

# THUNDERBOLT



# PRESS



*“...the pen is mightier than the sword”*

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## INTRODUCING: TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MEDIA

It is said that 21st century media is characterized by three defining attributes:

First, it speaks of wonders and mysteries.

Second, it is humble.

And third, if at all possible, it is given away for free.

The rather bold statement that 21st century media speaks of wonders and mysteries cannot just be flaunted in front of the reader arrogantly. It seems to require some attending explicatory remarks.

Wonders and mysteries are big words. Probably should not be tossed around casually or used excessively. In this manner, they tend to lose their sense of prodigiousness, their sense of awe.

What, then, do these alluring words mean? What *kinds* of wonders and mysteries, one might ask. Do they perhaps allude to some recondite knowledge of phenomena that most of us have not yet had the fine privilege of witnessing? Is there a suggestion that there are things enigmatic, or nebulous at best, to the rank and file, things that might soon be revealed? Can it be that the lavishness with which we greet this new millennium is more than mere ostentation, that indeed a new era of some kind is about to begin?

To believe otherwise, in the opinion of this writer, would not only be a failure to latch on to a tremendous opportunity, the chance to use a rare and unique occurrence as a psychological device to spur the human consciousness to greater heights. It would also indicate a failure to understand some very fundamental realities of life. Namely, that the infinite, invisible spirit of the universe, along with its indomitable band of supernatural entities and energies, including, but not limited to, angels and spirits of all persuasions, is still quite actively involved in the day-to-day enterprises of the human race. And that many of the world's spiritual traditions speak of a coming time of enlightenment for us all. Some even claim that that time is now beginning.

So what then, would this enlightenment entail? Are we not already rather enlightened creatures? After all, the feats of modern technology are more than ample evidence that the human brain has evolved into an unquestionably remarkable thinking machine. It has been creating wonders and exploring mysteries for years. Its accomplishments are legend. And our media has been covering the subject thoroughly. So what could another level of enlightenment possibly involve? Is there somehow a new realm of wonders and mysteries to which the uninitiated may expect to be presently introduced?

There are those who say that this is precisely the case. That the survival of the human race does not depend on its ability to respond to challenging situations and threatening predicaments with its traditional arsenal of resources, such as scientific erudition, political cunning, or military strength and sophistication. But rather, that the discovery of our own [for the most part hidden] personal resources holds the key to the future.

Just what these personal resources include is a story unto itself, to be considered in another article. Suffice it to say that they pertain to the realm of paranormal perceptions and psychic

phenomena.

So now we begin to get the picture. We are being asked to believe that we are in fact the possessors of a rather outlandish category of talents and potentials, above and beyond what are considered by most people to be normal human abilities. And that when we start developing these potentials and using these talents, we will witness marvels and discover wonders and explore mysteries beyond our wildest imagination.

If indeed we humans have potentials not being realized, if we have the power to rise above our own weaknesses and limitations to a significantly greater degree than we have been, then certainly those of us whose words and ideas are propelled by the various elements of the modern mass media to audiences around the globe have an obligation to say as much. For what, after all, does the media exist, if not to help spread the good news that there are high adventures that await us, that we need not condemn ourselves to lives filled merely with mundane routines and superficial amusements. At a time when our collective inner voice seems to be calling us to the quest more urgently than ever before, what right have those of us who feel that we are qualified to speak somewhat intelligently to the rest of the world to withhold any relevant information that we may have access to?

And so, let us move forward, writers and thinkers and explorers of new possibilities and realities. What a challenge! To speak fluently of wonders and mysteries. To expound with lucidity the immensity of the human potential. At a time when the human spirit hungers for something new and different as it never has before, what a challenge!

And so we come to the second attribute of twenty-first century media: It is humble.

This statement, though perhaps not quite so bold as the first one, may seem to some a bit curious. After all, pride, not humility, is the human way. And our media tends to reflect our pride.

But when we attempt to speak of wonders and mysteries we enter new territory. Pride doesn't work here. It falters, then stumbles, then retreats. It can't handle the illimitability of the unknown. Such a place, if not totally antithetical to its very existence, presents sufficient threat to at least render it silent.

In this new territory, this new realm of exploration, words don't have the same finality that they have in our old familiar world. Attempts to draw peremptory conclusions and utter apodictic assertions fail miserably. Efforts at making the incomprehensible unambiguous are, perforce, an exercise in futility.

We are left, really, with one viable option if we seriously wish to shoulder the responsibility of talking about some of the most unfathomable items in the inventory of human experiences. We must be audacious enough to make the attempt, yet respectful of the magnitude of the task. We must be profoundly confident in our literary competency, yet poignantly aware of the limitations of our words. We must be--well--we must be humble.

With this attitude, one can write with abandon. But without the sense of self-importance that can ensnare the writer who attempts to enlighten the general public with regard to the more mysterious aspects of the universe. And without the erroneous conviction that they are giving the reader much more than an introduction to this inexhaustible field of study.

For when we creatures of words, we humans, who insist on intellectualizing everything,

attempt to delve into mysteries born of the vastness of infinity itself, our words end at the door. Beyond lies a region of unequivocal vagueness. It is studied through experience. Not by reading or by thinking about it or by postulating logical hypotheses. Woe to the writer who attempts to assume any greater responsibility than leading the reader to that door.

In humility we can talk about wonders and mysteries without pretending to explain them. We can urge the reader to go beyond our words, into the very core of the mysteries themselves, without feeling responsible for their ultimate success or failure. What a challenge! That we finite creatures with our finite words and symbols might help lead other finite creatures to infinity! At a time when the collective human spirit yearns for something unexplainable, something unknown, something new and optimistic, what greater challenge than to speak unassumingly of wonders and mysteries and to spread the word that indeed that yearning is about to be fulfilled!

A quotation from *The Art of Dreaming* by Carlos Castaneda seems somehow apropos to this discussion of humility: "To seek freedom is the only driving force I know. Freedom to fly off into that infinity out there. Freedom to dissolve; to lift off; to be like the flame of a candle, which, in spite of being up against the light of a billion stars, remains intact, because it never pretended to be more than what it is: a mere candle."

So let us mere candles be wary, lest, in our eagerness to communicate, we assume a capacity to express the ineffable, and end up talking in circles. Or worse yet, in leading the reader astray, rather than contributing to their well being and enlightenment. The capacity of the media to lead astray is equal to its capacity to enlighten. Thus the obvious need for vigilance.

Whenever one is engaged in an act of power, such as expressing ideas to a mass audience, the potential consequences of abusing that power can be staggering--even fatal. Since words, images, and sounds are such powerful vehicles of communication, a certain degree of circumspection must necessarily accompany their use. When personal ambition or arrogance or greed or some other selfish motivation overshadows prudence in this regard--look out! Spiritual principles dictate that power be used conscientiously, that it be wielded sensitively, with largesse, with kindness. Great karmic results follow its misuse. The well being--indeed the survival--of those who use the power of the mass media to communicate depends on our willingness to adhere to those principles.

The third attribute of 21st century media, that it is freely given away, needs a brief explanation. Obviously, many people involved with the mass media have no choice but to be compensated monetarily for their work, as it is their only source of livelihood. It is not to those individuals that these words are addressed.

There are, however, countless people who are quite capable of sharing their work, whether it be written, recorded, or filmed, with the rest of the world, without receiving any reward, save for the joy of giving something freely. For those of us who are in this position, the time has come to give. No longer can wealthy writers, artists, musicians, publishers, broadcasters, and the like demand that ridiculously excessive payments be made to them in exchange for their services. This avaricious practice may have been understandable in the dark ages, but it has no place in modern human society. Those who continue to engage in such self-serving behavior will find that their audience has deserted them.

Having defined 21st century media, we must now ask ourselves: does the current state of the art measure up to these lofty standards? And if we wish to be honest with ourselves, we must acknowledge the obvious answer: we fail miserably.

Let us consider one important and undeniable fact: that the media is one of the most powerful human forces on the face of the earth, quite capable of exerting an enormous influence on the minds and activities of all who are subjected to it. We say *human* forces for the simple reason that any force or power of human origin pales in comparison to the really consequential powers in this world. Next to them, of course, we are mere peons, whether we be writer, prime minister, or commander-in-chief of an army of a million men. It is precisely our failure to recognize and acknowledge this disparity that leads to the aforementioned abysmal recreancy with regard to our communicative responsibilities.

Perhaps no other earthly power plays such a monumental role when it comes to not only influencing, but actually molding, the minds of the human race, as does the mass media. So susceptible are we to the suggestions implanted in our minds by the words, images, and sounds created by the various elements of the media, that it is fair to say that the survival of humanity depends on the courage with which the media is willing to shoulder its immense leadership responsibilities, as well as the insightfulness and imagination that are applied to the execution of those responsibilities.

It is rather obvious that wonders and mysteries are not major themes of today's media. They are discussed in some periodicals, of relatively small circulation, and in books that reach certain limited audiences. Occasionally they may even find their way into some obscure television program. However, the preponderance of material currently being fed by the media to the general public deals almost exclusively with the mundane and the platitudinous. It is loaded with banality. It fails to respond to the yearning inside all of us for something new and different, something exhilarating, something to propel us upward and onward to high adventures and unimaginable experiences.

More than ever before, humanity hungers for knowledge and information that can help us open doors to exciting new worlds. But what do we get instead? Inanities. Boringly repetitious vapidities. And constant reinforcement of the absurd and sophistical belief that human beings can find little more to do than immerse themselves in an unimaginative pursuit of worldly pleasures and vain intellectual amusements.

Furthermore, we are encouraged to subscribe to philosophies and to engage in behaviors and lifestyles that not only distract us from our true purpose in life, but actually pose a grave threat to our well being, indeed, our very existence. One obvious example of this egregious misuse of the tremendous power of the media is its mindless promotion of the primitive and puerile belief that life must necessarily include a great deal of conflict between human beings, and that grotesque acts of violence are a normal and natural part of our world. Another case in point is the reckless and infantile complicity on the part of today's media in the encouragement and abetment of the execrable and potentially disastrous failure to hold in high regard one of the most wonderful and powerful gifts ever bestowed on humankind: the gift of human sexuality.

Yes, my friends, it is clear that we who fancy ourselves to be the purveyors of information

and entertainment to our fellow human beings have a few changes to go through. Certainly we can do much better when it comes to furnishing our fellows with the material they long for so desperately. We have the power to inspire, to lead, to motivate. Now is the time to use that power in creative new ways.

When it comes to humility, one can only conclude that, generally speaking, today's media does not appear to know the meaning of the word. We are given to rashness. Serious consideration of our power and an earnest heedfulness to our responsibilities seem to be relatively rare. And an embarrassing and inexcusable superciliousness runs rampant.

Perhaps the most apparent example of our arrogance is the nefarious practice of attempting to brainwash our audience into buying things they don't really need, and which may contribute nothing whatsoever to their happiness and well being. Treating others as little more than objects to be used to enhance one's own financial status reeks of self-importance and demonstrates a monumental lack of respect for one's fellow human beings. This practice must stop! At the time of this writing, a major industry is paying a staggering economic price for its past insidious advertising, and indeed may be on the verge of extinction. The handwriting is on the wall. Let this be fair warning to all who are so thoughtless as to believe that they have the right to use disgusting psychological ploys in an attempt to manipulate people's behavior in this manner.

And what about sharing our work for free? It certainly is not a common practice. Many of those who receive large profits and royalties for their work are already among the wealthiest people on earth. Have they not yet experienced the exhilaration that comes from creating a masterpiece and making it available to the world, with no expectation of receiving anything in return? Unquestioningly, our performance in this regard leaves much to be desired.

And so now, we issue a challenge. Let those of us involved with the mass media recognize the enormity of our power. Let us assume our responsibility to the world as adults, not as wayward children. Let us courageously accept our duty as leaders. And let us lead constructively, with ingenuity and vision, into the future, not back into the stone age.

In order to effectuate this colossal task, we must be willing to reassess completely and totally our standards, our values, and our methods of operation. Our motivations must be pure, free from personal ambition and vainglory. Our literary and artistic works must be impeccable. We ourselves must be paragons of accountability and unpretentiousness.

Those who are unwilling to accept this challenge with sincerity and zeal will find that their days are numbered as practitioners in the mass media. They will be replaced by authors, publishers, artists, and broadcasters whose maturity and wisdom qualify them to be the true leaders of the twenty-first century. To these we say: Speak and be heard. For the souls of humanity thirst for your knowledge.

God bless you, our good friends. Let us move forward.

# THUNDER BEINGS ARE COMING BACK: AN ESSAY ON HUMAN POTENTIAL

Potential: "Something that can develop or become actual."

There are two common misconceptions regarding the inexhaustible subject of human potential. First-that the bulk of what human beings are or can be has already been more or less developed or become actual. And second-that the really impressive actualizations of whatever potential we humans may have are accomplished by only the relative few, while the remainder of the race must condemn ourselves to wallowing in mediocrity. What can be farther from the truth?

To dispel these illusions is the intention of this article. It is written for the adventurous and the youthful, and it is designed to entice. To entice the human spirit to break loose from its fetters of self-limitation. To entice the true self to awaken from its slumber and rise to the surface and take control. To encourage the voice of the rebel within the heart to speak more loudly, till the entire being understands the infinitude of experiences available to the human organism.

To understand the width and breadth of true human potential we need only understand who we really are. Yet the task of knowing our true self, as simple as it may sound, is a challenge of such a magnitude that few ever succeed at it. The demands of the twenty-first century, however, dictate that a much greater effort be made to discover our true nature and to be all that we *really* can be.

So what *are* we then, this body-mind-spirit we call the human being? The body we pretty well have figured out. The mind, while it is much more vague, is nonetheless something we seem fairly comfortable with. We accept it and use it with a reasonable degree of confidence. The *spirit* however, baffles us unconditionally. Most of us deal with it in one of two ways. Either we refuse to believe in it, by our deeds if not by our words, or we attempt to define it and describe it so thoroughly as to render ourselves totally ignorant of the subject. Both approaches are equally debilitating, for they deprive us of the use of our most powerful personal resources: those that derive directly from the spirit.

There is an alternative approach to the entire matter. One that few human beings actually engage in, yet one that is available to us all. It involves believing passionately in this amorphous something we call the spirit or soul, while at the same time refusing stubbornly to indulge in the luxury of believing that we will ever explain it to our satisfaction. It is the only acceptable approach for anyone seriously interested in the subject of human potential. For it involves not only a philosophy, but also an entire strategy for ordering one's life in a manner favorable to discovering and developing that potential.

This alternate philosophy, this optional lifestyle, is the real subject of this article. It is a philosophy of life that rejects categorically the two previously mentioned assumptions about human potential: that the human race in general has discovered most of its true potential, and that we don't *all* have the same unlimited potential. It is a lifestyle that is designed to support the seeker in their search for that potential.

So what is this mysterious thing we call the spirit then, this aspect of ourselves that we've

been told we can never really explain? What is the point of talking about it if it cannot be accurately defined?

Well-since we are creatures of words, it seems that if we are ever going to discover our true nature and begin to live up to our true potential, we must at least have a few words to say about our spirit. Keep in mind that these words cannot be intended to give that spirit an explicit definition. Such a vain effort would be self-defeating. We must refrain at all costs from petty attempts to mollify our reason and rationality by reducing the subject of infinity itself to something that can be precisely analyzed and then discussed in no uncertain terms.

But wait. We are discussing the human spirit. What does that have to do with *infinity*? *God* is infinite. We humans are finite beings, are we not?

To respond to these questions, let us ask another one. Where *is* God? Where is Allah, this Great Spirit that most of us profess a belief in? And the answer, as taught by any credible spiritual tradition, is: everywhere. Obviously, then, this inexpressible Spirit must be inside each and every one of us. And for that matter, inside of everything in the universe. If only we could fully grasp the implications of this awesome state of affairs!

If the Spirit, this invisible essence of the universe, which we might call God, or the Great Mysterious One, or the Absolute, or Allah, or any of a multitude of names, depending on our cultural or philosophical leanings, is truly inside of us, then so must be it's unspeakable power, it's infinite potential. Does this not make sense? Imagine! The illimitable talent of the Spirit is actually at our fingertips!

But if this is the case, why, we must ask, is the world so filled with imperfection and misery. Why are we all not appropriate expressions of this perfect Spirit? And the answer is, of course: We don't know. We may postulate an explanation, and many have done so. But we are wasting our time. The only prudent manner of facing this gigantic paradox is to accept it, and then move on.

The next step for any serious student of human potential is, naturally, to engage in a focused effort to take full advantage of this propitious condition. Different individuals may have different reasons for attempting to discover and develop the potential hiding within themselves. We all may have our own ideas as to what this infinite power may allow us to be or to do. Perhaps we have some notion of what a perfect human being might be and we would like to strive to be a perfect human being. Unfortunately, most of us reject completely the possibility of becoming a perfect human being. Those who don't, have a rather mundane conception of human perfection. Which is understandable, since that conception probably originated in the finite human mind. And the human mind is simply incapable of conceiving what our potential really is.

What a dilemma! Even if we wish to develop our potential, we really have no idea what it is we are developing! Fortunately, there is a way out of our plight. And that is simply to let the Spirit itself, not our intellect, reveal to us what our true potential is.

But now the real predicament begins. For in order to establish a viable connection with the Spirit, we must somehow calm our rambling mind. We must, somehow or another, subdue the incessant chain of thoughts, the capricious internal dialogue that we have come to accept as so normal and natural. Such a formidable task can prove to be the challenge of a lifetime.



There are numerous organizations, both formal and informal, whose task it is to assist individuals in their attempt to reconnect with the Spirit within and discover their true potential. We say *re*-connect because at least some of these organizations teach that, at birth, all humans have a strong connection with the Spirit. But through our contacts with older people we develop the habit of constantly thinking about something. Our internal chatter becomes increasingly more complex and habitual. This eventually results in a sort of psychic numbness, a mental state in which we are more or less oblivious to the presence of the infinite Spirit inside of us. Having lost our awareness of that Spirit, we are quite incapable of discovering our true potential. We have become, more or less, babbling idiots, who have no conception of who we really are. We operate as a mind and body, having effectively severed ourselves from our divine aspect, which is our true self. It is no exaggeration to say that the human race is basically retarded, almost completely out of contact with reality, and that ninety percent of what we do and believe is nonsense. These are hard words to accept, and will be met with incredulity and contempt by most who read them. But they are facts of life that must be understood before any of us can embark on the path of self-discovery and aspire to the goal of activating our real potential.

To drive this point home, let us examine the current psychological and emotional state of the human race in general. It has been deteriorating for years. Constantly increasing levels of anxiety, depression, anger, fear, and other negative emotions seem to be our lot. What a sad state of affairs, indeed! Is this progress? Certainly not! Is this the way to heaven?

Unequivocally no! One does not get to heaven by living in a hell on earth. It should be quite obvious to us by now that there is something horrendously wrong with the way we live. Why is life less intrinsically rewarding all the time? Why are we progressively less happy? The answer is: because of the lifestyles we pursue and the false philosophies that engender them.

Perhaps the most compelling reason most of us may have at this time for investigating the subject of human potential is to uncover methods of being in a good mood naturally. Such methods do exist and can be easily learned. They are infinitely preferable to becoming dependent on alcohol or amphetamines.

A comprehensive dissertation on the many ways of bringing out our potential is far beyond the scope of this article. The reader is heartily encouraged to pursue an inquiry into the practices and teachings of the above mentioned organizations. This does not require becoming an initiate of some secret society or joining a monastery or finding a guru who lives in a cave in the mountains. This may have been the case at one time. However, the sheer number of aspirants to the wisdom of such traditions has required that their knowledge be made available to the general public, and in recent decades a veritable flood of literature has been propagated by both organizations and individuals.

One does not need access to modern electronic media or to a large bookstore to find informative literary material. Assuredly, some of the most useful information this author has found on the subject of human potential was discovered by perusing the shelves in the non-fiction department of a small town public library. One good book, fortuitously discovered, can impel the seeker on a most enjoyable journey of self-discovery and enlightenment, and can eventually lead to adventures beyond one's wildest imagination.

Some of these organizations are associated with major religions. Those with a Christian background may find that the various writings on Rosicrucianism or Theosophy suit their taste. For those interested in the Muslim faith there is the wisdom of the Sufi. For one interested in Oriental traditions, there is abundant literature on yoga philosophy, and the works of Yogi Ramacharaka are very excellent sources of information. These are but a few of the options available, as the world has many spiritual traditions, most of which have their methods of connecting with the Spirit in order to promote well being and enlightenment.

Native peoples around the world have their own spiritual traditions, and their medicine men and women, or shamans, are as well versed on the subject of human potential as anyone. Their practices may seem rather outlandish to the average inhabitant of modern society. Nonetheless, their ways are as legitimate as those of any tradition. Written material abounds on their philosophies and methods. Much of it is not only informative, but highly entertaining as well.

The works of Carlos Castaneda are perhaps unparalleled in discussing the full magnitude of our real potential. His mentors seemed to have understood as well as, if not more than anyone, the full implications of our connection to infinity. For anyone truly interested in discovering what human beings really are and what we are actually capable of achieving, his books may be required reading.

There is such a torrent of literature available today that it is wise to have some clues or guidelines to protect us from misinformed writers and fallacious teachings. One cannot simply believe anything one reads. Hopefully, the following pointers will be helpful in that regard.

Submission of the entire self to our divine aspect is essential. Any teaching that declares that we have a right to do what we want is not to be trusted.

Recognition that the Spirit within us is one and the same as the Spirit within all people and things is also imperative. Authentic teachers of the truth all know this.

Knowledgeable teachers will remind us that we *all* have the same limitless potential.

While we may receive a great deal of reliable information from our teachers, it is the Spirit within us that is our real teacher. We must ultimately depend on our own inner voice for accurate information.

While the ability to promote our emotional and physical well being is definitely part of our potentiality, it is a relatively small part. The true aficionado of human potential will tell us that it also includes the capability of perceiving the non-physical aspects of reality. This is the feature of human potential that is most often overlooked by the average individual, as well as the part that is most difficult to believe. After all, modern society does not train us to believe that we all have an innate ability to perceive any supernatural entities or energies that may exist in the universe. Castaneda's writings are highly recommended for those who are daring enough to pursue a knowledge of this aspect of human potential.

Which brings up the subject of the rather cryptic title of this article: 'Thunder Beings Are Coming Back.' Thunder beings, according to some native American traditions, are spiritual entities associated with storms and thunder and lightning. They, of course, have not really departed. What has departed is our inherent ability to be aware of such mystical inhabitants

of this mysterious universe. It is our fervent hope that the time has come for all human beings to regain this lost awareness, this natural perceptual power, and once again be the kind of beings that God expects us to be.

We cannot close without mentioning one more important natural ability that all of us possess. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we all learn to use it. This is the ability to affect our fellow human beings with prayer-like methods. We say *prayer-like* because we are not talking about speaking to God and asking Him to grant favors, or something of that nature. We are referring to methods of channeling the Spirit, of directing the Spirit to another person or group of persons. Contrary to what we may believe, it is not just certain gifted individuals who have a special power to act as channels or conduits for the Spirit and thereby aid in healing or otherwise positively affecting others. We are all imbued with this power. It is a power that can bring positive change to the world, at a time when the world sorely needs to change.

To employ that power is very simple. For those who do not already have their own technique, an effective method is outlined in *The Final Battle*. It is easy to perform and can be done whenever one has the time and wherever one happens to be. It goes without saying that this kind of prayer is infinitely more efficacious in dealing with crisis situations than are bombs and guns.

When the pope says that evil cannot be conquered by war, that it can only be overcome by prayer, he knows what he is talking about. When the Sufi tells us that the infinite power of Allah is inside of us and can be utilized to affect our fellows, he is speaking from personal experience. When the medicine woman goes to the mountain to find a peaceful place to sit in quiet meditation on behalf of someone else, she does so because she knows it gets results.

It is often said that the president of the United States is the most powerful person in the world. This is veritable nonsense. It is an incontrovertible fact of life that the old woman who prays for the president is more powerful than the president, for she understands the source of true power. But why must prayer be left up to the old women? Have the rest of us not got the courage to join our efforts with theirs, instead of engaging in activities that so often only make their essential work all the more difficult? Have we not got at least a few minutes a day to lend a helping hand?

We live in a time when more and more of us are ready to go kill in the name of good. Killing in the name of good is always an evil thing to do, whether it is done by a renegade organization or by a nation state. If left unchecked, this diabolical behavior can only result in the demise of the human race. It is that simple. And that dangerous! It goes without saying that those who advocate this insidious practice, whether they be self-appointed demagogues or popularly elected public officials, are not the true leaders of humankind. There only leadership is ultimately in the direction of collective suicide.

There *is* an alternative. And that is to bring to bear the full brunt of our staggering human potential against the forces of evil. Rest assured: The future belongs to those who know how to pray!

## THE LAST HURRAH OF THE FALSE GODS

This is strictly adult literature. In other words, you young people might want to check it out first, before you let your parents get ahold of it.

The time has come for the human race to be excruciatingly honest, with and about ourselves. Why *excruciatingly* honest? Well, because sometimes the truth hurts. You know what I mean? It can be easier to live in denial than to courageously face ugly facts about ourselves. Instead, we tend to point fingers at one another and criticize someone else for *their* mistakes and ignorant actions. But those days may be about over.

Psychologically and emotionally, the human race seems to be deteriorating. Our mood has been declining for years. How much longer can this go on? I mean, we seem to be headed for hell in a handbasket.

So why don't we admit the real truth: Our philosophies of life aren't working for us. If they were, we would be progressively *more* happy, not *less* happy. Our lifestyles aren't really life *styles* at all. They're lives of quiet desperation, becoming more desperate all the time. There's nothing *stylish* about them. They don't contribute to our well being -- they detract from it.

Something needs to change, but change doesn't come easy. Particularly when the change involves some of the fundamental ideas we have about life in general. Altering minor details in the way we live may not be that difficult, but seriously examining the very philosophies we live by usually proves to be too much of a challenge. Most of us go to our graves clinging to the notion that the basic view of reality that has been handed down to us is perfectly legitimate. It just doesn't occur to us that our well being, our personal growth, and even our survival may require a willingness to examine alternative philosophies of life.

A common element of the prevailing philosophies of most human cultures is the high degree of emphasis placed on human beings. There seems to be an unstated assumption that people are the most important part of the universe -- that the world more or less revolves around us and our activities. While most of us profess a belief in some sort of spiritual presence, which we call God, or Allah, or whatever, that we supposedly believe is the ruler of everything, our actions tend to speak louder than our words. And they betray us. In reality, we think *we* are God!

To drive home this point, let's examine one concept put into practice by almost everyone on earth -- the concept of nation states and their governments. For thousands of years we have banded together in various groups, which we call nations or countries, and instituted governments, in an attempt to regulate our affairs and control one another's behavior. If the officials of these governments are popular, or if they have been elected by the masses, there is a common perception that all citizens have an obligation to obey their rules.

But doesn't this contradict our supposed belief in some sort of *Divine* ruler? Surely our practice of allowing governments to be given the authority to define good and evil for us is tantamount to declaring that *they* are God. And since our governments are extensions of ourselves, isn't it fair to say that we human beings have essentially elevated ourselves to the status of God?

With billions of false gods roaming the earth, it's no wonder our problems seem to

constantly increase. When billions of ego-maniacs stubbornly insist that our own way of life is sacred -- look out. When we all believe that we more or less have life figured out, there's trouble ahead.

Consider that this Divine Spirit that most of us claim to believe in is infinite -- which it probably is -- and that we human beings are finite -- which we obviously are. That means we are infinitesimal specks, insignificant nothings, in this enormous, infinite universe. It should logically follow that not a single person on earth is intelligent or talented enough to be exempt from a requirement to constantly re-evaluate our behavior and make an attempt to reform it. It should be obvious that we all need to learn, and grow, and change -- not just for awhile, but for a lifetime.

However, when life's realities seem to be telling us that our behavior is counter-productive, or that our way of life is contributing more to our demise than to our well being, it's not uncommon for us to become defensive and refuse to change. Our habits are so deeply entrenched that we just don't like to give them up, or even admit there's anything wrong with them. It's easy to find rationalizations to pacify our conscience while we continue to live by our false philosophies.

As a case in point, let's examine our practice of nations going to war in order to deal with crisis situations. In spite of the fact that more people are in a worse mood all the time -- more depressed and anxiety ridden and angry and afraid and nervous -- we still believe that wars are making the earth more peaceful. So why aren't we in a state of bliss already? We've had enough wars to "end all wars" and to "save the world for democracy" and to "set up an ideal state" and to "conquer evil with good," that we ought to be just jumping with joy and dancing in the streets. But it's painfully obvious that joy is a scarcer commodity all the time.

So why don't we just own up to the real truth? That every war since day one has been nothing more than an act of terrorism -- a nauseating atrocity -- orchestrated by some group of people who have deluded themselves into believing that their criminal behavior is justified for one reason or another. Since the writer of these words lives in the USA, and is more acquainted with it's history than the history of other countries, let's look at some of the things it has done in warfare. The better part of the population of two entire cities, men, women, and children, were murdered in cold blood with atomic bombs during world war II, just to get someone else to surrender. During the Vietnam war, numerous villages were literally executed by incineration, by burning them to a crisp with napalm, using the cowardly and truly insane excuse, "It became necessary to destroy the village in order to save it." During the first war between the USA and Iraq, how did we noble Americans get Saddam Hussein to surrender? By slaughtering tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers whom we knew were helplessly trapped in concrete bunkers, who had no chance to either retreat or surrender. A true massacre if ever there was one. And now, as these words are being written, America is engaged in a sham "war against terror," in which we have arrogantly taken the lives of thousands of innocent people. If we accomplish anything by this current psychotic episode, hopefully it will be to prove that *we* are, in fact, the largest terrorist organization on planet earth.

America is certainly not alone in it's guilt. Practically every nation on earth, as well as rebel

groups and militias, and even supposed religious organizations, have, at one time or another, exhibited the same kind of murderous behavior.

By now, you'd think we'd at least be *starting* to get the message -- that war ultimately makes matters worse. But, no, not us. Our old habits are too hard to break. So whenever some idiot starts shooting people, the rest of us start shooting too, assuring that the vicious cycle goes on and on.

Another blatant example of our addiction to false philosophies is our obsession with material possessions. It should be very clear to us by now that happiness can't be acquired by filling our lives full of more and more toys to play with. Yet, the more unhappy we become, the more desperately we try to buy our way out of our misery. And then, the more miserable we become. Another vicious cycle.

Let no one think that Americans are any better off than anyone else because of our high level of material wealth. The joy factor in this country has been declining for years, despite our abundance of money and the things that money can buy. Those who envy Americans for our wealth and who attempt to emulate our way of life, be forewarned: You're wasting your time. Don't follow our ignorant example of trying to buy happiness. It just doesn't work. Instead, reflect on the meaning of life and try to figure out how to find *real* contentment. Perhaps you can show *us* the right way to live. We certainly don't know, and we need all the help we can get.

Before we move on to suggestions as to how to alleviate this sad state of affairs, let's discuss one more example of our habit of perpetuating ignorance. The practice of turning human beings, and women in particular, into sex objects. Human sexuality has always been treated rather casually and women have been treated like toys that exist for the amusement of men for centuries. Doesn't this seem a bit dangerous? After all, sex is one of the most powerful forces in the universe. It has the power to create a human life. Its use or misuse affects the well being of the people involved. Casual and disrespectful treatment of such a powerful force contributes to an overall decline in emotional and physical health.

More and more women are voluntarily turning themselves into something less than human beings -- into things that exist for men to use for entertainment. It's no wonder more people suffer from anxiety and depression and other emotional ailments all the time. No doubt, part of the reason is our lack of respect for our sexuality. To the women of the world, we say: Take back your soul! You are more than just a body. You're a magical being, with a spirit hiding inside of you, waiting to burst forth. Refuse to follow the fashions and fads of the times, that attempt to reduce you to a piece of meat. Refuse to put yourself and your sexuality on public display. Don't give in to the whims of simple-minded men and their primitive attitudes.

The burden of leading humanity in a new direction rests on the shoulders of young people. Why? Because, as a general rule, the older we get, the more convinced we become that our way of life is just fine, and the less inclined we are to seriously examine our fundamental ideas about reality. Only someone with youthful energy and a rebellious attitude can rise to the daunting task of charting a new and realistic course for the human race.

But even for young people, change will be difficult. There is such tremendous pressure to

conform to the prevailing ideas and attitudes that it takes a true revolutionary, a committed rebel, to break societies chains and embark on a new path. And, above all, it takes the proper motivation. Just the realization that we are headed in the wrong direction isn't enough. We must also have an abstract purpose -- a belief in something very mysterious and infinite and unexplainable -- to provide the incentive to look for that new path.

The habit of reading is a valuable asset for a person dedicated to revolution. Hundreds of books are available in stores and libraries. They can give us valuable clues as to how to turn ourselves around. They certainly can't give us exact formulas for finding enlightenment, but their words may at least provide us with some hints -- as well as much needed inspiration. Those who take advantage of the opportunity to read the works of others who have been committed to personal growth and change will probably find some of those books to be extremely helpful.

The human race may now be at a critical point in it's history. Our inner turmoil, our psychological and emotional distress, is rising to an alarming level. The time has come to deal with it, once and for all. And we simply can't deal with it by following blindly the same unrealistic philosophies that are the cause of our problems. Our survival demands that we courageously face this truth.

There's handwriting on the wall. And it's written in giant letters for us all to read. And that handwriting is saying, loudly and clearly:

**Change! Change or die!**

# THE FINAL BATTLE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MAGIC AND THE MYSTERY OF THE UNIVERSE

A SURVIVAL MANUAL FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

THE DEFINITIVE NOVEL ABOUT ARMAGEDDON

"Eloquence a hundred times has turned the scale of war and peace at will"  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Beneath the rule of men entirely great, the pen is mightier than the sword"  
Edward Bulwer-Lytton

"From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever"  
Chief Joseph

## **INTRODUCTION:ADVENTURES WITH MAGIC ROSE**

"You gotta do it your own way," he said. "You gotta do it your own way." No matter how much any one tells you, you don't know nothin' till you figure it out for yourself."

Like a bolt of lightning and a clap of thunder the words of the old man struck deep into the young man's soul. As he watched in wonderment, the old man rose to his feet with the grace and youthfulness of a person half his age and mounted his steed. With a quiet "Home, Cactus," sitting tall in the saddle, he rode off towards the sunset.

At that very moment the old man was transformed, in the young man's mind, from the old grouch who had done about everything he could to make life hard for him, into the Wisest of the Wise, a true Master of Life who had just revealed to him the secret of the universe. "You gotta do it your own way," the words spoke from within, as they stood foremost in his mind, held in place by a brilliant light, brighter than even the sun, reminding him of something he knew he had known all along but could never quite put into words.



Now, too, in that same light, he came to understand why that man, and the others, indeed a whole generation of elders, had made life so hard for him. The criticism, the rejection, the hostility -- they all seemed to have a purpose now -- some Divine reason that would no longer allow him to go on complaining whenever any hardship chanced to come his way. For even in the most trying of situations a lesson is to be learned. Adversity does, in fact, make us strong. The virtue of a hard and challenging life was suddenly a lot more clear to him now. For how could he possibly have been prepared to embark upon the adventure to which the old man's words seemed to be an irresistible invitation -- actually an unavoidable command -- had he not gone through every experience, no matter how hard or distasteful it may have been, that life seemed to have drawn him through?

Slowly it began to dawn on him. Somewhere, deep down inside, those old folks must have known that he would survive every one of those experiences, that a whole generation of young people would not only survive but literally thrive because of the wisdom and strength and courage and self-discipline gained by facing an obstacle that must be overcome. What better way to force someone to grow up than to make their life as difficult as possible. Maybe they knew that a hard life makes men and women out of boys and girls.

It had been obvious to him for some time that his future and the future of his entire generation was not destined to be an easy one, as the world did not dance to the same old tune any more, and a grown man had better be prepared for just about any eventuality. Now he began to realize that life itself was preparing him for that future. Not only do the past and the present lead up to the future, but they also prepare us to deal with it. Somehow, the bitterness he held toward his elders seemed out of place now. Perhaps, instead, he owed a debt of gratitude to those old masters. Perhaps he ought to be a little more thankful to them, in his heart, for having the wisdom and courage to make his life a tough one.

With this all clear in his mind now, he turned his attention ahead to what surely must be his inescapable destiny. The words of the old man still echoed through the chambers of his mind, inviting and challenging him to partake of the journey which all must someday travel: that awesome journey through life itself in that precise and unique style which he and he alone would be allowed to experience. He knew now that he must find the answer to that old and renowned question of questions which stirs the hearts of all men and women who have an inclination to be philosophical: Just what really *is* going on, anyway?

And so, he felt ready now. Ready to explore, to discover, to adventure. For what was life, if not an adventure into the very heart and soul of the universe itself? With a sense of quiet anticipation, he smoked from his pipe of hand carved maple wood some of the gentle herb which he had taken for granted so many times before. But it was different now, for he knew somehow that such an action on his part would place him on the most serious and perilous path he could ever hope to tread. With a firm resolution to put forever aside his selfish and childish pursuits, he resolved to tread that path. Knowing full well that he must now face reality in its totality, with all the duties and rewards it thrust upon him, he looked forward to what he felt must certainly be the most trying yet most splendid life any one could possibly imagine. After all, he thought, life is not a party. It's a trip.

Awaken, awaken, enlightened one.  
Awaken, awaken, O beautiful one.  
Come with me. Come with me.

To where only the brave dare go.  
To the place within the soul  
Where dreams are made and spirits dwell.  
Follow me to the land beyond  
The world of men and earthly toil.  
Climb the road to heaven within.  
Walk the path to eternity.  
Open your heart to the song of life  
And let it carry you to paradise.

Like a song that came on the wings of the wind, the words seemed to dance through his mind, creating an urge to begin without delay that awesome and exciting adventure to which he had just been called. Did the words really come on the wind or did they come from some mystical source of knowledge deep within himself? No matter. He had heard them, and they were all that he needed. He knew now, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that something was going on, and it was time to find out just exactly what it was.

At that moment his faithful horse, whom he called Magic Rose, nudged him gently, as if she too had heard the call. With a sense of calm expectation, he mounted, and, without any guidance from him, she turned toward the east, and with a slow but determined pace moved towards the hills beyond. Perhaps she, true to her name, was at least partly responsible for the sense of mystical quietness that now seemed to fill the twilight. She must have been doing something to his head too, as he felt a certain quiet in his mind that he wasn't accustomed to.

As they glided across the grassy prairie, like a sailboat glides across a smooth lake, with only the occasional song of a meadow lark and the rhythmical drumbeat of Magic Rose's hoofbeats on the soft, green ground to accompany them, the light of the fading sunset slowly gave way to a new light above the eastern horizon. Suddenly its source made its appearance, with a reddish glow almost as broad as the prairie itself. The full moon, as it is accustomed to doing, began to make its rapid ascent, so swiftly you could almost see its motion. It continued upward until, in all its splendor and glory, it appeared as a glowing ball of light balanced upon the horizon.

It was then that the trip began. What had come over the young man moments before was only a tiny hint of what was about to happen. As the moon continued its journey upward, a strange sense of unrealness came over him, as if they were about to enter into some enchanted land of dreams heretofore unknown to him. What happened next he would never have believed had he not been there himself. For nothing he had ever been through before could possibly have prepared him to accept what his mind was trying to tell him was now happening, at least not without a certain amount of disbelief and uncertainty. Sure, he had come to understand in recent years that there was more to the world than meets the eye, that

things were not always exactly as they seemed. He had always wanted to believe in magic, but how could a merely intellectual preparation make the soul ready to meet such an awesome moment without at least a momentary sense of trembling and awe? This was not a book or a movie. It was a real, live experience, and he was right there in the middle of it, with no apparent alternative but to accept whatever it thrust upon him.

Was Magic Rose actually flying, or was something disrupting his senses and making it simply seem that they were airborne? He immediately dismissed the latter possibility, as his mind was as clear now as it had ever been and it was perfectly obvious that the earth had, in fact, disappeared. Not only that, but his own body, and his horse's, did not seem to exist with their usual sense of physical reality. Yet at the same time their existence in a mystical sort of way was as obvious and clear to him as, if not more so than, it had ever been before. Although his mind could conceive of no possible logical explanation for what he was going through, he knew instinctively, without having to think about it, that it *was* real. Dreams are dreams and tales are tales, but this was definitely the real thing. So what else was there to do but go along with whatever was happening and make the most of it. Not that he had any choice, for some invisible force seemed to be the Master of the Moment and he was not one to waste energy resisting the inevitable. That would only be an exercise in futility, which past experience had taught him to avoid. Besides, the appeal of the unknown was far more powerful than any hold the desire for earthly security had on him.

Upward and onward! The quest for knowledge suddenly became the motivating force of his soul, and he knew now, more than ever, that he must press on until he discovered the truth, even if it meant giving up everything he had previously considered to be important.

Whether the journey lasted for minutes or hours he could not tell, for even his sense of time was not as usual. But after what seemed a relatively short period of time, a sense of earthly reality began to return. His body and his horse's began to take on their old firmness, and, as if it had happened so gradually as to make him unaware of it, he realized that they were back on the ground again.

He did not quite know how to assess the experience he had just gone through or even whether or not it had actually taken place. But yet he knew that he had been awake the entire time, so it could not have been a dream, and if anyone was going to try to tell him that nothing had actually happened it would take a book to convince him. Then he noticed something that scared him just a little. They were nowhere near where they had been moments before. The moon, now high enough above the horizon to illuminate the features of the landscape, revealed unfamiliar territory. It appeared that they were still in the Sand Hills, but somehow they had traveled a long way from home. He had spent enough time exploring these hills, ever since he was big enough to ride a horse, to know just about every hill and gully in the vicinity like the back of his hand, but tonight he had obviously ranged out farther than he ever had before. This, of course, was not really surprising, as this evening's ride had been somewhat out of the ordinary, to say the least. But what was he going to do now, not knowing where he was?

The answer came with the question as it dawned on him that he had been giving Magic Rose free rein and, without any of the apprehension that had come over him, she was slowly

and confidently trotting toward the north. He had always felt that she was a special horse and tonight she was at her best. Whatever the invisible force was that was guiding her, it would have to do for him too. He did not particularly like being so helpless, but it appeared that he was going to have to trust something besides himself tonight. Perhaps, he thought, he was merely being tested by the Almighty Power which rules the universe to see if he was really ready to experience things which he knew nothing about. At any rate, when in doubt, have faith and ride the wind. The Good Lord provides.

The cool evening breeze was beginning to make its presence felt and he found himself wishing for the warmth of a fire and a blanket. Just then they mounted the top of a hill and, as if in answer to his need, he made out the silhouette of a homestead not far off, the glow of a fire flickering in the yard. Rider and horse seemed to be of one mind, for Magic Rose immediately picked up her pace and headed straight for the ranch.

Upon arriving at the scene he was again reminded of the curiosity of the evening's chain of events by the appearance and manner of the man sitting there tending the fire. He was of slender build and had the bright eyes and easy smile you might see in a child, even though he was obviously older than the lad who was about to become his guest. Arising nimbly, with a slight bow, he exclaimed, "Good evening. Welcome. I am at your service. What can I do for you?"

This immediate gesture of friendship in such a situation seemed a little peculiar, but the entire scene inspired such a feeling of trust that the young man merely slid off his horse and said, "You can tell me exactly where I'm at."

To which came the reply, "You are exactly where you belong," followed by such a hearty laugh that he was momentarily taken aback and began to wonder if there was trickery in the making. He suddenly got the distinct impression that not only had this man not been surprised at his arrival, but that he had actually been expecting him!

Sensing the young man's confusion, his host informed him that he was just a few miles south of the town of Atlantis, which meant he wasn't all that far from home. But how they had managed to travel that far in such a short period of time was beyond his comprehension, as the duration of their ride or flight, whichever it had been, hadn't been very long. His mind was distracted, however, by the offer of a baked potato which had been cooked in the fire and a cup of hot tea, sweetened with some homemade maple syrup.

After the warm meal he was ready to put off until tomorrow any more thought of the hows and whys of tonight's events. The rancher had already fed Magic Rose and put her in the corral and told the young man he was quite welcome to sleep right there if he wanted or he could sleep in the house, whichever he would like. The idea of curling up right there in front of the fire sounded pretty appealing, so he thanked his host for supper, unrolled his bedroll, and was soon fast asleep on the ground.

Awakening the following morning, the young man wasn't sure if he really wanted to sit up and look around or not. Would he find himself in the same place he remembered going to sleep at last night or would he find himself back in familiar territory, the entire incident having been some kind of dream?

The question was answered for him by the voice of a child, asking him if he wanted an

orange. Turning toward the direction of the voice, he saw her, perhaps three years old, holding an already peeled orange in her outstretched hand. Behind her was the same house that had been there last night and nearby was the corral, where Magic Rose stood quietly looking at them.

Smiling, he thanked the girl and took the orange. "What's your name?" he said.

To which she replied, "Katrina. What's yours?"

"Jeff," he said.

"You have a pretty horse," she said. "What's her name? Can I go pet her?"

"Sure," he replied. "That's Magic Rose. She's real friendly."

As Katrina walked toward the corral Jeff began eating the orange and it was then that he made a curious and rather startling observation. Looking off to the south, he could barely see the hills. It must have been at least three or four miles to the hill he had been on top of last night when he first noticed the ranch in the distance. How could he possibly have picked out that one particular homestead and then ridden such a distance in the time he remembered it having taken him to get there? This question, plus the general fact that he had experienced something last night and was still experiencing something totally unlike anything he had ever been through before started to weigh on his mind and he became a little apprehensive. He liked adventure, sure, but being pushed so abruptly into such a drastically different view of reality than he had held before was going to take a little adjustment.

But before he had a chance to dwell on the matter for long the rancher emerged from the house, and with a smile that reassured him that everything was all right, strange though it may seem, asked him how he had slept and if he would like to come on in the house and have some more breakfast. He introduced himself as John and the three of them went into the house, where he met the rest of the family: John's wife, Denise, Katrina's two brothers, Bill and Scotty, and an infant, Charlene, who had just finished her breakfast at her mother's breast.

There they dined on a simple but tasty meal of tortillas with maple syrup. They ate quietly and Jeff felt comfortable being with them, as though he was just another member of the family. So comfortable, in fact, that by the time they had finished eating he scarce could remember the questions that had been bothering him a short time before. He was even beginning to get excited about the affair and was eager to inquire of John what the exact meaning of this unusual experience was. He figured John was a little more on top of the situation than he himself was at the moment. John seemed to Jeff to be the kind of person he could trust -- in fact the entire family did -- and he now felt that perhaps he was really there to learn something from them, that they were going to reveal to him some of the secret mysteries of the universe. Suddenly it occurred to him that the obvious thing for him to do was to be quiet and wait patiently for one of them to make the next move.

John did exactly that. Getting up from the table, he procured a small wooden box, opened it, and began rolling a joint from its contents. He asked Jeff if he would like to go for a walk, suggesting that perhaps they might have something to talk about. Jeff liked the idea and soon they were off, the just risen sun at their backs and the prairie beneath their feet wet with the cool morning dew.

They were walking across a horse pasture and Jeff noticed that most of the mares in the pasture had recently given birth. Some of the rest of them looked like they would soon do the same. Something about the mares in foal that he could sense, kind of a peaceful feeling, made him glad they were there. Of course they had to stop and pet the babies, both men being horse lovers as they were, and the short trip across the pasture became a minor adventure in itself. A conversation about horses took place and Jeff realized how much the two of them had in common with respect to their ideas and dreams about man's relationship with this noble animal. He thought he was beginning to like being here more and more all the time.

Once past the herd of horses John's attitude turned more serious. A rather abrupt remark about Jeff being aware that he was there for some kind of purpose brought Jeff's mind back to the fact that this was more than just a recreational stroll. Yes, he was pretty well convinced that fate had, in fact, placed him there for a reason, a good reason at that, whatever it may be. He was somehow certain that it all had to be something more than just a strange occurrence, or accidental freak of nature that had given such a monumental jolt to his perception of the universe. Being in the presence of someone who shared his view of the matter was comforting. At the same time, it was going to take some getting used to -- being in the company of a person who could sense his thoughts the way John seemed to.

John explained that he did not know how long Jeff would be there but that he assumed it was his duty to teach him anything he could while he was there. "And first of all," he said, "you need to learn the truth about marijuana." As he took the joint from his pocket and began to light it, Jeff felt a little startled, remembering what had happened the last time he had smoked the magic herb. He suggested that perhaps this was not the time and place, for was not such a thing to be reserved for special purposes and occasions?

Smiling, John replied that everything that went on while Jeff was here was probably intended to be very special and reassured him that it was all right, even though it was so early in the day. They smoked in silence, and when they were finished John began to speak.

"Marijuana is sacred. It was given to us by the Almighty, a gift from Divine Providence for the purpose of aiding us in our journey through life." The almost booming voice and the profound sense of the statement itself were enough to get Jeff's undivided attention and hold it. "It must be approached with a sense of awe, respect, and responsibility," he continued, "if it is to be used wisely. For it can bring out your best or your worst. It is essentially a humble servant of whoever uses it, neither good nor evil, for nor against, yet possessing such an immense power that anyone who begins using it is unlikely to ever be the same again." The speaker paused and his eyes gleamed as though he were a Shakespearean actor, gazing intently at his audience.

"Used selfishly or excessively, it can lead to the most disastrous of consequences. Most who use it use it in this manner. For they do not understand the profound nature and purpose of this powerful but innocent little plant, probably because they do not understand the profound nature and purpose of life itself. Failing to do so, they fall prey to their own selfish desires, until their lives become a matter of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, and indulging in whatever kind of material or emotional comfort that happens to suit their fancy. When there is no longer any great sense of duty and purpose the soul begins to become stagnant and the

will to live begins to wane. Obviously, such a life could lead to calamity, and wise women and men avoid it at all costs. Not that only those who smoke marijuana are exposed to the possibility of this kind of existence," he added, "for everyone is. But the grass intensifies and magnifies the already immense consequences and accelerates their coming"

"Basically, what marijuana does is to heighten the awareness and increase one's sensitivity. And the first thing you become more aware of and sensitive to is yourself. Whatever trait of character, whatever vice or virtue, whatever insignificant part of the personality, whatever lost memory or hidden desire that lies sleeping in the soul or locked up in the vast recesses of the mind is brought to the surface and revealed. You might say it makes you face yourself. Sooner or later, even though it may take years, you will find out everything about yourself. What you do with that knowledge is up to you. If you find a devil inside of yourself and you feed it and let it grow until it takes over your life, that is your own doing. To blame the grass is only to make a scapegoat. If you find something beautiful inside yourself, and you nurture it and let it grow, you are one of the lucky few who have discovered the secret of this mysterious plant."

"When finally you have begun to discover yourself, the wise one asks, 'Where do I need to change?' And used properly, the marijuana can help bring about the necessary change. For it also has the effect of increasing one's susceptibility to suggestion. Used as an aid in meditation, it can strengthen one's efforts toward self improvement."

The young man listened as his new found mentor continued to speak. "You might say marijuana is a magnifier. It expands and intensifies what it comes in contact with, whether it be a thought, a feeling, a belief or idea or attitude, or even a physical condition. It can aid or accelerate the creation of a genius or a tyrant, a success or a failure. Practically any endeavor can be furthered by knowledgeable use of this herb. It would obviously be to our advantage to use it to enhance only those kinds of things which are becoming of a mature and civilized people."

"Fortunately, enough people have become aware enough of the truth so that the government has legalized the use of marijuana in order to allow an intelligent and fruitful relationship to develop between plant and man. This of course in no way implies a condoning or approval of the abusive use of the herb, which was a matter of common occurrence before its legalization. Its intention was simply to allow people to be able to use it beneficially, as an aid in meditation, and to lessen the publicity and undue sense of importance that had been previously attached to it."

As Jeff listened, it seemed as though John were a part of himself, telling him something he knew deep down inside but was just beginning to really figure out. There was one thing he hadn't touched on though, and Jeff was quick to ask him about it. How did the marijuana take him on that awesome trip last night? Is that part of its power?

This brought a smile from John and he was quiet for a moment. Then he spoke slowly, seeming to choose his words carefully. "Marijuana put you in touch with a power that was able to do it. Exactly how that power works, I can't really tell you. There are those wiser than I around here who could tell you more about such things -- probably you'll meet some of them. But the grass itself merely helped to heighten your awareness last night so that you

could feel that power, a power that something inside of you had probably wanted to believe in. When you felt its presence you accepted it and went along with it. Had your consciousness refused to believe what was happening when it all started, it probably would have quickly ended and you wouldn't have remembered much about it."

After another pause, he continued, smiling softly. "That is the true purpose of marijuana. To make you aware, gradually, over a period of time, of this aspect of reality. The magical and the mystical. The unexplained and the unexplainable. That awesome and indescribable world that lies invisible and unknown to ordinary men and women, but which, to a few wise ones, slowly reveals itself in all its splendor. Truly, as the Good Book says, 'the Kingdom of Heaven is within you.'"

"You can see," he said, "why the use of such a powerful plant is taken so seriously by those who understand it. To use it for pleasure alone can invite dire consequences. And it usually does, though often in a very slow and subtle way. Only the uninformed and fools would use it in this way for any length of time."

"But to use it to gain knowledge, to help open the perception to an awareness of that world of magical splendor, that is the way of the wise ones. And indeed it is a hard and trying life. The mysterious forces and powers which one will sooner or later encounter are so great that only perfectly disciplined individuals are capable of dealing with them. Life changes when one begins to take seriously this pursuit of knowledge. No longer are the ordinary pursuits of ordinary people of any real importance. Life becomes basically a preparation for the soul to enter that state of consciousness in which the entire spectrum of reality is visible -- not only the material world, but also that which lies beyond it. No earthly endeavor motivates the soul any longer except those that help pave the way to that mysterious Kingdom of Heaven within."

The morning's experience had been a profound one. Jeff had a strange feeling of apprehension. He felt a little unsettled. It was as if John's discussion had somehow affected his state of consciousness, over and above the effects of the marijuana. His mind felt quiet and peaceful on the one hand, and, on the other, confused and almost frightened over what he was going through. Just when he had gained a certain amount of confidence and comfort in his new found situation, something like this had to happen and force him to admit the truth again -- that he really had practically no idea what was going on.

John had gone into town on business when they had returned home. He had suggested that Jeff rest awhile, as he had something important to talk about that afternoon and that Jeff should be in a clear state of mind in order to understand it better. So after eating a light lunch, Jeff had made himself comfortable on the ground in front of a cottonwood tree, propping himself up against the tree and basking in the rays of the midday sun. He did not sleep, but lay there in a dreamy state of consciousness, trying to ponder the meaning of it all. Somehow his ordinary thought processes seemed to avoid him, and even though he was in a state of perfect awareness, he was unable or else disinclined to make any real effort to apply his powers of logical reasoning to the situation. So he finally gave up trying and focused his attention on the warmth of the sun and the sounds of the blackbirds chirping in the tree above him.



The sound of John's horse approaching signaled Jeff that his rest was about over. Another encounter with the truth was at hand. He felt a little excited. After all, John himself had said that he had something important to tell him. What could he possibly say to top this morning's revelation?

John unsaddled his horse and turned him out and walked over to the well for a drink of water. Then, carrying a cupful of water for Jeff, he walked over and sat down on the ground facing him, his back to the sun. After giving Jeff time to drink, he said that there was one more thing they needed to talk about in order for Jeff to get the most out of his visit there. Sensing that Jeff was all ears, he took on his slow, serious tone and began.

"You must learn to use your mind now," he said. "You must learn to use your mind in a way you have never used it before." He paused to let the words sink in. "We take our mind for granted," he went on. "We think we know all about it and use it to its full capacity, when in fact we have barely begun to comprehend the awesome power that lies locked up in this mysterious thing we call the human mind. Now you must learn to tap that power and use it to help you perform the duties you will be called upon to do."

The bluntness of this opening statement took Jeff by surprise. He had always believed he had some kind of higher mental powers he was going to use some day, but never had anyone else voiced such an acknowledgment, let alone encourage him to do something about it at the same time. This was starting to sound good and he wondered where it would lead.

John's next remark was a note of caution. "You must understand, of course, that there is no implication of some kind of easy or glamorous life as a consequence of learning to use this power, but rather a great deal of hard work and self-discipline will necessarily be forced upon you. In the first place, learning to control the mind to the extent necessary to use it in a powerful and effective way is very, very difficult and requires a great deal of will power and determination, as well as some sense of purpose to provide the proper motivation. In the second place, you must be properly prepared to deal with the immensity and the literally overwhelming awesomeness of the mystical and magical forces you inevitably find when you begin to explore the inner regions of the mind."

By now Jeff was almost hypnotized. In addition to the serious content of John's statements, the rhythm of the words and a musical quality in his voice came together to help create a magical sort of atmosphere, and he felt almost as if he were being suspended, weightlessly, by some invisible force, and the only thing for him to do was to relax and listen quietly as John's words flowed through this force to him. He felt as if he could simply let the words enter his mind and be stored there and he would have an intuitive understanding of the message without really having to think about them at the time. Jeff was a good listener.

John continued: "For the most part, we live on the surface of our minds. Our awareness is fixed on what we call the conscious mind, as opposed to what we commonly call the subconscious, that little understood part of ourselves, the deep down inside part of us where our true potential lies, where all the knowledge in the universe is available to us, all the great energy of the cosmos is at our disposal, and rarely if ever used because we don't even know it's there. An entire race of human beings, quite capable of being gods, and living in a heaven on earth, instead live lives of mediocrity and controlled boredom, or, worse yet, of profound

misery. Only when we awaken to the presence of this sublime potential will the world begin to walk the path that leads to true perfection. You, for one, may count yourself lucky, as you are about to learn how to use this power."

"Listen carefully now," he went on, "because I'm going to show you how to meditate. That is, I'm going to describe to you how to use your mind, your subconscious mind, in a way that could be called meditation. It is a very simple procedure, and when used properly and faithfully, it can do great things."

"Relax now and close your eyes. Listen to the sound of my voice and let everything else go. You will understand everything I say, but you can let your mind go blank, as I am speaking to your subconscious, which will remember everything I say."

"If you need to spend a few minutes letting your body relax, take the time. It's worth it. Breathe slowly and deeply, focus your attention on your breath and let its natural soothing rhythm relax your body and slow down your mind. This is just a preliminary to your meditation, but taking a few minutes to relax is good medicine in many situations. What you are about to do will be much easier and much more effective because you are beginning with a calm state of mind."

"With the outer mind calm, the inner mind becomes accessible to suggestion. So now you put a suggestion in it. Build up a mental image of what you wish to do and spend some time describing, in very positive terms, this thing being done. Then give your subconscious the task of making it all come about in a fitting and proper manner. This all sounds too simple, except for the fact that the accomplishments of the human mind can be nothing short of amazing, to say the least, when it is guided in a responsible manner by the soul which possesses it."

"Then wait patiently and let the mind work. The suggestion you planted, like a seed, will grow in your mind. The energy of your mind, not being content to remain confined, will go out into the world and tend to be a real force in bringing about that which you have engaged it to help you bring about."

"It helps to reinforce the original suggestion from time to time with a short meditation, repeating a phrase that will re-suggest the entire idea, without actually going over it again. Some things, for one reason or another, may require a longer period of time working on in this manner than others. Occasionally, we may be contradicting an idea or belief or attitude already existing deep down inside of us that we're not even aware of, and it may take a lot of energy to overcome the old way or habit. But the mind is capable of almost anything, and a faithful application of this principle has been known to produce astounding results. For, as we have all been told, 'As you believe, so shall it be done.'"

Jeff blinked. Then he blinked again. What John had just finished saying had been profound, but what he just *did* blew his mind. Jeff had, at one moment, been staring fixedly at John's face, the rays of the sun behind him creating a halo-like appearance around his head. The next moment -- it may have been a second or maybe a few seconds, he wasn't sure -- he was gazing directly into the full brightness of the midday sun.

At all appearances, the man had simply disappeared. Vanished. Poof -- just like a cloud of smoke. Here one second, gone the next. People just don't do that. But John just did. The

rotten so-and-so. Mess with my mind, he thought. He knew it was useless to look around. By now he was angry. He was more than angry. He was irate. He ran to the corral in a rage. They could not do this to him. Had he not come there innocently? Had he not been a gracious guest? What right had they to play with him like this? He could not comprehend why he should be put through such mental agony and he was getting out of there as fast as Magic Rose could carry him!

Guess again, buddy. Magic Rose wants to play. Seeing Jeff coming, she threw back her head, arched her tail, and pranced slowly away in a fashion that at any other time would have positively delighted him.

But now it simply reinforced his feelings of anger. Anger turned to fear and fear to confusion. Never before in his life had he experienced such a complete jumble of emotions all at the same time. The impact of everything that had happened since that old man had imparted his pearls of wisdom and he had smoked a little marijuana for an inspirational sunset ride was now hitting home. He felt as if he had just been hit in the head with a sledge hammer which he hadn't seen coming. His mind could not stand the strain. It had let itself be charmed by the magical little happenings that had been taking place for just so long. Then it did the only thing it could do under the circumstances. It freaked.

He ran. He didn't *want* to run. He just ran. He didn't know what was going on and he was incapable of caring about that any more. He didn't know if he was a stark raving lunatic or if he had simply been given a taste of some ancient knowledge heretofore possessed only by sorcerers and wizards and which no rational person would ever believe, or at least admit to their friends that they believed.

But even that did not matter now. He was out of control. His body was horrified. Running was more of an animalistic reaction than anything else. He ran for hours, oblivious to the surroundings and completely devoid of any sense of direction. He had been overwhelmingly stunned and he would never be the same again. If he survived the ordeal, which at this point did not even seem to be a certainty, how could he possibly go back home and even attempt to carry on the everyday affairs that had been such an important part of his world before, but which now could never amount to anything better than sheer boredom? After all, when the soul has been shattered into a million pieces so artfully and poignantly by the hand of God, getting drunk just wasn't going to be quite as much fun any more.

Somehow a spark of manhood still seemed to be alive within him, though, and finally, with all the force he could muster, he latched onto it, somehow knowing that it was his only hope of survival. His entire reality had been so thoroughly and utterly disrupted that surely death, with its toothless grin, must now be looking over his shoulder, ready to grasp him with its clutches of doom and thrust him into the unspeakable abyss of nothingness. Only a miracle could possibly save him. Reduced now, as he was, to the most helpless and wretched creature on the face of God's green earth, he knew how Saint Paul must have felt when that bolt of lightning knocked *him* off *his* high horse and rubbed his face in the dirt.

God seems to have a knack for making the proud man humble. He fell to his knees and, in an act of total submission, leaned over, stuck his face in the dirt, and prayed like he had never prayed before. Then, somehow convinced that his prayer would be answered, he did the only

thing any self-respecting grown man in his situation could possibly have done. He puked his guts out.

The next thing Jeff was aware of was that he was lying on a pile of hay with a blanket over him. He wasn't sure how long he had been awake. Better yet, he wasn't sure if he even wanted to *be* awake. Living in a perpetual dream might be better than facing what he knew he was going to have to face.

He was no fool though, and he knew he had to face reality. No one in their right mind tried to escape reality. Whatever reality *was*. That became the paramount question now. He wasn't about to bring upon himself again the horror that had so devastated him the afternoon before. Which left only one alternative: to face it all with its limitless possibilities. To seek to comprehend the incomprehensible. Not because he wanted to, for he had the feeling that he didn't really want anything any more. But rather because he *had* to. For he had been forced into an inescapable situation. He had come face to face with the realization that there really did exist in this universe forces of such an indescribably powerful nature that he was completely and totally at their mercy.

Never again could he afford to be complacent. Never again could he fancy himself to be better or wiser than, or in any way above, any one else on this earth. For at any moment, anything could happen. What, he did not know, nor did he care to speculate. But if what he had experienced the past two days was real -- and he knew it was -- then anything, literally anything, was possible. He cared too much about his warm little body to take any chances on some cosmic fist appearing from some invisible dimension and pounding him into the ground. Amazing how fear can inspire us to be humble.

His thought processes were working again, thank goodness. He knew that it was going to be some time before his psychic equilibrium would come back to him. After all, you don't get kicked in the head and then jump right back up and start playing your guitar again. You take the count, patch up your wounds, pick yourself up by your bootstraps, and thank your lucky stars that your rear end and your face are both still where they belong. Then, with an air of caution, you very sober-mindedly approach the stage, humbly ask permission from the guardian of the grandstand, and wait for your audience to bid you to perform. With a little luck, you're a lot smarter than before. A good kick in the head can indeed have an enlightening effect on the brain.

Jeff knew he needed to organize, somehow, in his mind, the lesson he had just learned. He needed something to remind him of his insignificance. He thought awhile, but failed to come up with a thing. He needed a nice catchy little phrase to put his self-indulgent ego in place whenever it even dropped a hint that it was about to muddle up his peace of mind with some cock-and-bull story of its own brave deeds and fearless accomplishments. What could he use, he wondered? He knew the answer would come.

Then, as he gazed, eyes half focused, at the ground in front of him, it came. Or, more realistically, it appeared there right in front of his eyes. He almost laughed when he saw it from the sense of relief. All he had to do to put himself in his place was to say -- and he said it then, right out loud: "You're just another turd on the prairie."

He lay there with his eyes closed, repeating it over and over. He would do so, he thought,

until he had convinced himself to the very depths of his soul.

But his soul was going to have to wait, for all at once his body cringed in terror as he felt something touch his shoulder. He almost cried. How could God be punishing him again so soon? Had he not already admitted his selfishness? Had he not fallen on his knees? He wanted to jump up and run but not a muscle would move. Helpless as a babe, he resigned his fate to the force that could at one minute reduce him to a babbling idiot, and at the next deliver him safely from the deadly attack of his own silly fears.

Then he heard a voice begin to speak. He whined involuntarily, like a scared puppy, and broke into a cold sweat.

"It's all right," the voice said. "We all love you."

Oh God, he thought. Can't you just leave me in my misery? Do you have to send some kind of angel to transport me even farther from my home?

But wait a minute. That voice was familiar. He opened his eyes and there in front of him, with her winning smile, knelt precious, adorable Katrina. Praise the Lord! Thank God for kids! His body fell limp, a sheepish smile came to his face, and he lay there and listened as she spoke, her beautiful voice soothing him, her wonderful presence reassuring him that everything really was all right. He knew then that he would live.

He also knew that from that moment on, whenever he beheld a child he would be reminded that there was something in this world to live for. No matter how unworthy he might feel, he would know that right there in front of him was the one miracle that made this whole world worth enduring. For in the face of that one innocent little girl he saw God, with all His infinite wisdom and power and beauty. Her pristine charm carried him momentarily to the second heaven, and he made there a vow that he would accept any duty, endure any hardship, pay any price, or make any sacrifice that was demanded of him from now on. For though he knew now that he himself was not that important, for the sake of the children, life must go on.

As she trotted off to get him some food, he lay back and relaxed, knowing that the worst was now over. And he thought that somehow he had taken a step into adulthood. A real step this time. Not the kind one fancies oneself taking when they turn twenty-one or settle down and get a job or get married or some such thing. Noble and necessary steps though these may be, they are nothing compared to the profound transformation the soul undergoes when it accepts completely the existence of that mysterious invisible force which all too often is merely given lip service in place of the supreme acknowledgment it deserves.

Spring turned into summer and Jeff grew a little each day. He was a little more reserved now than he used to be. And considerably more serious about life. He still had his dreams. As a matter of fact, he believed in them more strongly than ever now. But he was infinitely more patient in his expectations of fulfilling them.

He was learning to accept things that he wouldn't have considered accepting before. First of all, he accepted the fact that he was in this mysterious place and would be here until some invisible power beyond himself told him it was time to leave. He had come to realize that the accomplishment of any important task was a long row to hoe. Understanding this brought a kind of relief. He didn't get in a hurry now. He simply let things happen. No more push and

shove. Life tended to flow in an easy going and relaxed manner.

He felt better now, not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. He knew he was a lucky man because of what had happened those first couple of days, despite the torture it had put him through. A young man's wounds heal quickly, and painful memories disappear in the face of an existence filled with true contentment. He could see that he was being given a gift, one that his friends back home were yet to receive. They lived for money. Or they lived for pleasure. Or they lived for some vague purpose related to their materialistic view of the world.

He, on the other hand, though it had taken a considerable blow to his once secure opinion of the nature of reality, had been given a taste of the higher life. Enough of a taste to make him ever vigilant, lest he receive another cosmic kick in the seat of the pants when he wasn't expecting it. And, more importantly, enough of a taste to whet his thirst for knowledge so strongly that he would never rest until he knew it all.

His friends lived at the mercy of forces they knew nothing about, believing that they were the ones who pulled the strings and made the show go on. When something did not go as they had it planned they became confused or perhaps angry.

Jeff was learning now that if he did not make too many rigid plans, confusion and anger would disappear from his life. And this was giving him something all the money in the world could not buy. Peace of mind. He found himself spending a great deal of time alone now, happy to just sit quietly and do nothing, or to go for a long walk, or to work on things in his mind in the manner John had shown him.

His new attitude was accompanied by a corresponding physical change. He felt younger, more energetic, and at the same time more calm and relaxed. John and Denise had even commented that he was beginning to look younger, and, coming from them, that made him feel real good. Growing old had been something he had come to accept as natural, but now he was inclined to believe that getting younger was infinitely more preferable.

So life went on. He knew some day soon he would be going back home, but did not spend too much time thinking about it. He was far too satisfied with what he was doing at the moment to get caught up in speculation about what the future held in store.

Jeff had also learned some new ways to meditate, a little different from the one John had showed him at first. "You must quiet your mind," Denise had told him one day. "Sooner or later you must learn to exercise such total control over your thoughts and feelings that you can close your eyes and find total silence."

This would not be an easy task to fulfill, she had explained, since we have been taught from childhood to be constantly thinking about something, to the point where we don't even believe it is possible to exercise any real discipline over our mind. She had indicated that it was fortunate that this was the case, since the world that is revealed to our consciousness when our thoughts cease for even a brief moment is so awesome that it could kill us if we are not properly prepared to face it. His mind had unintentionally been in such a quiet state at the time of his beyond the ordinary experiences, she had said, which was the key that had made it all possible.

It all sounded too simple. Just quit thinking and the world becomes a magic world. But to

Jeff the idea had begun to make a great deal of sense. He himself had witnessed a man disappear into thin air at a time when his thoughts had become quiet, and you could argue with your reason and logic that such a thing was impossible until your mouth had run out of words, and not convince him, nor get anything more than a sly smile out of a person who had witnessed it himself.

So Jeff was content now to take his time. He used the techniques he had been shown, knowing that in due time he would have the necessary control over himself to quiet his mind at will. The most important method of meditation he had been taught involved simply paying attention to the ordinary tasks of his daily life instead of letting his mind wander or attempting to carry on a conversation with someone. This proved to be very difficult at first. He had been working in the hayfield for a neighbor of John's and Denise's. Watching a mower bar sliding through the grass as you drove around in circles for several hours a day wasn't exactly his idea of fun. Indulging in fantasies and daydreams would have been a lot easier. But for a man who was waiting to meet his destiny, it was purely routine.

Dancing was another way of forcing the mind to be silent that seemed to be in vogue around here. No one had ever told him that dancing was a form of meditation, but it was pretty obvious that you can't twirl someone around on a dance floor and stay in step very long while you're spacing off. He never knew that having fun could be so good for him.

The dance hall was the place to be on Saturday night and Jeff looked forward to the weekend with enthusiasm. There was always a crowd and everyone here was a good dancer. They said it was a natural high -- no hangovers.

The Volunteers was the name of the local band and that's exactly what they were. They played for free and they played well. Jeff had been amazed the first time he had heard them play. He thought he knew a little bit about rock and roll himself, but these people could jam. Not only that, but occasionally one of the musicians would step down for awhile and someone else would step up and take their place. In effect, the band constantly changed over the course of the evening, and sometimes none of the musicians who had started playing at the beginning of the dance remained on stage at the end. Never before had Jeff seen so many people in one place with such a talent for playing beautiful music.

As midsummer approached, he found himself rather accustomed to his new life, and he spent less and less time wondering when he would be leaving. He had come to love the people he had met and almost dreaded the time when he would have to return to the place he had come from. These people were real. They seemed to be cut from a different mold. Or they simply had learned to fill that mold more completely than any other people he had ever been around. Strangers to him though they were, they cared as much for him as even his friends did. They owed him nothing, yet they gave him everything.

Not that he disliked the folks back home. To the contrary. He loved them dearly, and more so each day. But after being the guest of so many magnificent and enlightened souls, how was he going to relate to a society whose only visions were their dreams of dollar bills?

But fate does not cater to the whim of the individual soul, for it has the entire world to look after. Its firm but loving hand is guided solely by that one Great Spirit which dreams of perfection for all. Therefore it moves impartially, sending one person here and another person

there, with the precision of an artist whose concern is not with the individual brush stroke, but with the creation of an entire masterpiece.

And so when Jeff began to sense the imminence of his departure, he accepted it without complaint. For one thing he had learned here with certainty is that a grown man takes what he gets.

Midsummer Night's Eve. The night when the powers that be celebrate the spirit of life and give their blessings to all living and growing beings on the physical realms of consciousness. A night of magic. A night of power. Some people actively participate in the spiritual affairs. More witness them, and all receive some of the power and knowledge bestowed.

Jeff was a little uneasy that morning. Not really an uncomfortable uneasiness, but more of an energetic feeling and nothing to do with it. He thought a long walk would be good, and soon he was trotting across the meadows, listening quietly for any sign of something unusual in the air. He ran and walked for an hour or so and felt quite relaxed when he returned. The uneasiness had been transformed into a calm feeling of expectation. Nothing important seemed to be happening, so he simply waited.

Jeff had changed. He was more confident and composed than he used to be. He was not as concerned about where he was going to be tomorrow. He simply knew that he would be where he belonged.

He ate a big dinner in the early afternoon, then lay down in the shade of a tree for a nap. Katrina came over and curled up in his arms without saying a word, and soon the two of them were sound asleep.

Jeff awoke first, about an hour later, and now he could feel something. He felt as if something was going to happen today. Looking at Katrina, he was touched. Somehow he knew that this would be the last time he held her in his arms. This dear little child, this beautiful little angel, had given him more in three short months than he had given anyone in the last three years.

She awoke and smiled at him. And suddenly his mind went blank. As she walked away he knew he had not only been touched. He had been blessed.

The afternoon was not the same after that. Some friends stopped by and picked him up and they drove to an old gravel pit about half way to town. They spent some time swimming and sunbathing, then drove to a cottonwood grove not far from there. Sunset was approaching and they relaxed quietly for awhile.

Jeff felt at ease. He felt a very reassuring sense of well being. He did not allow himself to wonder whether he would be leaving tonight, but he knew he had to be prepared for that possibility. And at the same time, he knew that he *was* prepared.

One of the other men began to speak. He revealed a secret to Jeff. The secret of the sunset. As they watched the sun approach the horizon and the few clouds in the western sky began their magical change of color, he told Jeff that they had discovered that there is a great power in the sunset that can be used to help us along the way if we know how to use it properly. And of course, the way to use it properly is to give it away as soon as we feel that we have received it. To not do so could be deadly, as this power was so awesome that any attempt to hold onto it for ourselves was futile, and it would simply overwhelm us, one way or another,



in its attempt to follow its natural inclination to flow gracefully and without restriction wherever it was truly needed.

"It is in giving that we receive," he explained. "For when we give this power away, more comes to replace that which has been given. Then it flows naturally, as it is meant to, and then and only then do we receive its benefits. We know that you no longer desire to hold on to anything selfishly and that you will know how to use this power wisely."

"The power," he said, "lies in the sunset's beauty." Over the years, they had come to see the sunset as the earthly manifestation of the concept of beauty and of all that was good in the universe. Every sunset was different. Indeed each moment of every sunset was different, for the sun was always slowly moving and any clouds present on the horizon constantly changed in shape and form. And since every person who watched the sun set saw it from a slightly different perspective, it created for each and every individual a unique and personal display of its power, meant for them and them alone. They treasured this special gift, for it was like a sign to them that the Great Spirit still smiled upon them.

To receive the power, he explained, you simply face the sunset and breathe it in. Breathe slowly and deeply and feel its strength enter you and fill you, giving you new life and energy and light to show you the way.

They passed around a joint and Jeff witnessed the most spectacular sunset he had ever seen. As he breathed slowly and deeply, he could actually feel a power come to him. And he understood what they had meant. It was awesome.

Now it was time for it to happen. Whatever was going to happen. Jeff had not felt the way he felt now since the night he had first come here. That was enough to clue him that this was to be an extraordinary evening. But rather than getting excited about it as he would have done at one time, he simply accepted it, knowing that whatever was going to happen would happen exactly as it was meant to, and there was no use wasting energy in idle speculation.

The dance was where it was going to begin. When they arrived there the band was playing, but for some reason the attention seemed to be on Jeff. He felt warm feelings for these people who had shown him so much and done so much for him.

Denise came over and asked him if he would like to dance. He felt honored. As they began to dance, she told him that this was a special night for him and that he should be as relaxed as possible, not think about anything, and simply let the magic of the evening carry him along. By now it would have been difficult not to, for the state of consciousness he was in did not leave much room for anything else.

When the song ended, she suggested that he dance with another woman who had come over to where they were. This time he was instructed to pay attention to the words of the song. As he let the words dance through his mind he realized that this was their farewell message to him. He knew he would always remember the song.

You have traveled many miles,  
You have traveled many days,  
You have traveled through the storm.  
You have sought to find the secret,

You have sought to find the way.

We have seen you in your searching  
And we have given what we can.  
Now you must take what you have got  
And pass it on.

You have seen what can't be seen,  
You have heard what has no sound.  
You have witnessed that which most  
Of us have never seen before.

You have learned to live with courage,  
You have learned to bow your head,  
You have learned to seek for others  
What you yourself have wished to find.

There is no one among us who can  
Do more than you can do.  
There is no one here among us  
Who knows the final truth.

Oh please, won't you be gentle,  
And please, won't you be kind.  
We're all looking for the answer,  
We all long to see the light.

You know it is a certainty,  
And it's surely meant to be,  
That we walk this road together  
Hand in hand.

Life will take us to the place  
Where all is good and free.  
Life will take us to the place  
Where we are meant to be --  
Where we are meant to be.

If we give ourselves away,  
If we give ourselves for free,  
If we give ourselves forever  
We will always know the way.

The magic of the evening was beginning to have its effect on Jeff. He managed to maintain his composure even though he was beginning to feel as if he were a part of some kind of dream. He also felt as if it wasn't his own volition that was causing him to move and act, nor was anyone else here acting of their own accord. But rather some invisible presence moved them all in perfect harmony. He could actually feel the presence. It was far more than a purely intellectual assessment of the situation.

Suddenly he realized he was dancing again. This time he could hear her telling him to focus his attention solely on the music. Though by now his thoughts had stopped, he was perfectly aware of what was going on and was easily able to understand what he was told to do.

Suddenly, the pedal steel guitar came alive. For a minute it seemed as if every note being played carried a message from heaven which etched itself indelibly on his soul. Then, suddenly, something happened, something new to him. He felt as if some part of him was about to leave his body, and for a second he wasn't quite sure if he should let it happen or not.

But a quick spin by his dancing partner, artful master that she was, made the decision for him. As she spun him around, his consciousness almost flew right through the top of his head, and he found himself walking toward the door, feeling as if he were actually floating along, three feet above the top of his own head. He walked on toward the door, not knowing why, but somehow knowing that it was the right thing to do. He was flanked by two rows of people, and he noticed that they were all smiling at him. As he walked along, they would say things in his ear, sometimes in both ears at the same time, and the effect was hypnotizing.

"Stay forever watchful," someone said.

"Always be kind to strangers," said another.

"Walking is good for you," and "Where there is faith, there is power."

He heard every word and he knew that they were the final message he was to receive while he was here with them. He walked slowly and deliberately and cherished this last moment with these people who had been more than friends.

Words could not express the gratitude and love he had in his heart for them. He knew that even though they would soon be gone from his life, in reality, they would still be there with him and he with them. A deep and awesome joy came over him.

When he reached the door of the dance hall, he was surprised at what he saw, though he had somehow known all along that she would be there waiting for him -- Magic Rose, saddled up and ready to go for another spectacular ride. Without even thinking, he swung into the saddle, and, after turning back for a wave goodbye, they sped off into the night.

This time he knew what was going to happen. Sure enough, they flew. This time there was no bewilderment, for such a thing was now a natural and normal part of his world.

He savored the experience, knowing that it was to be but a brief one. In no time at all they were galloping once more across the familiar countryside of the wide Elkhorn valley, the same full moon that had arisen on that fateful night now setting in the west and giving way to the light of a new day dawning. The cool air of the spring morning felt good on his face, and as they raced along towards home he saw in his mind the image of a baby nursing at its mother's breast.

And he felt alive now, completely and totally alive. The birds played a symphony as he rode, and just as the sun began to rise, he heard it. The voice which came from inside of himself and at the same time from everywhere around him. He knew it was the voice of the whole world, and he listened as it spoke:

### BEHOLD THE DAWN!

For the song you hear within your own heart is but the voice of the child within you as it yearns to be free from the illusion that we are any more or less than one great big beautiful world -- One Great Spirit, which in its infinite wisdom has allowed us to live as beings apart just long enough to realize our oneness. It is the song of one perfect infinity singing of that which is finite, knowing that all its individual parts must one day awaken and be aware of that which gives them life and does everything that is done.

You who have lived in the dark for so long, blink your eyes at the new sun which arises and brings the new day of eternal life. Know, O beautiful one, that the spirit of life which shines in your heart is one and the same with the spirit of life which dwells within us all. No longer do you need to fight and strive and beg, for you know now that in reality there is but one of us, and we love ourself dearly. And know that you who have never seen the light of day are about to understand the truth about the awesomeness of our existence. And when you do, you will know why the bird sings and the child smiles.

Rejoice! Put away your guns and bring out your guitars. There really is a reason to live. Never again will you feel so helplessly lost and alone. For I am with you now and always was and always will be. In truth, I am you and you are me. Be silent and feel the presence of that which can be neither seen nor heard. I promise you then you will know the truth and then you will see the Great Beyond, which is our true home.

Be silent and know: We are ONE!

## THE FINAL BATTLE: CONQUER YOURSELF

Pete was bored. School was a drag. Why did someone who knew as much as he did have to spend six or seven hours a day locked up in one classroom after another, listening to someone else who knew no more about what was really going on in the world than he did trying to tell him the way it was? He didn't blame the teachers. They didn't know any better. They really thought that what they were doing was important -- that it was really necessary to memorize and learn all the mundane material in all the text- books that someone else had written down with the mistaken notion that the youth of America had to be spoon fed knowledge and told how it was, as if they were not intelligent enough to figure out anything for themselves.

Pete knew better though. He had been around some, and he knew a thing or two that most people around here apparently did not know. Or if they did, they were obviously not letting on that they did. Which was probably the case, he thought, since it was his conviction that everybody, somehow, knew everything there really was to know. Most people just haven't figured it out yet he guessed.

He knew it wasn't their fault either, since that's the way they had been brought up. From the time they were born they had been thrust into this lifestyle. They had been told everything. It had been someone else's job to figure out what the world was all about and it was their duty to listen to what they were told and believe it all. No wonder they were no better than puppets on a string or lambs being led to the slaughter, convinced all the while that this was their inescapable lot in life.

Pete really wanted to do something to help them be free and happy. He even felt that it was his duty to pass on to them some of the knowledge he had been blessed with. He was tired of seeing the sad faces and the anger and the bewilderment all around him. He himself was about the happiest person in the world, and he wished he could share what he knew, for he wished that same happiness for everyone.

Pete glanced over toward the window and looked out across the field behind the school. As he did, he noticed out of the corner of his eye that Jodi had been looking at him. She looked away as soon as he turned his head in that direction.

Pete knew she liked him and he liked her too. But they were miles apart. She seemed like such a conformist. Sometimes she acted like she lived to party -- as if she didn't have a serious bone in her body. They were friends, but didn't talk much. Pete wasn't really sure how to have a serious conversation with someone like her, so he never made much of an attempt to talk to her. He was going to have to start, though. After all, a boy can't be by himself forever, and he figured that underneath that empty headed surface was probably his kind of girl.

The bell rang and class ended quite abruptly. It was Friday, and no one was into hanging around the classroom to discuss the finer points of today's lesson. If there was one thing Pete had in common with the rest of the students, it had to be the understanding that intelligent life always seemed to begin about three-thirty on Friday afternoon.

As they headed down the hall toward freedom's door, Pete noticed that Jodi was walking a little slower than the rest of them. If he wasn't mistaken, she was waiting for him to catch up with her. What does she have in mind, he thought. Lately he had been getting the impression that she wanted to get better acquainted. So, when he was beside her, he turned to her and, without really thinking, asked her what she was going to do this weekend.

"Party, I suppose," she said.

That didn't surprise him. He pretty much knew that would be the reply when he had asked the question. But then she *did* surprise him. She asked him what *he* was going to do this weekend. Never before had she actually expressed that much interest in him, and Pete thought that was a good sign.

He wasn't quite sure what to say for a moment, then the words just came out. "Same thing, I suppose."

There was an uncomfortable lull in the conversation as he tried to think of something else to say. He didn't want to blow it, but his mind was kind of blank and nothing came to him.

As Jodi turned to walk over to Christy's car, he quickly asked, "Are you going to be around town tonight?"

"Yeah," she said. "You?"

"Probably," he replied. "Maybe we can get together and do something."

"Okay. See ya."

And that was it. Pete wondered if they had a date tonight. That had not been his intention, but something about the whole conversation, as well as the tone of her voice, gave him the distinct impression that she had different feelings on the matter. He didn't know quite what to make of it all, but he guessed he had better be around town, and with his eyes open.

As Christy's car passed him, he looked over and saw Jodi looking at him. This time she didn't look away.

Jodi was a little unsure of herself as they began their customary Friday night cruise. Jim and Christy had picked her up, and, as they headed toward the main drag, she wondered what she would say to Pete when she saw him. But he can do the talking, she thought, so why worry about it? Besides -- first things first. She was ready for a beer!

Christy was already handing her a cold one. Jodi had been so lost in thought that she hadn't even heard the sound of the pop top -- a bit unusual for her, as that was one of those simple little sounds that was part of the music in her life. She reacted quickly, though, and took the beer with a grin. "Thanks," she said. "I needed that."

"So what's going on tonight?" Jim suddenly asked. "I'm kind of out of touch since I joined the working class. You guys'll have to fill me in on the social news and all that."

Jim had graduated at mid-term and now spent a great deal of his time working on a farm. He had to earn their daily bread. His and Christy's. They had been married since fall and she was going to have a baby this spring. She had stayed in school and was going to graduate in May. Or so she thought.

"Keep your eyes open for Pete," Jodi exclaimed. No use in being subtle. She couldn't wait to see that guy.

"Sure! So what else is new?" Christy replied, sarcastically. "Some day he'll put his arm around you or something and you'll probably faint."

"I talked to him after school and he said he was going to be around town tonight," Jodi said confidently. "So be sure and stop if you see him."

"There's Bill's pickup up ahead," said Jim, stepping on the accelerator. "Maybe he's with him."

Sure enough. After following the pickup's lead and making a right turn, they met them on the other side of the block, exchanged greetings, and joined forces. The party in Jim and Christy's car had grown to five now and was beginning to take on more possibilities all the time.

The itinerary now included a routine swing out south of town a few miles to pick up Bill's girlfriend, Cynthia. A short excursion into God's country. Which there wasn't as much of around here any more -- what with so many fields being plowed up and all. Kind of nice to see some wide open spaces for a change. Lot of ponds out in the meadows from melted snow. Ducks, too. Spring was coming early this year.

"What are we going to do tonight?" Christy voiced the question in everyone's mind.

"Let's start a revolution," Pete offered.

"Sounds good to me," Bill agreed.

"I won't argue, man," Jim joined in. "I'm tired of all this crap."

The girls just looked at each other. Christy was used to this kind of conversation. Jodi wasn't. She had only recently begun to spend much time with these guys, and their off the wall remarks still caught her a little by surprise. But that was part of their charm. Part of the reason Christy and Cynthia had fallen so easily in love and part of the reason Jodi was beginning to find Pete so irresistible.

"Why doesn't someone roll a joint on the way out there and maybe we can come up with some ideas on how to get this revolution started," Bill suggested.

Everybody looked at everybody, and suddenly Jodi exclaimed dramatically, "Will the *real* man with the marijuana *please* stand up!" This brought down the house. A good belly laugh for everyone, and anyone who hadn't been completely at ease before, sure was now.

"Hope a pipe will do," said Pete, after the laughter had subsided. No one objected, and he began to fill the bowl from a bag he had in his shirt pocket. He momentarily interrupted his task when they pulled into Cynthia's yard. Her parents, even though they might have known what was going on, probably would not have appreciated him being too obvious about it. It was something they simply did not understand.

The group now complete, they were ready to discover what the evening held in store for them. Down the country road they rolled. No hurry to get back to town.

Pete finished loading the pipe, handed it to Jodi, and proposed a toast to peace and revolution. The pipe was lit and passed around. They were off.

Christy stuck a tape in the cassette player and turned up the volume. The words of the song came loud and clear:

Spoke Krishna to the prince of the Pandu:  
Conquer yourself!  
You are your own worst enemy.  
Conquer yourself.  
I don't like criticism  
And I don't like complaint.  
I am the One who put you here  
And I gave you all that you have.  
So don't go saying your life is too hard --  
You pout and you whine like a child.  
If it's not as easy as you'd like it to be,  
Then perhaps you'd better be still.  
Look for the answer, there's always a reason,  
Everything has a purpose to fill.

Silence is golden --  
The light will shine --  
Open your eyes and see.  
The world could be such a beautiful place,

If you'd only take what you get.  
I'm trying to make a man outta ya, boy,  
But you sure haven't learned much yet.

Going home --  
Going home --  
We all are going home.  
But you are the one who's been dragging your feet,  
And you blame it on someone else.  
So take your medicine,  
I know what I'm doing,  
I'll get you out of this mess.  
If you think you're so cool,  
Then I'll show you  
Exactly what hard can be.

You're nothing but a fool  
With your head in the sand  
Going backwards faster all the time.  
If I have to knock you down a few more notches I will.  
Whatever it takes to turn you around  
And start you back up the hill.

The song had an ominous sound. It was different. Not exactly top forty, but these guys weren't into top forty anyhow. That stuff is okay for thirteen year olds, but we all have to grow up some day. Listening to the same old music that the radio stations around here played all day long would only hold them back and they knew it. So they picked out their own music, leaving the air waves for the kids who were too immature or just too chicken to try anything new and different.

"Good song," Bill remarked, but with a little reservation. Even though he had liked the song, something inside of him had taken it kind of hard.

"Music is food for the soul," Cynthia added. "Too bad the radio stations around here don't play songs like that, there's so many starving souls around."

"Yeah, really," agreed Christy. "Not to insult anyone, but most of the crap they play is really garbage."

A short chuckle of agreement, and then a musical interlude followed, as six hungry souls feasted on an instrumental song, played by a band of musicians who obviously understood that there was more to life than just earning money and spending it.

At almost the precise moment the song ended, the car engine stopped, just as if someone had turned off the key.

"What's going on?" somebody said.

"Spirits from the deep," Jodi crooned, in a slow, dramatic voice.



They rolled in the aisles over that one. She was getting just like the rest of them. She liked the reaction, too. Always does your confidence good to hear someone laugh at your jokes.

So what *was* going on, anyway? Do you just hop right out of the car as if you had planned to stop there anyway, and try to act casual in the face of who-knows-what? Or take the more rational approach and immediately try to start the car, assuming that it's a purely mechanical situation?

Jim instinctively tried the latter, to no avail.

"What now," somebody said.

"Nice evening out," Pete replied.

"Yeah, sure," said Jodi, sarcastically.

"Well, I mean, as long as we're here -- you know what I mean?"

"Guess I could look under the hood," was Jim's remark. "Maybe the coil wire fell off or something."

"Coil wire fell off?" Bill said questioningly. "Where'd you get this thing, anyway? Sanford and son?"

"Well, sounds like something electrical." Then he added, "Maybe," as an afterthought.

"I'll help you look," replied Bill. "It's getting kind of dark. We better do something."

So they all piled out and the car engine became the object of their scrutiny.

An almost total silence accompanied the twilight. Twilight -- a time of power. And silence -- the key to the other world. Two age old companions, now present to help six young people get whatever they were capable of getting from a situation that was, at one and the same time, mildly irritating and totally unavoidable.

The hoot of an owl broke the stillness from a hundred yards or so away. Jodi and Pete were the only ones to give it much attention, the rest of them being fairly intent on finding the nature of the car's ailment. Jodi turned, took a couple of steps in the direction of the sound, and let out a "Whoop," in a near perfect imitation of the owl's own call.

"Pretty good," Pete remarked with a grin. "Wanna walk down that way and see if we can see it?"

"Sure," she replied. Neither of them was being of any help there, and a chance to be alone for a moment seemed to be calling them. It was a natural. So off they went, down along a row of trees, gazing ahead for any sign of motion among the branches.

By the time they reached the place they had thought the sound had come from, neither of them was thinking about the owl. Fate had other plans for them at the moment than catching glimpses of magical creatures of the woods. As they stood gazing at the treetops, he casually, yet gently and sensitively, put his arm around her shoulder. She didn't faint. She just put her arm around him and listened as he spoke.

"Pretty strange, the car stopping and everything," he said.

"Yeah. Wonder what it all means," she replied.

Before either one of them had time to offer a suggestion, a dark form appeared in their field of vision, and in an instant, the owl swooped down toward them, passing several feet above their heads.

Without a word, the two of them turned and ran, hand in hand, back toward the car.

Whatever they had gone to see the owl for -- whatever mystical purpose or spiritual significance the encounter may have had for them -- it was over with now. Brief though the moment had been, it had allowed a communication to take place. A communication between nature and humanity, or perhaps even between heaven and earth. Something inside both Jodi and Pete knew that they were somehow richer for the experience, that they had gained something from it, somehow.

Arriving back at the car, they found their friends sitting inside, the car's engine running. They opened the door and got in the back with Bill and Cynthia, just in time to hear the concluding remark by Bill in the conversation about the car's stopping and subsequent re-starting without any apparent mechanical motive. "Yeah," he said, "sometimes strange things happen. Maybe we needed to stop here for some unexplainable reason. Anything's possible."

"Yeah," Jodi replied. "We had to go talk to an owl, anyway."

"So what did the owl have to say?" Cynthia asked.

"Yeah," echoed Jim. "What kind of knowledge did you guys come back with?"

Jodi looked at Pete. After a short pause, Pete replied, "You shoulda been there. He swooped down over our heads. Real low. That's all there was to it."

"He told us the future would blow our minds," Jodi exclaimed. She didn't know where the remark came from. The thought just came to her, so she said it.

At another time this might have been taken strictly as a joke by most of them. But at the moment, it sounded serious enough to them to not get more than a polite chuckle or two.

"The present is doing a pretty good job in that respect, at least as far as I'm concerned," said Pete. That being the consensus, it was agreed upon to just go with the flow the rest of the evening and see what was happening.

The trip back to town was a fairly quiet one. The atmosphere in the car seemed a little more serious than it had been before. These were fairly serious minded people anyway -- life seemed to compel them in that direction, more so than it used to. So the mood was a natural one for them. An appropriate mood for the times.

The times. The times were getting tougher. In more ways than one. Life just wasn't quite so easy anymore. Not only for this group of struggling souls, but for the community around them. For that matter, the whole world wasn't spinning quite as smoothly as it normally did, or at least seemed like it should.

Not that there was any feeling of despair or sadness prevailing in this crowd. Quite the contrary. After all, it was Friday night. This was their time to reinforce one another's faith in the future. Individually, they all knew somehow that God had not put any of us on this earth just to suffer and die. And they were pretty well convinced that it *had* been something beyond themselves that had put us here, too. Call it God, or the Great Spirit, or the Force, or whatever you want -- it was all the same to them. Though they weren't that enthusiastic about going to church on Sunday and acting out the other routines laid out for them by well intentioned, but ill advised and unenlightened, church leaders, there was not a one amongst them who would be afraid to tell you that there was obviously something there affecting our lives at all times.

These guys were street Christians. After all, they figured, it was the spirit of the law that

counted -- not the letter. You could even quote Jesus on that one, if you wanted to.

Though they were by no means Jesus freaks or Bible quoting fanatics. Their religion was of a much more practical nature. Pete had even responded to someone once who had asked him if he had turned his life over to Jesus yet by saying that Jesus can point out the way, but he can't walk the path for you. He had read enough to know that there were a lot of spiritual traditions in the world besides Christianity, and that they all had some legitimate message. He had learned as much from the Bhagavad Gita as he had from the Bible. He even felt he understood the message of the Bible better because he had read other holy books that described things in different ways than it did.

You might say that this Friday night gathering was equivalent to a church service for them. Being practical people, their temple of worship was wherever they happened to be at the time -- in this case, a car. No one being appointed minister, all were equal priests, and they all learned from one another. The essential ingredient was a common understanding that there *was* an invisible presence in their world, and that they needed to know as much as they could about how it was affecting their lives and be as conscientious as possible about doing what it seemed to be telling them to do with regard to their day to day affairs.

The invisible hand of fate did not seem to have any particular excitement in store for this band of aspiring revolutionaries the remainder of the evening. There wasn't much to do but become part of the usual weekend routine of a small town, so their ongoing adventure merged with the festive activities of their friends.

Cruising the streets for awhile revealed who their partners in whatever lay ahead were going to be. Someone commented on how most people were a little more subdued than usual for a weekend night. Not that they weren't having fun. They were just a little more serious than usual at the same time.

"Too bad basketball season's over," Cynthia said. "They were really great this year."

"They're good entertainers," Jim offered. "We went to about every home game, and they were really fun to watch. Beat the heck out of staying at home and watching some stupid movie on television about people killing each other or something."

"I think this town owes the team a lot, just for that reason," Christy added. "Think of all the little kids who got to get away from one evening a week of watching the boob tube and see some good clean entertainment instead."

That seemed to echo the feelings of everyone in the car. And probably most folks around here felt the same way.

The number of cars cruising the streets suddenly began to diminish, and Jim correctly guessed where most of them would reappear. At the home of a man he worked with a small social gathering was beginning to take shape. The six people in Jim's car joined this affair, it seeming like the obvious thing to do at the time.

It, too, was of a more subdued nature than the usual Friday night party. The normal round of joking and laughing and clowning around was there, but there seemed to be more than the average number of people either sitting and standing around quietly or making an attempt to carry on a serious conversation.

Jodi and Pete split a beer and found a spot to stand near one side of the room. Jodi noticed

that the two of them were getting more than their share of glances, and one of her friends nudged her and grinned as she walked by. It took Jodi a few seconds to realize why. Then it dawned on her that no one had ever seen her and Pete standing together holding hands before. She had a momentary attack of self-consciousness, then reassured herself that it wasn't necessary, as it was a perfectly normal situation to be in. It almost seemed as if her friends' glances and smiles were indicating that they knew it had been bound to happen sooner or later, and it was about time anyway.

In the next half hour or so, Pete and Jodi became aware that everyone was becoming a little more relaxed and comfortable, and they began to discuss the subject of alcohol. A few others joined them and they all discovered that they were basically of one mind when it came to drinking beer. While no one disagreed that there might come a day when they wouldn't feel a need to drink, they all felt that it was good medicine for them once in a while, as long as they were sensible about it. Their lives held their share of problems, just as did the older folks'. So why couldn't they have a little bit of the same medicine their parents used on weekends to help relax and relieve the tension, in order to be better able to face the assault of another long week of psychological harassment? Being treated like some kind of kid just because they were only fifteen or sixteen or seventeen years old was pretty demeaning anyway. To add insult to injury, they were then told they couldn't even have a drop of the elixir most older folks used with more or less regularity to ease *their* pains. Sheer hypocrisy, they thought.

"Why don't them folks that preach at us about not using alcohol and other drugs talk about moderation instead," Pete said. "If you need to drink, drink in moderation. Anyone who thinks it's time for this society to quit booze and other such things cold turkey must be crazy. Maybe some day we'll mellow out and not need any drugs, but I have a feeling that's going to take some fundamental changes in our basic way of life. You know, get to the root of the situation first. In the meantime, why don't they leave us alone and let us have some relief?"

"Yeah," someone replied. "If them old folks can get falling down drunk when they can't handle reality, why don't they quit telling us how to act. They should clean up their own house first."

"Well, you know, a lot of people will go to the medicine cabinet and get a handful of aspirin, or something stronger if they got it, whenever they have a headache, just because they don't want to accept a little pain," someone else added. "So I don't think they should preach."

By now, this conversation had become the center of the party's attention. A freshman boy who had been listening to the spirited discussion suddenly found he had the courage to speak his humble opinion. Encouraged by the comments of the others, and his tongue loosened, but not unhinged, by a couple of beers, he said something he had wanted to say for a long time. It came out kind of funny, and everyone grinned, but the words were unmistakable gems of wisdom.

"Well, cripes almighty," he began. "Ya know? I mean, shoot, man, we're old enough to be grown men and women if they'd just let us. I been reading this book called *The Imitation of Christ*, and it says that if we all looked deep enough into our own hearts and souls, we'd find so many faults of our own to work on that we wouldn't have enough time to try to tell other people how to run *their* life. So why don't they let us learn to deal with life in our own way

and we'll give up alcohol when it's time to give it up, and in the meantime, we won't go preaching to them."

The feelings of the youth of America having been summed up by a fifteen year old grown man, Jodi proposed a toast to freedom and moderation. Someone cranked up the tunes, and a newly inspired detachment of would be volunteer space warriors sang along with the Jefferson Airplane:

Look what's happening out on the street --  
Got a revolution,  
*Got* to revolution...

Jodi and Pete left the party early, both of them feeling a little tired. It being a warm evening, they had decided to walk instead of asking someone for a ride. They both welcomed the opportunity to be alone together for awhile anyway. They held hands and talked and enjoyed the walk to Jodi's house.

"You ought to do some acid sometime," Pete suddenly remarked, when they were about half way to Jodi's place. "It'd be good for you."

"You mean LSD," Jodi asked, a little surprised at the abrupt remark.

"Yeah," Pete replied. "It's all right if you know what you're doing. You can get a lot of good out of it. But if you fool around with it, it'll kill you. It's not kid stuff. Most people don't realize that and they use it just for kicks. That's pretty stupid. You can have a really good time with it. It can be a lot of fun. But at the same time, it affects your mind. If you're not aware of that, it can hurt you -- really bad."

"It's hard to describe what it really does, but one acid trip can put you through a lot of changes. It can change your entire personality. It's like marijuana, except a lot more powerful. You've got to exercise a great deal of discipline over your mind whenever you use either marijuana or acid. They magnify things inside yourself, so if you allow the weird things in your personality to have control, the grass and acid will simply make you weirder. If you dwell on the positive side of yourself and attempt to maintain a positive attitude at all times, when you've been smoking marijuana or when you're tripping, they can help you improve yourself. That's what they're for -- self improvement."

"The fact that so many people start acting strange when they've been using marijuana or LSD for awhile isn't the fault of the drugs. It's their own fault. They're just too chicken to exercise a little control over themselves. They'd rather indulge in catching a quick buzz than make any serious attempt to improve themselves or the world around them."

"But, then, that's the American way. We're a pretty childish and selfish society. We live to catch a buzz. We're very materialistic people, and we mistake material comforts for true happiness. We think God put us on this earth just to amuse ourselves and make ourselves comfortable, so that's what we do. We chase after every kind of comfort money can buy, and it's hurt us. We're a weak society anymore. I mean, in a moral or spiritual sense. We think we're so tough because we can sit in front of an electronic console and send enough rockets with bombs on them across the ocean to blow up half the continent of Asia, but we're such

little babies that whenever we want to go six blocks, we have to sit on our butts and drive because we've forgotten how to use the two good legs God gave us. We're pretty bad, really, if you stop and think about it."

Jodi made no attempt to speak, being content to listen to Pete. Encouraged by her attention, he continued to talk.

"All the junkies and partiers and clowns that people point to and criticize and condemn are nothing more than reflections of our society as a whole, you know what I mean. I'll tell you something I read once, and I believe this to be true. More often than not, if we find ourselves criticizing someone else for something they do or something about the way they are, it's probably because it reminds us of something inside of ourself that we don't want to admit or face up to. It's always easier to point a finger at someone else than it is to take our own self into account. It's like Jerry was saying. If them hypocrites in the state legislature or in Washington had enough courage to examine their own souls thoroughly, they'd probably find enough shortcomings of their own to criticize, and maybe they wouldn't be making so many rules for the rest of us and telling us we can't drink a little beer or smoke a little grass once in a while."

Jodi was impressed. She knew Pete was smart, but she had never realized before how much of a common sense philosopher he really was. Suddenly, a thought came to her, and she couldn't help but express it. "Why don't you write a book," she exclaimed, her eyes beaming. Pete just smiled.

"I'm serious," she said. "You're smart. You could say a lot of things that might change the world."

They walked on in silence. The idea sounded good to Pete. He knew he had it in him, and, with encouragement like he was now getting, he figured it would probably happen sooner or later.

Upon arriving at Jodi's house, the two of them agreed to get together the next afternoon and do something. Then Pete trotted on home.

Jodi had a weird dream that night. At first, she thought she had woke up. Then she made a most peculiar and startling observation. She seemed to be standing on her head, just above her bed, not actually touching the bed, but rather, suspended several inches above it. She could move her feet and touch the ceiling with her toes. It was dark in the room, so she couldn't actually see anything. She was simply aware that she was in that position. It was as if some invisible force had actually picked her up and was holding her there, upside down.

Then she sensed a presence, as if some kind of spirit was there holding her, and she was helpless to do anything about it. She couldn't feel anything like hands or arms touching her body anywhere, yet she knew with a certainty that something invisible was, in fact, suspending her there. An attack of fear hit her, along with the sudden realization of the incredibility of the situation. This can't *really* be happening, she thought. Though a second before she had been convinced she had been wide awake, she concluded she *must* be dreaming, as her mind was incapable of believing that something like this could actually take place. She then experienced the sensation of falling, and, a second or two later, found herself lying awake in her bed, under the covers. She was sweating, and her heart was beating

rapidly. This time she knew she was wide awake and there was no invisible presence there with her.

She lay there for some time, trying to remain composed and make some sense out of that weird dream. The longer she lay there, the more she convinced herself that it *had* been just a dream. But she could not deny the fact that it had been such a vivid dream that she actually had believed for a brief moment that she was awake and that some really strange supernatural experience was occurring.

Jodi fought off sleep for awhile, afraid the dream might recur if she fell asleep again. Then she began to pray, figuring that was the best thing to do, and a peaceful sleep overtook her.

The next morning, upon awakening, she immediately remembered the strange occurrence. By now, the memory of the experience was less vivid, and it was easier to believe that it had been just a dream. But a haunting thought kept passing through her mind. She had read enough about supernatural occurrences and paranormal experiences to believe that such things were actually possible. But why, she thought, should something like this happen to *her*? No, she told herself, this had all been just some really weird dream.

Suddenly, she thought of Pete, and remembered she would be seeing him that afternoon. That thought reassured her, and she figured she would tell him about her dream. She lay in bed awhile, her attention focused on him, and a warm, pleasant feeling came over her.

Jodi lost herself in the house work and yard work all morning. She was thankful for something to do to distract her mind from the thought of last night's experience, though she couldn't seem to help thinking about it, off and on, throughout the morning.

At noon, she fixed herself a lunch and ate. Then she headed for Pete's house, running most of the way. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. The sun felt good on her face, and it looked like a great afternoon to be doing something outside.

Pete was waiting for Jodi when she arrived at his place. He was sitting cross legged on the ground in front of his shack, as he called it, soaking up the rays of the sun. He had fixed up an old garage in the back yard of his mother's place, and it was more or less his home. Basically, it was a bedroom. He ate and used the bathroom in the house, but he had his own little mansion in the back yard, which gave him a sense of privacy.

Pete immediately stood up and walked across the yard to meet Jodi. He took her by the hand and the two of them walked back over and sat down on the ground in the sun. Before she had a chance to relate to him the story of her little adventure during the night, he again brought up the subject of LSD. He stressed the importance of being in friendly surroundings when one is tripping, and the weather that day would make it ideal for a walk in the country. That would be much better, he said, than doing it in town.

Jodi was a bit apprehensive, to say the least. First she has a dream like she has never had before. Then she is asked if she wants to take some LSD. She remembered what Pete had said about LSD, about how it could kill you if you didn't use it wisely, and she wasn't sure if she should do it. But his confident manner was reassuring to her. He was smart, and she figured he knew what he was talking about. She trusted him. She knew he wouldn't tell her that an acid trip could be a positive experience unless it was really the truth.

Pete procured the acid from a hiding place inside his shack and they each took one. They

then proceeded to hike across a pasture adjacent to Pete's yard, toward open country. The sound of the traffic in town was soon replaced by the songs of birds heralding the arrival of spring, and they both felt a sense of relief at being out in the country.

Pete felt obligated to reiterate the importance of maintaining a positive attitude at all costs while they were under the influence of the LSD. The conversation became more or less one sided. Even sounded like a lecture. But Pete had seen people change for the worse because of a lack of understanding of the effects of the powerful substance they had just taken, and he was not about to let that happen to someone he cared as much about as he did Jodi.

An hour later they were in a grove of trees a few miles from town, apparently alone, except for a myriad of God's creatures which inhabited the grove and surrounding prairie. They were beginning to feel the effects of the acid and, at Pete's suggestion, they sat down on a dead log to relax awhile and observe what was going on around them.

Pete had explained that the predominant effect of the LSD would be to heighten their awareness, and Jodi was beginning to understand what he had meant. A gust of wind struck her face and caught her attention. She experienced a feeling of exhilaration as the wind caressed her face, and then she began to notice the sound created by the wind as it moved through the trees. It was as if the trees and the dead grass and leaves on the ground were musical instruments that the Great Spirit was playing by blowing a breath of air across them. She became aware of the different sounds made by the wind as it struck different parts of the trees and as it blew over different things on the ground. Even her own hair produced it's own peculiar sound as the breeze passed through it.

Jodi looked at Pete and they grinned at each other. She wanted to say something, to make an attempt at conversation, but words eluded her. It seemed all she could do was grin and let her attention focus on the sounds and sights of the world around her. It was actually pretty entertaining, like watching a movie or something. The whole grove seemed alive and bursting with energy. Little things that she never would have noticed before, or not have paid much attention to, were now holding her spellbound.

Suddenly, a brown thrasher came from out of nowhere and landed on a branch about fifty feet above where they were sitting. It began to sing, and the sounds it produced were almost hypnotizing. After a minute or two, Pete commented that it was not repeating itself, that every time it warbled, it was a slightly different melody. They watched and listened to it for about ten minutes and, as far as they could tell, it never once repeated the same warble.

Just as suddenly as it had appeared, the bird flew away. At precisely the same moment, the wind died down, and for several seconds they experienced almost total silence. Out of the depths of that silence came a thought to Jodi. An intuition. Not a thought that resulted from a process of reasoning. With a relative certainty, she felt that the bird had been singing to them, conveying some sort of mystical message from somewhere. She expressed her thoughts to Pete and he agreed with her. Neither one of them knew what the message had been, but they both concluded that probably some part of them had comprehended what the bird had been saying, on an instinctive, rather than an intellectual, level.

Jodi had always been a nature lover, but never before had she appreciated the birds and the wind and the trees like she was now. "Nature is a great entertainer," she commented to Pete.



"Yeah, awesome," was his only reply. He understood where Jodi was coming from.

The two of them began to walk slowly through the grove, not heading in any particular direction. For a couple of hours they enjoyed the performance put on by the variety of plants and animals that made their home there. It was all free. It didn't cost a penny. The simple pleasures of life, Jodi thought. For the first time in years, since she had been a little child, she was content to be amused by whatever happened to be before her eyes. Who needs parties or television or fast cars, she thought, when the earth itself has so much to offer.

The most rewarding moment of the afternoon came as they walked around a large old oak tree in the center of the grove, and there, not more than five feet in front of them, stood a little baby fawn, perhaps not yet a day old. As they watched, it gingerly bent its little legs and slowly lay down in the grass, in a spot in the sun. It lay there with its eyes open, either unaware of their presence or unaffected by it. For several minutes Jodi and Pete watched the innocent little creature. Then, looking up, Jodi just happened to spot a doe about thirty feet away, barely visible through the branches of the trees and shrubs, watching them intently. They presumed she was the fawn's mother, and decided it would be best to leave, not wishing to cause her any unnecessary anxiety.

Their trip then took them across a hay meadow next to the grove. The contrast in scenery was striking. It almost seemed like a different world. Without the abundance of trees and wildlife to focus on, their attention turned more toward themselves, toward their own thoughts and feelings.

Pete had spoken about how the acid would make them more aware of the world inside their own minds, as well as the world around them, and now Jodi began to understand what he had meant. Before, in the grove, she had been so distracted by the sights and sounds that she hadn't paid much attention to herself. But now, she noticed that her mind occasionally wanted to race, and from time to time she was almost overwhelmed by the thoughts and feelings that seemed to flood her consciousness. She felt she knew exactly what Pete had been talking about the night before when he said you have to exercise control over your mind.

Pete found himself in a talkative mood. He sensed that Jodi would appreciate listening to something of a philosophical nature, so he began to talk about things he felt were important. He had read a lot of literature having to do with spiritual and supernatural things and the power of the mind and meditation and things like that, and these were the kinds of things he enjoyed discussing with people when he had the chance. He got the feeling that it would be a good time to talk about some serious things with Jodi.

Not knowing exactly where to start, he finally settled on a rather blunt statement. "We create the world with our minds," he said. "Not so much our conscious mind, but our subconscious. There's so much power locked up there that it can actually change our world. There are people in this world who have learned to control the powers they have inside themselves to such an extent that they can actually perform feats that most of us would consider to be impossible."

He then talked about some books he had read about a college student who had gone down to Mexico and met an old Indian medicine man named don Juan. Don Juan had made the man an apprentice, and taught him how to use peyote and other plants that affect the

consciousness, and he had all kinds of strange, supernatural experiences. Sometimes he would go out of his body or see really weird unbelievable spirits, or even go into other dimensions of reality, beyond the physical universe.

In the midst of this discussion, Jodi suddenly remembered something. Her dream! She had forgotten to tell Pete about her dream. She gave his hand a squeeze to indicate she had something to say. He stopped in the middle of a sentence to listen.

She told him in detail about the experience, and he listened, with great interest. Then he revealed to her that he had had similar experiences before himself. Enough of them, in fact, to be utterly convinced that they were *not* dreams, but real, supernatural experiences.

Pete's conviction of the reality of such things was a little unnerving to Jodi. She had taken the easy way out by writing her own experience off as simply a vivid dream, but now she wasn't so sure. After all, when it had first occurred, she had thought she was awake. Only after she had convinced herself that it couldn't possibly be happening, did she fall back asleep and wake up in her bed. Pete's interpretation was that her mind was unable to accept the reality of the situation when it first occurred, therefore it promptly put her back to sleep and convinced her that she had been dreaming.

The lighthearted feeling that had prevailed earlier in the afternoon had begun to fade away, and the mood was now a lot more serious. For Pete, the nature of the conversation was commonplace. For Jodi, it was something new. Her perception of reality was being seriously challenged.

Jodi had a question, but wasn't quite sure she wanted to ask it. She had a feeling Pete might have an answer, and she wasn't sure she wanted to hear it. But she asked it anyway. "Well, why did it happen? And why has it happened to you? What's going on anyway?"

Jodi's tone of voice, and the way she blurted out the question, were so funny they both broke into uncontrollable laughter. They laughed so hard they almost fell down, so, finally, they sat down on the ground until they both regained their composure and were able to start talking again.

Jodi looked at Pete, waiting for his answer. He wanted to say something that would make sense, so he took his time, choosing his words carefully.

"I've read a lot about such things, and spiritual literature, and so forth, and this is my understanding of why such things happen," he began. "We tend to believe that the world is essentially a physical world -- one that can be perceived solely with the physical senses. A world rather devoid of the kind of phenomena we've been talking about. Well, if you consider that God is a spirit, an infinite spirit that can do anything, then you have to conclude that anything is possible. Most people nowadays believe in the existence of angels and devils in the world and in the possibility of supernatural things happening and so forth. But most of us don't make any attempt to learn anything about these things or to cultivate much of a sense of spirituality in our lives. We live for money and pleasure and material comforts and give lip service to our spiritual beliefs by going to church on Sunday for an hour or so, and that's about it. The majority of our waking hours are spent thinking about making money or catching a buzz or what have you."

"So sometimes God likes to remind us that there *is* really a spiritual side of life, and that

reality includes the supernatural, as well as the physical. What happened to you was probably just God's way of telling you to make some changes in your life. You know, to learn more about these kinds of things, and maybe to just get basically a little more religious, so to speak."

Jodi wasn't quite sure what to think. Pete's explanation sounded convincing to her. Not just that she trusted his judgment, either. But rather, that something inside her seemed to respond to what he had said, as if it was an explanation she had been waiting for.

The two of them continued walking across the meadow. Pete continued to talk about some of the books he had read and about his understanding of the nature of reality in general. Jodi didn't say much. She was kind of glad he was able to shed a little light on her experience, and, in view of his remarks, she knew she must at least accept the possibility of it having been real, even if she wasn't *completely* convinced. The more she thought about it, though, the more convinced she became.

They were heading back in the general direction of town, walking along a small stream. When they came to a place in the stream where there was a small waterfall, about a foot high, Jodi suggested they sit down and relax awhile. They sat facing the stream, and they both began gazing at the water bubbling and frothing below the falls. The effect of watching the water and listening to its sound was hypnotizing. For the longest time they just sat there with their arms around each other, staring at the water. This seemed to have a calming effect, and soon they both felt very relaxed.

Then, something strange happened. They both experienced a sensation of floating out over the water, as if a part of them had left their bodies and was able to move around at will. They experienced the sensation simultaneously, and both were aware that the other was there with them. It didn't last long. Something seemed to pull them back, and they found themselves in their bodies again, sitting beside the stream.

"So what was *that* all about?" Jodi exclaimed.

"I guess we went out of our bodies for a minute there," was the only explanation Pete had to offer.

This experience had not been nearly as scary for Jodi as had been the one the previous night. As a matter of fact, it had been kind of fun. Pete had enjoyed it too. It had been something new for him also, and he told Jodi. She felt good about knowing there was something she was as experienced at as he was.

"I think relaxation is the key to leaving your body," Pete remarked. "Somehow, when you get real relaxed, it's possible to leave your body and go flying. Some people say that it's the soul that leaves the body. Soul travel, they call it. There's a philosophy or religion or something that teaches about soul travel. Eckankar, it's called. I don't know much about it, but I think it involves travel not only in the physical world, but also to inner worlds and other dimensions of reality."

"Inner worlds and other dimensions of reality?" Jodi asked, with a puzzled look on her face.

Pete thought for a second. "Imagine," he said, "that there exist right here, right now, entire worlds that are invisible to us, but just as real as this one. Some people say that this is so, and that if we are able to somehow take our attention away from the physical world, we would

become aware of amazing worlds, so incredible that they are impossible to describe. But supposedly, no one is allowed to enter these worlds until they have undergone the proper training and preparation. Otherwise, since the forces and beings that exist there are extremely powerful, it would be dangerous, or even fatal, to do so."

"What do you mean, not *allowed* to go there," Jodi asked. "Not allowed by whom?"

"By the Great Spirit," Pete replied. "It's in charge."

This was comforting to Jodi. The whole thing was sounding pretty strange, pretty eerie. To know that God was the one who decided whether or not we could go to some twilight zone that we didn't even know existed, was encouraging.

"Here's something else I've read," Pete continued. "And it makes sense to me. What Jesus Christ was referring to when he said the kingdom of heaven is within you, was these other worlds. In other words, heaven exists right here on this earth. We just aren't aware of it, that's all. But it is accessible to us, even while we are alive, if we are prepared for it."

This was a new interpretation of the Bible for Jodi. Her conception of heaven was more like it was some kind of place far removed from here. Some place where only dead people got to go. Even though Pete's ideas sounded kind of far fetched, they did appeal to her. Something about them made sense. She was beginning to think that she would like to read some of Pete's books. Her curiosity was being aroused, and his suggestion that maybe she should learn more about spiritual and supernatural things sounded reasonable to her. His suggestion that maybe she should get basically a little more religious was *really* starting to appeal to her. After all, if the world was filled with infinite possibilities, she didn't want to have to experience them without the aid of a friendly Spirit that knew a lot more about what was going on than she did!

Jodi was changing. Her basic philosophy of life was undergoing some alterations this afternoon. Her attitude toward the world was beginning to get more serious. Pete had warned her that one acid trip could do this, that she might never be the same again. She could not possibly have known at the time exactly what he had meant. His admonitions had not prevented her from taking the acid, though, simply because she was ready for a change anyway. Life wasn't all that hot anymore. Not near what it was cracked up to be. So the idea of something new and different in her world didn't sound that bad. She just hadn't expected the new and different to include going out of her body and finding out that things which most people would never believe possible, actually were possible.

The sun was getting lower in the western sky, and the afternoon was cooling off. It appeared to be time to be heading back toward home. Jodi took off her shoes and went splashing up the creek -- something she had not done since she had been a little girl. The feeling was great, just like it had been when she was a child. She made the observation that at least one of the effects of the LSD seemed to be that it made you feel like a child again. If you had told her the day before that she could have the time of her life doing the simple things that she and Pete had been doing all afternoon, she never would have believed you. But now she knew. Anyone who thinks it's wrong to take LSD only knows half the story, she thought.

Pete followed close behind, and the two of them ran up the stream quite a ways. When they approached a road, they sat down by the bank of the stream and put their shoes back on for

the rest of the walk back to town.

The sound of a car coming down the road broke the silence. About the time they finished putting their shoes on, the car came to a stop, about a hundred yards away. They could not see the car. Some willow trees obscured their view. Likewise, they knew they were out of sight of the occupants of the car.

Then something inexplicable happened. Three gunshots were fired, in rapid succession, in their direction. They heard the bullets whizzing through the upper tree branches, not more than fifteen or twenty feet above their heads. The two of them held on to one another and crouched as low to the ground as they could get, like a couple of scared rabbits, not knowing what to think.

Then the car sped off. As quickly as it had begun, it ended. Two bewildered people were left alone, shaking in their boots, to come up with an explanation for yet another strange occurrence. This time, Pete was on an equal par with Jodi. His composure had been shaken as badly as was hers. They embraced each other without speaking.

This time Jodi knew, without Pete telling her, that God was giving them some kind of message. It was obvious that the person who had fired the shots could not possibly have had any idea that there were two people on the other side of the trees. Jodi's and Pete's presence there was just a coincidence. But why did they just *coincidentally* happen to be there when someone decided to try out their new pistol, or whatever they were doing? More than likely, even if the shots had been fired at their level, the thickness of the willow grove would have prevented the bullets from striking them. However, it was *possible* that they would not have. Their warm little bodies *could* have gotten turned into cold little corpses, the victims of a bizarre accident.

As they sat there in silence, a revelation came to the both of them simultaneously. They both knew, without a doubt, that they were being reminded of one of life's great and simple truths: No matter how safe or secure any of us might think we are, we could die at any time. We are vulnerable. God can do anything. He could rearrange a few circumstances in our world at will, and put us out of our misery, if He felt the world would be better off without us. Or, He could threaten us to within an inch of our life, then spare us, just to prove He's really around.

Death is a good teacher. That is to say the *threat* of death. Jodi and Pete quietly discussed the feelings they both felt regarding the situation. They were in perfect agreement that they should both make some changes in their lives, that they needed to orient themselves in a more spiritual direction. The foregoing incident had been quite sobering, conducive to reflection on the seriousness of life. The two of them continued their walk to town, reflecting upon and talking about the seriousness of life.

When they arrived back at Pete's place, Pete announced dramatically that he would now give Jodi the grand tour of his shack. She grinned as he opened the door and bowed down, signaling her with a motion of his arm to enter. When she entered, she was impressed. The room was simply yet tastefully furnished. Pete followed her in. He stood in the middle of the room, pointed to one corner where a mattress lay on the floor and exclaimed, "There's the bedroom." Pointing to another corner where there was an old couch and a throw rug on the floor, he concluded, "There's the living room. Well, so much for that. Wanna listen to some

music?"

Jodi nodded and said, "Yeah, sure. Sounds good." She was more interested in the books she noticed in a small wooden bookcase over against one wall. As Pete picked out a tape and put it in the stereo, she began browsing through the books. When Pete came over and knelt beside her, she asked him which one would be a good one for her to start with.

Without hesitation he replied, "The Teachings of Don Juan," and pulled out the first book of the series. He handed it to Jodi. The two of them sat down on the couch and Jodi began to read. Pete rested his head on her shoulder and closed his eyes. Jodi found the book interesting and read for awhile. Pete kept the music playing at a quiet level so as not to distract her. Jodi finally tired of reading and put the book down.

At that moment, Pete remembered having been told of a party that was to take place that evening up the street, a few blocks away. He told Jodi about it, but suggested it might not be as much fun as the one they were at last night. Most of the people who would be there would be older folks, that is, people in their twenties or thirties. "They're a bunch of hard core partiers," he explained. "Not really very serious people. I mean, they're nice people, and all that, but they don't seem to care much about anything except amusing themselves -- catching a buzz and partying. They could give a hoot about the rest of the world, just as long as they have their chance to have their fun. They like to smoke marijuana all the time, but they don't make any attempt to exercise any control over their minds when they do. They use it strictly to enhance their pleasurable experiences. Not that it's wrong to use marijuana for pleasurable purposes. But if that's all you use it for, without any consideration for what it's doing to your mind, you can end up paying dearly. It's easier to be self indulgent than self disciplined, so they become more self indulgent all the time. They just get older, without getting any wiser. Basically, they're a bunch of big kids who think they're all grown up when they're not. But it's not really their fault. They don't know any better. Too bad, because they're making life harder on themselves. Self indulgence has its own rewards -- mainly pain and suffering -- and they're collecting them right now. For a lot of them, their lives don't amount to much more than a soap opera. Sooner or later, though, the pain will get too hard to handle, and they'll be down on their knees, begging the Good Lord to show them the way out. In the meantime, though, they'll probably keep on suffering."

Pete and Jodi weren't quite sure what they felt like doing, so they decided they would walk up the street toward the party, and then decide whether or not to go in when they got there. Upon arriving at the house, they still weren't sure what to do, so they figured they might as well go on in and check it out for awhile. If they didn't feel like staying, they could leave.

The atmosphere inside was not particularly appealing to either one of them, but they decided to stay for at least a little while and see what was going on. The place was pretty crowded, and in the hustle and bustle, the two of them got separated from each other. Jodi spotted another high school girl and quickly walked over to stand beside her. She had not been particularly comfortable standing by herself, especially with a lot of the older guys giving her the eye.

Then she experienced the weirdest sensation. She got a feeling like if her shirt was unbuttoned and her breasts were exposed. She knew this wasn't possible, but found herself

glancing down, just to make sure. She concluded it must be just a weird sensation as a consequence of still being under the influence of the LSD. But then she had another weird sensation. She felt almost as if a hand were touching one of her breasts. Not actually a physical sensation, but enough to make her wonder what was going on. She was more ill at ease than ever now. Suddenly, she felt the sensation again, but this time it was not on her breast. It was in the area of her groin. She began to experience a mild panic. Glancing around, she noticed one of the guys staring at her. He quickly looked away. Then she had a thought, or more of an intuitive flash. She knew with an absolute certainty that it had been his thoughts that had caused the sensations. Her panic turned to anger. Creepy jerk, she thought. What's he doing to me, anyway? She looked around to see if she could locate Pete. She wanted to get out of there, really bad.

Meanwhile, Pete had found himself in a somewhat similar situation, though not nearly as freaky as Jodi's. He was standing by a woman he knew, a woman about thirty years old. They had not been talking, as the stereo was playing pretty loud, making conversation difficult. Pete began to get an uneasy feeling. For a second, he couldn't figure out why. Then it began to dawn on him. He had pretty good intuitions. No dummy was he. Smart enough to know when a woman was lusting after his body, and a little more calm and collected in such a situation than Jodi, he knew exactly what to do. Leaning toward her, so she would be sure to hear every word, he said, "Better guard your thoughts, my friend. Some people can read your mind."

She looked at Pete with an expression of surprise on her face, then acted as if she was about to ask him what he meant. Before she had a chance to voice her question, Pete quickly added, "You're a married woman. You're not supposed to be thinking thoughts like that." She began to protest that she didn't know what he was talking about, but she was talking to his back. He didn't need to be keeping company with *her* any longer, and he wasn't going to listen to any cowardly excuses.

Pete suddenly got the feeling that Jodi was thinking about him and that she needed him to be with her. He spotted her across the room and made a bee line to where she was standing. One look at the expression on her face told him all he needed to know. He quickly took her by the hand and led her toward the door.

They exchanged stories on the way home. When they got back to the shack, Pete gave Jodi a warm embrace and apologized for even bringing up the subject of the party.

She said it wasn't his fault, and experience is the best way to learn, anyway.

"Our minds are like transmitters," Pete told her. "They radiate energy out into the world around us, carrying our thoughts and feelings. If we think about someone, and that person is sensitive enough, they can actually pick up our thoughts or feelings. It's possible to literally read a person's mind, even from miles away. How that guy's thoughts manifested themselves in the kind of sensations you felt, I don't know. But our minds are very powerful, and they can do strange things."

Shortly after sunrise the next morning, Jodi left Pete's place and walked home. She figured her mother would probably be mad, but she didn't really care. Her mother was a hypocrite, so her criticisms of Jodi pretty much went in one ear and out the other. Her father was a truck

driver and was away from home a lot, and she was pretty sure her mother was having an affair with another man. She wasn't absolutely certain, though, and had never dared bring the subject up with her mother.

"Where have you been, young lady?" was the question that greeted Jodi when she walked into the kitchen.

"Over at Pete's," Jodi replied, nonchalantly.

"At Pete's," her mother said. "You know where your home is. You're supposed to be spending your nights here, not at some boy's place."

That was about the last straw. Jodi suddenly did something she had never had the courage to do before. She knew her father had been gone since yesterday, so she looked her mother squarely in the eye and calmly asked, "So where were *you* last night? Over at your boyfriend's?"

Her mother began to reply. The first few words came out in a defensive tone of voice. "What do you..." Then, a brief pause. Her tone changed, and the last three words sounded almost meek. "...mean by that?" Then her jaw just dropped.

Case closed, Jodi thought. She had hit the nail on the head. There was nothing more to discuss with her mother, so she simply turned and walked away.

As Jodi walked into the living room, her three year old sister, Jenny, came running from her bedroom, having heard the sound of Jodi's voice. They smiled at each other. They were good friends. Jenny got along with Jodi better than she did with her parents because Jodi treated her like a regular person instead of like a dumb little kid. She didn't talk down to Jenny, like so many older people do to little children.

Jodi told Jenny about the baby deer that she and Pete had seen the day before, and suggested that maybe if they turned on the television, there might be a nature film on, maybe even one with a baby deer in it. Jenny liked that idea. She loved the nature programs, and she ran over to the TV set and turned it on. The two of them made themselves comfortable on the sofa.

The image of a man appeared on the screen. Then, suddenly, out of nowhere, a broadsword came flying through the air. Whack! The man's head went flying.

Jenny screamed. Jodi quickly grabbed her little sister in her arms, stood up, and moved swiftly toward the television. When she got near the set she stopped, leaned forward, and, in a maneuver she used to practice when she was bored, raised one foot, twirled around in a half circle on her other foot, and delivered a perfectly executed karate kick to the off switch of the television. The staggering blow caused the set to teeter backwards, momentarily balancing itself on its back legs, before returning to its upright position, dark and quiet.

By then, Jodi and Jenny were on their way outside. The two of them sobbed together awhile in the back yard. Jodi was almost in a rage. Why, she thought, did her beautiful, innocent little sister have to see crap like that? Why did the sickest minds in our society have to become television writers? Why couldn't they just go to an institution and get some help, instead of turning their psychotic fantasies into movies that any three-year-old can watch?

Jodi cursed the satellite dish in the back yard. She had thought it was all right when they had bought it, but now it had turned into an instrument of terror for her little sister.

What about the broadcast company executives, she thought. They have to be the most



irresponsible morons in the world. They sit in their offices and draw huge salaries to make the decisions as to what kind of entertainment the rest of the world needs. But what she and Jenny had just witnessed was not even close to entertainment, she thought. It's puke. It's disease. Stupid imbeciles are lucky they haven't been shot, broadcasting filth like that, by satellite no less, all over the world.

Jenny had quit sobbing and was entertaining herself by following a butterfly around the back yard. Jodi, however, had not yet recovered from the assault on her consciousness. Her thoughts were still racing and she was unable to calm down.

Suddenly, Jodi decided to go see Jean. Jean was Pete's aunt. She lived a couple miles outside town, near where Jodi and Pete had been the day before. She was almost as old as Jodi's parents, but she was like a sister to Jodi. Jodi had a great deal of respect and admiration for her. She was a real person, someone Jodi found it easy to talk to. She felt she needed to talk to Jean now. She thought Jean might be able to give her an idea about what to do. She knew she had to do something now. Something to change the world. She understood now why Pete and Bill and Jim liked to talk about revolution. This world *needs* a revolution, she thought. Not the kind of revolution where people shoot each other. That would be stupid. But it was obvious to her that the world needed to undergo some radical changes. The incident with the television had really got to her. She told herself she was going to start some kind of revolution, if it was the last thing she ever did.

Jodi ran most of the way out there. The exercise relaxed her some, and she felt better. She hadn't seen Jean for a few weeks, and the thought of getting together with her took Jodi's attention away from her feelings of anger and frustration. Jean was kind of a hero to Jodi. She didn't bust her butt trying to make a buck, just so she could make herself more comfortable. She was too sensible. She paid her way and she had what she needed. Her pickup may have been old, but it ran good and it looked good. She even did most of the maintenance on it herself. Jodi didn't know any other woman, at least not Jean's age, who had no hesitation about doing something like overhauling the brakes on a pickup or car.

Jean was a vegetarian. She hadn't eaten meat in years. When Jodi had first met her, she was pretty surprised that anyone would actually not eat meat. After all, this was beef country. *Everybody* around *here* was into eating meat, she thought. Jodi had pretty well been brainwashed by the public relations campaign of the meat industry. It didn't take her long, however, to figure out that all the talk about having to have meat in the diet for proper nutrition and energy was nothing more than some peoples' opinion. Jean was as good an example of a strong and healthy human being as she had ever met. She cut her firewood by hand and split it with an axe. Jodi even helped her once in a while. Sometimes Jean would spend an hour cutting firewood, then go out running for an hour. Jodi knew there wasn't a woman in town, anywhere close to Jean's age, who could match her for energy. What impressed her the most was how young she looked.. She could hardly believe it when she found out how old Jean was. She was pushing forty, but looked more like twenty-five. Shortly after they had met each other, Jodi had started eating less meat herself, and now she didn't eat much of it at all. She felt more energetic, too, and her health didn't suffer a bit.

When Jodi arrived at her place, Jean was sitting cross legged on the ground, on the south

side of the house, meditating in the sun. She got up when Jodi approached, and the two of them went into the house and had tea and breakfast.

Jean listened attentively as Jodi told her story. She began with the story of her trip with Pete, then told of the incident with the television. Jean seemed to understand Jodi's feelings about the TV situation and her concern for her little sister. She commented that whoever had characterized television as a vast wasteland was putting it mildly. She agreed that something needed to be done.

Jodi had hoped that, somehow, she would be able to get some kind of guidance from Jean, something to give direction to her new found zeal for changing the world. But she wasn't quite sure what to ask Jean, and she began to feel kind of dumb for having come out there. Finally, she came up with a question she thought might at least get a conversation started. "You know about psychic powers and things like that, don't you?" she asked. "How can a person get some sort of peaceful revolution going?"

Jean smiled. With words like psychic powers and revolution, anyone could have got a conversation going with Jean. Those things were right up her alley. She wasn't quite sure where to start, though.

"A peaceful revolution," she mused, as she stood up. She walked over toward a window, a serious look on her face, as if gathering her thoughts. She faced out the window a moment, her back to Jodi. Her eyes were closed. She let her mind be calm, and made a quick prayer to the Divine for guidance. Then she turned and stated bluntly, "I'll show you how to meditate."

"Meditate?" Jodi questioned, in an almost offended tone. She was talking about revolution, not meditation. Meditation didn't sound quite exciting enough to have anything to do with revolution.

"C'mon," Jean said, grabbing a jacket and heading for the door. "I know a good place for that."

Jodi was hesitant, still not convinced, but the gleam in Jean's eye told her Jean knew what she was talking about, so she followed. Jodi thought Jean seemed kind of excited, which was a little out of character for her. She normally took things pretty casually.

They headed for the grove of trees where Jodi and Pete had been the day before. On the way over, Jean explained some things about meditation. "If you're serious about helping to bring about radical changes in the world," she told Jodi, "you're talking about a more or less impossible task. To perform the impossible requires making use of everything we have at our disposal. Our most powerful weapon is our psychic powers. Our psychic powers are invisible, and they are inside of us. Therefore, we have to look within ourselves. We have to meditate."

Jean sounded a lot like Pete sometimes. She had been the one who had got him started on the path of knowledge. Many of the books in his bookcase had once been in hers. She had showed Pete a few things about meditation too.

"One thing we have to always remember, though," she admonished Jodi, "is, that if we wish to conquer the world, we must first conquer ourself. We can't divide the world up into good people and evil people. Good and evil exist within all of us. To get rid of evil, we must all struggle to overcome whatever is evil within our own individual self. Anyone who thinks

they have already accomplished this is wrong. The ones who have done this already, are in heaven, and if the rest of us think we are going there some day, we had best know that *we* are the evil one. We can't ignore or excuse evil actions on the part of others, of course, but most of us don't realize that our first responsibility in the battle between good and evil is to take *ourselves* into account and bring *ourselves* under control. And don't believe any of that crap about armageddon being some big war where all the good guys kill off all the bad guys. No one is one hundred percent good and no one is one hundred percent bad. So the only armageddon is the one inside of us."

Jean talked about some basic kinds of meditation, and suggested some books she thought might have some useful information for Jodi. Jodi had never really been much of a bookworm, but there wasn't much in the school library, at least that she had seen, that dealt with the kind of subjects that Jean's and Pete's books did. She never read any of the drugstore paperbacks, either -- the romance novels and western novels. But that book over at Pete's the evening before had rekindled her interest in reading, and she had been hoping to get a chance to look through Jean's books.

When they got to the grove, Jean went straight to the log that Pete and Jodi had rested on the afternoon before, and sat down. Jodi couldn't help but smile at the coincidence, and she explained herself to Jean. Jean seemed pleased and said that was a good sign. "Maybe this is a power spot for you," she said. "I'm sure it's a good place for you to meditate."

Jean suddenly moved from the log to a position on the ground in front of it. She sat cross legged and leaned back against the log, facing the sun. At her suggestion, Jodi did likewise.

"What I'll show you now is a preparatory kind of meditation," she began to explain. "Basically, you might say it's for your own protection. After all, what we call psychic powers are pretty awesome, to say the least. Anyone who tries to get very involved with them without a very sincere effort to get their stuff together at the same time could get hurt -- bad. So I'm obligated to stress the importance of what I'm about to show you."

Jean then instructed Jodi to close her eyes, breathe slowly and deeply awhile, and let her body relax. "Now," she continued, "visualize a light in the center of yourself. Focus your attention on it. Concentrate on it alone. As you do, imagine it growing -- expanding and getting brighter. Let it fill your entire body and then let it spill out into the world around you. Imagine it continuing to grow, shining all around you, farther and farther out into the universe, until it finally fills the entire world. Take as much time as you need to do this. It doesn't hurt to spend some time at it, at least until you become comfortable with the technique.

"It's difficult to explain what this light symbolizes," she said. "You might say it represents whatever powers you have in you. By imagining the light flowing out into the world, you are letting these powers grow and increase naturally, without getting bottled up inside of you. If that happens, that's when you get hurt. This meditation somehow has a way of opening up the heart and preventing that from happening. It is very essential -- and very powerful.

"Practice this every day, or as many times a day as you feel like," Jodi was told. "When you're ready, then I'll show you how to bring governments and armies to their knees. Come back tomorrow, or next week, or whenever you feel like it. But before I can show you any

more, you've got to feel comfortable doing what I just showed you. I can't tell you any more today."

As Jodi and Jean were leaving the grove, they saw a doe and fawn, walking slowly along the edge of the trees. Jodi thought this was a good sign. She didn't know much about signs, but something told her it had to be a good sign.

Jodi spent the rest of the day over at Pete's. They didn't do much. They spent a lot of time lying in the sun out in the yard. Jodi read some more and practiced meditating. The two of them talked a lot about what they might do to bring about some constructive change in the world.

Pete couldn't help but remember Jodi's suggestion that he write a book. It sounded like a good idea to him. He was even trying to come up with ideas on how to write some kind of book. Jodi's thoughts had turned to writing, also. Somehow, that sounded like a good way to carry on a revolution. It sounded like an awesome task to her, trying to write something good enough to have an effect on the whole world. But she was not one to be a pessimist when she felt she had a task to perform. She was a firm believer in the old adage, "Where there's a will, there's a way." And she only had to think back on the horrifying scene in her living room that morning to know she *had* to do something. If not for her own sake, at least for the sake of her little sister, and millions of other children, who are at the mercy of forces created by a bunch of gutless old people who think it's all right to do anything for money. She was still pretty upset about what she had seen on television.

Along toward evening, an idea came to Jodi. Since she and Pete and some of their friends were musicians, and were trying to get a band going, why not write a song, she thought. Music is powerful, and a good song could put some suggestions into people's heads. She got a pen and paper and sat down in the yard, leaning back against a tree.

For a long time, nothing came to her. She would almost start to write, then stop, the inspiration just not being there. She finally closed her eyes and rested her head on the tree trunk. When she opened her eyes, she noticed something she hadn't been aware of before. Off in the distance a bank of dark storm clouds was moving their way. There was a constant rumble of thunder, and it sounded kind of ominous. Suddenly, the inspiration came, and she wrote down this song:

Thunder in the heavens --  
Gods have had enough.  
Better stop that killin',  
An' all of that stuff.  
You're time is comin' soon --  
You're lookin' pretty bad --  
You might get a beatin'  
Like you never have had.

I don't like to be the one  
To have to tell you the news:

You don't change your ways,  
You're gonna sing the blues.  
This ain't none of my doin' --  
I'm just lettin' ya know --  
You're gonna be mean then  
You gotta go.

Better listen to my warning if you really think you know it all.  
Everybody knows --'fore it's over you're gonna fall.

I'll tell you a story 'bout a girl I know.  
She's three years old and she wants to grow.  
She chases butterflies, around the back yard.  
Fool with her and you fall down hard. Oh yeah!  
Been hearin' these stories, how you're messin' with her mind.  
Let me tell you, buddy, she's a friend of mine.  
If you think it's all right to make her sad,  
You got another think comin', 'cause I'm gettin' kinda mad. Oh, yeah!  
I know sorcerers' ways, and I'll come to you in your dreams.  
You'll wake up in the night, and you'll hear strange sounds and screams.  
That tappin' on your shoulder that you think you been feelin',  
It ain't imaginary -- some day it'll send you reelin'.  
Bad luck come around, a knockin' on your door.  
When you try to stand up, just knock ya down to the floor.

We all do wrong -- we all pay the price.  
Sooner or later, maybe we'll learn to be nice.

Two nights in a row away from home didn't make Jodi any more popular with her mother. Her mom had by now gotten over their little confrontation and was not averse to lecturing Jodi on proper behavior. But, to no avail. Jodi was every bit as much of a grown woman as she was, and did not need her mother's advice near as much as her mother thought she did. So, shortly after she got home from school on Monday, she left again. She was in love, and she knew where she belonged. This time, she took enough clothes so she wouldn't have to come back for a few days.

Then, it was off to Jean's. Jodi felt comfortable with the meditation Jean had shown her, and was anxious to learn more. She had no idea what Jean would show her next, and she was looking forward to finding out.

Jean walked out to meet Jodi when she saw her approaching. They walked immediately over to the grove. On the way over, Jean again attempted to explain some things that would help Jodi understand what she was going to show her.

"It's difficult to talk about these kinds of things," Jean began to tell her. "Spiritual concepts

just don't lend themselves to being easily talked about with words. They have to be experienced in order to really be understood. So, keep in mind that the words I'm using are symbolic, and are simply for the purpose of giving you an idea or a suggestion of what you will be doing. Some of the things I say might even sound kind of corny, but if you can overlook that, I think they'll help you understand.

"What I'm going to show you today, I call praying. However, it's not the same thing we normally call praying, so don't be misled by the word. What it actually involves is meditation and concentration. Prayer is just a word I happen to use to talk about it.

"It's a technique that involves both a visual and a verbal kind of meditation. The visual part is essentially the same as what you learned yesterday. I'll try to explain the verbal part. Let me see -- how can I put it?"

They walked a ways in silence, then Jean began slowly. "Some Christian people would call it 'speaking the word.' It involves the use of a mantram, which is an expression with a definite meaning, which is repeated over and over, either out loud or in silence. You will have to come up with your own mantram, so I'll try to explain something about it.

When you pray for someone, basically you are praying that they will become enlightened some day and will understand the spiritual nature of the universe. You are praying for them out of love, not out of anger or for any selfish reason. You might say your prayer is simply your wish for them that they go to heaven."

When they got to the grove, they again sat down on the ground, near the log, facing the sun. Jodi was instructed to do what she had been shown yesterday, so she began to visualize the light, shining out over all the world.

"Now," Jean said, "imagine this light shining on someone who needs to be enlightened. If you can't think of someone right away, wait a minute, and you will know who to focus on. It could be an individual, or a group of people, or a community, or even the whole world. Imagine the light filling them, then expanding outward. As you do this, wish for them that they might come to understand the truth, and that they will come into a perfect harmony with God and all the universe, instead of being in conflict with it. Think of a brief expression that sums up your loving desire for their enlightenment. Repeat it over and over as you visualize the light filling them. As you do this, know, without a doubt in your mind, that they *are* receiving some kind of enlightenment, as you continue to speak the word and shine the light, if you'll pardon my corny expressions. Concentrate on what you're doing and have faith. Concentration is important, but faith is the real key. If you believe in the existence of an infinite spirit in this world, and if you believe anything I've told you, then *know* that this light you are directing really does symbolize some kind of infinite force and that it *will* bring to the person or persons for whom you are praying whatever they need in order to understand and accept the truth. You might call this force love. You might say you are directing love to someone. We've all been told that love is the most powerful force in the universe, but we don't take this idea too seriously. It really is, though, and when we use it in this manner, it gets results. It has to. That's its nature.

Don't expect anything in particular. Who knows exactly what the effects will be. God will take care of that -- in the manner that is best suited to the individual. Rest assured, though,

that results will come. Be patient, and you'll have your revolution."

Afterward, they walked silently to the edge of the grove. There, they parted company. Jodi headed for town and Jean went trotting off in the direction of a small herd of deer she had spotted across the meadow.

About halfway back to town, Jodi saw a coyote. It was loping along slowly, not noticing her. When it finally looked over and spotted her, it quickly changed its direction of travel, so as to avoid crossing paths with her, then acted casual, as if unaffected by the incident, in the way coyotes do.

When Jodi got back to Pete's place, Jim, Christy, Bill, and Cynthia were all there. The attention was focused on Jim and Christy. Jim had quit his job that day, and was relating the story.

For some time, Jim and Christy had had ideas of doing a little farming on their own some day, on a small scale. They were organic farmers -- not really into farming the way most people around here did. They kind of hated to see a lot of synthetic fertilizers and other chemicals being used and were pretty well convinced that it would be possible to use more natural methods of farming, even on a large scale, if we put our minds to it. Jim worked on a large farm that did use a lot of chemicals because he didn't seem to have much choice at the time, and because he figured that, until more people did change their methods of agriculture, it would have to continue to be done that way.

One thing had been really starting to bother him, though. There was a lot of nitrate contamination in the underground water supply in this part of the country. His wife was about to give birth, and nitrates that happened to be in the water she drank might affect her baby, as she intended to nurse it herself. Not that nitrate poisoning does adults any good, either, but their baby was their main concern. Jim had realized that in a couple of months, he would be spending fourteen or fifteen hours a day sitting in a tractor, pulling a tank of anhydrous ammonia around, fertilizing the cornfields. Some of the fertilizer would inevitably end up in the ground water, and this was the main culprit in the nitrate contamination. Since they had been planning on moving into a trailer house owned by his employer, in the corner of one of these corn fields, and already knew that the well there was highly contaminated in the summer, what he would be doing, in effect, would be poisoning his own family's drinking water and jeopardizing his baby's health. The idea of using a machine to purify the water, rather than making a sincere effort to farm in a manner that would prevent the contamination from occurring in the first place, sounded pretty stupid to them.

Jim was a man with a conscience, and his position was beginning to bother him pretty bad. After a long talk Sunday night, he and Christy had decided he would give his two weeks notice the next day.

When Jim had informed his boss that he was going to quit, the boss had got a little upset. He had gotten kind of huffy and had told Jim if he was going to quit, why didn't he just quit right away. Jim didn't argue. He left.

Later that morning, Jim had remembered that he knew a man who owned a couple of old houses, both unoccupied, on the edge of a hay meadow, in a region where there weren't very many fields of corn. On a hunch, he picked Christy up at school and the two of them had

driven out to talk to the man, to see if he would let them live in one of the houses, if they fixed it up themselves.

By coincidence, the man had just been thinking about how it was kind of a waste that no one was living in either of the houses. They were old, but with a little work, could be made comfortable. He had told them that they could live there for free, in whichever house they wanted, as long as they wanted, if they wanted to spend the time and money remodeling it. Not only that. He had also told them that he tested his wells on a regular basis, and that there were practically no nitrates in the water around there. Something about the direction of the underground water flow, or something, he thought.

Christy and Jim were thrilled at the prospect of moving to the country, to a place where they knew they would have good, pure drinking water. They would work on the house in their spare time, and move into it whenever they could. Jim would be working for a friend of theirs, a carpenter, who had told him he could use some help most any time, and that Jim could work more or less when he felt like it.

The next day, everybody skipped school and went out to Christy's and Jim's new homestead, to help clean up and begin the remodeling. Christy was in a strange mood that day and she had a far-away look in her eyes. She was moving slower than usual, too, and spent a lot of time standing around, watching the others work.

Around mid-afternoon, the three women went for a walk in the trees that more or less surrounded the house. It was a particularly warm day, and the air was filled with the sound of thousands of blackbirds.

The three men were working in the house, and Jim was finding it hard to concentrate on his work. He almost felt nervous, though he couldn't understand why. Suddenly, he thought of Christy, and, for some vague reason, he thought he should go to her right away. He practically ran out of the house, Bill and Pete right behind. They headed in the direction of the three girls.

When they got to where the women were, in a sunny spot in the middle of the trees, they saw Christy, sitting on the ground, holding something. Jodi and Cynthia stepped aside to let Jim meet his newborn baby daughter.

The chain of events that followed the next couple of weeks was a marked departure from the old routines of Jim and Christy and their friends. They were going through some changes. None of them really understood exactly why, but they were all aware of a new sense of seriousness about life in general. Their lives had not been as easy lately as they used to be. For that matter, neither had the lives of a lot of other people around here. There was a general sense of uncertainty about the future of the economy, plus a lot of other things were affecting people's lives individually, and the more serious mood that was beginning to prevail in the community was a natural reaction to the general disruption of their sense of security.

Christy and Jim and Roseanne, as they had named their baby, moved to the country a little sooner than expected. They had been living in town, right next door to Christy's parents. When Jim had quit his job, the tension had suddenly got so thick you could feel it. Her parents, as well as his, were convinced that they were doing the wrong thing, and made every attempt they could to talk them into reconsidering. Jim and Christy had come to believe they



were doing the *right* thing, the only thing their consciences would allow them to do. They understood that there was more to life than financial security and material comforts, and they felt that their new lifestyle was best for Roseanne. She was their main concern now.

Thursday evening, after a useless argument with his parents, Jim got the urge to move out to the country right away, instead of waiting until the house was completely remodeled. He was a little depressed when he walked into their house in town, and he walked over to where Christy was sitting on the floor, with Roseanne lying beside her. He began to tell Christy about his feelings about moving. Roseanne looked up at her father, and something in her little mind told her that he was really quite a man, the kind of man she *needed* for a father. With all the energy she could muster, she kicked both legs and waved both arms and smiled the biggest smile she was capable of smiling. Jim couldn't help but grin. He picked her up gently, and danced gleefully with her around the living room. That evening, with the help of their friends and Bill's pickup, they moved a bunch of furniture, and moved into their new home.

All of them continued to skip school that week, which was pretty unusual, even for them. Skipping one day was normal, but not a whole week at a time. The principal was after them, and Bill's and Cynthia's parents were pretty much up in arms. In an unexpected move, the two of them got permission to fix up the other old house, the one down the road from Jim's and Christy's and Roseanne's. On Saturday, they moved in.

Pete and Jodi were also ready to make their move. They talked to Jean, and she told them they could move their shack out to a place on her property. They were beginning to work on a concrete foundation to set the house on.

The band was practicing about every night now, and they were getting enthusiastic about being able to play to an audience some day. They liked to play songs that had some kind of message to them. Somehow, they felt an obligation to do more than just entertain people. They felt they should say something positive and let their music be some kind of force for constructive change in the world.

Pete played the drums and Jim and Bill were the guitar players. Cynthia played a mean rockin' piano, and Christy, though fairly new at it, was really getting into playing bass. Jodi played pedal steel guitar. She had just recently joined the band, although she had been playing the steel for a couple of years. Her uncle had given her his old one when he had bought a new one, and had told her that anyone who could play video games like she could, could be a real wizard on a steel guitar. Coincidentally, her allowance had just been cut off for having been caught climbing the town water tower with a can of paint and a paint brush, and, unable to finance her video game habit, she had focused her attention, in her spare time, on playing the steel guitar.

One evening after practice, the six of them got to discussing the political situation in the country. They pretty much all agreed that it was too bad somebody with some new ideas didn't get into congress or the white house. They all felt that the world could use some new leadership.

"Well, after all," Bill stated, "when the people who make the laws have their heads so far up their rear ends they don't even know they have their heads up their rear ends, who's gonna listen to them anyway?"

Cynthia suddenly had a thought. "Why shouldn't somebody like Bob Kerrey be president," she asked. "He'd tell it like it is."

Everyone liked that idea. They all felt that he would do as good a job as anybody else would, that he was an honest and conscientious enough person to take the job seriously, instead of making some kind of political game out of it.

"Kay Orr could be vice president," Jodi added. "She'd tell a few people where it's coming from."

One evening Jodi got an idea. She shared it with the rest of them. It was a way to get this revolution started, maybe -- get the show on the road. They made their plan and prepared to put it into action.

Late Thursday night, they made their move. Jim, Christy, and Roseanne drove over and got Bill and Cynthia, then headed into town. Pete and Jodi were waiting for them, and when the car pulled up, they came walking out of the house, trying to act casual. Under one arm, Jodi was carrying a large bundle. Pete was carrying some rope. They got into the car, and away they all went, to do their deed.

The next morning, shortly after school started, someone glanced out of a classroom window and got a surprise. In a voice obviously intended for everyone in the room to hear, he exclaimed, "Hey, far out, man. Check out the water tower."

Thirty students and one teacher looked out the window. Up on the water tower was a banner which proclaimed in loud, bold letters: BOB KERREY FOR PRESIDENT.

That night the band made it's debut. One of the seniors' parents were out of town for the weekend, and had told him that it would be all right to have a party, if he wanted to clean up their farm shop and have it out there instead of in the house. It was a large shop, and with everything moved over against the walls, it made a good impromptu dance hall. The musicians set their instruments up at one end, and at dark they began to play. In six part harmony, they began to give their message to the world:

Spoke Krishna to the prince of the Pandu:  
Conquer yourself...