“How do you do / all the things/ you do?”/ If I am asked that question once,/ I am asked it/ hundreds of times!/ And at last/ I am going to bring myself/ to making the horrible revelation/ that the way things are accomplished/ does not rest entirely with the individual/ who apparently does them./ That individual/ has perhaps one virtue,/ the gift/ of working well/ with other people/ and choosing good associates/ to work with./ Outside of that,/ the success in accomplishing a great many things/ simply means/ having expert assistance. (Pause - one - two - )

Of course./ I can only speak for myself/ so I will tell you/ about the people/ who make it possible for me/ to do a great many things./ For instance,/ take the mechanics of housekeeping/ in the White House./ Fifteen minutes/ spent with Mrs. Nesbitt every morning/ is all/ that I have to do about that./ Of course,/ at first/ it did require a little time/ to start things going/ and for us to work out a system. (Pause - one - two - )

Mrs. Nesbitt/ was a friend of mine/ who lived near me/ in the country/ and had worked with me/ in the League of Women Voters./ I knew her/ to have executive ability./ I also knew/ that she was a very good cook,/ that she had had/ a certain amount of experience/ in various kinds of businesses./ Realizing/ that I had to change a number of things in the White House/ to cut down expenses/ and simplify generally,/ I decided/ that I would rather have a friend/ who would think along the same lines that I would,/ who would be interested/ in the same things/ and who was not/ a professional housekeeper. (Pause - one - two - )

It caused/ a certain amount of sorrow/ to dear old Ike Hoover/ who entered in his diary the fact/ that I had no housekeeper/ and who confided in a friend of mine/ his anxiety on the subject./ However,/ after we had been at the White House a few days,/ life settled down/ into an even routine/ and has proceeded along it/ ever since. (Pause - one - two - )

The pride in their work/ which inspires all those/ who have long served in the White House/ is a thing to be respected/ and treasured./ No money/ can pay for the kind of service/ which is given/ in the President’s House/ and the fact/ that Mrs. Nesbitt could appreciate this/ as well as I could/ has been a tremendous asset. (Pause - one - two - )

Mrs. Nesbitt’s work/ consists in managing/ all the people/ who actually work in the house,/ both men and women./ She plans the work;/ engages and dismisses people;/ if for any reason a change has to be made;/ she buys all supplies;/ plans the meals;/ keeps detailed accounts;/ sees to the cleaning and general renovating/ or upholstery work;/ all of course,/ with my consent and approval;/ she watches over the china/ the silver/ and glass;/ and is always in the background/ ready to meet any emergency/ during entertainments. (Pause - one - two - )

We had a clear understanding at the start/ that her the³ responsibility for a certain results⁴ was hers./ that she was free to come to me/ every morning at a certain hour/ between 8:30 and 10:30:/ It has worked out beautifully/ and I do not think/ that any one could ask for more efficient cooperation/ than I have had/ in this particular side of the White House. (Pause - one - two - )

The next person to be seen in the morning/ is Mrs. Helm/ whose particular responsibility/ is the social correspondence/ and entertainments/ given during the official season/ from November to June./ She makes up the lists of people/ who should be invited/ to different entertainments./ She goes through the cards/ left at the White House/ and arranges for all those to be received on my day “at home”./ She works with the people in what is called/ the “social bureau”;/ who get out all the invitations./ She helps me at receptions/ and teas/ goes over the seating/ of the official dinners and lunches with the State Department
and myself. She brings me every morning the lists and the table seating if there is a party pending and also any questions or notes that have come in on entertainments or social functions of any kind. She sees that I have a list of these functions on my desk, kept up to date and reminds me again at the last minute who are to be my nearest neighbors at entertainments and last but not least she brings to my attention anything which she thinks would add to the pleasure and comfort of my guests. She is, of course, free at any time to bring me her suggestions. (Pause - one - two -)

Mrs. Helm takes all the telephone calls and they are legion on these subjects and notifies the head usher of all people on the purely social lists who are to be received and the hour of their arrival. As nearly as human beings can run these things without mistakes it is done by the White House social bureau and Mrs. Helm and the State Department. Considering the numbers that are constantly contacting the White House for some social reason, I feel it most remarkable that Mrs. Helm has been able to do such an extremely satisfactory job and yet at all times to remain calm and unharrassed at least outwardly. I have known her for several years and felt I was particularly fortunate to find her willing to join my group of wheel turners. (Pause - one - two -)

On the personal side I have a young colored woman who acts as my personal maid. She keeps my clothes in order and packs them sometimes with only ten minutes' notice. (Pause - one - two -)

The last and most important person is my own secretary, Mrs. Scheider, who is head of the whole social bureau. Directly under her is the non-social bureau and by non-social I mean the force dealing with the regular mail which covers every possible subject. Mrs. Scheider has been with me for fourteen years. We worked together in New York and that work included a number of political campaigns. Both state and national when I was in charge of the women's work. From this experience we had already planned before coming to Washington a good system of working with people and mail in volume. We found, however, on arriving there that we would have to do some reorganizing of our system as we found the mail and work much greater than we anticipated. With the established force there it was easier in some ways as the members of that force and the men who head it were well versed in the ways of White House mail and were extremely helpful to Mrs. Scheider. (Pause - one - two -)

The mail is brought to Mrs. Scheider's desk as it arrives from the post office. She sorts it and takes out the personal mail which by long experience and a knowledge of my family and friends she has come to recognize and then the letters which seem to her important. The balance is sent down to the mailing room in the basement of the White House to be opened read and classified. The mail containing requests for information and assistance is routed to the respective departments without being answered in the White House. There are requests for gifts for church bazaars and to these we send a photograph of the White House hundreds of which I sign in my idle moments then there are requests for my autograph and these I sign in countless numbers in more idle moments on small cards marked White House. There are letters asking me to speak or to give interviews or to be patroness or to send messages - this is one classification. Then there are letters which seem more important than others or rather which seem to require immediate attention this is another catagory and the third group contains the mail which can only be answered by me personally. These are all returned to Mrs. Scheider who goes through them and answers all she can answer - the final balance comes to me for answering. I usually spend two to three hours a day in the busy season on this mail marking new letters and signing those already written. I simply write on the letters what I think should or could be done leaving the letters to be dictated in full by Mrs. Scheider. Usually out of the daily batch I personally only have to dictate two or three letters. The number of letters received in 1934 was approximately one hundred and five thousand. (Pause - one - two -)

Besides this Mrs. Scheider attends nearly all the social functions pours tea at at homes sees innumerable people whom I am unable to see and who are satisfied to see her and tell her their problems. She also attends the press conferences and takes notes on them. In between all this she answers the telephone at five minute intervals and does a job which sometimes I think really requires twenty four hours out of the twenty four. (Pause - one - two -)

In the midst of all this she takes the dictation of all my articles and speeches and these often have to be done over two or three times after I have revamped them. Any difficulties in her bailiwick/
come to her to be settled/ so she has also outwardly to appear calm and peaceful/ regardless of what her inner feelings/ may be./ She usually goes with me/ on the trips which I take/ and that means/ detailed arrangements/ for the work suring her absence./ (Pause - one - two - )
So now you can understand/ how one busy person/ is free to do the work which she does herself./ There are many other people/ who help me in my life in many other fields of interest/ and there are men/ as well as women/ who make the wheels go round in the White House/ but I have confined myself tonight/ to telling you/ about the those women's side/ whom I see daily./ (Pause - one - two - )
As a parting tribute/ to the particular people with whom I work/ I should like to say/ that though for all of us/ the work has been intense beyond anything we had ever done before./ and though we have had times/ when we have wondered/ whether we were going to get through our tasks./ still/ I do not remember/ ever having a disagreeable word/ or feeling of misunderstanding/ with any of these associates of mine./ (Pause - one - two - )
All honor to those/ who make the wheels/ go round!

Transcribed by Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project staff.
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Transcribed from a script held in the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

3 This is a handwritten interlineation.
6 The letter “s” is a handwritten interlineation.
9 This is a handwritten interlineation.
12 The letter “m” is a handwritten interlineation.
15 This is a handwritten addition.