

# THE LAST DAYS OF THE PRESIDENT

LBJ in retirement

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by Leo Janos

On the night before Christmas, 1971, Lyndon Baines Johnson played the most improbable role of his varied and controversial life. Protected from public view behind the gates of his Texas ranch, and no longer suffering the cloying presence of a battalion of White House reporters, Johnson donned a red suit and false beard, climbed aboard a small tractor, and drove to the hangar adjoining his airstrip. Assembled inside were the families of his ranch hands for what had become a traditional ceremony over the years: receiving greetings and gifts from LBJ. This time, they were so stunned at the sight of the former President ho-ho-hoing aboard a chugging tractor that they greeted his arrival with disbelieving silence. Undeterred, Johnson dismounted the tractor and unloaded a bag of toys for the children, sent to him for the occasion by an old friend, New York toy manufacturer Louis Marx, father of Patricia Marx Ellsberg.

"I'm going to enjoy the time I've got left," Johnson told friends when he left Washington in January, 1969, a worn old man at sixty, consumed by the bitter, often violent, five years of his presidency. He had never doubted that he could have won the 1968 election against Richard Nixon if he had chosen to run for another term. But in 1967 he launched a secret actuarial study on his life expectancy, supplying personal histories of all the males in the recent Johnson line, himself included. "The men in the Johnson family have a history of dying young," he told me at his ranch in the summer of 1971. "My daddy was only sixty-two when he died, and I figured that with my history of heart trouble I'd never live through another four years. The American people had enough of Presidents dying in office." The prediction handed to

Johnson was that he would die at the age of sixty-four. He did.

He returned to the Texas hill country so exhausted by his presidency that it took him nearly a full year to shed the fatigue in his bones. From the outset he issued the sternest orders to his staff that the press was to be totally off limits. "I've served my time with that bunch," he said, "and I give up on them. There's no objectivity left anymore. The new style is advocacy reporting—send some snotty-nosed reporter down here to act like a district attorney and ask me where I was on the night of the twenty-third. I'm always guilty unless I can prove otherwise. So to hell with it." His press grievances were usually accompanied by favorite examples of anti-Johnson stacked decks—among these, the flurry of comment generated when he had lifted his shirt to expose ample belly and fresh surgical scar. He explained: "Rumors were flying that I really had cancer. I had to prove I really had my gall bladder taken out." By contrast Nixon, he thought, had intimidated the press into fair treatment. "The damn press always accused me of things I didn't do. They never once found out about the things I did do," he complained with a smile. One result of such self-righteous bitterness was that the man who had been the world's most powerful and publicized ruler was simply swept down a hole of obscurity, surfacing only occasionally at University of Texas football games or at the funerals of old friends such as Hale Boggs and Harry Truman. A logical surmise was that Johnson was brooding in silence on his ranch porch, pouting at the unfriendly, unloving world beyond his guarded gates. But LBJ's temperament was more complicated than that: relaxed, easy, and friendly for days, he would suddenly lapse into an aloof

and brooding moodiness, only to give way to a period of driving restlessness. He was a seesawing personality for as long as anyone could remember.

His first year in retirement was crowded with projects. He supervised nearly every construction detail of the massive LBJ Library complex on the University of Texas campus, which houses not only thirty-one million documents acquired over thirty-eight years in Washington, but also the LBJ School of Public Affairs. At one point, university regent Frank Erwin approached Johnson about an Indiana educator who was interested in running the LBJ School. Johnson frowned at the mention of the state which sent to the Senate one of Johnson's least favorite persons, and among the most vocal of his war critics, Vance Hartke. "Frank," Johnson responded, "I never met a man from Indiana who was worth a shit."

There was fresh bitterness over a series of hour-long interviews with Walter Cronkite for which Johnson had contracted with CBS before leaving the White House. The first show, on Vietnam, had been a fiasco. "I did lousy," Johnson admitted, and raised hell over what he claimed had been an unfair CBS editing practice—Cronkite refilming new questions to answers he had originally given during the interview at the ranch. "Cronkite came down here all sweetness and light, telling me how he'd love to teach journalism at Texas someday, then he does this to me," he fumed. The critical reaction to his television interview on Vietnam reinforced Johnson's conviction that his presidential memoirs should be divided into two separate books, one on domestic policies, the other on foreign affairs. In this way, he reasoned, the Great Society would be spared from the critical response he anticipated to his explanations of Vietnam policy. His publishers talked him out of separate books, and Johnson cautiously began unfolding his version of his presidential years. Assisted by two trusted staff writers, Robert Hardesty and William Jorden, he issued only one firm guideline, that not one word should appear in the book that could not be corroborated by documentation. To aid in this effort, Johnson threw open to his writers every file and document from his White House years, including telephone conversations he had held as President, which were recorded and transcribed for history. (Exposure to this material was largely for his writers' background information; few revelations or previously unpublished documents appeared in Johnson's book.) Jorden, a former *New York Times* reporter who had worked as an assistant to Walt Rostow, was particularly impressed with his research reading. "My God," he said, "I thought I knew just about everything involving Vietnam dur-

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ing my White House days. I discovered that I had missed a lot."\* William Jorden worked on the book's Vietnam chapters, which went to twenty drafts and were read by McGeorge Bundy, General Earle Wheeler and William Westmoreland, an Abe Fortas, LBJ's pre-eminent confidant, among others, before receiving final approval. The result of all this effort was a fully researched but flat and predictable apologia of the Johnson years, most of its vital juices evaporated many drafts ago.

Hurt and disappointed by the adverse critical reaction to his book, *The Vantage Point: Perspective of the Presidency, 1963-1969*, Johnson found solace working the land of his 330-acre ranch, which he bought in 1951. Under a fiery Texas sun, the Pedernales River runs clear and full. Fat cattle graze languidly in the shade of live oaks. Johnson knew that he owned some of the loveliest property in Texas, and unleashed his energies as a working rancher like a restless child entering a playpen. LBJ installed a complex irrigation system (and was observed clad only in paper shorts helping to lay pipe in the middle of the shallow Pedernales), constructed a large hen house, planted acres of experimental grasses sufficiently hardy to withstand severe hill country weather, and built up his cattle herds through shrewd purchases at the weekly cattle auctions near Stonewall. On one occasion, ranch foreman Dale Milenchek talked Johnson into purchasing an \$8000 breeding bull. The massive animal impregnated only a few cows before suffering a fatal leg infection. Johnson complained "Dale bought me the most expensive sausage in the history of Texas."

No ranch detail escaped his notice. Once, driving some friends around the spread, LBJ suddenly reached for his car radiophone, which crackled just as much in retirement as it had when he was President. "Harold, Harold, over," he barked. "Why is that sign about selling the Herefords still posted? You know we sold them last week. Get it down." At the LBJ State Park, across the road, Johnson enjoyed escorting his guests to a slide show and exhibit on the hill country. On another occasion, he observed Johnson watching a preview of a new slide show with increasing annoyance as the bearded face of a local Stonewall character appeared in various poses, slide after slide. Turning angrily to his park supervisor, Johnson exclaimed "Will you please tell me why we need six slides of Hondo Crouch?" Another must on a Johnson-chauffeured tour was the family graveyard, a few

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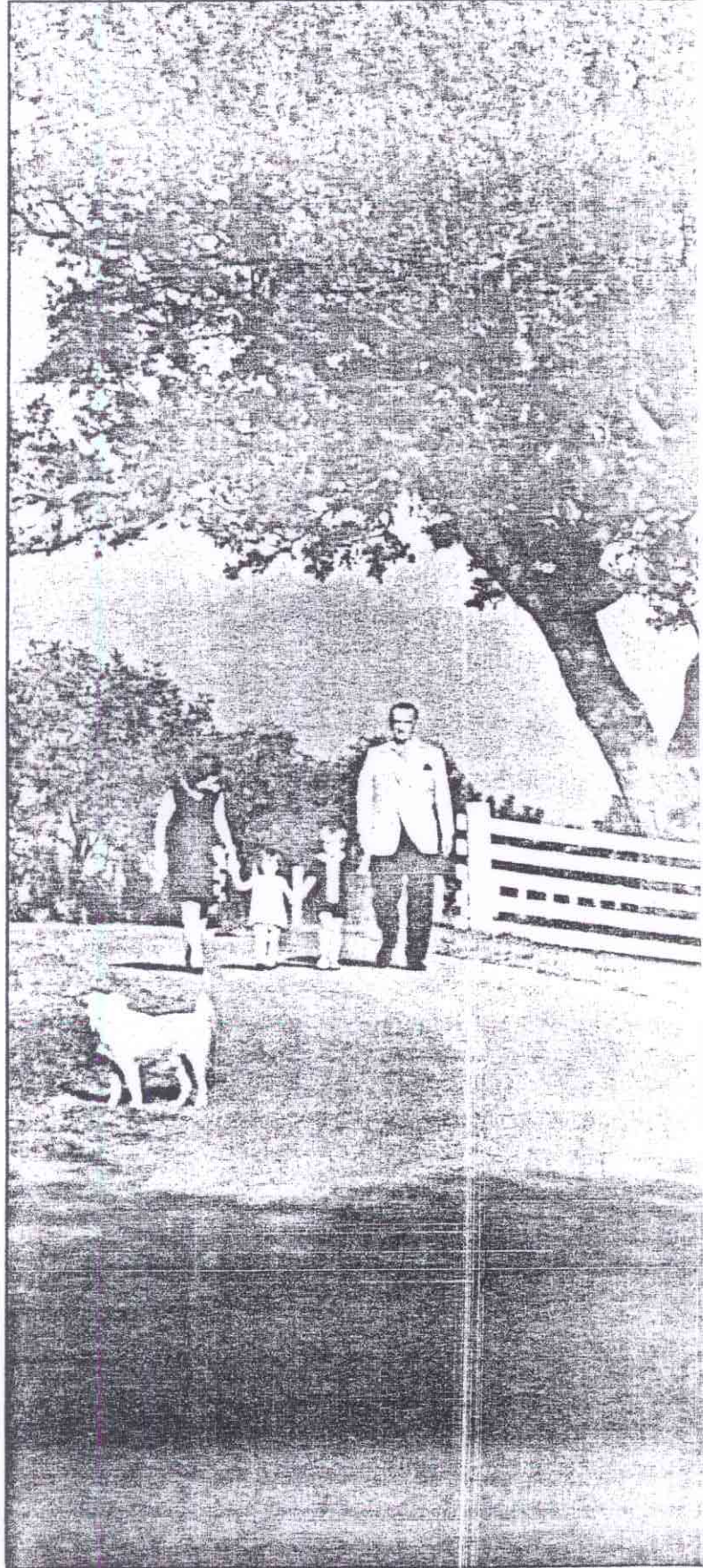
\*One of the more secretive Presidents, Johnson nevertheless was unexpectedly willing to open up portions of his archives to scholars as quickly as possible. At the time of his death, he had arranged for the LBJ Library curator to meet at the White House with Nixon's then chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, to discuss declassification of Johnson's foreign policy papers. The basis of the meeting was Nixon's new executive order providing more flexible guidelines on declassifying documents. LBJ hoped his papers would meet these new guidelines.

hundred yards from his home. "Here's where my mother lies," he solemnly declared. "Here's where my daddy is buried. And here's where I'm gonna be too." Then, a sudden acceleration and the white Lincoln Continental would roar to the cow pastures.

Old friends invited to dine with the squire of the Pedernales would be advised that dinner was at eight. But not until ten or eleven would Johnson appear, happily tired and dung-booted, to regale his guests about the new calf or progress with his egg production. "He's become a goddamn farmer," a friend complained. "I want to talk Democratic politics, he only talks hog prices." Often, Johnson took friends to a favorite hill on his spread to watch the sunset. His Secret Service bodyguard, Mike Howard, unpacked an ice chest and glasses, and the group would relax and drink to the setting sun. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, cook Mary Davis, a keenly intelligent black lady, would begin pressuring Lady Bird to get Johnson and his guests back before dinner was ruined. "Another half hour and I simply cannot be responsible for this roast," Mary would complain. With a sigh, Lady Bird would begin the artful manipulation of her husband. Contacting him on the car radio, she would suggest: "Honey, why don't you take everyone over to Third Fork and show them the deer?" (Third Fork was only a quarter of a mile away, in the direction of home.) Such ploys often failed, however. "Damn it," Johnson would reply, "I'm not going to be pressured into keeping to anyone's schedule but my own."

He was still very much "Mr. President" to the retinue serving him in retirement, including three round-the-clock Secret Service protectors, a Chinese butler named Wong, brought to Texas from the White House, two secretaries, a dozen former White House staffers, who worked at the library but could be tapped for other duties when the occasion demanded, as well as a dozen or so ranch hands who were kept scrambling. A phone call would dispatch an Air Force helicopter to carry him forty miles from his ranch into Austin, where a landing pad had been built on the library roof. For longer trips he used his own twin-engine turboprop. A visitor expressed surprise that LBJ could still summon a helicopter to fly him around the Austin area. An aide responded, "He was living this way when he was in the Senate."

He took up golf, puttering around courses in Fredericksburg, and on trips to Mexico. One day, playing with a few aides and friends, Johnson hit a drive into the rough, retrieved it, and threw the ball back on the fairway. "Are you allowed to do that?" one of the wives whispered to a Secret Service agent. "You are," he replied, "if you play by LBJ rules."



LBJ and Lady Bird with their grandchildren at the ranch

Each December 21 he would host a rollicking party at the Argyle Club in San Antonio to celebrate his wedding anniversary. The guest list was limited to his closest friends, including a Texas businessman named Dan Quinn, who on the day of the wedding had had to run out and buy a ring for Lyndon to give to Lady Bird, since the groom had forgotten that particular detail. The hired band was instructed to play danceable music only, and Johnson, a classy ballroom dancer of the first rank, would dance with every lady present into the wee hours.

Each February Johnson would take over a seaside villa in Acapulco for a month's siege. The exquisite estate is owned by former Mexican President Miguel Alemán, a business partner with LBJ on several Mexican ranchland deals. Johnson would fly in family, friends, and aides, as well as his own cook, food, bottled water, and even air-conditioning units. He brought his own food, water, and liquor to Acapulco to avoid the embarrassment of his 1970 trip when nearly all of his guests developed classic cases of "Mexicali revenge" after being fed local produce. At night, films would be shown, courtesy of LBJ friend Arthur Krim, who would have the newest releases flown down. Johnson also loved to visit Alemán's ranch, Las Pampas, deep in the Mexican interior, enjoying the total isolation and rugged beauty of the place. He was moved by the poverty of some of the ranch hands, who almost invariably had large families. Using an interpreter, Johnson would lecture the wives about birth control and the need to have small families if you are poor. Back in Texas, he began sending the families packages of birth control pills, vitamins, clothing, and blankets. "If I became dictator of the world," he said, "I'd give all the poor on earth a cottage and birth control pills—and I'd make damn sure they didn't get one if they didn't take the other."

Each Friday morning, a White House jet landed at the LBJ ranch, depositing foreign policy briefing papers prepared especially for Johnson by Henry Kissinger's staff. On two occasions Kissinger himself arrived at Johnson's door for personal briefings on the peace talks; twice he sent his deputy, General Alexander Haig. In all, LBJ's relations with the Nixon White House were cordial, although he sensed that the briefing papers told him only what Nixon wanted him to know. His death canceled plans he had negotiated with the White House to entertain Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in Texas, following her February meeting in Washington with Nixon. Johnson thought it would be a splendid idea to have Mrs. Meir participate in a question-and-answer session with the students of the LBJ School. Through an old supporter, New York industrialist Abe Fein-

berg, he queried Mrs. Meir on the matter and received word she would be delighted to visit with the students and attend a Johnson-hosted luncheon in Austin. The White House arranged to fly Mrs. Meir to Texas. A few weeks before Johnson's death, Richard Nixon called to tell him that a cease-fire was imminent. Johnson got in touch with his veteran speechwriter, Horace Busby, and asked him to prepare a statement on the cease-fire. "Get this thought in," Johnson instructed Busby. "No man worked harder or wanted peace more than I."

Johnson had decidedly mixed emotions about his successor. He was puzzled by Nixon's cold style ("Imagine not inviting one member of Congress to Tricia's wedding. If you don't respect them, they won't respect you") and aghast at some of Nixon's domestic policies. Shortly after leaving the White House, he remarked to a Texas businessman: "When I took over the presidency, Jack Kennedy had left me a stock market of 711. When I left the White House, it was over 900. Now look at it. That's what happens when the Republicans take over—not only Nixon, but any of them. They simply don't know how to manage the economy. They're so busy operating the trickle-down theory giving the richest corporations the biggest break that the whole thing goes to hell in a hand basket." Amused staffers recall that on the trip back to Texas aboard Air Force One, Johnson went up and down the aisles giving financial advice: "Keep all your money in cash," he urged. "Nixon will have us in an inflationary recession before his first year is over." (He had also, he told me, given his outgoing Cabinet members a different, if equally sobering, kind of advice: "Each of you had better leave this town clean as Eisenhower's hound's tooth. The first thing Democrats do when they take power is find where the control levers are. But the first thing Republicans do is investigate Democrats. I don't know why they do it—but you can count on it.")

Johnson gave Nixon "high grades" in foreign policy, but worried intermittently that the President was being pressured into removing U.S. forces too quickly, before the South Vietnamese were really able to defend themselves. "If the South falls to the Communists, we can have a serious backlash here at home," he warned. "When you think of what the South has been through, and what that government is up against, it is nothing short of a miracle that they have kept everything together for as long as they have. Thieu's no saint, but you have got to respect his ability to keep things together under the worst conditions imaginable."

Over a lunch, at which I was a guest, a few days after the first installments of the Pentagon Papers appeared in the *New York Times*, Johnson ruminated about his own Vietnam policies. "We made a couple of key mistakes," he admitted. "To begin

with, Kennedy should have had more than eighteen thousand military advisers there in the early 1960s. And then I made the situation worse by waiting eighteen months before putting more men in. By then, the war was almost lost. Another mistake was not instituting censorship—not to cover up mistakes, but to prevent the other side from knowing what we were going to do next. My God, you can't fight a war by watching it every night on television."

He then launched into a long defense of his policies against the allegations and implications contained in the *Times's* articles. "All the time, in 1964, I really hoped we could negotiate our way out of a major war in Vietnam," he said. "The Russians shared our hope." As the situation deteriorated in Vietnam, he said, he tried, by proceeding with U.S. troop buildups quietly and slowly, to avoid inflaming hawk sentiment at home and, perhaps more important, forcing Hanoi to call on the Chinese for help. "I told my advisers, 'By God, don't come to me with any plans to escalate this war unless you carry with you a joint congressional resolution.' I wasn't going to follow Truman's mistake in Korea when he went in without congressional approval. They claim I used Tonkin Gulf as an excuse. Hell, the Communists hit us there twice. The first time their torpedo boats hit the day before, I did nothing, hoping it was either a mistake or the action would not be repeated. But when they hit us again the very next day, I was forced to act. And just about every member of Congress was marching right along with me." He was particularly ruffled by the accusation that he had been secretly planning to bomb the North at the time of the 1964 campaign, when Barry Goldwater was calling for precisely such an act. "It is absolutely untrue," Johnson said. "On at least five occasions I personally vetoed military requests for retaliation bombing raids in the North. Only late in 1965 did I reluctantly agree to it. Not one of my principal advisers—Rusk, McNamara, Bundy, and George Ball—opposed my decision not to rush into retaliation strikes. We had contingency plans to bomb in the North for retaliation for terrorist raids in the South. But I didn't want to do this. Finally, they attacked our base in Pleiku in February, 1965, destroying many planes and killing a lot of our men. I was forced to act. I felt I had no choice. All of my civilian advisers, every one of them, agreed with me. Dean Rusk told me, 'Mr. President, this is a momentous decision.' I suppose it was."

We were in a private dining room on the third floor of the LBJ Library. Across the hall was a replica of Johnson's White House office. A three-foot electric pepper mill sat at the head of the table, and butler Wong scurried in with a plate of steak and sweet corn. Johnson seated himself ahead of his guests, a presidential practice carried into retirement, and began to eat. Aides arrived to

whisper in his ear about incoming calls. He either shook his head or left the table for many minutes. Secret Service agents haunted the surrounding corridors, walkie-talkies in hand. *Déjà vu* was a decorative theme: on one wall of the dining room were the framed photographs of heads of state whom Johnson visited during his years in office. "Here's my favorite," said Lady Bird, pointing to a photo of South Korea's President, General Chung Hee Park. "He was a real no-nonsense fellow." (Lady Bird was more conservative than the public ever realized.) LBJ laughed. "I remember our trip to Seoul. My God, I've never seen so many people lining the streets. I asked Park, through an interpreter, what would he estimate the crowd to be? The interpreter jabbars a bit and tells me, 'President Park, he say population of Seoul is one million. People on the streets is one million. That's all the people we have. So solly.'"

During coffee, the talk turned to President Kennedy, and Johnson expressed his belief that the assassination in Dallas had been part of a conspiracy. "I never believed that Oswald acted alone, although I can accept that he pulled the trigger." Johnson said that when he had taken office he found that "we had been operating a damned Murder Inc. in the Caribbean." A year or so before Kennedy's death a CIA-backed assassination team had been picked up in Havana. Johnson speculated that Dallas had been a retaliation for this thwarted attempt, although he couldn't prove it. "After the Warren Commission reported in, I asked Ramsey Clark [then Attorney General] to quietly look into the whole thing. Only two weeks later he reported back that he couldn't find anything new." Disgust tinged Johnson's voice as the conversation came to an end. "I thought I had appointed Tom Clark's son—I was wrong."

Johnson rarely worked at the LBJ Library, preferring instead to do business at his comfortable ranch office, where on the wall opposite his large desk hung a painting of a Texas landscape by artist Peter Hurd. At Lady Bird's behest, Hurd had been commissioned to paint the official presidential portrait, resulting in what Johnson called "the ugliest picture I ever saw." Reminiscing, Johnson explained: "He didn't follow the strict rules about size and style laid down about those portraits. I like his scenes much better."

In March, 1970, Johnson was hospitalized at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, after complaining of severe chest pains. Doctors reassured him that he had not suffered a heart attack; instead, the pains were caused by angina, a hardening of the arteries to the heart resulting in an insufficiency of blood to the body's most vital organ. Although there was little that could be done to cure the condition, Johnson was urged to lose

considerable weight. He had grown dangerously heavier since leaving the White House, gaining more than twenty-five pounds and weighing around 235. The following summer, again gripped by chest pains, he embarked on a crash water diet, shedding about fifteen pounds in less than a month. But shortly before Christmas, 1971, he shocked his friends by suddenly resuming cigarette smoking, a habit he had discarded over fifteen years before, following his first, near fatal, heart attack. "I'm an old man, so what's the difference?" he explained. "I've been to the Mayo Clinic twice and the doctors tell me there is nothing they can do for me. My body is just aging in its own way. That's it. And I always loved cigarettes, missed them every day since I quit. Anyway, I don't want to linger the way Eisenhower did. When I go, I want to go fast." He quickly became a chain smoker.

In April, 1972, Johnson experienced a massive heart attack while visiting his daughter, Lynda, in Charlottesville, Virginia. Convinced he was dying, he browbeat Lady Bird and his doctors into allowing him to fly home to Texas. So, late in the night of his third day in intensive care, a desperately sick LBJ was rushed to the airport and ferried back to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio. The departure was so sudden that the Charlottesville hospital director, hearing a rumor that Johnson might try to leave, rushed to the hospital only to find LBJ's empty wheelchair in the parking lot.

Miraculously he survived, but the remaining seven months of his life became a sad and pain-racked ordeal. "I'm hurting real bad," he confided to friends. The chest pains hit him nearly every afternoon—a series of sharp, jolting pains that left him scared and breathless. A portable oxygen tank stood next to his bed, and Johnson periodically interrupted what he was doing to lie down and don the mask to gulp air. He continued to smoke heavily, and, although placed on a low-calorie, low-cholesterol diet, kept to it only in fits and starts.

Meanwhile, he began experiencing severe stomach pains. Doctors diagnosed this problem as diverticulosis, pouches forming on the intestine. Also symptomatic of the aging process, the condition rapidly worsened and surgery was recommended. Johnson flew to Houston to consult with heart specialist Dr. Michael De Bakey, who decided that Johnson's heart condition presented too great a risk for any sort of surgery, including coronary bypass of two almost totally useless heart arteries.

"I once told Nixon," he said, "that the presidency is like being a jackass caught in a hailstorm. You've got to just stand there and take it. That's what I'm doing now." But he was also busy preparing his estate for his death. During the four years of his retirement he had managed nearly to

double his considerable estate, which included stock in at least nine Texas banks, television interests in Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana, a real estate and photographic supply company in Austin, 3700 acres of land in Alabama, and extensive property holdings in Mexico, the Caribbean, and five Texas counties.

The flagship of Johnson's business empire had been the Austin television station, KTBC, which Lady Bird had launched in 1952, nine years after she bought radio station KTBC. In September, 1972, LBJ engineered the station's sale to the Los Angeles Times-Mirror Corporation for nine million dollars, a premium price which impressed several of Texas' shrewdest horse traders. The sale provided Lady Bird with \$4.7 million, and the two Johnson daughters with \$1.3 million each. Working with his most trusted assistant, twenty-nine-year-old Tom Johnson, who had served as assistant White House press secretary (and is the newly appointed editor of the *Dallas Times-Herald*), LBJ negotiated with the National Park Service to take over his ranch home as a national museum after his death and when Lady Bird no longer desired to live there. Most poignant of all, he began a series of tough bargaining sessions with a Tulsa land company to sell the working portion of his beloved ranch. Surprisingly, these financial moves were made without the assistance of his lifelong business partner, Judge A. W. Moursund. "The judge and I have split the blanket," Johnson said. And that is all he would say.

Apparently the two had argued about the purchase of a bank, but, whatever the reason, Johnson and Moursund, a Blanco County judge whom LBJ had known since boyhood and who during LBJ's presidential years had a direct White House line plugged into his hill country ranch, remained totally estranged for the last year of Johnson's life. The split-up offered a rare peek inside Johnson's complicated business empire. Holdings and liabilities jointly filed included more than \$700,000 in loans from federal land banks in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. Dividing property, Johnson received a 4000-acre ranch and 214 subdivision lots along Lake LBJ in Austin; while the judge received 3200 acres in Oklahoma and more than 2000 acres in a nearby Texas county. All of the loans were listed in the names of Moursund and his wife.

Sick and depressed, Johnson had hoped to attend the 1972 Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach, if only to stand up and take a bow. He needed some warmth and applause, but from Larry O'Brien and others the message filtered back that he had better stay home. The McGovern nomination disgusted him. "Nixon could be defeated if only the Democrats don't go too far left," he had insisted. But to John-

son, party loyalty ranked with mother love, so he was far from pleased to find such old colleagues as George Christian, Leonard Marks, and former Commerce Secretary C. R. Smith working for Nixon against other old friends such as Liz Carpenter and Joe Califano, who campaigned for McGovern. Of John Connally, with whom his relationship had long been complicated, and who he thought would run on the GOP ticket as Nixon's running mate, Johnson remarked philosophically: "John sees a good opportunity." But when another close Texas confidant stretched his endorsement of Nixon to include active support for Texas Republican Senator John Tower, Johnson angrily called the offender and exploded: "You're a fat old whore."

Johnson's choice to beat Nixon was Edmund Muskie. In his view, Senator Muskie was "crucified by the press. They zeroed in on him because he was the front-runner and pounded him out, just like they did to Romney in 1964." His disappointment was mollified slightly by his own estimations of the Maine senator, which he had discussed with friends a few years before. "Muskie," he had said, "will never be President because he doesn't have the instinct to go for his opponent's jugular." Prior to the convention, Johnson held long telephone conversations with both Muskie and Chicago's Mayor Daley on the strategy to stop McGovern. He advised Muskie to stand firm and hold out to see whether there would be a second ballot. But he refused to act on Daley's plea that he, Johnson, take an initiative and speak out against McGovern. "Johnson knows that if he takes such a stand it will be counterproductive," a friend said at the time. "If he goes against McGovern, it will only boost McGovern's stock. Lyndon just doesn't carry any weight in the party anymore, and he knows it. It's a miserable fact for a man who only four years ago was President of the United States. But it is a fact."

So Johnson suffered the election in silence, swallowing his nitroglycerin tablets to thwart continual chest pains, endorsing McGovern through a hill country weekly newspaper, meeting cordially with the candidate at the ranch. The newspapers showed a startling picture of Johnson, his hair almost shoulder-length. Former aide Bob Hardesty takes credit for this development. "We were working together one day," Hardesty recalls, "and he said, in passing, 'Robert, you need a haircut.' I told him, 'Mr. President, I'm letting my hair grow so no one will be able to mistake me for those SOB's in the White House.' He looked startled, so I explained, 'You know, that bunch around Nixon—Haldeman, Ehrlichman—they all have very short hair.' He nodded. The next time I saw him his hair was growing over his collar."

During the final months of his life he was suffering terrible pain. One of his last public appear-

ances, his dramatic speech at the Civil Rights Symposium at the LBJ Library, proved to be so exhausting that he spent the next two days in bed. He filmed a final interview with Cronkite, taking long rests between camera loadings. Against the urgings of his wife and friends, he attended the mass funeral of fourteen Austin youngsters killed in a bus crash. "Those people supported me when I needed them over the years," he insisted, "and I'm going to support them now."

Lady Bird noticed that he was unusually quiet on that cold January morning, but nothing seemed wrong, so she decided to drive into Austin for shopping. At mid-afternoon, on January 22, the Secret Service placed an urgent call to her via the car-telephone, and Lady Bird, in a shaking voice, called aide Tom Johnson at the television station. "Tom," she said, "this time we didn't make it. Lyndon is dead." □

## THE GHOSTS

From the field she calls John, John. O  
remember then the quick fall  
of daylight on her dress, the field  
sprigged with blue-eyed grasses.  
It is the first morning of the world. Only  
here among the bloodroot, under  
the thick, white flowers, he sees the sun  
pick at a rabbit, left behind  
by winter. Memory replaces  
worship. And she watches

his thigh pressed to the stove,  
the implacable spread of frost  
on the windowpane. It is night. The babies  
are all gone. Humming she hears the first  
star's tentative, hungry words. He has been  
held there for years. The moon  
has washed his face of all blood.

by Kathryn Ungerer