

Capitol Punishment

Ghost Guard Song: Wail to the Chief

By Art Buchwald

"Do you believe in ghosts?" I asked the man.

"After what's been happening around here for the last two months, I don't know what to believe anymore. I reported the voice to my superiors, and they told me to forget it. They said if anyone asked me, I heard nothing."

"You mean it's another cover-up?" I asked.

"I just follow orders. They say it's a matter of executive privilege, and I can't talk about anything I've heard here, even if it's a ghost who has done the talking."

"It must be lonely work."

"Aye, that it is. Sometimes when the fog rolls in the rose garden, I think I hear the U.S. Marine Band playing 'Hall to the Chief.' Once, I saw the White House guards marching in their old uniforms."

The voice came out loud and clear again. "Martha, Martha, why have you deserted me?"

"The voice sounds so familiar." I told the guard.

"That it does. It's somebody I know, but I can't make out who."

"I'm sure it isn't Lincoln."

I was walking by the White House the other night when I heard an anguished cry from inside. "Alger Hiss. Where were you when I needed you?"

I thought nothing of it and walked a few more steps. Then I heard the same voice again: "Where were those college bums when I needed them?"

A guard standing by the gate asked, "Can I help you, sir?"

"That voice coming from inside. It's so eerie."

"Aye," he said. "It's been going on for weeks now. It does give you the willies."

"Who's in there?" I asked.

"Nobody. The house is empty."

"Empty."

"Aye. They all moved out. There's nobody there."

"But the voice. I heard a voice."

"That you did. They say the place is haunted, and full of ghosts."

I heard the voice again. "Ehrlichman, Haldeman, Kleindienst. Gesundheit."

"And it isn't FDR," the guard said.

"Lyndon Baines Johnson had more of a twang in his voice."

The guard scratched his head. "It beats me."

"When did they board up the house?"

"About three weeks ago. It seems after all the trouble, they couldn't get anyone to work here. The secretaries were frightened, after the big-shots left, no one would take their place. So they closed it down and moved to Camp David."

The voice again: "In our own lives let each of us ask—not just what government will do for me, but what can I do for myself?"

"You don't have any grass on you?" the guard asked.

"No, I'm sorry I don't. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. You hang around here for a little while, and pot kind of makes you forget what's going on. Tell you the truth, mister, I really got the shakes."

"Why don't you go to a psychiatrist?"

"Not on your life. If I did, somebody would break into his office and steal my records."

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