painful, headway.

Give my love to Ibby and, as always, the best to yourself.

As ever,

Tunisia, where independence leader Habib Bourguiba presided over a former French colony, was among the least of Eisenhower’s worries in the fall of 1957, despite the space he devotes to it in this letter. Far more pressing were inflation, continuing turmoil in the Middle East, the Soviet launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile, renewed pressure for a build-up at home, and, finally, the crisis over school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas. In Little Rock, where integration of the high school had just begun, Governor Orval Faubus had ordered in the Arkansas National Guard, ostensibly to preserve the peace but in fact to block black children from entering the school. When efforts at compromise with Faubus had failed, and after angry white mobs had driven black children from the school, Eisenhower finally and reluctantly ordered federal troops into Little Rock.

Swede, meanwhile, grew worse, struggling with increased difficulty to sustain his end of the correspondence, abandoning altogether his “Royal Ike,” and writing slowly and laboriously by hand.
18 November 1957

PERSONAL

Dear Swede:

It is too bad that your condition of weakness does not respond more readily to treatment. If the writing of a full letter seems to become too much of a burden, why don't you, from time to time, just jot down a note, in a few words, about anything that occurs to you. When you get a package of them, send them on to me. I do think you should not waste your strength trying to compose a coherent letter—much as I like your communications.

Since July 25th of 1956, when Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez, I cannot remember a day that has not brought its major or minor crisis. Some of these have been handled in secret; that is, no explanation or recitation of fact is possible for the simple reason that to bring some of them out in the open would cause as much trouble as the wrong answer. For example, had we published an account of the long, patient and hard work we did with the British and French, as well as the Israelis, in order to prevent the attack on Egypt and in making plain what would be our attitude in the event that such an attack was undertaken, there would have been the greatest political trouble in Britain, and probably in France. So we just had to let people think that we acted on the spur of the moment and astonished our friends by taking the action we did. Actually, they knew exactly what we'd do.

In the matters that currently seem to be disturbing the country so much, namely our relative position with Russia in arms development, you can understand that there are many things that I don't dare to allude to publicly, yet some of them would do much to allay the fears of our own people.

The most recent difficulty in the foreign field of which you have read involves our shipment of token arms to Tunisia. This we did in conjunction with the British after conversations with them demonstrated we were thinking in parallel lines.

What happened was this. Somewhere along about early September the Tunisians came to us saying that they simply had to have arms for internal security and some protection against border raids. We knew that the French were maintaining close ties with Tunisia and we urged the French to make a satisfactory arms deal with Tunisia, in order that the latter country would not turn to the
Soviets for help. The political leader in the country, Bourguiba, is a very fine friend of the West and the most intelligent man that I know of in the Arab world.

He became more and more insistent when he found that the French were using delaying and evasive tactics and he told us frankly that he would simply have to take the Soviet's offer which, financially, was far more favorable to him and his country than anything we could give him.

We and the British told the French that we would have to send a token shipment by November first because in our opinion we would otherwise risk the loss of that important area. You do not even have to glance at your map to know what the strategic value of the region is. The French then replied that they would make some delivery of the necessary arms to Tunisia and asked us to abstain. To this we gladly agreed, provided they would do it by November first.

When their government fell, they pointed out that there was no one there in power to take action and asked us to delay still further. This we did, much to the anguish of Bourguiba.

I have forgotten for the moment exactly how we fixed the date, but we then stated that we would wait until November twelfth, but we told both the French and Tunisians that, on that date, we would deliver a token shipment of arms (from us only 500 rifles). When November twelfth came, the [Félix] Gaillard government was in power but the matter had not been settled. Under our pressing, the French government finally said it intended to deliver the arms and had agreed in principle to do so, but before actual delivery could take place the Tunisians would have to agree that their whole source of arms supply from then on would be France.

In other words, even though Tunisia is ostensibly a free government, one with which we have exchanged Ambassadors, the French asked them to agree that for any military purposes they would be completely subservient to the French.

As you might expect, Bourguiba flatly rejected this condition and insisted that we deliver the token shipment of arms, as promised.

On our part, we felt it was a matter of good faith to deliver on November twelfth, but since the French seemed at last to be aware of the grim seriousness of the situation, we put off, with the British, actual delivery for another twenty-four to forty-eight hours, to give the French a renewed chance to settle the matter.
In spite of our actions, taken with the utmost caution and after long and exhaustive conferences, to postpone delivery after November twelfth, and so again breaking a promise we had given in good faith, the French went back to the Tunisians with the same old argument—namely that they, the French, had to be the sole source of supply of arms for Tunisia.

With the matter in this highly unsatisfactory state, we finally delivered the token shipment on November fourteenth, and France has since been acting like a spoiled child.

Of course we were well aware that France was seeking any kind of excuse to blame someone else for its own difficulties. That is a favorite trick of French politicians these days. But no matter how serious the consequences, we decided that if we were to hold on to the Mid East and have any kind of decent relations with the Arab world, we simply had to go ahead with an agreement that seemed to us to be based on Tunisian rights and on fairness in our dealings with other nations.

Just what the outcome will be I cannot say. The French are fully capable of the most senseless action just to express their disagreement with others.

Their basic trouble is that they are still trying to act as if they headed a great empire, all of it, as of old, completely dependent on them. If they would center their attention mainly on their European problems and work with others in their solution, they could be a happy and prosperous country.

Today their production per man is, I am told by the experts, even higher than that in Germany. Yet Germany is making money hand over fist, and France is on the verge of bankruptcy.

* * *

I am slated to make two or three more speeches this fall, or at least by the end of January. Subjects still to be covered are such things as "The function of mutual security assistance in our nation's defense," "The farm problem," and the "Economic situation." This last I will defer for some time because of the hope that a few of the uncertainties will be cleared up and I can make a more meaningful talk on the matter.
You mention the Little Rock situation and your conviction that I had done the right thing. My biggest problem has been to make people see, particularly in the south, that my main interest is not in the integration or segregation question. My opinion as to the wisdom of the decision or the timeliness of the Supreme Court’s decision has nothing to do with the case.

The point is that specific orders of our Courts, taken in accordance with the terms of our Constitution as interpreted by the Supreme Court, must be upheld.

I said to a man the other day: "You disagree with the decision and tell me that I should show my disapproval by refusing to prevent violence from obstructing the carrying-out of the Court’s orders."

"Let us take a different example. Suppose you had been thrown into jail by an arbitrary sheriff or United States marshal. Your lawyer asked for a writ of habeas corpus and it is granted by the judge. But the feeling in the locality is such that the sheriff feels completely safe in telling you he will not obey the order, and you will remain in jail. Now comes my question: Would you consider I was doing my solemn duty as the President of the United States if I did not compel your release from jail?"

If the day comes when we can obey the orders of our Courts only when we personally approve of them, the end of the American system, as we know it, will not be far off.

Along with these speaking chores that I mentioned a while back, I have the State of the Union speech to make, a Budget in preparation to send to Congress, the Economic Report to approve and send on, and then the endless conferences with legislative leaders while Congress is in session. The only hope I see for any real letup is some time around next July. Several things would have to happen to make that period any better than the present.

The Congress would have to adjourn early. There would have to be a general easing off of tensions in the free world. And fewer people must be struggling to see me with "very important messages and pieces of advice." If all three of these things happen, possibly my family, my associates, my secretary and I can give less attention to our blood pressure and the condition of our general nervous systems.

Having said all this, I must tell you that physically I seem to stand up under the burden remarkably well. Yesterday I think the
doctor said my blood pressure was 130 over 80 and my pulse something on the order of 66.

The biggest worry of all is the constant question of "doing the right thing." Certain of the problems are so complex and so difficult that there is no really satisfactory answer. As [John] Foster Dulles explained it the other day when we were talking about the French-Tunisian mess, "This is a matter of choosing whether you want your arm broken in two places—or your leg broken above the knee." But I have the satisfaction of knowing that I do my best, that I have with me a group of honest, dedicated, and in some cases very wise men to advise and help, and that, finally, the Almighty must have in mind some better fate for this poor old world of ours than to see it largely blown up in a holocaust of nuclear bombs.

So with this kind of support I manage to keep at least the shreds of a once fairly good disposition—a matter on which Mrs. Whitman may write you a minority report—and all in all feel that the job is being done about as well as it can be under the circumstances.

While I am often urged to be more assertive, to do a little more desk-pounding, to challenge Russia more specifically and harshly, I do not do these things for the simple reason that I think they are unwise. Possibly I do not always control my temper well, but I do succeed in controlling it in public. And I still believe that a frequent exhibition of a loss of temper is a sure sign of weakness.

I seem to have gotten into a spate of introspective thinking here and making you the victim of its expression. Actually I have nothing quite so important to do as to wish for you a reasonable and quick return to a state of good feeling, particularly in getting rid of those blankety-blankety headaches. Along with this, I want to send my love to Ibby and your family.

As ever,

On November 25, while at his desk, Eisenhower suffered a stroke that left him briefly paralyzed and unable to speak coherently. As word of the stroke spread through Washington, there
were rumors of resignation and calls, in Congress and by the press, for the president to step down. Even Eisenhower was heard to mumble that "if I cannot attend to my duties, I am simply going to give up this job." But as with his earlier illnesses, Eisenhower’s powerful will and strong constitution once again took over; and by the time his secretary, Ann Whitman, wrote the following letter to Swede, Eisenhower was already recovering.

1 December 1957

PERSONAL

Dear Captain Hazlett:

All week I have wanted to write you this note, not that I can add anything to the news I know you get daily about the President, but to try to reassure you—and myself at the same time—that the President is really going to be all right again. Incidentally, just in case you didn’t see it, I am enclosing a copy of an editorial in the New York Times of yesterday that has touched me more than anything else these last difficult days.

You remember, of course, the President’s letter from Augusta. Now that I think back I could have offered a minority report. I only knew then that I was fighting a losing battle against the pace that the President seemingly had compulsively set for himself. We had all ignored those hard lessons of the heart attack aftermath and everybody seemed to be dumping all the unsolvable problems squarely in his lap. With the Sputniks and Little Rock and the failures of the last Congress still fresh, there wasn’t ever for the President, here in Washington at least, a moment that he could use to think. He was, furthermore, wrestling with speeches at all hours of day and night, and under great pressure. For instance, a concrete example of what I mean was the Oklahoma speech. I had no plans to go on that trip, but at noon that day the speech was still far from final. So typewriters were dumped on the plane and somehow or other we finished it. All that tends to build up in me and must for the President be magnified a thousand times, a
tenseness that means loss of sleep, and a feeling always that you are not doing the job right because there simply isn’t time.

On the plus side, I think the high government officials and the President’s staff have learned, this time, that they must stand on their own feet. I believe the President is the only person who can save the world today for a future that surely could be bright. If we can un-clutter his desk with the trivia (and I take that back, it really isn’t trivia) but the less of the more important, I think he is the only person who can weld our friends into a cohesive group and overcome the suspicions of our potential enemies. And certainly he has the courage and will to do his best, despite all these blows that fate throws him.

I seem to have wandered far from what I meant to be a reassuring note to you. I know how worried you are. These are little simple things: The President has called me on the phone several times since last Monday. He has seemed absolutely perfect in his speech. There is positively no loss of anything except this business of trying to find the right word, and that occurs only when he is tired. One of his friends from New York saw him yesterday at the farm, and reported that he looked just fine.

We had an alert out at Bethesda, but apparently you did not go there for the overnight checkup that you wrote the President [about]. Please let us know if you go through Washington, if only so that Captain Crittenberger or I can bring you fully up to date on the President.

Don’t think of answering this; it does me good to write to someone as close as you are to the President. And please forgive my bad (Sunday, let’s call it) typing.

Sincerely,

[Ann C. Whitman]

P.S. Couldn’t you have been generous and let Army (and the President) win yesterday?