

## Dancing Among the Wildflowers

Time - Late morning of January 22, 1973

Place - Master bedroom, Johnson's ranch

(A light Texas-two step rendition of HAIL TO THE CHIEF is heard. The music slowly fades as the lights go up. Lyndon Johnson, early sixties but looks older, walks in the bedroom and looks around. Besides having a difficult time breathing, he clutches his heart as if he's in pain. As he walks over to the night stand, he quickly takes off his cowboy hat and jacket and throws them on the bed. At the night stand, there's a collection of pill bottles. An oxygen tank stands next to it. He looks over the pill bottles and picks up a small bottle of pills. He quickly takes a pill and then turns on the oxygen tank. As he sits in a chair next to the bed, he puts the oxygen mask on and starts to take big breaths of oxygen.)

LYNDON

(Takes his mask off, looks around and calls out)

Bird.

(Pause)

Bird.

(To himself)

Where's that woman?

(Takes another hit of his oxygen)

Probably planting goddamn wildflowers or bushes somewhere.

(Shakes his head in disgust as he takes another hit of oxygen)

I swear to God that one of these days I'm going to wake up and find that she has planted a tree on top of me.

(The phone rings. He waits for a moment and looks around to see if someone will answer the phone.)

## LYNDON

(continuing)

Bird.

(Calls out)

Bird, the phone is ringing.

(Calls out)

Bird!

(Calls out)

Isn't there anybody to pick up that phone?

(As he reaches over to the phone in disgust)

Goddamit...you can't get good help anywhere these days.

(Picks up the phone)

Hello.

(Pause)

Yes, this is the President.

(Pause)

Oh...it's you, Tom. How are you and how's the family?

(Pause)

Oh yes...they do grow up quickly. Sometimes not as fast as you want them to do so.

(Starts to breathe hard and reaches over for his mask)

Wait a minute, Tom. I need some oxygen. Nothing serious.

(Inhales a deep breath of oxygen)

Yes, I'm back.

(Pause)

I'm fine...really. Just need to catch my breath, that's all. It's a good thing you called this morning. I needed to talk to somebody. There's a lot that I need to get off my chest before I die.

(Pause)

There's no need to call the doctors. There's nothing they can do as this point but just prolong the inevitable.

(Pause)

Mrs. Johnson doesn't know and I don't want her to know, either. She'll just get upset and try to take over situation.

(Pause)

No...I just need to talk if that's okay with you.

(Pause)

I knew you would understand.

(Pause )

This morning? Well, I had to drive around the ranch with Jewell Malechek to survey the deer fencing.

Tom, I know that deer have to eat but why do they have to eat Mrs. Johnson's flower gardens.

(Pause)

She gets so touchy when they do and then she takes it out on me as if I'm responsible for those damn deer.

(more)

LYNDON (cont'd)

(Pause)

Anyway...I started having a difficult time breathing and had chest pains. I don't know if it was caused by the thoughts of having to face Mrs. Johnson over the recent damage caused by the deer or just being with Jewell in the car.

(Looks around)

She certainly has a nice pair of tits....Jewell, that is. Mrs. Johnson's just lie there...looking up at you like fried eggs and being judgmental at the same time. It's enough to make a man impotent. But need I transgress. What's on your mind, Tom?

(Pause)

February?

(Pause)

I don't know about February. Mrs. Johnson wants to go to Acapulco then. She thinks a change will help me.

(Pause)

I don't know if it will. I think I'm beyond help, what do you think, Tom?

(Pause)

The last time that we went, she invited the Royals.

(Pause)

Not the royalty. The Royals. You know Darrell is the football coach at the University of Texas.

(Pause)

That's the one. Dumber than Gerald Ford. He doesn't know anything about politics. It's all football for him. And I don't know and care anything about football. Why anyone would waste their time playing or even watching a stupid game like that is beyond me. So I guess we're a perfect match.

(Pause)

Mrs. Johnson isn't any help. She brings all the guests together and then she usually slips off to bed early, leaving me to entertain them. I don't know why. Maybe she's heard my stories too many times. What do you think?

(Pause)

When she's down there in Mexico, she's always admiring the flowers and taking tours of old buildings. She says they're historic. They just look old to me. Am I missing something, Tom?

(Pause)

I asked why she does that when there are so many flowers and quote "historic buildings" at home. But she says that they're not the same. They look the same to me...old, don't they to you, Tom?

(Pause)

I agree. And then every night, she studies the bible.

(more)

LYNDON (cont'd)

Hell, she has read that book hundreds of times...like she's searching for the mystery of the universe or something I don't know what. And if that wasn't bad enough, she reads spiritual meditation in the morning. I sometimes wonder if she's going to leave me and go on a mission somewhere. But she wouldn't leave me, would she, Tom?

LADY BIRD (O.S.)

(Concerned)  
Lyndon....Lyndon.

(Lady Bird hurries into the room and sees Lyndon and catches her breath. She's dressed in a conservative business skirt and jacket as if she's going to a meeting somewhere.)

LADY BIRD

Jewell told me that you weren't feeling good and I...

LYNDON

(Covers the mouthpiece)  
Can't you see I'm on the phone, Bird?

LADY BIRD

Yes, I can see that. Now how are you feeling? I ran into Jewell and she told me that you had...

LYNDON

(Dismisses her)  
I'm fine. Can't you see that?  
(Into the phone)  
Sorry. Mrs. Johnson came into the room, all upset about something. I swear to God that woman drives me crazy at times.

(She stands back and looks at him judgemental and then shakes her head. She glances over and sees his cowboy hat and jacket carelessly thrown on the bed. She looks back at her husband and realizes the seriousness of his health situation. As Lyndon continues to talk, she walks over to the bed and picks up his hat and jacket. Holding the items close to her, she sits down slowly on the bench at the end of the bed.)

LYNDON

(continuing)  
 You were saying?  
 (Pause)  
 Yes?

LADY BIRD

(Quietly...as if she's mouthing the words)  
 Who are you talking to?

LYNDON

(To Lady Bird)  
 What?

LADY BIRD

(A little louder and punctuating the words)  
 Who...are...you...talking...to?

LYNDON

(To Lady bird)  
 I'm on the phone.  
 (Into the phone)  
 Yes?

(As Lyndon continues his telephone conversation, Lady Bird properly lays the hat and jacket on the bench and then hurries over to the vanity and sits down. She opens her purse and looks for something to write on and with. She finds an used envelop and pen and writes a note. She then gets up and hands it to Lyndon.)

LYNDON

(continuing; Looks at it and looks up at Lyndon)  
 What's this?

LADY BIRD

It's a note.

LYNDON

I can see that.  
 (Reads it)  
 "Two quarts of milk...a dozen eggs..."  
 (Looks up at her)  
 What does this have to do with me, Bird?

LADY BIRD

The other side.

LYNDON

Oh.

(Reads the other side)

"Who are you talking to?"

(Looks up at Lady Bird)

I'm on the phone with Tom.

LADY BIRD

Oh.

(Pause)

Tom who?

LYNDON

(Becoming impatient)

Tom Johnson...my assistant.

LADY BIRD

Oh.

(Pause. Mouths back)

Tell him "hello".

LYNDON

(Cover the mouthpiece)

I'm not your personal secretary. Tell him yourself.

LADY BIRD

Now Lyndon.

LYNDON

(Into the phone)

What's that, Tom?

(Pause)

Oh, it was Mrs. Johnson, trying to interfere with my personal business...again.

LADY BIRD

(Protested)

But I...

(Pause)

Never mind.

(As Lyndon continues to talk on the phone with Tom, Lady Bird remembers something that she wanted to ask and slowly takes the envelop from her husband. She sits on the bed, writes another note and then hands it to him.)

LYNDON

Wait a moment, Tom. There must be another emergency. Mrs. Johnson is handing me another note.

(more)

LYNDON (cont'd)

(Starts to lose his patience but takes the note)  
What is it now?

(Reads it)

"Did you check the plants?"

(To Lady Bird)

Do you mean...your rose bushes?

LADY BIRD

Yes. Is there any more damage by the deer?

LYNDON

Yes, there is...but I'll take care of it, Bird.

LADY BIRD

But how...and when?

LYNDON

Don't worry about it...like I said I'll take care of it.

(Into the phone)

Mrs. Johnson is always in a constant battle with the deer out here. Maybe I should invite Henry Kissinger to the ranch and have him negotiate a peace settlement. What do you think, Tom?

LADY BIRD

Now Lyndon.

(Tries to explain)

I just feel sorry for those poor deer. The land is so built up around here now there's no place for them to eat. They're starving, but they still make me mad!

LYNDON

(To Lady Bird)

I know, Bird. It's hell if you do or hell if you don't.

LADY BIRD

Oh you.

(She turns and quietly walks over to the dresser as if not to disturb her husband. She carefully pulls out a couple drawers looking for the right accessory or something while eavesdropping into her husband's conversation. She pulls out an array of scarfs and ties them around her neck and sees if they go with her outfit.)