

*The Dance*  
*and the*  
*Diamond Sky*

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*The names of the characters in this story  
have not been changed to protect the innocent.  
They protected their own innocence.*

# PART I

## One

I stared at the floating furniture, the shimmering clothes in my closet, the dimensionless walls – reflected like a mirror in the liquid blackness of my fourth floor window.

Beyond the glass was a frozen night; no stars shining. Winter awaited the emergence of our frail young spirits, ready to carry us through the campus gates into the chaos of Washington, DC. and environs. But we remained protected, cocooned. My dorm room was perfectly insulated. My thoughts were intended to be about simple things -- studying a preset curriculum while snacking on a bag of potato chips from the vending machine down the hall. Perhaps listening to the toned-down recorded version of Jimi Hendrix singing *The Wind Cries Mary* on the hi-fi I'd brought from home.

I turned my gaze from the window. Sherry remained motionless, sitting on the edge of my unmade bed, her eyes fixed upon me.

I reached for one of the books sitting on my nightstand and flipped it open to a random page – charts and symbols

appeared, hieroglyphic images of dots floating on lines.

"This is my music theory book."

I weighed it in my hand, like the book on evolution Spencer Tracy held in the closing scene of *Inherit the Wind*, but forming the opposite conclusion. "It's very clever. It transforms simple sounds, basic musical ideas, into something that looks like rocket physics. Apparently, the goal of the book is to have me to no longer understand what I hear."

I pointed to another book on the floor near the foot of my bed, "And this one -- this is my treasured philosophy book. I truly loved that book, until last week. That's when I went into my professor's office and said, 'Dr. Ludwig, I read ahead to the Nietzsche chapter and it made total sense. It changed everything I thought was true, until I read further ahead to the William James chapter, which said something completely different, and changed everything I thought was true *again*. So I began to wonder, being that you're my favorite professor here -- what do *you* think is true?'

"He says, 'About what in particular?'

"I said, 'About all the things they're talking about in our book -- the spark behind the human spirit, freedom of choice versus everything being predestined by God. *God!* I mean, what do you think about God, Dr. Ludwig? Is there one? Or

more than one? Or nothingness? Or if there is nothingness, could it be a conscious kind of nothingness?"

"He shrugs and says, 'I don't really know. I mean, there's really no way to *actually* know.' I waited for him to say more, but he didn't.

"So I said, 'Well is there any way to *actually* know anything about anything?'

"And he says, 'Probably not. But I'm not sure.'

"So I was like, 'Then why are you having us read about all these philosophies if they could *all* be wrong, but in the end we can really never know if they are or aren't? What's the point?'"

I paused, waiting for Sherry to be incredulous. But she replied, "So...?"

"So, I'm giving you a glimpse into the mind of the person that's teaching me World Philosophy."

"He's a genius."

"What I'm trying to *say* is..." I was getting flustered.

"What are you trying to say?"

"I'm trying to tell you, I'm *sick of being here!* I'm sick of faking it. Most of the professors are faking it. But they're getting paid to fake it. I'm just wasting time, faking it because everyone says I'm supposed to. But I have a new plan, Sher. I've thought this through for days. I'm serious. Are you ready?"

“Do tell,” she said suspiciously.

“Okay. Part I: I drop out of college and move to San Francisco.”

Sherry’s eyes narrowed. “And when you get your 1-A and they ship you off to Vietnam?”

“Part II... I move to Canada before they catch me.”

“You'd never be able to come back! They'd put you in jail if you came back, or if they caught you trying to leave!”

“There'd be no reason to come back, because of Part III.”

“Which is...?”

“You'd be with me.”

Now she understood why I asked her to come see me this weekend. Her hands covered her face. She pushed her hair back from her eyes and beckoned me with her finger until I sat next to her.

“I can't do that, Jackie.... I can't. I've been accepted to some really good schools – Columbia, Stonybrook, Harpur. Maybe none of them are any better than here. But I'm a year behind you. I haven't experienced any of this yet. I need to find out for myself.”

I actually thought she was going to say yes. I had no Part IV. And no three-Part Plan, version B.

I walked back to my dorm window, mind racing. I saw it held the past, present, and future in one image: I could see

Sherry behind me, reflected in the icy black glass, ghost-like; then with a mere squint of my eyes I could see my own reflection. Refocusing outward, four floors beneath me I could see the well-lit walkways of the main quad -- and further still, the car lights, like a confused parade of fireflies blinking across Massachusetts Avenue.

She interrupted my time-shifting, "There has to be something valuable you can learn here."

I turned around and was struck, as always, by her wild sea green eyes. They would wash right over me at times like this. She had a way of penetrating the real me – no reflections, no parallel realities.

“Well, here's what I've learned so far: You actually *can't* learn about music by analyzing Bartok. You can't learn how to think like a scientist if science is taught like it's a religion. My economics teacher is living in an apartment on campus with his wife and kid – but if he knows so much about economics why isn't he rich and living in some fancy mansion in Georgetown? And my political science teacher doesn't want to talk about Vietnam because it's too controversial. In other words, he wants to keep his job by talking about past wars and making it completely irrelevant to everything going on in the present. *Don't you see?* They're teaching us how to accept it all, so we become a part of it, a part of them, without questioning what it is we're doing. The

thought of being here for three and a half more years is immoral! I just can't do it."

*"It's three and a half years of keeping you out of the goddamned war, Jackie!*

She was used to listening to my sociopolitical rants. But I wasn't used to hearing her voice raised to this level in response.

"You're *deferred* here, Jackie, you're safe here! Safe enough to be bored and complaining about it. Don't take that for granted. Staying here is the only *legal* way out of the political trap they've set for you. Don't *you* see *that*?"

I shook my head, "And what if the war is still going on by the time I graduate? Then I'm 1-A anyway. Then what? Hide away in grad school?"

"Why not?"

"And what if the war is still going on four years after that? With America running out of teenagers, and, come on, you know that if we win *this* war they'll be sure to start a new war somewhere else a year after that. We'll never run out of wars, and new weapons to test. That's what you learn in history class when you bother to read between the lines."

Her lips tightened. She closed her eyes.

"I'm trapped here, Sher. I'm *allowing* myself to be trapped here. Is that the kind of person you want me to be? A coward who's relieved and happy to be trapped?"

I started pacing around my tiny dorm-cage. It was after midnight, but I was feeling a bit manic. I was freaked out after hearing she had refused to join my Canada plan, but also feeling that even without her, my plan was still the best plan I could think of.

“Look Sher, I get it. I hear all the voices in my head warning me – my parents, my friends – they say, 'Be cautious, be *logical*. It's just *college*, for God's sake – deal with it, just like everyone else.... you're young. Time will pass.' But the truth is, it's not the right thing to do.”

She met my eyes for a long moment. “And what do you hear my voice saying?”

"I don't know anymore.... Not sure."

She motioned me to sit down beside her again, then gently pulled my face closer to hers. She whispered the words in my ear with surprising softness:

“My voice says, 'Fuck them, Jackie.'”

"Really?"

She nodded.

I smiled, then began to laugh.

She kissed me, then began to cry.

By morning, my mind was clear.

## Two

I first met Sherry when I was sixteen, in the summer of 1967. Politically, it was the year before the worst year ever.

My parents were renting a beach cottage in Point Lookout, Long Island. All my friends were back home, forty minutes away, spending their summer in the languid nothingness of Westbury.

I was taking a restless morning walk with the ocean tide intermittently washing over my feet. My eyes looked down warily from time to time, on the lookout for baby jellyfish. In the distance I saw a girl about my age walking towards me in a bikini. She was holding a pink shell in her hand.

As she came closer she didn't acknowledge my existence. But that allowed me time to secretly study her face. She had an all-American, mid-western kind of look – a petite nose and mouth, brown hair falling just below her neck, a few freckles scattered; pale skin, unaffected by the July sun.

As she began to walk past me I improvised. “I think you dropped your necklace,” I called out.

She looked at me as I picked up a gooey strand of seaweed and held it up to her, smiling.

“I don’t wear slime, or hang out with it, thank you,” she almost smiled back. Her eyes were liquidy green. They almost made me shiver. I was mesmerized into an unfortunate silence.

She continued walking. I watched her drifting away for a long time. I assumed she would just be another fantasy girl that would haunt my dreams for the next few days, or weeks, or months, until some other fantasy girl appeared and disappeared for weeks or months. I took a long swim, fighting my way beyond the shorebreak. After body surfing back to the place where I first saw her I made my way back to our rental cottage.

What I soon learned was that Sherry's parents had rented a vacation house in the same neighborhood as ours. I began to see her from time to time in different settings. We'd say hello. Eventually we reached the point of striking up brief but friendly conversations. Occasionally, when I saw her sunning herself on a beach towel, I'd wander over and ask if I could sing her a new song I'd written on my guitar.

I would close my eyes and sink into the intensity of a particular phrase while strumming or fingerpicking the chords. Sometimes she would turn her head and watch me with an odd curiosity, the way one might inspect a lab animal after it was injected with an experimental drug. Or

she might inquire why I'd chosen to use a particular word or phrase. I received nothing more in return. No compliments, no encouragement.

I would then feel sure that I was nothing more to her than a fleeting distraction. A no-see-um. I was just *there*, buzzing around, making no conscious impression.

But there were other times when she would take a walk with me down to a small adjacent beach where the waves were strong, and we'd swim out toward the open horizon. This is how we found our first true connection.

People watching from the shore would sometimes begin to panic, thinking we'd gone out too far. But we were both powerful swimmers and knew the secrets of the local undertow.

On the way back to the main beach she'd comb the dunes for shells and beach glass and colored stones. Her hair would be salt tangled, sand twisted, making her face look wild and beautiful.

She'd start to confide in me, if I remembered to be quiet. She'd tell me things about her parents, or about a book she was reading.

But when the day was over and she was gone, a familiar loneliness would come over me.

At the end of summer, in late August of 1967, my family and I returned to our house in Westbury, and Sherry

went back to her house in Farmingdale, about fifteen miles away. A new school year was about to begin.

Because we had become secret swimming partners, or maybe because my songwriting was getting a little better, we decided that we were now “a couple.” Simply meaning we would talk on the phone, and try to see each other on weekends if we could find a ride from one of our parents.

She was a year younger than I was; an effortless A student, interested in almost everything she was assigned to study. I struggled to get my B's and occasional A's—dreading every night of homework.

After a hopeful first week or two of classes I would begin to feel bored and disappointed. I would start to wander from class to class like a young Roman slave in chains. Choicelessness was my favorite long word, surpassed only by the forever-endearing antidisestablishmentarianism (a word which in many ways would neatly sum up the fledgling anti-hippie movement.)

I'd often be slumped behind the furthest desk from the blackboard, scribbling out a short story I was secretly writing, or reworking a lyric in my magic notebook. It was *magic* because sometimes the notebook would take over and write something better than I was capable of. Then I'd go home and write music to the words. One song I wrote that year was called *Schoolyard Shadows*:

*On the faces of the children  
Is the very same confusion,  
Are the very same reasons,  
Why I gave up for so long.*

*Sun casts shadows on the blackboard.  
Red hand slowly whirls the seconds by.  
Can you remember all the wasted time  
Separated from your soul?  
What good is learning if it erases your reflection?*

*Some of the deepest people I know  
Nearly flunked right out of high school.  
They were given up for fools  
As they dreamed their dreams alone.  
What good is learning if it erases their reflection?*

*What good is learning if it erased their sense of reflection?*

## Three

As soon as I passed my driver's test Sherry and I became inseparable. I'd bring my homework over to her house almost every night. While she was working on it, I'd write songs cross-legged on her bed.

Sometimes she'd have us memorize the dialogue of a one-act play she'd written, which we'd then act out, using her bed as an overly-bouncy stage.

We devised new philosophies. We discovered new ways of tasting and touching things – a slow, hypnotic method that she learned from a book written by an actual Indian guru.

We tried kissing with our mouths half-full of blackberry wine.

We tried marijuana for the first time one night and ended up finding a new musical scale by rearranging the strings of my guitar. It went one step beyond open tuning -- we literally changed the order of the strings.

I also remember what her hair smelled like. I don't think it was the shampoo she used because her hair always smelled that way. No one else's hair has ever smelled that way. I guess that's why the word *her* was cleverly inserted into the word pheromones. Of course, so is the word, hero.

## Four

In early December of 1967, Sherry and I went to hear Harris Duran speak. Harris was an eloquent political protégé of Dick Gregory – a black politician-comedian running for President of the United States. Their speeches were becoming the *in thing* to attend on the college circuit.

As we entered Adelphi University, I felt immediately out of place. A lot of the students had long hair. Some students moved slowly, as if deep in thought. They seemed reverent. Others looked angry; one spoke in a low hissing voice about revolution. I began to feel a bit scared.

By the 7:30 start time the auditorium was packed.

Harris Duran arrived on stage an hour late, welcomed by rousing applause. He was a tall, rather large black man dressed in a gray sports jacket and jeans. He spoke in a smooth elegant voice.

After a few stories about his experiences in the civil rights movement, quoting Martin Luther King Jr., at the end of each vignette, he began to focus on the topic of the evening, the war in Vietnam.

He said, “Let me tell you what we have accomplished with this undeclared war: All of Southeast Asia, and most of the rest of the world, now hates America and its definition of

freedom. They hate us, they mistrust us, and they are afraid. Why? Because they don't want the kind of freedom where the only truly free people are white, straight, rich Americans. Our form of freedom is no longer appealing to anyone else.

"So, yes, we can tell people in other countries what *we think* they should want. But *true* freedom cannot be forced down people's throats. Freedom is what people under unjust rulers will fight and die for, when the time has come, when there is no other right choice to make. It cannot be bestowed upon them, or forced upon them, or won for them, with *our* armies. It must be *chosen from within*."

Duran pointed his finger beyond us, his voice rising with far more power now, like a gospel preacher, "The answer to combating Communism does not lie in a massive use of American soldiers, or dropping bombs on an agrarian culture still living in a world that existed a century before we were born. The answer lies in perfecting a system of democracy here at home -- a democracy where the scales are not tipped for those fortunate enough to be rich white men. Or those who wear a badge. If, indeed, we create a democracy and a capitalist structure that allows for true equal opportunity -- in the marketplace, in the courts, on the streets, and on the beat, where police are humanized and depoliticized; color blind, and *part of* the community they

serve, instead of believing they are apart from the community they control -- yes, *if indeed*, that is what America evolves into from this cauldren of chaos we find ourselves in today -- then, we can show off that kind of freedom and democracy to the rest of the world, until it's like a well-lit window. A well-lit window of enormous scope, inviting all to see into, and reflect upon. First a candle. Then a flame. Perfected each day, holy unto its mission, until it becomes like a bonfire! Until the world can't resist it. Then freedom shall ring everywhere, not just for the lucky few who write the rules and control the many."

I looked around. No one was moving in their seats. Not a sigh. Not a cough. The girl next to Sherry had tears streaking down her face. Sherry listened with her body leaning slightly forward, eyes closed.

By the end of his speech, Harris was imploring us to join in a boycott, which he and Dick Gregory were promoting nationwide. He told us, "Stop buying records, stereos, and new clothes for just this one year, and tell the store owners and record companies why -- tell them loud and clear, there can be no joy in music, and no desire to buy a new tee-shirt, or a new denim jacket, *until the war is over*."

"These are billion-dollar industries you would be slowly destroying. You are their main demographic. You buy *from* them, therefore, you *control* them! *That* is true

capitalism at work! Within months you will see the power of special interest groups lobbying for you, instead of working against you. They will go to congress demanding an end to the war, until they equal the voices in the Pentagon, and match the money of the weapons-makers, hell-bent on destroying all humanity.

"Oh yes, our congressman -- *our* congressmen -- will finally stop shrugging off the gruesome pictures on TV of villages, unchanged for generations, being fire-bombed by American planes. The shrill protests of the few will turn into a chant of the many, flowing down the streets of Washington D.C. We will be Main Street, *mainstream!* We will be the new voice of democracy and freedom. We will start the bonfire! And then we must keep it lit, long after the war is over."

He looked at us in silence -- a final dramatic pause allowing for reflection, and said, "Because of the special generation that I believe you are, you have the power to be a guiding light for the future of this country and the world. You can save lives. You can stop a terrible war. *Don't be fooled!* Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, they will never hear your beautiful songs of love. Songs cannot finish this work we do. But non-violent protests *can*. If our weapon of choice is *capitalism itself*, we will not fail. But our actions must be forceful, dramatic, and united. Therefore, I call on each of you to join me, with one voice, so that we can end this

massive mistake in America's history. We must end the killing of our young for no rightful purpose. I challenge you from this moment on to take the course of history into your own hands."

## Five

Durant's message echoed for days in my brain. Logic broke through where there had once been lies, or silence, or confusion.

I was now positively and guiltlessly against the war. The President was wrong. Congress was wrong. The media was wrong. My parents were wrong. My friends were wrong. I became fully committed to Harris's idea.

For weeks I tried to get my high school classmates to join the music and clothing boycott. But they concluded, or were convinced through rumors, that I'd been "brainwashed." I'd become a Communist. Possibly even a paid subversive.

One of my teachers reminded me of the "classic mistake" made by President Wilson – with his policy of isolationism, and the subsequent rise to power of Adolph Hitler. But I countered that South Vietnam's President Park was more like Hitler than Ho Chi Minh ever would be.

This did not help my cause. In fact, everyone now *knew* I was a subversive. Why else would I not hate and fear the ever-evil Ho Chi Minh? The more angry they became, the more wild my responses became. Somehow my words couldn't get across what I knew the be true.

Sherry also tried to tell her classmates what she'd heard, but she met a fate worse than mine. Some brave anonymous high school patriot left her a note saying he intended to "get her pregnant" (in the name of Democracy, apparently) if she continued with her slanders about America and the war.

At the time she showed me the note I was at the peak of my own frustration. So my first reaction to the sloppily scrawled words was uncontrolled rage. I wanted to find out who wrote it and kill him. (Ironic, obviously, since I was preaching non-violence as the answer to one and all.)

"This is a new one – patriotic sexual assault." I screamed. "He should be forced to crawl around in Hell for years, tortured hour by hour."

"Well maybe he'll run for President someday," Sherry said. "That would do it."

I thought about it for a moment, then added, "Yeah, wouldn't you just love to see that jerk drag himself through all fifty states, lying to everyone, begging for money, and then *lose*?"

"No, then *win*," she laughed.

The incident eventually slipped back into the recesses of our daily lives like a bad dream.

We left him to his own fate.

\* \* \*

On a snow-drifty winter evening, we went to the suburban house of a schoolmate of mine, whose parents were on vacation in Florida. My friend's name was Richard Attas. At the age of seventeen Richard was already making a steady living – playing seven-card stud with "friends" (bums) in the basement of Howard Johnson's on Jericho Turnpike.

This night we were escorted to his parents' bedroom with a deep bow and a wink, and left alone. (His fee for the use of his house for a few hours was downright charitable: five dollars.) The room was strait-laced and airless, filled with photographs of strangers -- parents of parents. And their parents. The bedspread, as we climbed under the covers, was stiff and scratchy, perfumed polyester, so we pushed the entire mountain of it down onto the floor. Sherry and I had fantasized about "the first time" for so long. But there seemed to be no joy in this room, no room for spontaneity. We cracked the windows to let some cold air in and turned the nightstand lights on high so we could see each other's eyes. We didn't want the darkness to come between us.

Sticking obediently to the plan, on a count of three, we took off our clothes from separate sides of the bed. I put my

cold hands on my stomach to warm them. Then I let my fingers gravitate to her.

After a while she moved over to my side of the bed and touched my shoulder, then kissed me. I became motionless -- frozen angels exploding inside my brain. I stared up at the ceiling, feeling cold and clumsy.

Then another emotion took over. I opened my eyes, sat up, and stared at her hauntingly smooth skin in the lamp light. Soft white curves. Dizzying beauty. I wanted to stare at her endlessly, still the moment, and call it a life, but something indescribably magnetic kept pulling me closer to her. Suddenly our bodies touched and became entangled, threaded together, suspended, perfect. It was as if we had always been.

## Six

The following summer we spent every day together, wandering around the Long Island beaches, and playing our daring game of swimming out toward the horizon when the currents were right.

At night we would drive through small towns, listening to British pop on the radio, while watching the all-American procession of pizza shops, movie theaters, liquor stores, neighborhood banks, and five and dimes drift by.

One night as I was driving, I began to notice how the long white beams from the passing streetlights reflected off the windshield. Each one elongated itself as we moved beyond it, attaching to the windshield glass when we passed by, like a gondola oar made of star-ray. It passed us on to the next streetlight, where the next white oar took over. We let the current of streetlights guide us on.

But by summer's end, a strange feeling was in the air — a feeling of being carried to places no one wanted to go. Everyone in America felt it. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy had been murdered two months apart. The war was escalating.

I was also personally being carried away, not by a driving passion,, but by the next step I *had to* take: I had been accepted to American University in Washington, D.C. And because of the draft, there was no question whether or not I should attend.

In early September, a few days before I left for school, Sherry and I decided to revisit the beach where we met.

We arrived in Point Lookout late in the day, at the tail end of a thunderstorm. The rain had stopped. We watched the lightning travel west toward Fire Island. We heard the distant thunder reverberate across a low thick sky, then explode. The wind stretched the high clouds apart like taffy.

Pink spilled through the sky, creating smudgy cloud-streaks reminiscent of a child's finger painting. Down near the water's edge the sand had been wiped clean of footprints. It lay gray and fresh, revealing a million tiny holes, like the fossils of raindrops.

Sherry's aqua-colored eyes stared past me into the rough churning sea. She stood beside me, wearing a ragged inside-out sweatshirt, her brown hair wet and curled slightly at the edges. "College is bound to change things, Jackie," she said quietly.

She came closer and grabbed hold of my arm with both of her hands, "I mean, regardless of how we feel about each other, no matter what happens, the next time we see each

other, we'll be two different people. Don't you see? It's so wild. Since we met, it's been a continuum, one unbroken era. But now a new era is upon us.... No matter what happens from here, we'll never be the us from where we've come. Not ever again."

## Seven

Six months later, Sherry's insight had proven true. Though I never stopped thinking of her, everything in my life had changed. It culminated with me telling her about the Three-Part Plan while she sat on my small bed in my dorm room on her weekend visit.

I returned home in April of 1969, having officially dropped out of college. The plan was to go to San Francisco, a place I'd never been. I was going without her, with no specific plan to return. And if I got drafted, I would go to Canada and start a new life there.

Sherry was finishing her final year of high school. She had been accepted early to all the schools she'd applied to. Princeton seemed dreary when she visited; too stuck-up and old. But they wanted her. They offered her a partial scholarship. Columbia had intensity, right in the heart of New York City. But she wanted more of a small-town atmosphere. This led her to a state university in upstate New York called Harpur. It made a positive impression on her. She liked the students and professors she'd met. They were serious, intellectual, but seemed free-spirited and quirky. She loved the two classes she was allowed to attend for a

few hours. She told me, “Everyone there seemed comfortably irreverent.”

Back home, my parents were in a frenzy. Their hippie musician wayward son had just dropped out of college in the middle of his freshman year, in the middle of a war.

They thought about checking me into an insane asylum, which was all the rage back then. So I spent part of my time at home trying to convince them I hadn't lost my mind, but indeed, had found, and was actually *using*, my mind, for once.

I spent the rest of the time at Sherry's house, not wanting to say goodbye, not wanting our time to end.

The coming separation felt far more frightening and final than when I'd left for college. In college, Sherry was still with me – I'd call her on the pay phone most nights, and see her on school breaks. But California was thousands of miles away. I wasn't going to study there and live suspended in a cocoon; I was going to start a life, a real life. The break in the continuum would be complete.

We went through our last days together locked in a kind of death dance. Sometimes we would hold each other until the present moment became the *only* moment. We knew this was likely to be the official end of our relationship, but we didn't talk about it.

The night before my flight, I walked into my parents' room. My father was watching the late-night news. My mother was reading her typical seven-hundred-page novel. I believe it was Michener. She looked nervously at my father as I stood at the foot of their bed.

"Mom, Dad, I've come to say goodbye, and make peace."

My dad said quickly, "We'll talk about it tomorrow."

"We've already talked about it..."

My mom gave him a heartbreaking glance.

He squinted at me, "I said we'll talk about it tomorrow, and that's final." This was growled at me as an absolute order, a tone I rarely heard around my house.

I climbed the steps to my room, wrote them a goodbye note, laid it carefully on my nightstand, and slept until 4am. I kissed our fat dog, Candy, on her cold nose at 4:15, and tiptoed out the front door.

I walked ten blocks to my old elementary school and called a cab from the pay phone in the parking lot.

Four hours later I was sitting on a plane, looking out from a window seat, thinking of Sherry.

## Eight

I was so high I had no idea what state I was in. This many miles up, the ground below showed no boundaries; no dividing lines.

As we passed over small towns I saw baseball diamonds, each the size of a kid's freckle; I saw checkered open fields of green and brown; meandering lakes and rivers. I thought of the chaos down below, the social interweavings, the political uproar. But from the edge of the sky all seemed quiet and peaceful. America seemed like a wild young land, a strong and growing gum-chewing kid with grass-stained jeans, and mountains to climb.

I landed in San Francisco on April 10, 1969. I knew no one, and had no particular plans. As I emerged from the terminal, the air smelled warm and floral. The sky was a robin's-egg blue. It gave me an immediate impression of freedom and openness. California had a vibe to it. I felt very excited to be *in* California.

Busses and taxis crowded the loading zones, but I walked, following signs to the freeway. I scurried down the entrance ramp, looked out upon the vast four-lane corridor of asphalt and cars and wind, and stuck out my thumb.

Less than a minute later, a black Volkswagen slowed and swerved to the shoulder. I picked up my guitar and backpack and ran over to it. A wide-eyed girl stared up at me from the passenger seat. The driver seemed to be in his middle twenties. He had a scrawny acned face, and had a cigarette hanging from his lips. As the girl got out and folded her front seat forward, she pushed her blonde hair away from her face and smiled at me. I squeezed into the back seat. I looked at her and then him again. I thought they made an odd couple. She was very innocent looking, but he looked grungy and seemed a little wasted.

After he swerved back onto the highway the girl turned around and asked me where I was headed. I told her anywhere in San Francisco would be fine.

She laughed. "Well, we're already *in* San Francisco." She was wearing a soft white blouse and a pair of intricately patched jeans. She was barefoot, and sat with her legs beneath her, Indian style.

She mentioned a couple of street names, and the driver said "Okay, baby."

Then he said to me, "Have a blast in Rainbow-ville, man. You just came in, right? So, a word of advice.... " he turned his head half-way back to face me for a moment—cigarette steaming as it hung limply, "Forget the Haight,

man. It's a dead scene now. It's just for the TV cameras and junkies, know what I'm sayin'? The groove's gone."

He quickly returned his eyes to the road, talking almost to himself now, "I mean, the Pranksters, and Wavey's and Gravy's, they've all split for greener pastures. Only the parasites and college kids are there now, screwing with each other's heads and waving at the tourist buses. Know what I mean?"

I definitely did not know what he meant.

He stopped to take a short breath, then coughed before continuing his *Welcome to San Francisco* monologue. "Yeah, nah, everything's scattered now, except for the concerts at the park. But even some of the bands now are a fuckin' joke. And if that's an acoustic guitar you have in the case there, well, that's just the kinda shit I'm talking about. No offense. But folk music is dead. This town needs to *rock!*" He yelled the last word way too loudly to be considered mentally sane while simultaneously pounding his fist on the steering wheel.

His "advice" had A-bombed my high spirits and I began to engage reality – where will I go after he drops me off? Where will I sleep tonight? Is folk music really dead? Why was Dylan playing with a band now?

The San Francisco skyline appeared through the front windshield. It revived my optimism. It had a light-hearted

grace to it, a sense of form and spaciousness quite unlike the mad Manhattan towers that had gone forth and multiplied like monstrous weeds.

We left the freeway at Fell Street and negotiated the infamous San Francisco hills. The car brakes moaned and squeaked on the descent. Outside the car window the bay winds whipped the hair and coattails of the citizenry. The apartment buildings we passed by were two-and three-story Victorians. Nearly all of them seemed freshly painted in pastel colors and seemed very well-cared-for, with long rectangular windows and engraved archways.

We came to a stoplight, an intersection called California and Divisadero, and parked in front of a small grocery store called, Diana's Market. He said, "This right here is the crossroads to the rest of your life." His crooked gray teeth were exposed as he smiled proudly at his poetic, philosophically potent goodbye.

The girl got out and folded the front seat forward so I could get out, then slammed the door.

He drove away, wheels screeching, while she was still standing next to me.

"I hate hitching alone," she said. "So I guess you owe that ride to me."

"Well, thanks. He was a very *trippy* guy."

"Yeah, not really." She was waiting for the light to change. "You must be from the East Coast," she added.

"My accent?"

"Among other things."

I felt a little awed, looking around at the unfamiliar rows of pastel houses. I thought to myself -- kids drew colored houses like this back in first grade -- "Here's my sky-blue house, Miss Gedbaugh, do you like it? That's me under the M&M tree."

The girl could see the spaced-out look in my eyes. As the light changed, she said, "I might be able to offer you a place to stay for the night at a friend's house. But I need to ask my friend."

I quickly followed her across the street.

The friend, Calvin, lived two blocks away from where we had been dropped off. It was in an old stucco apartment building on Guerrero Street -- not nearly as well-taken-care-of as the apartment houses a few blocks back.

Calvin answered the buzzer, looking especially happy to see the girl. He was tall and thin, maybe about twenty-five, with smooth black skin. He wore a pair of wire-rimmed glasses.

We followed him up to the third floor and entered a tiny square room, sparsely furnished with box crates and

pillows, and hazed with incense. Paperbacks and record albums were scattered everywhere.

“What’s the occasion, Jan?” he asked.

“Well, we seem to have a wanderer who's strayed one dimension beyond the visitor’s bureau.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“I was wondering if you had room for him for a night?”

He looked me up and down. “What kind of guitar do you have there?”

“It's a 12-string.”

“That’s good. That’s very good. Thieves statistically hardly ever play 12-strings.”

He gave me the brother’s hand shake.

After a few hours of conversation, the three of us cooked dinner together. From time to time as we ate, I stared out the living room window. The sun was beginning to set across the city. I realized it was already moon-dark back in New York. My mom was probably crying. And Sherry? Doing her homework. Wondering if I was all right.

When we were finished eating, Calvin asked me to play a song. I was glad to be able to sink back into a familiar part of myself. The song I played was something I'd just written, on my last night home.

*Sometimes when I'm lost inside  
feeling life passing me by  
I forget that you're here with me  
blind to what's in front of my eyes.  
Like a radiant morning sky  
it's so easy to turn away  
with a heart too dead to see...*

The newness of the situation fine-tuned my objectivity. I could see myself from a proper distance. I watched the lyrics weave through the music. Some of them rang true and cast the intended spell. Some of the words weren't quite right, or said too much. I scribbled a few notes to myself in my magic notebook afterwards.

It was after midnight. Calvin, after telling us part of his life story – including being imprisoned in the suburbs of Chicago as a kid, trapped in an all-white neighborhood with his very stubborn black professor-father and high school teacher-mother -- announced he was going to bed. He had to work in the morning at the car wash. (Good thing he'd gotten a degree in chemistry from Loyola.) He told me I was welcome to stay for a few days as long as my guitar was staying too.

Jan said goodnight and left. The lights were turned off. I crawled inside my sleeping bag, feeling excited, displaced, feeling an urgent sense of wonder, sleeping for the first time under the western sky.

## Nine

Unlike New York, people walked around San Francisco at a leisurely pace. Many of them wore weird colorful patchwork clothes. They would hug each other as soon as they met, and hug trees sometimes, and hug stray dogs like they would have hugged a long-lost friend.

I thought about the few precious dollars I had left in my pocket and wondered – does anyone work here? With Calvin being the exception, apparently only “straight people” worked full-time. Hippies could not afford to let an entire day go by working when there were so many *actual* things to do. So instead, they gathered together in the park, or sat on their door-stoop playing music. Some of them would be jamming on what would loosely be called drums. Some played guitars. Others danced, with or without music being played.

Seeing that virtually everyone knew how to play an instrument of some kind made me feel a bit insecure about my own music. I had always hoped my songs were special. I had a secret dream of being known as a great songwriter. But it seemed that just about everyone else in this entire city had the same dream.

I sat with a windy-haired girl in Dolores Park a few months later -- she had a beautiful voice and played her songs of love staring right into my eyes the whole time, as she sat in a half-ripped white wedding-gown. She introduced herself as Abbey C, or maybe it was Abbey Sea, and said to me, "I want to change people and the world with my music. My songs are like my children. I want them to be heard and remembered forever."

She basically voiced everything I *never* would have said aloud to *anyone*. It was frighteningly sobering. She was my "competition," along with the likes of Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Steve Winwood, The Beatles, and all the other brilliant songwriters making it in the real world.

I didn't like to jam with other musicians. Jamming felt like a waste of time. I wanted to find musicians who wanted to play *my* songs. But I also wanted to arrange the parts carefully, to sound composed, but free. I wanted *control*. In other words, I was a party-pooper in many ways -- the only one not dancing and beating on a drum. The only one not pretending to be a hippie version of Cuban. Everyone else seemed to be having a great time. But the entire scene would just make me feel more isolated.

I knew I would never look as appealingly sexy as Abbey C, or Sea, in her ripped wedding dress. And I was completely stunned by Dylan's lyrics - Gates of Eden,

Visions of Johanna, Desolation Row; and moved by Joni Mitchell's open tunings and beautiful word-poems. Lately I had become a fan of Tim Buckley's mesmerizing voice, and his band – free, but controlled – just the way I wanted my band to sound someday.

I felt like I was light-years away from the kind of artistry those musicians were capable of.

But Calvin didn't let me sink too low. He wanted me to play my songs over and over. He told me I had my own musical style and liked the stories I told with my lyrics. One night, against my will, he dragged me down to the neighborhood club called, "King Richard's."

Richard, the owner, and Calvin were friends. Calvin convinced him to give me a quick audition before the doors opened. So I pulled out my guitar and began to play, singing into a live mic on stage. Meanwhile, Richard was busy answering the phone -- laughing with someone on one call, yelling at someone on another, while I played through my one set of originals in front of a hundred empty seats. I was sure Richard the King hadn't heard a word or a note that came out of my mouth.

As I was dejectedly packing up my guitar he came over to me and said, "Hey, you're good. I'm surprised – Calvin, I thought you were tone-deaf!"

He turned to me and said, “How would you like to open for Richie Havens? I don’t have the dates yet. But the Havens crowd will dig you. I can’t pay you, but you’ll get exposure.”

I was stunned and excited. Asking for money would have never entered my mind.

When Calvin broke the news to Jan she was impressed. In fact, they started to make a list of friends to invite to the concert. I was not competing with Abbey C, or Sea, anymore. Suddenly I had been catapulted up to a level far beyond singing to dogs, trees, and the permanent inhabitants at the park.

My joy lasted for five whole days, until I saw the “Going Out of Business,” sign on the window as I walked by the club one day. At first, I thought someone accidentally (or maybe as a joke) put it there. Then I thought I was having a nightmare. I squeezed my eyes with my fingers to re-focus, or hopefully to wake up. But no, it was King Richard that was having the nightmare. The King had apparently been deposed by King Landlord. It was guillotine time. The landlord had no sense of history apparently, and could wait no more for his rent money.

A day later the electricity was switched off. The windows were taped with a white X, the ignominious mark used to denote entry into The Entrepreneurial Hall of

Shame. My dream had literally gone bankrupt after one-hundred forty-four hours.

During the giddy days before the King's demise, Calvin toured me around the city with Jan. We traveled in style in Calvin's relatively new used car. He took us to The Fillmore one night for some true inspiration – it had been in preparation for my “gig with Havens.” We also frequented an all-night diner where he knew a waitress that would feed us all of the other diners' uneaten rolls and butter, along with *all-you-can-drink* ice water, until the wee hours.

Each night after the diner we'd go back to Calvin's place and talk for a while, then Jan would depart, and I would crawl into my sleeping bag in the living room. Every time I thought about Sherry my sleepiness evaporated. I would start writing her a letter by lamppost light, which crept through my window like a yellow mist.

Before I left, Sherry had said not to call her -- coast-to-coast phone calls excessively expensive -- but to write her poems and stories about the essence of things here. What I saw, what I felt. Sherry was far more into the essence of things than the things themselves.

So I sent my poem-letters to her a few times a week. I also made sure to occasionally drop a postcard to my parents in the mailbox:

Hey Mom and Dad. Still not crazy. Proof: A stray dog in the park agreed with me this morning when I asked for a second opinion.... And, still alive. Proof -- *this*.

More later. - J.

It was about nine in the morning on day two of the post-King Richard apocalypse, according to my newly invented calendar. Calvin had just stepped over my empty guitar case to leave for work. I was strumming away in his kitchen, the room where the resonance sounded best, while also eating his food, when the phone rang. I thought taking a message would be the polite thing to do.

"Hello, Calvin's place," I said officially, as I looked for a pen and a scrap of paper to write on.

"Don't ever say Calvin's place. I could have been the FBI," Jan responded.

I laughed. "Well, yeah, it's a New York thing to answer other people's phones. Even robbers stop to answer the phone, out of courtesy."

"That's *cool!* I'd love to go to New York City someday! Anyway, I think we need to take your mind off of King Richard's beheading. How about a grand tour of Mill Valley and the magic mountain? I might even introduce you to

another friend or two who could put you up after Calvin gets sick of stepping over you every morning.”

I accepted her invitation and quickly slipped into my ratty sneakers. Of course, I grabbed my guitar. It went with me everywhere, like a puppy, a puppy born from ego, which is a much bigger dog than a real dog. The puppy's birth mother was blind hope -- a lovely golden retriever with cloudy eyes.

Jan's apartment was only a few blocks away. The morning was bright and windless. A perfect day to play tourist and see the sights.

I rang the buzzer at the oversized front door. Through the translucent glass I saw a wavy pink figure descending the stairway. Jan was surprised I had arrived so quickly. (This was another New York trait of mine: whatever you're about to do, *hurry up* before you waste time! I had a lot to learn from Californians.)

She stood before me dripping wet, wearing an old Pepto-Bismol-colored bathrobe that seemed two sizes too big.

“Come in, I'm freezing.” She turned and led me up the stairs, then welcomed me through the open door of her apartment which led directly into her living room.

She ran on tiptoes into the bathroom down the hall,

“Make yourself at home while I finish my bath, I’ll just be a minute,” she called out. “Why don’t you put on a record?”

A Buffalo Springfield album was on the turntable, so I set the tone bar in motion, placing it on the wide groove just before the first track. After one song I felt inspired, so I took my guitar from its beat-up case and started singing a song of mine, which I had written a few days before.

I called it, Thoughts of Why --

*East winds take my mind back  
through the years  
teach me to seek out,  
whisper to be what I believe.*

*But my spirit has an anchor  
as light as youth.  
And I keep drifting  
even after my eyes have seen the truth...*

Jan emerged wearing a pair of beat-up jeans and a canary-yellow cotton tee-shirt that blended in with the color of her hair. She put on a necklace of small azure beads, using a slightly brownish cracked mirror hanging over the

fireplace to make sure the biggest bead was right in the middle.

“Are you feeling adventurous?” she asked. “I thought maybe we could climb Mt. Tam. How’s that for a cool way to tour of Mill Valley?”

“You don’t have to go that far to cheer me up!” I had no idea where Mill Valley was, and Long Islanders don’t know anything about mountains whatsoever.

I envisioned Mt. Tam to be a steep fortress of barren rock with Jan throwing a rope down to me from some impossible height. But she seemed very calm about it.

She waved me into the kitchen, and we made sandwiches. Flowers were everywhere. Jars of nuts and dried fruit lined the shelves. On the wall above her black phone was a poster of Buckminster Fuller smiling benevolently beneath fog-thick glasses. I heard birds singing in her backyard. Music from a record player was drifting down to us from the upstairs apartment.

“We’ll have to hitch.” Jan was stuffing food into a little green knapsack and searching her pockets for the house key. Then she pulled out something else from her pocket and said, “Uh oh, look what I found. Man, I forgot all about these guys.” She showed me two small purple pills and said, “Wanna trip?”

I had never tripped before, though lots of my college friends had. Some had had amazing experiences. A few had experienced a day of madness and terror. But I figured if I wanted to be a songwriter and a poet and disconnect myself from normal life... well, this was one way to disconnect... from everything, into everything else.

I said. "Can it help me overcome my fear of heights?"

"Absolutely," she laughed, "When you're higher than height, the fear never happens!"

I presumed tripping was a normal occurrence for her. After all, she lived in San Francisco – the psychedelic suburb of Berkeley.

She put the two pills on a flowery antique dish. Some orange juice was poured, and we each swallowed a pill without speaking. After listening to a side of Highway 61 Revisited, we climbed down the long flight of stairs into the street.

Compared to New York, San Francisco seemed pruned in size, like some bizarre form of architectural Bonsai. In contrast to the East Coast's steely grays and dreary browns, here stood a yellow house with green trim next to a white house with blue trim – all bathed in blinding sunlight.

A block from Diana's Market we caught a ride to the Marina. By the time we were dropped off I was feeling a

little *strange*. “Watch carefully now,” Jan said as she ran across a small embankment. I ran behind her.

The Golden Gate Bridge suddenly appeared, huge, prodigious, nearly vibrating. The red of its great arc stood starkly above the bay. Skyscraper high. It reached up to the fog. The gleaming vertical cables were like the strings of a giant harp ascending by degrees to the arches. Alcatraz and Angel Island were off to our right. Between them, little white sailboats lingered, like snowflakes on a cold blue mirror.

We walked across the bridge, fighting a world of wind with the sun coruscating off the water. At mid-span we looked behind us. San Francisco seemed silent, deserted. Small bright buildings formed a base at the foot of the skyline, then tumbled down across the hills to the sea, like scattered rubble from a marble quarry.

From the scenic overlook at the bridge’s end we hitched another ride all the way to Mill Valley. We walked past the bus depot in the middle of town. Mt. Tamalpais loomed larger now, but I was glued to the details right in front of me: the glistening of the sidewalk, the sound of our blue jeans in motion, the flowers placed neatly and proudly in the windows of the wooden shops, and Jan’s face, which now seemed shimmery and golden. The sun made her blue eyes turn other-worldly turquoise. Like the sky was materializing

from the inside. Was that where sky came from? I had always wondered....

I don't remember how we got to the foot of Mt. Tamalpais. I just remember walking as if I was on an electric track, as if I was being pulled along by a cabled wind that wasn't there, until I was staring suddenly at some Jupiter-sized trees.

"Oz," Jan said in a reverent tone as she ran crunchily into the towering woods. In this case, The Wizard was more like some a Johnny Appleseed from outer space. I had never seen Redwood trees before. I was telling myself that their incredible height had to be due at least in part to chemical hallucination.

As I followed her up the shadow-dappled incline, feeling the loamy fragrance expanding in my lungs, feeling the presence of these colossal peaceful beings hovering so far above us, my mind came to a point of revelation about nature: I was completely attached. There was no separation between what I was thinking and everything it was. Walking behind Jan, up and up, I suddenly felt like a tree with a swirling mind.

"Two climbing trees," I said out of breath. The phrase hung in the air, sounding more insane with each passing second. But without turning back to look at me Jan parted her arms a little, and I understood they were her branches.

Our path was very maze-like and zig-zaggy. There were endless Y's and W's and Z's on the trail, with seemingly random choices made by Jan at each crossroads, as if she knew the crossword puzzle.

"Do you know where we're going?" I asked breathlessly. My voice seemed to echo off of her hair.

"Up," she said simply, laughing. "This is my first time too. But it's hard to get lost. There's just up and down, right?"

My mind began to veer off the present moment. I began wondering about random things -- were Cheerios bagel seeds? Was the universe a seed in some other... universe?

As we walked, the leaves and twigs snapped loudly beneath our feet, bringing me back to the here and now. There were muddy moments. And dry moments. We were floating within the protective gauze of the mountain, between a cotton sky and its half-melted chocolate foot paths.

As we came to a vista point, it struck me that the land of Earth was made-up entirely of speckles: Pebbles embedded in the semi-mud of the forest floor. Sun shadows dappling through tree branches. The valley below us -- Monet-like, with scotch broom and warm purple lupine rambling for endless miles in rhythms of color. Brush strokes, a mosaic of speckles.

As we reached the mountain summit, we found ourselves totally out of breath, gawking at a huge stone amphitheater. We walked slowly across its length. Rows of seats were made of heavy stones. We came to what looked like a cement-like baseball dugout. "What *is* all this?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said. "Look at the cobwebs in there. This thing must be a thousand years old."

A huge bank of low clouds rolled in, dragging darkness across the landscape. They looked like giant doves with full-shadowed bellies.

As we wandered back to the other side of the amphitheater it began to drizzle. We came to the edge of the mountain peak and looked down. Thousands of feet below lay a luminous green forest slowly being cloaked in fog.

"We're children of the sky now," Jan said, looking down like a goddess upon the terrestrial world.

A torrent of wind and rain suddenly leaped at us, almost blowing us off our feet. But we laughed at the elements. We turned our heads upward to drink the cool cloud-milk. We *were* a part of nature, yes, like little lambs sucking on our woolen cloud-mothers' bellies.

By the time we thought of trying to find cover we were too rain-soaked for it to matter. I slipped in a yard of mud

laying in wait and tumbled to the ground, with legs and arms flailing.

We were wild-eyed and wet and cold – tripping – a three hour walk from civilization. The route we had taken was too steep for easy descent, especially with the entire world around us turning into a chocolate milkshake. We were alone up here, and who would venture up to the summit of a mountain in the rain? It could be days.... Cold hungry nights.... I came face-to-face with the stark reality that our lives might be in danger.

I didn't feel a part of nature now. I realized if we didn't find a way down from this mountain we could both end up dead. That's the only true way of being connected to nature, I thought. But it definitely wasn't as fun as being disconnected and alive.

I remembered a time back in Long Island, a week after I met Sherry, when I swam far out into the ocean alone. I felt so strong, so adventurous, but I misjudged the current. I almost didn't make it back. The waves couldn't have cared less about me. They demanded respect and intense clarity of mind.

I looked at Jan's face. She was shivering and feary-eyed, like a wet puppy. I led her to the stone dugout and we sat on its cold bench. The rain fell onto the slab roof in a patternless way, but I translated them into what started to sound like a

four-on-five polyrhythm. “Looks like a rain-out,” I said, pretending to chew gum, pounding my fist into my left hand as if it were a baseball mitt. I turned to her with a smile on my face.

She became very silent.

We weren't connecting. Who the hell was I to her? Some crazy stranger she'd known for a week. And who was she to me?

I leaned back. The cement wall was cold and wet, leaking through the cracks; drippy drooping spider webs were dangling from the corners. I sank into a jungle of madness. Thoughts hopped around hopelessly out of control.

The rain was also dripping off of the spider webs in a four-on-five polyrhythm now. On the other hand, it seemed like I could choose to hear rain falling in any pattern I imagined. I focused until I was able to change the rainfall to a series of sixteenth note triplets. That disappointed me. Rain was rhythmically simpler than it first appeared to be. Or maybe only as complex and patterned as the mind perceiving it. At least *this* rain.

Within half an hour, the weather calmed down. The rain was silent. I smelled the strong true odors of the mountain. We were surrounded by unfazed, unconfused beings – trees, small animals – they were so fully alive, but

living simply, constantly creating new life in their universe of green.

I, on the other hand, seemed to be all mind, a dream network with nothing real or solid to fall back on -- an intricate but meaningless timeflash of chemistry, temporarily disturbing the molecules I smashed into.

"I feel like a pinpoint of light being dissolved by a sun of information," I said aloud.

"I know! I feel that same thing. It's like we have to climb this mountain from the inside to begin to know anything. Maybe that's the point."

"Is there a point?"

"Everything is the point."

I looked at Jan, amazed that we seemed to be talking about the same thing; thinking aloud together. She added, "And since we've been magically transported here, to the 3-D summit of everything, maybe something amazing will happen!"

The storm had stomped off, and the sun appeared like a spotlight through the mist. Birds tentatively began to qweep. We ventured out of the dugout. Our clothes were soaked, our shoes and socks were spongy. I was oppressed by cold liquidness. It felt nauseatingly heavy, clinging to me like mercury.

We walked towards the amphitheater and looked at the steaming front-row seats – water being sucked upwards by the sun to merge with clouds so it could rain again. It created the famous ascending fog effect, the classic wild scene in a horror movie.

Jan stood on what seemed like a stage and stretched out her hands: “*Fi-ga-ro,*” she sang in mock baritone.

We were suddenly at a psychedelic séance, calling up the ghost of Figaro.

“Show us something amazing, oh Figaro!” she laughed.

At that moment we heard a voice shouting to us. We looked up. A guy with long black hair (definitely not Figaro) was waving his arms at us from a few hundred feet away.

“*Hey there, mountain travelers!*”

“*Hi!*” I shouted back to him, waving my arms frantically. I felt my hands moving in slow motion through the thick air. Fog air can feel like taffy if you concentrate on the micro-weight. I waved many seconds too long.

But wait, how could another person have made it all the way up here to the summit in the rain? We stood amazed, aghast as he zig-zagged his way towards us down the small cliff.

His body was wiry and his movements, as he leaped from rock to rock, were strong and athletic.

Standing beside us, he was only barely out of breath. He looked around as if to make sure no one else was listening, which of course was fairly preposterous. "Hi," he said again, and began to laugh. "I'm, uh, tripping."

"Oh my God, so are we!" Jan gasped.

The three of us stared at each other's faces for a moment. It was like looking into an infinity mirror. Everything was swirling.

"How do we get down?" I asked.

"*Why?*" he smiled.

"Not from the trip," I said. "Down the mountain. Back towards town."

"Oh, *town!* Follow me."

We rushed after him – this rain-drenched savior who had appeared out of the distant fog. I was hoping he wasn't an hallucination.

We trotted up some stone steps and over a little hill. On the other side of that hill, to our stunned surprise, we encountered a parking lot.

*Roads!*

I began to feel like maybe this *was* Oz. The wizard had tricked us again.

Purple streaks of wind flashed across my eyes in the newborn sunlight. I grabbed Jan's arm and we followed this person, Lee, to his rusted black Chevy, in which sat his very

silent tripping girlfriend, Angel, and off we went, circling down the slopes of Mt. Tam, battling centrifugal force.

Jan and I sat in the back seat. Through the rearview mirror I studied Lee's face. He had gray eyes, which were in startling contrast with his stringy long black hair. He had a jazz horn player's goatee, and one slightly chipped front tooth that was not necessarily unflattering. He was speaking to Angel, trying to either amuse or distract her from her dark mood.

"I always wanted to drive wild, like Neil Cassidy," he said nudging her, "but I have a larger desire to stay alive so I can listen to one more Hendrix solo."

I leaned in and away with the sharp turns around the mountain, watching the landscape speed shadows across Jan's face.

I couldn't believe he could drive tripping. What exactly was he seeing out the front windshield? Wind? Shields? Aliens laughing in the wind while racing beside him? Did aliens plant all the road signs, or were they real?

Lee continued to take the turns whooshingly. It crossed my mind he might be trying to combine suicide with homicide. Maybe he and Angel were breaking up in the most unique way imaginable. This was the way they'd agreed to end it -- and bringing hitchhikers along just made it that much crazier.

After another series of death-defying turns, I started imagining-praying that we wouldn't fall straight down if there was a mistake of wheels, but would instead fall *up* into outer space. And, in fact, that might have already happened. Otherwise, how could we have not fallen already?

I looked out the passenger window and saw a sheer drop of thousands of feet. I felt like an astronaut. I was clutching the grab-handle above my window with both hands to stabilize myself. It felt like I was holding onto a meteor.

"Ever been to New York?" he yelled back to us.

"Not recently," I said.

Jan burst out laughing, realizing that I'd only left New York two weeks ago, but this day felt like years.

The hairpin turns pushed her into me from time to time. She felt warm. I resisted the urge to hug her, or pet her. She seemed beautifully familiar.

"Hey, my name is Lee, by the way."

We failed to announce our names in return due to the temporary inability to locate our vocal cords.

"I grew up in Brooklyn," Lee said. "I remember one night, I was at the Flatbush station – the subway – late on a Saturday night..." he was obviously telling his story to Angel, too, but she stared glumly out the passenger window.

"... and these guys were on the other side of the tracks staring at me, nudging each other and whispering. No one else was around. I was about seventeen, coming from my girlfriend's house. My first love, Sarah... Angel, I told you about Sarah, remember?"

No response came from Angel.

"My grandmother's name was Sarah – no relation, trust me. And so I looked at these guys and said to myself, 'Self, if I don't think of something fast, someone may be scooping my butt off the tracks like a pancake.' I mean, I know Brooklyn, I grew up in Brooklyn, and these guys didn't look like a bunch of disgruntled Dodger fans. Sure enough, they jumped down onto the tracks and pulled themselves up onto my side until they were about fifty feet away and walking straight towards me.

"So I just start twirling around with my arms spread out like an overhead fan, and I started to scream at the top of my lungs, 'Ah-bah-rah-bah-rah-bah-rah-bah. Dog sing fire Shakespeare...' just blathering, free consciousness, right? Then I start crawling around on the ground amidst a parade of cigarette butts and torn up Nestlé's Crunch wrappers, and I start barking at the top of my lungs. "Awoooooooooooooooooo!"

"Then I turned and barked right at them. And you know what happened? They got freaked out and ran away! These guys were about to beat my brains out and rip me off,

take my money, whatever... but they didn't want to be part of someone *else's* insanity. Ironic, eh?"

We nodded foggily.

"And you know, that's how straight people react to hippies too. They can't imagine our insanity is better than their insanity, and we can't imagine theirs, to be honest. I mean, I don't judge the way they rush around wasting their fucking life Monday through Friday, glancing at their fucking watches all the time. If that's the way they want to live, cool with me. We're just operating on different wavelengths. They're like A.M radio., and we're F.M."

Jan and I watched the landscape blur by until we were floating back across the giant orange bridge. The water below was gushing with sunlight - reflective waves of visual energy.

Soon we rode roller-coaster-like across a dizzying maze of streets. The sky was turning a Mars violet as the sun descended. We awoke, as if emerging out of dream-cellophane. A voice came into our heads....

"Earth to tripsters," Lee called out. "Come in tripsters. Over."

"Hi," Jan whispered softly.

"I don't mean to drop in on you from out-of-the-blue like this, but where are you guys headed?"

We were stopped at a traffic light. We looked around, and our eyes suddenly focused on Diana's Market — California Street.

"My God, right here!" Jan said, dry-mouthed.

Reality continued to make no sense.

After Jan exchanged addresses with Lee we stepped into the dusky red street, our shadows long and spidery, and he drove off.

Neither of us knew if we'd ever see him again. We only knew that somehow we'd made it back down the magic mountain, back home, via the LSD express, protected by fate, and by each other, for a while.

## Ten

After helping ourselves to some orange juice and a plate of vitamin C we wandered into the living room. I peaked in Jan's bedroom and noticed a large sketch of an old woman's face on the wall. It was very detailed, made of a thousand delicate lines.

She saw me observing.

"Anybody you know?" I asked.

"It's a self-portrait of me in a hundred years," she said matter-of-factly.

We sat together on a ratty gray couch. I smelled a barely detectable odor of dust and concrete from an opened window. It had begun to drizzle; a remnant of the Mt. Tam sky had followed us home.

A bus drove by, hissing under dampened wheels. The curtain blew forward and a few drops of rain found their way inside the sill. Jan shut the window then pulled the curtain fully open, anchoring it with pieces of colored string that had been attached to the wall.

Above the neighboring rooftops, a race-car-shaped cloud was speeding its way into the final darkness, smoky gray against a spent sky. Second by second I felt like the darkspeed of that cloud. Everything I'd known was spinning

away, a death, an unfolding. Headlights from a passing car created a white shadow flashing across the wall.

She turned on the overhead light. The room took on a soft glow.

I got up to look more closely at Jan's drawing in her bedroom. It seemed to shimmer in waves, going back and forth between Sherry's face and Jan's face as an old person, and then becoming a maze made up of stringy lines crashing into each other. It was quite remarkable how chaotic the drawing seemed standing so close to it.

"Tell me what you're thinking," Jan said softly. She was standing behind me now.

"Car headlights of thoughts."

Noticing the somber shift in my words she decided to lighten the mood. "Hey, wanna play me a song?"

"Okay. If I can remember how!" I laughed.

"I think you'll remember."

I couldn't get up from the couch for some reason.

"Please?"

"Okay." I felt myself drifting weightlessly through the hallway. I unlatched the silver hooks of the tattered black guitar case and lifted the top, then pulled my guitar out carefully, hearing an almost imperceptible rush of air, as if it had been vacuum-sealed in its curvy cave.

I loved this guitar -- my 12-string Martin. I stared at the maze of silver and bronze strings, the long row of frets, the rosewood soundboard, unsure if my fingers would be able to lock into their little dance. But once I sat cross-legged on Jan's floor and began to sing everything fell into place. The sound was bathed in a clear jangly resonance.

*... You are there in the silences  
in between my every thought.  
You are the freedom I feel  
in moments I escape being caught.  
.... Caught up in the win and lose,  
Always something more to choose  
to take me away from you...*

Each one of my songs was like a psycho-acoustic window into myself. It was nice to remember one of me.

"I love that one, Jackie. I haven't heard it before."

"Thanks."

"Is it about someone in particular?"

"Mostly myself."

"Mostly?"

"Myself remembering someone particular."

"A girl someone?"

"Yes."

"Sounds like you love this girl someone."

"I do. Her name is Sherry."

Jan kept asking more questions. So I told her about how we met, and that, even from the start, she never let me get away with writing a bad song. She always pushed me to capture what I was feeling and thinking without compromising. Without faking it. She'd say "I don't think that is what you really mean." Or, "Why are you repeating that verse again? Don't be lazy, tell more of the story."

I also told Jan about how in the summertime we would swim far out to sea and play like dolphins. I tried to describe the strength and confidence I felt when we were swimming in rough waves together.

"Why did you leave her?"

"I didn't leave her. I just left."

"Were you not in love anymore?"

"I wasn't anything anymore. I just hit a crossroads. This is where it took me."

I wanted to change the subject. "Have you ever been in love?"

"Not really. I mean, it wasn't anything like what you just described. But I had a boyfriend for a while. His name was Glen. We met in tenth grade. He played on the football team and all that. After we graduated, he joined the Army. He thought he'd have an advantage, have more of a choice

over where he'd be sent if he joined before they drafted him. I don't know where he ever got that idea from. Up until then I remember feeling like I loved him, but it's hard to say now if I ever did. He used to come visit me when he was on leave. It got very confusing. He talked differently. Thought differently."

"And then?"

"Then I turned eighteen, and left home. I got a job downtown, worked nine to five in a shiny little office with three other girls, with long rows of fluorescent lights humming above us." She put her hand above my head and wiggled her fingers in mock fluorescence.

"Sometimes we'd get stoned in the bathroom after lunch and spend the rest of the day wondering what we were doing there. Last month I couldn't stand it anymore, so I quit."

Her eyes narrowed, "I need to take a bath. I'm cold. But you don't need to leave..."

She got up from the couch and put on a Joni Mitchell record. Then she stood in the doorway of her bedroom, sliding bracelets off her wrist and laying them on her dresser. We were full of mud – our clothes, our hands, our faces. Our hair was twisted and ragged from the rain. She went into the bathroom and began to run the water. Then she reappeared, "You can join me if you want," she said

casually. "Otherwise, if we run out of hot water it's your problem."

She went back into the bathroom and shut the door. After a time, the water to the bath was shut off.

I remembered something Sherry said the day before I left for San Francisco. She said I couldn't just sit around waiting for my draft notice to come. And she was leaving for college soon. I had to go and find a new life, my life. Not wait around for life to find me. Because it was not always a kind stranger.... Tripping on acid and taking a bath with this beautiful girl I'd just met a few weeks ago was not the new life I had imagined back in New York. But it was far better than many of the possible new lives I'd imagined....

I wiped a few remaining purple LSD-streaks away from my eyes and found myself walking towards the bathroom door, then turning the octagonal glass knob.

The white floor glistened and the air was heavy with steam. Jan's face and shoulders sat above a blanket of bubbles. Yellow hair curled down her back. Her blue eyes stood out in the stark whiteness of the room.

I knelt down beside her. We began to talk about the day, about Lee and Angel. Then she looked at my fingers and began to laugh, "What are you doing?"

"What?"

"What are your fingers doing? The tapping sound you're making on the side of the tub?"

"Oh. Well, I met this really great piano player once. And we started talking, and I told him someday when I could afford a piano I wanted to learn how to play. So he said I could get a head start by doing these Hannon thirds exercises on a desk or a table when I have nothing else to do. It's like this alternating finger thing.... See?"

As I was showing her, she said, "Are you saying you have nothing to do?"

"No. It's just become a nervous habit I guess."

"Show me how to do it."

"It's like this, thumb and third finger hit together. Then index and fourth finger. Then middle and fifth finger. Then you reverse it."

She tried it. I put my hand on top of hers and touched the correct fingers she needed to move until she felt the alternating motion."

"Oh, I get it. That's kind of hard!"

"You have to relax your wrist."

An awkward silence followed. Then she stood up, and with little white bubbles clinging to her like a gown she pulled me up to meet her. My clothes soaked up some of the warm water dripping from her fingers as she unbuttoned my shirt and pulled the rest of my clothes to the floor.

Together we slipped beneath the foam, which reflected colors like a thousand little prisms. Face to face, legs entangled, she began to wash me, kneeling close to me as she wiped the dirt from my face. Then she leaned back and closed her eyes.

Feelings began to gather in me that were more than LSD-induced. And more than just sexual. For the first time there was a person that was not Sherry making me *feel* something amazing.

We dried each other off. I followed her into her bedroom and we huddled together beneath her quilt.

"I want to kiss you maybe," she whispered softly. "But first I have a very important question. Do you still love Sherry?"

"Well, yes. Of course."

"Does she still love you?"

"Yes." I was sure of that.

"Good!" Jan smiled.

"Good?"

"I'm happy that you wouldn't lie to me, or add some qualification to the love you have. And I'm happy you love someone who loves you back. Did you think I'd feel disappointed, or jealous, or?"

"Well..."

“Because I don't. I never would. Jackie, it's so strange, people think they can meet someone and feel good, or maybe even begin to feel love, and all of a sudden be allowed to stake their claim, infuse the other person with their own possessiveness and fears. It's like committing love-suicide. It kills any real love before it can grow. I won't play that game with myself, or anyone else.”

She laid back on her pillow.

I moved a little closer and studied her face. There was a soft, almost angelic glow that I don't think was the LSD. We weren't tripping anymore.

She opened her eyes and caught me staring, then pulled me down towards her. We kissed, and as our kisses deepened she curled her leg ever so slightly around mine and I felt our bodies merge.

Whispers, laughter, music, then the dawn tiptoed in. We slept until the darkness came again.

## Eleven

Mid-dream, the front door buzzer sounded. It sounded like a choir of wasps. We decided not to answer it, but it rang again

Jan got up and pushed the intercom button. "Who is it?"

A muffled voice, "Uh, it's Lee."

Jan started laughing. We quickly put on some clothes and went down the stairs to open the door.

He stood there, slumping slightly from the shoulders.

"Angel and I just broke up," he said dryly. "Would you mind if I crashed with you guys for the night?" His eyes were brooding.

"Uh, no, not at all! Come on in," Jan said. Our morning was his dinner time. I was trying to orient myself to the fact that an entire daylight cycle had gone by.

His gray eyes looked steely sad. "Here, sit on the couch and relax," I said. I began to guide him by the shoulder.

Jan looked rosy-cheeked, sun-kissed, radiant. Lee saw us standing next to each other and put the puzzle together.

"I think I may have come at a bad time."

“No, this has been very a good time,” Jan smiled. “Why don’t you put on a record while we get ourselves together. We won’t be long, we were just in the middle of a conversation.”

“Take your time, talking.” He put on an eleven-minute song, Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands, and Dylan’s voice filled the room. He had an amazing way of sounding lawless, angst-ridden and romantic at the same time.

Back in bed, with the door locked, Jan’s face sank into my neck. Her hair felt as soft as yellow rose petals. I was transported back into our little bubble world. She quickly pulled my jeans off, then hers, and laid herself over me.

I was starting to fall in love with a girl who didn’t seem to mind that I also loved another girl, and that I might not ever stop loving her. *And even shouldn't!* She was seamlessly flowing into my life, instead of trying to invalidate it, or diminish what it was.

We emerged and invited Lee into the kitchen where the three of us proceeded to consume a large portion of Jan’s food supply.

Lee vacuumed up everything even remotely edible. His long stringy black hair hid his face when he bent over to put food in his mouth. His face was unshaven, making his goatee a little longer than it should have been. I noticed wrinkles under his eyes. As he spoke, his stories were rambly and

funny. But he also seemed to be far more intellectual than his zig-zaggy stories conveyed. I almost wondered if he was half-faking the "typical Brooklyn kid" thing.

"Want to smoke some hash?" he asked just microseconds after swallowing the last of his sandwich. Before we could answer he was pulling out a crinkled plastic baggie from in his pocket in which sat a very small milk chocolate-looking pebble. He laid it on the table. Then his eyes got big as he pointed to something hanging on the wall in the living room with his other hand.

"Oh man, a gas mask!" he howled. My eyes focused on an odd, ugly gargoyle hanging in the corner.

"I *love* those things," he smiled.

"A roommate I had for a few months left it here," Jan said.

"Was it used for protests in case the cops used tear gas?" I asked.

"Maybe. But she didn't seem the type to go to protests..."

Lee interrupted, "I *know* what it's for. Bring it over here." He put his feet up on the table and waited for me to get it down from the wall.

"Oh, yeah, and bring me some aluminum foil," he barked euphorically. Jan obediently got the some from a bottom drawer in the kitchen.

Lee molded the foil around the mouth hose of the mask and attached a pipe to it.

“Here, put it on,” he said to me.

I pulled it over my head. My breathing sounded echoey. I looked out of the blurry plastic eyes as Lee put some hash in the pipe and lit the match.

“Breathe in, boy.”

I breathed in through my mouth. It felt like I had breathed in airlessness. There was no feeling of air entering my lungs.

“Again!” he called.

I took a deep breath waiting for some oxygen but instead a little smoke entered the chamber.

“*Again!*”

With the next breath it felt like my whole body filled with smoke. Smoke covered the eye holes. I gasped for a new breath but got more smoke. I ripped the mask off. My face was hot and red and I was coughing.

They were laughing. “My turn,” Jan said. They each took a turn suffocating in smoke until we were all quite numb.

Lee started wandering around the house while Jan and I stole a kiss. He found Jan’s ex-roommate’s wetsuit and flippers hanging in the hall closet. He whispered something to Jan. They took my jeans off and put the wetsuit on me,

then the flippers, then the gas mask, and walked me over to the hallway mirror. I looked like a cross between a scuba diver and an anteater, an unbelievable creature, ready to step onto the set of a very bad sci-fi movie.

“Let’s take the little monster for a walk,” Jan said.

We were very stoned, rambling down the streets of San Francisco at 9 P.M. My feet flopped on the sidewalk. I could hear my breathing as I walked. The eyeholes were still slightly fogged with smoke. People stared. Some smiled. One lady broke into a trot, her purse waving behind her like a retreating enemy flag.

At last we came to Jan’s destination: a park with swings that overlooked the skyline. I took off the mask to get a better look. The skyscrapers pulsed silently in the mist.

We each sat on a swing and began to rock. I pushed mine to the limit, looking directly across a valley to the city lights, feeling as if at my highest point I was flying off the edge of the cliff. Afterwards we lay down in the cool night grass. I put the gas mask back on. They turned to me and began to laugh.

“Hello in there, little monster,” Jan mewed.

“He reminds me of someone,” Lee said in a reflective tone. “Ah... Nixon.”

“It’s the nose,” Jan said, pulling gently at the hose of the mask.

Suddenly I realized how hard it was for me to breathe. My mind began to create suffocation scenes. I saw the newspaper headlines: "Stoned Hippie Suffocates in Gas Mask." I ripped the mask off, hungrily gulping in the fresh night air.

A policeman walked by. He looked at my wetsuit and flippers and slowed to a stop. But Jan smiled her straightest California hometown smile until he just shook his head and walked away.

Lee sat back, his arms and hands forming a pillow for his head. He stared up at the stars. "You guys are great. You remind me of me and Marilyn when we were in love. Not Angel. This was before Angel, after Sarah."

He stopped, lost in reverie, then shook his head, "Marilyn... was 'the one.' But after three years, the one became a zero," he laughed. "And then it became a negative number, at least for her. She started to get depressed and restless. She told me she was going out of her mind trying to find out who she was, and what we were supposed to be together."

He looked at us and said, "So here's a history lesson for you guys: One night I just said to her, 'Look, life can be easy. You just do what you need to do to survive, pick up your work check at the end of the week, and watch the money say goodbye too quickly. But just find a way to keep laughing at

the whole mess. And I'll do the same. And some nights we'll be crazy with joy, and some nights we'll feel crazy because there's nothing, or tragedy, but we'll just deal with it. And the anger too, when we disagree, we'll just deal with it. We'll hang out with friends, maybe have some kids someday... *won't that be enough?* I mean, welcome to love, welcome to life. Call your mom once in a while. It doesn't need to be any more fucking complicated or meaningful than that.'

"A few days later she left, and I never saw her again. She left me a very neatly written note — '...not your fault, you're wonderful, it's me.' Blah, blah, blah. I don't even know where the hell she is right now. Someone said she went to India. Though I don't know if she could have handled some guru telling her the same things I did in an Indian accent. I mean, where do you go from just staying present and living your life? Believing in ghosts, or gods? Searching in outer space, looking for a race of alien saviors?"

"What about Angel?" Jan asked.

"Ah, yes, Miss Self-Declared Angel, Miss Infinite House Guest. She was a friend of a friend of mine in New York. She came to crash for a few nights at my place. I liked her, so she moved in, took over the place, put a bunch of crap on the wall, and eventually kicked me out."

"God, no!" Jan laughed.

"Yeah, angel was too secular of a word. She was definitely an earthling. Princess of Infinite Pain, perhaps. But you guys are perfect. Perfect for each other, I can see that."

I still had the feeling there was more to Lee than all of his trippy stories. Plus, he seemed *way* older than us. At least twenty-three.

"Did you go to college. Lee?"

"Oh, Jeez, college, yeah. I was a history major at Columbia. Graduated. Probably ruined my life."

"What? Why?"

"Well, as you may not know, history majors don't make money because there is no job called history. But history majors don't make very good hippies either, because after studying history it's hard to believe that human beings can change into something good and innocent and trustworthy when they never have before. The only thing you seem to do with all the information they wallpaper into your brain is, surrender to reality. You hear everyone talking about non-violence. Well, hey, guess the-fuck what? The concepts of non-violence and universal love are centuries old, way before Gandhi and Martin. And they'll remain mostly concepts, because no group of people can pull it off for long. It's not in our nature."

I looked over the edge of the hill we were on and watched the downtown buildings, luminous, a thousand

soft yellow windows glowing. To the east was the Bay Bridge, rows of white lights, still and steady, hovering above the scattered car lights moving below – red brake lights, headlights, all moving silently like the flowing of blood through veins and arteries. I began to wonder what Lee thought about Harris Duran? Did he care? Or did he really think war and racism and killing each other were just the way things are, and always will be?

I spent most of my six months at college reading about so many different philosophies and opinions – and long before that, Sherry and I were making up a philosophy of our own. It was called "The Three Line Philosophy," where the best and worst, or smartest and dumbest of people end up doing the same thing but for different reasons, with a "normal" person being the only one to go the opposite way.

For example, if a teacher writes on the blackboard "It were a house," and asks if that's correct English, a dumb kid might say, "Sure, I guess." The "average" student would say, "No, it should be 'It was a house.'" But someone on a higher level might agree with the dumb one, and say, "It's correct, because I understand what's being communicated and that outweighs the game of rules."

So now even though Lee was seemingly cynical about hippies and pacifism, I knew he might, for just that reason,

feel more deeply about it than most people. A level above the norm.

I was thinking about asking him something to test out my theory when Jan just asked him straight out, "Well Lee, could you kill someone in a war?"

He looked at us cautiously, "Yeah, I could do it. If the opponent was evil enough. I could see myself forced into becoming just another pawn in the game. Like Einstein! I mean, here is this brilliant, compassionate, life-long pacifist who helps make the atomic bomb. But he had his *reasons*, you know? His logic was that if he didn't help create it Hitler would. And sometimes the lower ideal is important enough to sacrifice the higher one."

We stared at him silently. I thought to myself -- the three-line philosophy even applied to Einstein.

But Jan was shocked at his answer and her face showed it.

He noticed. "Look, Jan, don't tell anyone, but there are *assholes* out there!" his voice was screaming and laughing at the same time. "It can be a struggle just stay out of the way. And it's been that way since the beginning. Samaria, Rome, Germany, Vietnam, it's all one recurring nightmare. Those who've tried to change the violent nature of humans have never succeeded."

Jan interrupted. "Well, I think our nature *is* changing now. I think human consciousness all over the world is slowly, but permanently..."

"Nah, that's not gonna happen," Lee said shaking his long hair.

"Poor old man," Jan laughed sympathetically. "The game is rigged. Nothing left to learn."

"It's not that I want anyone to stop *trying*."

"Lee, if we all keep trying, we can change things," Jan said forcefully. "The way I see it, we're all becoming a little more aware with each passing generation. A little more respectful of life. War is no longer considered a *glorious* thing like it was centuries ago. What I think is that people all over the world are developing a conscience."

Their eyes met – Jan's sky blue. Lee's battleship gray. "We have to work at it, Lee. Of course. Maybe it's not in our nature to be kind, or forgive. But we can't let life destroy us. We have to learn to *be* who we want to become. We have to live the way we want things to be."

"That's just a dream, Jan. A fantasy to think..."

"No, it's *the dream*! And it's up to each of us to make it real."

Lee shook his head.

Jan smiled at us. Her smile was disarming. She smiled for no reason sometimes.

And because of the sheer illogic of her kindness, all Lee could manage was a nervous laugh.

I walked between the two of them as we headed back to California Street. I looked up now and again at the splash of stars. I knew what Jan meant; I understood the dream she was talking about. On the other hand, I knew what Lee was saying was also true. To deeply and permanently change things... change what exactly? Could love and kindness ever fully eradicate jealousy and greed and anger? Even inside *me* now -- would I be able to accept Jan loving someone else and still be able to love her, like she encouraged me to keep loving Sherry? What if she and Lee fell in love? *The truth* was very tricky when it came down to individual circumstances.

And how could Sherry not feel awful when she hears about Jan? I would have to tell her. I was beginning to fully absorb what had happened over the last few days. My perceptions were shifting back to the insanity of normalcy.

On the other hand, maybe the dream Jan was talking about wasn't just an innocent prayer. Maybe it was the *only* way to save ourselves in the end. Maybe that was the truth we couldn't admit to. War was never going to save us. Jealousy was never going to save us. So then, what would?

I looked up at the stars one last time before we entered the apartment. They were scattered like pulverized white

letters on a sacred parchment; their cryptic messages forever  
wasted on novice stargazers.

## Twelve

Lee and I became permanent boarders at Jan's apartment. Lee promised to help pay the rent. I promised to try to find gigs. If King Richard was ready to hire me why wouldn't other club owners around town? But as it turned out, we found work all three of us could do.

On a typical morning the three of us rose early and prepared ourselves for a few hours of selling *The Berkeley Barb*. It was the underground paper everyone read. Even the businessmen in the financial district would part with their quarters out of curiosity.

Then in the afternoon, we would head uptown to Noah's Car Wash where we found employment with the help of Calvin, who was their manager-accountant-hose sprayer-mechanic and public relations guy.

Another kid who worked there was from Montgomery, Alabama. His name was Charley Grimes, a ragged-haired hippie with a long southern drawl. I thought Californians were slow, having come so recently from New York. But being around Charley was like being in a time warp. Slow squared. He thought Californians were all just "rushin' round like chickens with their heads cut off." A quaint

agrarian expression that made me a little sick when I actually thought about it.

He wore a bandanna to work to prevent his long hair from getting tangled in peoples' windshield wipers. He was tall, with long thin hairy legs and big wide feet, and always wore his oval John Lennon glasses because he was nearly blind without them.

Charley was also the catalyst for making Noah's the most famous car wash in the city. "Jus' sittin' round wipin' up raindrops can put you clean to sleep," he drawled. "If we're gonna do this shit, let's have some fun."

Putting Charley's plan into action was a gas, as they say in car wash parlance. At noon, all the businessmen would line their cars up around the block, eating their lunches behind the wheel waiting their turn. After each car went through the automatic cycle Charley would begin drying off the outside.

I'd jump in the front seat to wipe off the dust and empty the ashtrays. The customer stood on the sidelines glancing at his watch or staring out at traffic.

But then Jan would run up to him in her cutoff jeans shorts and sleeveless t-shirt and give him a big smile and a hug. She'd hand him a flower, then lead him gently into his car.

Meanwhile, Lee was under the hood, eyeing things over real quick, “Hey, don’t forget to get some oil next fill up.”

Charley would start dusting off the guy’s suit, maybe straighten his tie. The guy would be standing there dumbfounded, holding his flower.

We’d give him the peace sign as he would start his engine, or just salute him goodbye, and he’d wave back, dazed.

Noah’s was the “in” car wash for as long as we could stand working there.

We found more work through Charley, because of his interest in natural foods. One day he drawled out this long rap about pesticides and chemicals and food additives. Some of the statistics were being hidden, he said. Official facts were being twisted. And the profits were going to people who didn’t give a shit about anything as long as they were all millionaires. He felt the eating of meat wasn’t so bad, it was the grotesque method of slaughtering the animals that was immoral. Those people would all be going to hell.

We could hardly swallow our roast beef sandwiches listening to him preach about this stuff.

One night he invited us to his apartment for dinner. It was the first time I had ever tasted a raw string bean, or tofu, or cashew sauce.

As it turned out, Charley was one of those people who had a vast amount of knowledge about almost everything, from law to carpentry to agriculture. He'd been a model student and was an insatiable reader. But he was also a fierce activist. He left his parents and a high paying job in the family business to help blacks in Alabama register to vote and defeat George Wallace, who was an unapologetic racist. After Wallace won and became Governor, Charley migrated to San Francisco.

After another night of dining "au natural" we agreed to help Charley with his dream – starting a non-profit natural food co-op.

Every weekend we hitched to Berkeley and would go door-to-door selling memberships to "The Alternative Natural Foods Co-op." Jan drew a logo and had it printed on green cards. Each card had a number. Members were entitled to buy their food at cost. Non-members would also be able to shop at the store, but they would have to pay twenty percent more, which would still make our food cheaper than any store, natural or not, in the Bay Area.

We rented a store front on College Avenue with the membership money we collected. Some of the produce had to be bought on credit directly from organic farmers in Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino.

While it was fun helping Charley fulfill his dream, I was more focused on the gigs I was starting to get around town. The clubs that auditioned me and hired me weren't anywhere near as big as King Richard's, but they were alive and thriving. I played to audiences of thirty, or fifty people. The club owners usually invited me back a week or two later and paid me with food.

The week before The Alternative was set to open its doors Charley, Jan and Lee were buzzing with energy, fixing the store to meet city codes, installing produce cases, and plastering walls and ceilings. I was not handy with tools. So I usually played guitar for them while they tore things apart and put things together.

We had barely gotten to the store that morning when a guy with shoulder-length blonde hair carrying a thick black notebook walked up to us and asked us what we were doing.

"We're fixing up a store to sell natural foods, non-profit," Jan said proudly.

"Well I'm a carpenter by trade, and I'd be glad to help," he said.

"Great," Charley crooned. "We could use any help 'tal."

The guy began to wander around the store.

"Hey, what's your name?" Lee asked.

"Jesus."

“Uh-oh,” Lee mumbled, watching him toy with a paint brush.

“Oh man,” Charley moaned to the sky. Then he turned to the guy and said, “Welcome to Berkeley, Jesus, I hope you had a pleasant pilgrimage from Bethlehem.”

Jesus turned to me, “I’ve escaped from the institute on Durant Street because they were trying to kill me.”

This knocked me right off the chair I was standing on. Lee stopped working, but Charley went back to mixing plaster. Nothing was going to stand in his way.

Jan came out from the back room, “Why do you think they’re trying to kill you?” she asked. Her tone was soft and kind and he was super-sensitive to it.

His eyes started getting watery and his lower lip quivered, “I don’t know.”

“Well, we sure need some help,” Jan said flashing her typical boyish grin. “What can you do?”

“Anything,” he said.

“Can you help connect our bathroom plumbing?” Jan asked.

“Sure.”

“Okay.” She wiped a dirt smudge from her forehead and led him over to the bathroom. “It’s supposed to be hooked up right around this corner over here somehow, and then this pipe will have to be connected here... somehow.”

Lee held out little hope that Jesus was the solution. Ye of little faith. But he realized this was a good way to get Jesus out of our hair temporarily.

Everyone focused for a while on their separate chores. No response came from around the corner, just an occasional clanking of tools against metal. Lee and I looked at each other from time to time and shrugged. After a while we noticed the clanking stopped.

"Hey, uh, Jesus," Lee yelled.

There was no reply.

We walked back to the bathroom and there he was sitting cross-legged with a few tools around him, writing feverishly in his notebook.

"Jesus, how ya doing back here?" I asked.

"Great, I'm done."

"You're done?" Jan laughed.

"Yeah." He went back to writing in his notebook.

Lee went over to the sink and toilet and started playing with the levers. Everything worked.

"Jesus, that's incredible, man!"

He smiled, "My pleasure, my son. Blessing upon you."

I glanced down at his notebook. The writing was large and scrawly, written with a red pen.

"Time for a lunch break," Charley chimed in. He was beaming. Things were really coming together.

“Jesus, are you hungry?” asked Jan.

“No, thank you.”

“Well, we’ll bring you back something anyway. Okay?”

“Don’t tell them!” he gasped. He leaped up and began breathing in short rapid breaths, his hands pressing nervously against his chest.

“Who?”

“The guards, the Romans. They want to kill me – roamin’ Romans.”

“We won’t tell anyone,” Jan said sternly. “You deserve to live, Jesus.”

“Thank you,” he said softly. He watched us leave.

When we came back, he was gone.

## Thirteen

Jan's brief encounter with Jesus was a painful one. She told me she could have turned out like him.

"I know life can make a person crazy, Jackie. I guess I just found a way to escape. Jesus couldn't."

Jan—her actual name was Jeannette Lisa Morrow—was an only child, raised in Fairfield, a small town fifty miles north of San Francisco. Her parents met there a year before she was born.

They married because Jan's mom was pregnant. According to Jan, her mom was a real knock-out when she was young, with the look of a '30's movie starlet—curly blonde hair, long eye lashes.

Jan's father would take her on errands to the bank or the hardware store. And her mother dressed her in frilly clothes and called her "Angel eyes."

But then something happened. Time maybe. Life maybe. By the time Jan was six there were constant arguments in the house. The first times the arguments got bad she would feel tense and confused and would hide herself away each time the yelling started. But after a while Jan came up with a more creative solution.

She found an ability to go into a trance-like state where the grief and fear just passed through her "like wind." That's all it was, she said to herself, sound-wind, like a jagged edgy kind of music. Nothing more.

There were times when that didn't work. The words, the stories, would freeze inside of her. She would understand the sources of their anger, the crazy things they were screaming.

But she made up a game, where thinking about the words didn't count. Only her favorite memories counted. Memories of walking hand in hand with her father. He was whistling and talking about the types of flowers growing in the neighbors' yards. Her mom was baking a strawberry cream-cheese pie.

When the yelling stopped, she would stop the memories. She wouldn't allow herself those happy thoughts any other time. She wanted to save them for the special time, when she needed them most. She even learned to look forward to the arguments so she could crawl under her covers and close her eyes and remember how sweetly her life began.

Her favorite person was a neighbor named Maria. She was the wife of a military officer who was stationed at nearby Travis Air Force base. Jan loved Maria's soft voice and her special touch – a quick stroke of the cheek with her

fingertip. Or sometimes there would be a long hug where Maria would almost rock her.

For Jan's eighth birthday Maria gave her a plastic hairband glittering with rhinestones. Jan cherished it, and pretended she was "Princess of the Island." Sometimes she would even dance in front of the mirror and watch the rhinestones sparkle, like secret messages coming from the sun.

One night, after a particularly bad argument, Jan's mother came into her room. At first, she seemed sad and quiet. But then her eyebrows began to furrow while staring at Jan's hairband lying on top of the bed. In a fit of great frustration and anger she pointed out to Jan that there were two rhinestones missing. She held it right in front of Jan's eyes and pointed at the two empty holes where the ten-cent rhinestones had been.

"Didn't Maria give this to you as a present?" her mother screamed. "You break everything. You lose or ruin whatever people give you. How do you think Maria will feel?" Then her mom started crying.

Jan was made to crawl around on her hands and knees to find the two rhinestones. She combed her fingers through the shag rug, crawled all the way under her bed, looked in the darkest corners of her closet, crying the entire time. She

never felt more guilty, or hateful, in her whole life. Never, before or since. The rhinestones were never found.

But instead of falling into a state of depression, or feeling anger, or fear, Jan went deeper into her fantasy world.

Most summer nights she was put to bed before the sun went down while her parents would sit silently in front of the television in the den. She could hear the older children in the neighborhood playing tag out her window.

She could smell the trees turning sweeter as the sun set. Jan would take out her special notepad and draw. As the room darkened, she would force her eyes to adjust to the blackness.

For a time, she drew pictures of the sea and big ships and fish. But they frightened her for some reason. After that she sketched forests and mountains. They made her feel warm and graceful.

But drawings of the sky became her favorite. They gave her a free and open feeling even as she drew them. She filled in clouds and planets. One time she imagined the stars were the rhinestones she had lost. They shined down upon the world to protect her. They thanked her for the freeness they felt up there. They had escaped being down here.

When she was fifteen, Glen came into her life. At first, she liked his strength and felt protected by him. The fact that her parents distrusted him made no difference to her. She had long ago pushed them to the outer boundaries of her life.

But after a while, the very strength she was attracted to became the thing she disliked in him the most.

When he was eighteen, Glen joined the Army and proposed to her on the same day. But she was far from ready to lead that kind of life. She was sure there were other kinds of people in the world, people more like her.

She moved to California Street in San Francisco, and fit right in with the hippies, the colorful ragged clothes, the poets with dreams of communes, and a new vision of the world. Here was the result of having stayed true to her fantasies, she thought. Thousands of other souls had made the same decision. A few of them were a step beyond poets, or eccentrics. They were a little crazy, a little strange. Like Jesus. But Jan felt a special empathy for the lost souls. She too had been at a powerful psychological crossroads. The difference was, she escaped relatively unharmed. She was safe here, with people that respected love and joy and kindness.

Except for the sketch of the old woman on her bedroom wall, I never saw any of her other drawings. She said she

had thrown them all away before she left home. The old woman was supposed to have expressed a particular wisdom. But, according to Jan, she just ended up looking like "a tired old hag." Still, she liked it enough to keep it, and even hang it up in her room.

Despite my prodding and encouragement she wouldn't draw anything new. She'd laugh, "I'd just end up drawing more hags." She would blush when she said this.

Soon we would find ourselves thousands of miles away from Fairfield, and California Street. And Jesus would have suffered through a hundred more crucifixions in a world that had never been fair.

## Fourteen

One Saturday in late May, Jan showed Lee and I her favorite observation spot near Seal Rock. We climbed underneath the highway bridge then sat huddled together, watching the mist roll in and listening to seals bark.

Early that evening, upon entering the apartment we heard the phone ringing. Jan ran to answer it.

After a few words she held out the receiver. "It's your dad!"

I walked over slowly, expecting the worst. I had given them this number to call only for emergencies. "Hello?"

"How are you, Jackie?"

"I'm doing well, dad."

"Listen, your mother's not well. She's on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She's really worried about you, boy. And so am I. We want to fly you home for a few days so we can talk."

The last thing I wanted to do was leave. But after talking it over with Jan I agreed to go home for a quick visit. I thought about seeing Sherry and my stomach leaped with joy and despair.

Jan and I were sitting on her bed the night before I left. I'd been playing my guitar, but then I leaned all the way

over her to lay it on the floor. I leaned over her a little too long until she pulled the book she was reading away from her eyes and started laughing.

"What?"

"Jan, tell me the truth, don't you feel just a little... something... anything... about me seeing Sherry?"

"Something? Anything?"

"I don't know, just a little jealous maybe?"

"No! You know that I don't believe in that. It's silly." She began to raise her book back toward eye level, but I intercepted it.

"Well, I mean, jealousy is theoretically silly, and it's great not to believe in it, theoretically, but sometimes it just happens. Don't you think?"

"No."

"You mean you've *never* been jealous?"

She was quiet.

Then she said, "Look, Jackie, from everything you've told me, Sherry's a great person. You both love each other. If I make myself feel bad over that, then what the fuck am I doing believing in love at all?"

"So it's kind of like sound-wind? You don't care about jealousy because you choose not to? You refuse to acknowledge its existence"

She shrugged and lifted the book again.

I stopped there.

The next day I hitched a ride to the airport.

\* \* \*

The plane ride was long and bumpy. Finally, we swooped over New York City. From the sky it looked like a massive soup of brown brick buildings, tall steel obelisks, and caramel-colored smog. We circled Manhattan three times awaiting clearance, arriving at Kennedy an hour late.

My mom and dad were waiting for me. My dad smiled wistfully. My mom looked in horror at my embroidered green corduroy pants, my army jacket, and a growth of beard.

“How are you feeling, Mom?”

She hugged me and started crying. My dad took the ratty knapsack I'd borrowed from Lee and we walked to the car.

It was a silent ride home. We drove through the toll booth on the Belt Parkway with its gray plodding traffic, to Southern State Parkway, with its green plodding traffic, to Wantagh Parkway. By that time, I was sleeping in the back seat.

We arrived just before dinner. Westbury was its typically flat suburban self. We made the turn onto Eastfield Road, to the small white house with the perfectly hedged yard.

A Republican in a tennis shirt, including a green alligator on the pocket, was out walking his miniature poodle. Larry Katz. Hello Larry Katz. And hello, too, to his charming wife, Gloria, who for my entire childhood was seen dressed only in a quilted bathrobe and hair curlers, preparing for her night out with infinity.

After dinner we settled into the “red room.” This was our T.V. room—a 10x10 cubicle with a hard couch, a T.V. that swiveled, and a black card table for snacks and jigsaw puzzles. It was called the red room because the rug was red and the walls were pink—this was my mom’s visual concept of wild fun.

“So,” Mom sighed with an ever-saddening gaze.

“I’m really happy guys,” I said finally. “I’m living with an incredible person named Jan, and our friend Lee. We work. We make money. So you don’t have to worry about that.”

“What do you do for work?” my father asked politely.

“We started a non-profit natural foods co-op.”

“Non-profit on purpose?”

“It’s a *co-op*, Dad.”

"But how do you make money if it's non-profit?"

My mom bit her lip, "Do you all live together?"

"Well, yeah. I mean..."

"Do you do drugs? *Together?*"

Things only got worse from there.

The night ended with my dad and I watching a Yankee game without speaking to each other. During the game my dad had a few beers. I ate all of his pretzels.

The Yanks won 5-2.

## Fifteen

Sherry was waiting outside as I pulled into the driveway the following morning. She made a funny face through the front windshield as I nervously wrestled the keys from the ignition.

I'd forgotten how amazing her eyes were – the color of wet emerald. "Welcome hipster!" She hugged me tightly. We went inside. There were four or five people wandering around, most of whom I'd never seen before. Izzy and Bess kept an "open house," literally. Their door was never locked. They would come home many a night to find a few friends drinking their beer and watching T.V. in their living room.

We snuck upstairs. She locked the door, then turned on some music to scramble our conversation from the outside world.

"So tell me everything," she said breathlessly. I started to tell her about California and its enormous beauty, about my friendships with Jan and Lee, the co-op, and back to Jan again.

"Goodbye, dear!" Bess yelled. There was a loud knocking. Sherry let her parents in. They were on their way to a party at the other end of Long Island. Bess hugged me tightly. "How ahr ya, sweetheart?"

Izzy tousled my hair with his strong hands. "Got a California accent yet?"

"We probably won't be back 'til tomorrow afternoon," Bess said quickly. "John and Dorey offered their guest room. Cindy will be at Stacey's. Freddie's out for the night with Zack. Sodas and food are in the fridge."

Bess turned to me, "Will you be around this weekend?"

I nodded, but in fact I didn't know what was going to happen.

"Good, we'll talk." She blew us a kiss goodbye.

They went down to join their friends and the house quickly emptied.

Sherry went downstairs and locked the front door of the house after they left. I tried to continue my story, but she cut my conversation short, pulling me close to her and kissing me.

She put her hand around the back of my neck and gave me a long kiss. I tried to find the words, hoping to make the truth obvious and gradual. But it only served to confuse things.

"Jan and Lee sound great," she said, trying to be cheery.

Finally I said, "Sherry, do you think Jan and I...?"

She put her hand over my mouth and nodded her head yes slowly, fixing her soft watery eyes upon me.

"It's different than you think," I said.

"How?" she whispered.

"She would love you. And I still love you. And she knows that."

A tear rolled down her face, but she made no sound. Then she wiped her eyes with a quick swipe. "We each made our choices. I know that. You can only control fate for so long until the undertow pulls you away."

I reached out to put my hand in hers. Surprisingly, she reached back. Then she leaned forward. Feeling her body close to mine, feeling her trembling ever so slightly, had a powerful effect on me. I wanted to tell her what I knew was true - that she felt like a part of me. No one would ever replace who she was to me.

We kissed and melted into each other as we had so many times before, except now I felt a small but terrible distance. A heart split in two.

We fell into a dark sleep.

\* \* \*

We both awoke at midnight. Our evening nap had softened the atmosphere slightly. I felt more reconnected with hers, transported back in time, to our time. Sherry declared there was only one thing we could possibly do

now. I expected the worst. But she began to fling all of her Beatles albums out from under her bed, and we started listening from the beginning.

We had watched each of The Beatles grow up year by year, album by album. The long hair, the wild colored clothes, those were just the images. The music spoke an entirely new language to the world. It was a language of pure joy, of innocence with a knowing wink. They became more serious when the world around them did. We watched them experiment with meditation, usher in the psychedelic age, glorify non-violence in an age of war. The joy in their music somehow remained, even as the war deepened. They became spiritual teachers for all of us.

We turned the stereo up loud, loud enough for the music to absorb us, and we sang the words together. We felt their humor and fearlessness wash over us. We held each other tightly while listening to the odd futuristic arrangement of "Tomorrow Never Knows." We were trying, in some way, to have its sound and message glue our souls back together. We tried to purge our shallow needs, our crazy thoughts. We wanted to become one with the rhythm of everything and find peace there.

By 5 A.M. we were sound asleep again, our arms wrapped tightly around each other, letting the power and

love of “Magical Mystery Tour” wash over us, like the mind-altering drug it was.

\* \* \*

I spent the following afternoon, a Sunday, with my parents. I wanted to see Sherry one last time that night, but she said she was exhausted. I made peace with my parents as best as I could. The upside was they were fairly certain I didn't need to be in a mental institution. Not now. Not yet.

Monday morning Sherry was back in school. I took a taxi to the airport for a noon flight.

As the plane took off my thoughts were tangled. Sherry said her jealousy was a natural first reaction, a reflex. It would pass.

Jealousy *was* natural, that was terribly obvious to me. I took a deep breath and tried to swim back to some other reality, the peaceful place she'd taken me to.

## Sixteen

As I walked through the terminal at SFO and into the bright sun my thoughts were held at bay. California had magic air -- greens and blues were interlaced in the atmosphere somehow. Everything was soft and vibrant.

I walked quickly to the freeway. It took me half an hour to get a ride, and two more rides after that to get within six blocks of our apartment.

I could feel Jan's presence strongly. It was amazing that my feelings for her were not diminished by my feelings for Sherry. I was living in two separate worlds, both real, both beautiful, both teetering within the realm of non-continuum, where pretty much anything could happen.

A recurring inner torment arose in me again. What if Lee and Jan had gotten together while I was gone? I went through a few horrible scenarios in my head -- or were they supposed to be "beautiful" scenarios too?

I felt so unnerved, and so *angry* at myself for having all these hypocritical nightmare thoughts -- why did I have to think thoughts that were encoded with deprivation, selfishness, clinging? Hadn't I just experienced a heart opening, sensual, almost mystical time with Sherry without feeling like it negated what I felt for Jan? If Jan loved me

too, really loved me, then our love would grow no matter what she felt for someone else... right?

*Theoretically.*

For some reason a sickening jolt in my stomach forced me to start running, running away from my unshakable thoughts mostly, while running towards her apartment. My ratty knapsack kept tilting slightly as I turned corners.

Three blocks further on I was panting, dully aware of a stitch of pain in my ribcage. I caught sight of Diana's Market, darted to the intersection, and rounded the block onto California Street – running head-on into a policeman.

My knapsack fell to the ground.

"Hey, what the hell are you doing?" He was clearly angry about being knocked into the side of a wall by a hippie.

"Sorry," I panted. I reached for my knapsack.

"What's in there?"

"I just came back from New York." I began to panic.

There was a joint in one of my shirt pockets, a parting gift from Sherry.

"Open the backpack."

I unlatched the belts and buckles and pulled it open. People walking by began to stare.

Socks. Underwear. Blue jeans. Red corduroy shirt with a middle button missing and a joint in the pocket. He lifted

the clothes and looked below them. Toothbrush. Pencil. Magic notebook.

After another small delay – he checked my driver’s license to verify I had I.D. - I escaped and reached the apartment.

It struck me that Jan and Lee might not be home. I had left my return time open and the two times I tried to call no one answered the phone. I fumbled for my key and opened the door. Lee was reading on the couch.

“Ta-da,” I sang.

“Oh fuck,” he moaned, staring at me as if I were a ghost.

“What? What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, man.”

“Where’s Jan?”

“Out.”

“Out where?”

“Listen,” he stood up and pulled me into the living room, his voice lowering. “Glen got a three-day pass and just showed up out of nowhere. I don’t even know how he found her.”

Suddenly I heard voices coming from Jan’s room.

“Shit,” Lee hissed. I stared at his face, blocking out all other images. His eyes were glazed. He seemed to feel all the

pain I was feeling. Or maybe, as I had imagined, he loved Jan too and was in the direct line of fire with me.

Misery pulled its trigger: the door opened and Glen came out, his short red hair exposing his strong neck. He was about six foot two. He crowed a hello at me as he went into the bathroom. Jan stayed in her room. He reappeared a minute later and went back into her room. Fifteen minutes later he walked out the door, duffle bag in hand.

Jan didn't come out. She must have known I was here. I sat by Lee silently. He picked up the book he'd been reading. There was nothing to say, really.

My bones felt heavy, frozen. I slid off the couch to sit cross-legged on the floor. I rested my head on Jan's beat-up coffee table and started tapping my fingers.

Lee laid his book down. "What are you doing?"

"What?" My voice was muffled, hidden in the crook of my elbow.

"With your fingers, man. You're interrupting my reading."

"Oh, it's just a thirds exercise a piano player taught me a long time ago, in case I ever have a piano someday."

"Well that makes a fuck of a lot of sense. You want to fill your cheeks with air too, in case you get a tuba?"

"It's a nervous habit."

"Well at least play something I like." He touched my torso with his foot in a friendly way, in a show of empathy and compassion, then went back to his book.

Finally, I went to Jan's bedroom door and knocked. When I opened the door the room was dark, the curtain was closed.

"I'm home," I said with unexpected softness.

I walked closer to her bed. She was sitting against the wall facing me with her legs folded under her. "How was your trip?" she asked.

"Okay."

"Is your mom feeling better?"

"Yes."

"How was Sherry?"

"Fine."

"I didn't know he was coming, Jackie" she said suddenly. "He got my address from my parents and just showed up."

"So how was your visit?" I asked.

"Okay, I guess."

She shook her head. "There was so much I had to get straight with him. He was a big part of my life. But things are clearer, better now. And we also know we'll probably never see each other again."

She motioned for me to sit down and said, "So tell me about New York."

"Not yet. Please, first tell me more."

"Well, I told him it pissed me off that he joined the military. I told him I was against the war, and all violence. I thought he'd laugh at me. But he didn't. He said the Army sucked and he thought they were getting ready to send him to Vietnam. He has no choice, no freedom while fighting for freedom. He saw the irony in that. He thought about going A.W.O.L. but he knows they'd find him and lock him up and he'd be seen as a traitor.

"I told him about you and he didn't get too upset. I think he realized our time was over. Last night we smoked some hash and he started to cry. I felt bad for him." Jan paused a moment. "Then we talked a little more. Then he left."

I didn't ask whether or not they slept together. I tried to shake off the deadly feelings inside me, just let them pass like sound-wind, but they remained unyielding. Things were getting too complicated, internally more than externally.

After a long silence I said, "You know, my great-grandma, she lived to one hundred years old. Sherry and I used to sit with her when everyone else thought she'd

become senile. Her short-term memory was not so good, but her thoughts about everything else were still clear.

"One day Sherry asked her if there was any one thing she'd learned about relationships that she could pass on to us. She said, 'Well, there's two kinds of truth. The truth of the world, and the truth between lovers. The truth of the world is merely avoiding outright lies. But the truth between lovers is to tell each other everything, everything, so that there are no surprises. So you really know each other. Then, if feelings change, or circumstances change, you still stand a pretty good chance of having a best friend for the rest of your life.'

"When I told Sherry the truth about you and me, it hurt her, but if I hadn't told her, she and I would have been reduced to the level of that one single lie. Because everything I would have done or said while holding on to the lie would have been fake. And I would have become a coward. And I hate cowards more than anything."

I said all this as a prelude to admitting my jealousy for Jan, and I wanted her to tell me honestly if she felt any jealousy about me and Sherry, for real!

But Jan thought I'd told the story for a far different reason: "Yes, okay, we slept together, Jackie," she blurted out. "He touched me and kissed me, and I tried kissing him back. But it didn't feel right. It wasn't 'love,' but I wanted to

turn it back into love. But I couldn't. Then I let him do it. I just couldn't let him down." Her face turned pink, her mouth trembled for a moment.

"Well, of course, I slept with Sherry too. So you can sleep with whoever you want. But I don't know. It still feels terrible."

"Why? Do you think I would sleep with just *anyone* for any reason?" she asked. "That's not what I believe in. I hope that's not what you think."

"No, but I slept with Sherry because..."

"Because you really love her. And she knows you, and she loves you."

"But doesn't that make you feel angry, or sick to your stomach, or afraid I'd leave you for her?"

"I also might lose you because you'd be turned off by my fear of you leaving me! If I try to control it, then I'm out of control. Do you see?"

"I don't. Because thinking of Glen 'doing it' makes me sick. I don't know where you get the inner strength. I think you are either very courageous, or insanely naïve beyond belief, or you don't really care about me, or..."

"None of the above," she said quietly. "I've already told you everything I know about myself, and everything I believe for myself. You should know all the answers you're searching for too. Or find them."

\* \* \*

I awoke at dawn and gravitated into the living room. Lee had left an hour earlier. He had gone up north with Charley to make a co-op run.

Jan lit some candles and made some cinnamon tea. She poured us each a cup then sat down close to me.

"I'm still thinking about what your grandma said." She took a sip of tea and held the cup in both hands, using its heat to warm her. "I want to tell you what else I've been thinking, Jackie. But first I want to ask you a question. Tell the truth! If Sherry met someone and fell in love, would you be jealous?"

I thought about it. I imagined Sherry in love with someone else, naked in bed with him, kissing him passionately. But oddly, and to my great surprise, I felt strangely calm. I was happy for her. I wanted her to be happy.

"No," I replied, "It's different."

Jan nodded her head, "Your jealousy with me is something I think I understand. But I guess I'm a little afraid of it."

"Why?"

"Because I ask myself sometimes if you love the image of me, or if you really do love me. I would hope the answer is yes, you love me. But if our time together ends, would we still be friends for the rest of our lives, like you and Sherry will be? Or would your jealousy make you hate me? And then how could we ever say what we had was love?"

"Whatever you do, Jan, I could never hate you. But, I mean, these feelings are bound to come up again. I don't really control it. So now that you know that truth about me, why should you continue to love me? Why don't you just tell me to go away?"

She didn't answer me.

The silvery sky had awakened the birds. I could hear the morning traffic swooshing by sporadically on the street below.

Jan walked over to the stereo and turned it on. I presumed this was mood music so we could talk some more. I heard a record fall and the needle drop. I was ready for Joni Mitchell, or Dylan's Nashville Skyline. But no, what came on was totally unexpected, *riotous* – John Coltrane: A Love Supreme.

She began dancing to this crazy music by herself, and I watched her for a while.

Suddenly the music began to break through to me. I heard it on an entirely different level. I'd never understood

this kind of jazz before. It had merely screamed at me and jangled my nerves. But Jan became like a moving translation, everything was suddenly decoded.

She came over to me and held out her hand. She pulled me up from where I was sitting and swirled me around the living room.

And I felt, as my eyes closed and the room swirled, not madness or cacophony, but pure riotous energy. 'Trane's saxophone did *scream* – it screamed in altered scales, defiant and wild -- it was a tense kind of passion, born from tremendous pain, pain that had crawled out of a dark witch's spell and crashed down all the walls, until it found the fresh air - the uproarious streaming light.

Jan held me as the last cymbal roll peaked and faded, then she whispered to me, "Nothing else matters but this, Jackie. Deep inside, I know you know that too. And that's why I don't want you to go away."

**PART II**

## Seventeen

In 1969, as in all war years, lovers quarreled and made up, there were weddings, children were born. But at any moment, private dreams could be shattered. There were all those brave souls coming home from Vietnam, dead or alive. But there was also an internal war, a civil war, going on in every state in the country.

Berkeley was now our second home -- The Alternative Natural Food Co-op was a big part of our lives. We were a living, breathing part of a new experimental community. So we volunteered food, money and time to the founders of what came to be known as People's Park and helped it take shape.

It started when a group of kids, mostly students from U.C. Berkeley, got together and cleaned up a rat-infested abandoned lot off campus.

They came to us asking for donations. They envisioned building a park, installing a playground and benches. They wanted to plant flowers and grass. They wanted to set up a free food and clothing center for those in need. It was a grand scheme. It was a messy, painstaking project done purely out of a sense of community spirit. And, unbelievably, they pulled it off.

One girl that was heavily involved in the details called herself Misty. She was younger than we were, we thought she might even be a run-away. Her most noticeable trait was her boundless energy. After shoveling dirt and cleaning up garbage for hours she'd come into the store in her green army shorts and sleeveless shirt, jubilant and talkative.

Lee, in particular, was curious about her. After spending a good deal of time with her during off-hours he came to the conclusion that she either didn't know how to read and write, or she simply refused to. She came from Lee's "hometown," Brooklyn, so they had a lot in common, and even shared a lot of the same accent and expressions.

Misty talked fast and had an edge to her. She had long tangled red hair and countless freckles, and, I swear, two different-colored eyes: one green, one blue.

Five days after she arrived in California she had begun working for free at People's Park. Actually, they paid her in food. For her it was all just a kick. Until, that is, the university made a surprise announcement that the park had to go.

This drab little piece of land - now coming alive through volunteers - was attracting not just students and a handful of street people, but families living in the neighborhoods. It was on the verge of becoming a part of the Berkeley landscape, when suddenly the Board of Regents

decided to kick everyone out. No more working for free for the good of the neighborhood! Governor Ronald Reagan proudly told the press he wouldn't back down from the situation. He threatened to bring in the National Guard.

But volunteers kept showing up. They kept feeding the homeless. They had created a beautiful place where people could gather, and children could play.

One morning, just before dawn, the police arrived — equipped with flak jackets, tear gas launchers, shotguns and telescopic rifles. They kicked out a few street people who were sleeping in the park overnight. Within hours, an eight-foot steel fence was erected around the perimeter. The kids wanted a park. The Governor built a wall.

Misty came rushing into the store crying and told us the news. By noon 3,000 people -- Misty, Jan, Lee Charley, and me included -- gathered for a rally on the UC campus, and proceeded to march to the park in protest. A rock was thrown from a rooftop along the way, and without warning police opened fire into a group of spectators standing on an adjacent roof. Absurdity had turned to tragedy. Berkeley was now officially occupied by a militia.

A day after the protest, thousands of National Guardsmen were called in to maintain the peace. They appeared in full battledress, armed with rifles, bayonets and tear gas. If that wasn't weird enough, state cops in riot gear

roamed the streets. Inside the tiny park itself, now sealed off with barbed wire, were US Army tanks and a giant troop tent. And flying above it all was an American flag.

"The Alternative" became a fertile meeting ground, in all ways.

Not only were protesters showing up there to meet and eat, but Lee and Misty had begun having passionate interludes in the back of the store, amidst brown burlap bags of Chico San brown rice. It wasn't mere promiscuity that drove them. And it was more than just a political movement's desire to multiply. They were starting to spend all their time together.

Lee invited Misty back to our apartment a few times, and soon after that, with our unanimous approval, she moved in.

"I just want to tell you guys I don't have any money to help with rent or food, and I can't cook."

"Welcome to the club," I laughed.

A few days later, a national day of protest was declared. People's Park sympathizers from all over the country were going to counter-invade and liberate Berkeley.

The idea was to build a new park around the old park and have the largest picnic protest in history.

Our little family made its plans for a pleasant day,  
packed lunches, rolled some joints.

When we got there, we saw that someone had actually  
sodded the four streets around the park and erected potted  
trees and a couple of bandstands.

The music began. Jan got up and started dancing.

Misty went to talk to the organizers, and suddenly I  
was being invited to sing a song on the make-shift stage.  
Someone warned me the police might storm the stage at any  
minute and arrest whoever was singing. After hearing that, I  
decided to play my new song, called Castles:

*You're the power.  
It's amazing how you've grown.  
You could tie my hands,  
at your command  
expect me to fold.*

*We can stand up you say,  
stand against you lawfully.  
But when no one is watching  
the ones who dare it  
are brought to their knees.*

*Sitting in your castle tower*

*with the power of ten million men.  
So caught into your concerns  
you forget to remember  
the reason you were sent.*

*I've seen you in history before,  
thinking yours is the only way, just like the rest.  
Trying to play games  
to trap the changes  
that will come and come again.*

*. . . But the country that's gonna last  
is the one that lets everybody speak.  
And the country that's gonna last  
is the one that wants everybody free.  
Lack of compassion has in the past  
sunken castles like yours beneath the sea.*

My song ended with a power chord and the applause that followed was maybe the best reaction to a song I'd ever had. A swarm of people came up to me as I jumped off the stage and asked me where I was playing next. I gave them the names and dates of my next two gigs.

Meanwhile, right after my song ended, a girl sitting next to Jan took a flower that had fallen on the grass and

cautiously approached the barbed wire. She talked to a guardsman for a while and I saw him laughing sheepishly while he looked around to make sure his commander wasn't watching. Then she took the flower and stuck it in his bayonet. Cameras went off. Photos appeared all over the country the next day.

Within a few hours, flowers started adorning the fence from all four directions. Guardsmen were invited to join in the festival. They wanted to. I know they did. But they were trapped behind the wall they'd built.

## Eighteen

Misty was a hardcore Brooklyn kid before she came to California. She chewed gum, smoked cigarettes when she could bum one off a stranger, walked fast, talked fast, and cursed a lot. Brushing her hair was a waste of time. She would eat anything, and drink anything.

But Lee was changing her. She no longer lived in her leather motorcycle jacket. Now she wore a flower on her flannel shirt, actually Lee's flannel shirt. And she loved it when he slowly combed her long red hair.

Misty was growing up, she was learning how to read beyond comic book level, learning about history from Lee, and learning how to love.

But Misty's influence on Lee was even more visible. He was suddenly funny all the time, and a full-on activist. No longer would he ponder the world silently while stroking his beardless chin. He became insatiable in his appetite for the outdoors – walking with Misty. And the indoors – fucking Misty. Laughing, eating, driving like a wildman - everything was aglow.

He also told me a secret about his past. "After me and Marilyn decided to move in together, I found a little greetings letter waiting for me in the mailbox one day. It was

my draft card. After a restless night of mulling things over I decided I'd have to take the plunge, painful as it might be, and fulfill my obligations as a U.S. citizen and self-sacrificing patriot. So I dragged my ass down to Brooklyn City Hall and burned my it in front of a bunch of local reporters.

"I gave my little speech about Vietnam, told them I thought this little 'police action' had gotten out of hand, told the reporters that showed up I thought they were a bunch of vultures because the only way they'd even bother to come and hear a citizen's grievance was if the poor jerk promised them in advance he'd burn his draft card, or set himself on fire, or whatever. And then I high-tailed it out of there before the police showed up.

"The night before, Marilyn and I had stayed up right through morning talking about our options. And, I'm telling you, we were really tight for a while, 'cause she never even hesitated promising to run off to California with me. She thought it would be a lark. A barrel of fuckin' monkeys, to be the girlfriend of a draft-evader.

"We hitch-hiked to L.A. and lived there for almost two years. I had a job teaching history in an alternative school. Wow, thirteen-year-olds! They're a trip. I tried to play it straight, but they saw through my little sports jacket and snap-on tie. They loved me!

“Then I made a big mistake. I told this friend of mine, who was not the brightest lightbulb on the planet, about me being a draft dodger. And the moron goes and tells some of the other people I know, and pretty soon everyone in Santa Monica knows. I mean, it’s like I walk into a bakery and some guy drinking coffee and eating a jelly donut says, ‘Oh, if it ain’t George Washington.’”

“Well, you better believe I got paranoid. I decided I had to split. So we moved to San Francisco. But I think by that time Marilyn was beginning to see the pitfalls of living with someone running from the law. And, you know, there were other things too, to be honest. A lot of other things. Like by then she hated me. But anyway, then India called...”

“You must have been scared they were going to catch you,” I said.

He nodded. “I got lucky.”

“So why didn’t you just move to Canada?”

He shook his head, “I can’t imagine leaving. I think about all the people who support the war blindly and scream ‘America, love it or leave it.’ Well, if freedom is the ultimate game, then I figure if anybody should be leaving, it should be people like them who don’t get the point. I’m not fucking going anywhere.”

That scared me. If, or actually *when*, my draft notice came, my plan was to go to Canada. Originally anyway.

Before I met Jan and Lee. My plan was to leave everyone I'd ever known. My plan was *not to care* about leaving everyone I'd ever known.

Lee's bravery didn't change my mind, but the reality of how hard and lonely a life like that could be sobered me.

"Hey," he said in a quieter tone, seeing that my mind was spinning a bit. "Did I ever tell you the story about how Pythagoras died?"

"No."

He got up quickly and started pacing, "Dig this -- this is relevant. Here's a guy who was like a Greek Buddha, living around 550 B.C. He was the father of all science as we know it, a total math freak, the first to conclude the earth was round. But he also believed in communal living. And he was also totally against the eating or killing of animals. Even eggs were not cool to eat. So he started this school. All his prized students lived there. He was like, famous and eighty years-old. running this huge vegetarian commune, and you know what happened?"

"He died of protein deficiency?"

"No!" Lee laughed. "The state government, *Athens*, the first true democracy, started getting pissed that he was making up his own laws at the commune, and teaching crazy ideas to the younger generation, including questioning all laws, including his. A subversive! So they set fire to the

school. Burned it to the ground! Most of the students died. Pythagoras died, too. Some think he died in the fire. Others think he escaped into the woods and starved himself to death. See, what I'm getting at?"

"Not exactly."

"Police states can be turned on and off in a democracy too. There's no police state as long as there's no threat. But, it's like freedom on a leash, you know what I mean?"

As Lee told me all this, I watched him stroking his non-existent beard from time to time, while never touching his goatee, or nervously rubbing at his nose, laughing with the ironic twists of his own monologue.

He sat back down next to me. He decided to let the end of his story resonate, percolate. He sat slightly hunched, in his torn jeans and old red sneakers. His long stringy crow-black hair crisscrossed his face. His mouth had turned dry from speaking for so long. His eyes were sad but restrained, like two imprisoned pools looking out into the free and foolish chaos.

At this moment, I felt as if I saw him clearly: I perceived him as ultimately just another victim, like me. An intelligent but helpless victim of our time, more or less resigned to his fate. Just another lost soul in the world.

At this moment, there was no doubting it. But I would soon be proven very wrong.

## Nineteen

After another month of part-time work and working at the Co-op, our little family of four was doing quite well. Rent was no problem, and food was ample. Then one day Sherry called and told me about a three-day arts and music festival she was thinking about going to in Upstate New York. Hendrix was going to play. And Janis, and The Who. I told her that sounded amazing. So half-jokingly, she asked me if I wanted to come -- with everybody!

She wanted to meet all these characters I had been writing to her about. Including Jan.

When I talked it over with the others there was no hesitation. They were always up for an adventure. *Let's go!*

Within a week we had given up the apartment, and Lee bought a used very beat-up VW bus with Jan's security deposit.

Lee's mechanical skills were prodigious. But his sense of design and fashion were non-existent. The van was technically ready to ride within a week. But it looked like a dented rectangular prism that had been dropped in mud.

Jan, on the other hand was quite visually creative. She put an old carpet in the back and planted a little cactus in the

ashtray. We bathed it, and cleaned the windows with Windex, filled the tank to the very top, and headed east.

We spent two full days in a hippie mountain campground in Colorado they called "Dream Canyon." About a hundred forest hippies were living up there with the tacit consent of the local ranger.

Pine needles replaced roads and filled the air with an erotic fragrance. If it could be bottled and dabbed on people's clothes and faces the world would be a better place. But there would be another billion babies.

At night the sky seemed to be overlaid with a giant telescopic lens. I saw the Milky Way, glowing like San Francisco mist. I saw Mars, a red beacon calling. The moon was pockmarked with various cosmic catastrophes.

In the morning the sun rose late over the pines, having to also negotiate the walls of the canyon. We packed the van, said goodbye to clean drinking water we'd scooped up from the canyon stream, and rolled back down into the rest of America.

## Twenty

Once we got to the East Coast Lee and Misty were dropped off in Brooklyn to stay with their respective parents and regroup.

Jan came with me to stay in Long Island with my parents.

We were welcomed with cautious joy, though Candy, our immensely fat spoiled dog (a miniature collie that looked like a balloon trapped in a shopping bag) went immediately for Jan's ankles.

My mom offered Jan the traditional salutation given to friends and strangers alike: "She won't hurt you."

My father was yelling above the metronomic barking, "Come 'ere, you mutt you," adding to the decibel level.

Immediately we were led to the dining room table. Mom, after initial resistance, had really come to love Sherry. She wasn't quite ready for some new girl, especially a shoeless bra-less California hippie in an embroidered skirt wearing amber beads. But Jan's smile was infectious. And though her nervousness was apparent, so was her sincerity, and her willingness to help with dinner.

"We heard a lot about you," my mom said politely.

"Oh, what have you heard?" Jan laughed and looked shyly back at me.

“She’s heard about you because she reads all about hippies in the newspapers,” I joked, holding up the latest New York Post headlines. Look at this: Hippie Kills Three in Newark.”

My dad shook his head.

“Jackie!” Jan said. “How are they supposed to know about the good hippies if you don't show them what they're like? What else can they think if they can't even understand their own son?”

My parents started liking her right then and there. She liked them as well. She told me she found them to be open-minded and kind. She was in awe that they really seemed to love each other. She thought about the stark contrast to her own home life.

A mini crisis arose when we were deciding upon sleeping quarters. My mom wanted Jan to sleep in the red room. Of course, I was determined to have her sleep with me.

After threatening to sleep in the van behind my old elemental school every night, my mom relented.

So my old attic room became our turf. That first night we made love in my soft little bed, with my old hi-fi turned up just loud enough to prevent the squeaking springs from floating down through the wooden floor.

## Twenty-One

Sherry had just recently graduated from high school. But during the last few months of her senior year, having been affected by the events on the West Coast, and especially by my recounting of Berkeley's People's Park via letters and post cards, she felt it was time to take a stand.

Girls had not been allowed to wear pants at her school. Sherry thought this was ridiculous. So on a particularly brisk May day she entered Farmingdale High School wearing a pair of black slacks. When she was told to go home and change, she refused. She was sent down to the principal's office where she explained that her legs were constantly cold in dresses. He demanded Sherry go home and put a dress on, so she obeyed. She went home and put a dress on over her pants.

She was greeted by a shocked and angered principal and a cheering crowd of high school girls who were all expecting to see the legs of a lost cause.

Eventually, Sherry, whose 98 average was too high to allow for an easy expulsion, went to explain her case to the Suffolk County School Board, accompanied by Izzy and Bess and a proud entourage of liberal friends. After a long and

very loud debate that brought every Republican P.T.A. mother out of the woodwork, Sherry won her battle. The board members had been convinced in the end that a vote against her would have brought about a court case. And a court case on women wearing pants in school might have opened up a Pandora's Box of student demands and legal challenges. Since Sherry's days as a high school tempest were numbered, they voted to suspend the rule on a trial basis.

By early June Sherry was a school hero.

But this wasn't enough. Peace marches were occurring around the country. Police were over-reacting. Nixon was paranoid, calling protestors Communists and trouble makers. These things inspired Sherry to stop playing with pawns and bishops and start taking aim at the king and queen.

On June 10th, she refused to pledge allegiance to the flag and refused to stand while others pledged. Her reasoning, she told the principal, was that she did not feel the need to pledge her allegiance to flag and country over 200 times a year, did not appreciate being told when to pledge, how to pledge, and having the very words forced down her throat. She began calling it "the threat of allegiance."

The next day, a fellow student named Wesley John Harlow also refused to pledge his allegiance. He then made school news by passively resisting a fellow student's fist with his nose. This Wes had now become Sherry's boyfriend. He was learning the cost of love, and the consequences of civil disobedience.

When we finally found ourselves in the same place together, Jan had heard so much about Sherry, Sherry had heard so much about Jan, and Wes had heard so much about me, everyone was pretty much terrified to meet each other.

\* \* \*

Our first group rendezvous was the Sunday after Jan and I arrived. We decided to meet at Jones Beach. We figured it would be fun to let Jan see *the* New York beach at the height of summer.

The beach was packed. People had their territories staked out with pointed umbrellas, picnic baskets, blankets and piles of clothes. The ocean was gray, with white foam forming bathtub rings across the tide line. The foam held its shape on land because of various detergents and chemicals dumped from pipelines and barges. Most of the children were berry-brown from a month in the sun, their dark curly hair caked with salt and sand.

The day did not quite flow as I'd hoped. The conversation was sparse. We were all tongue-tied. Wes kept staring at Jan, then me, then sheepishly looking away.

Sherry talked to me awhile, then went off walking by herself.

Finally, Wes said, "I think you both have very interesting faces.... I think I'd be happy just to paint faces the rest of my life."

"You paint?" Jan was intrigued.

"I try. I want to study it in college. At this point I just paint by feel. I don't know much about technique. It's all just instinct."

"I used to draw," Jan said almost to herself.

"I like to draw too. Especially from photographs."

"So what do you see in Jan's face?" I asked him.

"Well," he hesitated.

She looked at me and blushed slightly before returning her gaze to him.

"Her features are very well proportioned; everything seems to merge together like a Rodin sculpture. I mean that as a compliment. It's not like your face is just a marble smudge! But you would be hard to paint, I think, there's nothing sharp or angular to use as a reference. That's why I'm an amateur."

When Sherry returned from her walk, she looked tired. She laid her head in Wes's lap and shut her eyes with her face tilted toward the sun.

"Why don't you play us a few of your new songs," she said without looking at me.

At this point I was glad to supply some diversion. I took out my guitar and sang a song about Jan, Lee and me—the day we sat under the highway bridge at the Cliff House watching the sun set as the mist came in.

Wes seemed impressed. Sherry seemed reserved, like when I'd first met her, and in the end told me only that my voice and guitar playing had gotten better.

We drove home in silence. I suggested we stop for ice cream, but Sherry declined, so I drove us straight to Farmingdale. Before she got out of the car she turned and said to Jan, "You're very beautiful. Thank you..." -- she seemed to stop in mid-sentence. She kissed me on the cheek and said goodbye, then they disappeared into the house.

When we got home and finally shooed Candy away from Jan's ankles my mom and dad served us dinner. I thought about the day silently as I ate.

After dinner my parents went next door to visit our neighbors. Jan went downstairs to watch T.V. She seemed to sense I needed some time alone. I played my guitar and sang over a progression I found, searching for a melody. When

the phone rang it broke the spell. It was Sherry. She was crying.

“Jackie, would you do me a favor?” She took a deep breath, “Don’t ever call me or see me again.”

“What?”

“Jan’s great, she is, but I can’t take seeing you guys together. I broke up with Wes tonight because I realize I don’t love him. He’s just a friend. Seeing you two made that clear to me. I thought I could do this, Jackie – I thought I could see you, both of you, and feel alright about it. But I can’t. There’s no need to say anything, just let me deal with this in my own way, without going through any more pain than I’m already feeling. Please, don’t call me again.

Promise.”

“Sherry...”

“Promise me.”

“I promise, but...”

I heard her quietly hang up the receiver.

I sat motionless for a long time. I could feel my heart beating, I could hear my breathing. I didn't want my mind to run away with me. It was too hard to listen to my inner thoughts. All the implications. So, as if in a dream, in a state of shock, I slid down onto the floor, picked up my guitar and sang a song about Sherry into my tape recorder. In the end,

my emotions overwhelmed me. By the time Jan came upstairs I was crying.

Jan lay down next to me and put her hand on me. She inched closer, put her lips against my neck and began to ask me something in a whisper, "Why is it that. . .?" but then she stopped. I think she realized whatever it was she was about to ask, I couldn't know either. Without another word I fell into a dark sleep.

At 7 A.M. the phone rang. I picked it up quickly and cleared my throat, "Hello."

"Jackie... I'm sorry." Sherry's voice sounded weary. She obviously hadn't slept. "I don't know how I'm going to do this." She breathed deeply, whispering through her weariness. "I can't let myself run away, there's no integrity to that.

"So what are you saying?"

"I'm saying we should all get together later. Start over. Or actually, evolve things. It shouldn't end like this."

I took a long deep breath and exhaled. "I'm so glad. I couldn't have done what you asked anyway. In fact, I wrote a song about you. It came from out of nowhere."

"Yeah, well maybe that place is actually somewhere, and the normal place is nowhere," she said. "You never know."

We were invited to meet her and Wes at her house at noon (she had apologized to him too).

When we arrived, we encountered a series of blankets and open sleeping bags arranged in overlapping fashion in the middle of her backyard. On a table under the awning were sandwiches, a pitcher of grape juice, and a bucket of ice.

We ate, sunning ourselves a while. It was eerily silent. Not what I'd hoped for. I thought about playing guitar, but something didn't feel right.

"Hey Wes," Jan said, "do you live nearby?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Why don't you show us some of your artwork?"

"Well, I don't really show anybody. I mean, nothing's finished."

"Wes," Sherry said. "Let them see. You're really good."

Wes walked us to his house eight blocks away, brought us down to the basement, and turned on the overhead lights.

There were canvases of all sizes leaning against each wall. Some were just prepared with neutral colors waiting for an idea. Others seemed like finished pieces but without frames. There were abstracts painted on small pieces of Masonite. There were pallets filled with pools of color. Paint

was splattered across the concrete floor. Oil and acrylic paint lay on a wooden table. Some looked like giant tubes of toothpaste, some were squeezed down to the last drop.

Wes had created half-dozen fantasy landscapes, and two canvasses had running horses. But human faces were by far the most prevalent theme.

On one side of the workshop there were pictures of faces cut out from magazines and carefully clipped with clothes pins to a taut string. Each face was unique, caught in a special moment. One canvass portrayal of a face was perfectly realistic, while another took on different qualities of shade and perspective to make it seem dream-like.

Jan looked closely at each face. Then Wes saw her looking at a paint-filled smock hanging on a hook.

"My parents gave that to me. I don't use it much. I mostly just paint in blue jeans and a sweatshirt. So if you want to paint, put it on. I have plenty of empty canvases."

"No thanks," Jan said quickly.

"If the smock fits.... " he smiled.

"No way," Jan blushed.

We walked up from the cellar through the den, and out through the garage, where we were overwhelmed by sunlight.

Sherry requested that Wes and Jan go pick up some ice cream from a store a block away and meet us back at her house. They seemed happy to oblige.

When Sherry and I returned to her backyard she sat down on a lounge chair in the shade, and I sat on a lounge chair beside hers. We heard the neighbor's children splashing and laughing in a little plastic pool. I thought it typical of Sherry's parents to forgo living at their beach house this summer simply because they were having too good of a time in Farmingdale with their crazy friends.

I touched Sherry's hand with mine, then returned it to my side. "It makes me feel terrible to think I have the power to hurt someone I love so much," I said quietly.

"Well, furriers pet their minks," she deadpanned.

I frowned.

"Jackie, I'm not serious, about the minks anyway. Look, I know Jan is really nice. I believe we could maybe even become friends someday. But there are other things..." She sighed deeply, slowly swirling a glass of dark juice in her hand, momentarily watching the spinning ice. "I remember reading in one of your letters that you wanted to somehow find a way to ban jealousy from your life. That's a beautiful idea, and I've tried doing it, for you. I'm *still* trying. And I'm all for sharing love in the world. But what it really comes down to for me is that I want to find one special someone to

love, and not share. The normal old-fashioned stuff, you know? I talked to Wes about it on the phone last night after I talked with you. I love him, but he's not that special person for me."

She put her glass down and curled her knees up, wrapping her arms around them. "Anyway, I feel really bad about what happened to us. I could have gone with you to San Francisco, you offered that to me -- Plan A, Part III. I remember. So I would never blame you for what happened. But I'm frustrated because I guess it did feel like you were that special person. Maybe." She hardened herself and said, "So that's it," with a quick shrug.

I leaned over closer to her. "I know how sucky jealousy is. I don't know how anyone can overcome it. That's the truth. So how can you even still love me?"

"I don't know. I have to fight the pain that I feel y time you're around me!" She swatted impatiently at a mosquito. "I mean, I want you around. But I also want you to know. And I hope you never have to feel what I feel. So in that way, I still love you."

She looked at me directly. That green oceanic look. It reflected the continuum back to me, for the time it existed. I felt a wave of joy merging with a wave of sadness. The joy was knowing she still wanted to be in my life. All she every gave me was joy and beautiful times. The sadness was that

everything had mutated so far and so fast from where we started. I could blame the war. The draft. But that wasn't entirely true.

When I met her gaze she narrowed her eyes into a sarcastic squint and said, "So if I have to put up with you, you'd better be extra nice to me!"

I looked at her quizzically. "I will."

"Treat me to fancy dinners any time I want!"

"Okay...."

"Buy me a new car, and a house in the Bahamas." her face took on a sweet, fake arrogance. "Or maybe Malibu."

"Definitely. Right on the beach... with the money I make from my first hit song. I promise."

"Well then, okay." She swatted at another mosquito, leaned back weakly, and closed her eyes. "I guess it's a deal."

It was an unconvincing beginning, but despite the difficult circumstances, Jan and I saw both Sherry and Wes often over the next week.

Jan was in awe of Sherry's strength and intellect. And Sherry had to admit, Jan's love and disarming honesty was hard to resist.

We used Sherry's house as our home base. Izzy and Bess bought food for us almost every night, as long as we cooked it and did the dishes. They called us their live-in

help. Izzy and Bess were quite amazing. They loved each of us, they witnessed our sincere attempt to love each other, and care for each other. They teased us, they made fun of our strangely interconnected relationships. But they were also impressed with their daughter's strength, and with our love for her.

Then one day, Misty and Lee arrived with a sleeping bag, an arm full of clothes, and a gram of milky-brown Lebanese hash. We smoked it in Wes's basement, amongst all of his creations.

I stared mostly at the abstracts. The paint seemed to move around right in front of my eyes.

On August 13th, 1969, we crawled groggily into our sleeping bags, lined up in zig-zag fashion on the floor of Sherry's parents' living room.

We figured we'd get an early start to the arts and music festival, and leave the day before it started.

We figured we could camp out on the open land and watch everyone arrive.

What we couldn't know was that hundreds of thousands of people had the same idea.

The six of us piled into Weegee, which is the name Sherry had chosen for our van – dedicated to her neighbor's dead dog, which she had found scattered in front of her

house when she was seven – and began driving towards  
Highway 17.

## Twenty-Two

On a normal summer day, Max Yasgar's hillside in upstate New York would have been peaceful and picturesque: ankle deep grass, daisies, dandelions, butterflies, the sounds of birds. Nearby a sweet cold lake would reflect the high sun. A red-bellied woodpecker would sit on a tree limb, hidden among the leaves. All was silent.

Miles away, a parade of whirring motors and spinning wheels travelled over the speed limit on Highway 17, passing right by the town of Woodstock, on their way to somewhere important.

But on this weekend in August everything turned topsy-turvy. The highway was silent; the cars were motionless. The grass was hidden; the hillside sprouted a dense forest of faces that stretched from horizon to horizon. The sounds of birds were dwarfed by electrified songs. And the lake was constantly pierced by diving naked bodies – sleek young bodies, uninhibited and free. Like a family of porpoises who'd just escaped from Marine World.

We had bought tickets to *The Woodstock Music and Art Fair weeks* in advance. None of us had to be convinced to go.

How could anyone pass up three days of art and music for the low low price of \$7 a day. Free lodging – bring your own sleeping bag. Come to the lovely “Hillside Hotel” and stake out your spot for the weekend. Come sit on the lawn and enjoy the orchestral sounds of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix.

In fact, enjoy all the “J’s” you wish.

Come be entranced by the sacred prayers of a real live Swami.

Sway and swoon to the riveresque currents of Richie Havens, his rough dreamy voice, and his open-tuned guitar echoing across the valley.

Come, be stomped on and deafened by Iron Butterfly.

Be rained on, sit soaked and laughing, inhaling, exhaling.

Meet interesting people from all over the world. Watch the tiny tablets and subtly-soaked paper strips of sunshine acid being passed around like sun-tan lotion on a private beach.

Be part of the fun! Experience the magic first-hand. All for only \$7 a day.

The day before the festival, cars were lining Highway 17 for miles in both directions. There was word that the State Highway Patrol might close down the highway altogether.

That's when we first began to realize something extremely wild was going on.

We decided, after moving no more than a thousand yards in five hours, to pull off the highway and park in the woods. A few other vans and cars followed our lead.

We gravitated together, several like-minded tribes, and began to address the immediate problem: how do we get *there* from here?

"I hate to mess with your heads," said one guy, jumping out of his blue flatbed truck, which was painted bumper to bumper with swirling stars like Van Gogh's *Starry Starry Night*, "but I just heard on the radio they're not letting anyone else through on the highway -- drivers or hikers. And all the exits and roads from here have been barricaded."

A girl appeared from the shadows of the trees. I hadn't noticed her getting out of any car. She said in a quiet voice, "There's a back road that can get us there. I was just there this morning. But I don't know how to get back there. I trailed this strange guy and his group, but now I've lost them."

I nodded.

"Eric the Orange."

"What?"

"That was his name: Eric the Orange," she laughed.

I imagined a very round man in a reddish-yellow shirt with the word, "Sunkist" emblazoned across the front of it.

We were all wondering whether we should embark down the unknown path the girl had pointed to, hoping to channel the ghost of Davey Crocket, when she came up to Jan slowly and smiled a strange slightly frightened smile. She introduced herself as Laura.

She was wearing light green pants with an elastic waistband, a white sleeveless button-down blouse, and tennis sneakers with no socks. Her face was an odd European mix of pale Irish skin, solid brown round Spanish eyes, short straight brown hair and an aquiline nose.

She seemed out of place, transported here from another era, an older time. But she tried hard to be open and inquisitive about us. And even though she was quiet and seemed a bit down, half-moon creases would appear under her eyes when she smiled, giving her face a distinctly joyous appearance. It seemed paradoxical, like when certain markings near a fish's mouth could make it look like it was smiling even when it was being eaten alive.

All of a sudden, she cut Jan off mid-sentence and pointed to a guy walking on the other side of the highway. He had long wild curly red hair running down his back and a thick red beard. He was dressed like an old woodsman with a broad black belt and loose brown clothing. He was

barefoot, moving quickly with an entourage of people following behind him. "Eric the Orange!" Laura gasped.

We flagged him down.

"Hey there," he smiled at Laura, a rather overly seductive smile. "Where'd you go hiding off to? Laurie, isn't it?"

"Laura," she corrected him.

We were about to ask him if he could tell us how to get to the concert when he blurted out, "Well, do you all want to go to the festival or not?" Then he looked around and said, "I guess we might as well head back for a look-see, right?" The others looked weary, ragged, like they'd been walking all day. But Eric the Orange looked fresh as a daisy, thank you, and when he stomped off, we followed, carrying our supplies and sleeping gear with us.

For the first quarter mile we were still dragging things, dropping things, strapping knapsacks over each other's shoulders. We found out from some of the others that we were actually miles from the stage. We wandered a confusing zig-zag path. No wonder Laura couldn't retrace it. After a long while we began to pass around food and water. We tried to keep to Eric's steady pace. I knew at this very moment thousands of cars and people were being turned away. I began to feel almost clandestine, like a rag-tag army sneaking along empty roads behind enemy lines.

Many hours and sixteen joints later I figured we had all gotten ourselves royally lost. It was hard to see in the thick gray twilight. Eric the Orange had a flashlight, but we had only the wild colors of each other's clothing to light the way. Finally we heard the distant sounds of applause cascading over a hill.

"Thar she blows!" Eric yelled.

We all began running wildly, jumping in the air, whooping, despite possible detection by police or other officials, and the fear of being told to turn around and go home. There were no ticket takers anywhere. The ticket booths were abandoned early that morning as a tidal wave of humanity descended upon the land.

We ran to the sound, the uproar, feeling the swell of victory and excitement. We had arrived! (And as far as cheap wild vacations went, so far, so good!)

\* \* \*

My most powerful memory of Woodstock is of that first moment when we made it over the hill, standing on the perimeter of a vast network of faces. My eyes became transfixed on the distant stage, which was lit like an eternal flame at the edge of twilight. Even within those first seconds we knew this was not just a concert, or a crazy lark.

Something was about to take place that had never happened before. Our generation had arrived, literally, from every state in the country, in various altered states of consciousness, bringing along their guitars and children and dogs and drugs.

We were exhausted but ecstatic as Richie Havens calmed half a million people into a spiritual silence. We got settled and took puffs of joints that were being passed around in every direction. And then, of course, the perfect cosmic joke happened – it began to rain.

Jan started laughing. She had been dancing with forty other people but was now running back to me giggling beyond control. "The rain, it's so beautiful. We are the *luckiest* planet! Rain and music all on the same planet. How did that happen?"

Lee was in some heavy conversation with a guy who wore a jacket embroidered with the words, "Draft Nixon." Lee came over to Jan, saw her laughing and holding her arms out to embrace the rain and started dancing a weird kind of Irish jig with her. I got up and joined in.

Wes was watching from a distance, but finally pulled Sherry up from where she was sitting and they started imitating Lee.

The rain kept falling.

The festival grounds and surrounding environs had been declared a national emergency because of the size of the crowd. Thousands of police had gathered a few miles away dressed in riot gear, expecting the worst. Food and drink were rapidly vanishing. And now the entire valley was turning into a bowl of mud.

But everyone everywhere was jumping around to the rhythm of the music, laughing, petting stray dogs. Nobody cared anymore. The whole event had turned into a mystic muddy celebration of chaos and anarchy.

At midnight the rain stopped falling for a while. Arlo Guthrie stood before us with his acoustic guitar, a lone figure lost in a maze of stage wires and microphones. He laughed and shook his head as he announced that we were, at present, one of the largest cities by population in the United States. He asked us to stand up. He declared us "Woodstock Nation." A separate country, a country of our own creation. He looked out at the great sea of people in the mist, then lit a single match and held it in the air. He asked everyone all across the hillside to join him, to light matches and raise them high above their heads.

Five hundred thousand of us were crammed side by side as we raised our little flames to the sky. We gazed across the valley, astonished at what we saw. The light

seemed endless, stretching out to the horizon in every direction.

The hippie movement, the counter-culture, in that one moment, became a visual prayer. It joyously welcomed the oncoming storm, the riot police, the mud and mosquitoes, and all future life on our rainy little planet.

By the end of the evening we were physically and emotionally exhausted. But we realized there was no way we could sleep at the concert grounds. Everything was under water. We followed Eric the Orange (who had sat by Laura the entire time, while Laura sat by Jan) back across the zig-zaggy miles to our parking space through another downpour.

We were soaked like sponges and buzzing with laughter when we finally reached the van. We all piled into the back, Weegee's living room, and took off a considerable amount of wet clothing. Then we slept, huddled together with a mass of sleeping bags covering us.

When I awoke I heard the rain still falling. Among the bodies, curled together like a litter of newborns, was Laura. She had my jacket wrapped around her. Her mouth was slightly open. She had such a clear bright face. I wondered what could have happened to bring her to this point, alone and latching on to our little tribe. Eric the Orange was gone.

He had written us a wet note of farewell. He was off tromping through the forest, leading new groups of rain-slogged forest wanderers to and from our newborn country.

The morning grew late as everyone awoke. We stepped outside and immediately began hearing rumors that the day's concert had already been called off because of the continuing rain and the overflow crowds. Our parking neighbor in the Van Gogh truck relayed the information to us, listening constantly to the all-news radio station.

State officials on the radio were begging people to stay away, or turn back, if they were headed towards Woodstock, because the police and the National Guard were now blocking all the exits for miles in both directions.

Food and water were being flown in via helicopters. Weather reports predicted there was no chance of the rain clearing by four o'clock, concert time. But no one seemed to care.

There was no way anyone wanted to go back to where they'd come from, or back to who they were before.

The rain miraculously stopped, and the afternoon show began late. The music flooded the hillside, in joyous defiance of, pretty much everything.

## Twenty-three

After three days of rain and mud and music filling every pore of us, we trampled back to Weegee and made our way home.

We brought Laura back with us, and put her in Sherry's bed. She'd caught a cold on the last day and it seemed to be getting worse. We all felt sorry for her. She seemed sweet, and had a beautiful, almost childlike face. Jan and I made her a pot of rosehip tea, and she finished it rather quickly.

She said, "You guys, I'm so sorry," then blew her runny nose into one of thousands of soft white tissues Sherry had supplied. "I'll leave as soon as I'm better," she continued, "and I'll be sure to pay you for food and gas, and the tissues."

Jan laughed, "Forget it. Sherry's parents aren't like that, and neither are we."

"I chose you, you know?" Laura interrupted, staring at Jan with a slightly puffed face and her nostrils turning red. "I chose you, of all the people I met at the festival."

"Why?"

"I guess I've just been trying to follow whatever God tells me to do." Then she sneezed helplessly.

"God bless you," Jan said.

“Thank you,” she replied formally, then started to laugh, but instead began to cry.

Jan moved closer and spoke calmly, “What are you thinking?”

“Nothing,” Laura sobbed.

“Nothing doesn't make you cry,” Jan raised her eyebrows.

Laura laughed through her tears.

“Would you like to keep it to yourself, or...?”

“Yes. To myself please.”

Jan firmly touched her hand, which was clutching a gob of tissues full of tears and homeless viruses.

“Hey,” Jan brightened, “would you like to hear some really great music?”

“Sure, I guess.”

“Jackie writes amazing songs.”

“Oh,” she sat up and looked at me. “Sure, that would be really nice.”

I was summoned to play some cheery songs to lighten the mood. But then I played a ballad. Just one ballad! And that did it. Laura went into a convulsive crying spell and we couldn't stop her.

When she finally exhausted herself, Jan said, “Laura, look, there's no use holding this in. Trust us.”

“Where are you from?” I said, trying to divert the spell.

"Kansas City."

"Did you grow up on a farm, or in the city itself?"

"A little of both!" She seemed to perk up a bit. "We moved to the city when I was fifteen. I'm twenty-one now. My birthday was just last week."

"Why are you traveling around alone?" Jan asked.

"To be someplace else." She laid her head back on the pillow.

"To get away from your family?" Jan asked.

"No."

"From the law?" I laughed. That seemed inconceivable.

"No. Yes. Laws."

"Laws?"

Jan and I looked at each other.

Laura shook her head. "You know, I used to be so *believing*. I trusted everyone -- the newspapers, my father's opinions, the government, the police. Then. Now, I hate them. I hate them for what they did, for no good reason." She began crying again, and speaking louder and louder, "Except to satisfy their own stupidity and their own egos. Why should I ever trust them again? They killed him, and there's *no* good reason, and I'll never trust them again."

"Killed who?"

"My... my husband." She turned away and curled her legs up into her arms. She was hyperventilating. It took a

few minutes for us to calm her down. She blew her nose into a few more tissues. "He was a soldier. But he *wasn't*. I mean, he should never have been made to go. He was the kindest person. We were so happy. We got married before they took him away from me. They stole him and killed him!"

She covered her face with the blanket, but she wasn't crying now. She was out of tears. She was just angry. Beyond angry. Breathing heavily.

Woodstock had been a shocking, soul-wrenching experience for Laura. She was caught between two worlds. She wasn't "straight," but she wasn't a hippie either. She believed in Jesus in the most literal sense and had never experimented with drugs. Since her husband died, she swore she would never fall in love again. She hadn't even embraced anyone, not one hug, for over a year. But Woodstock started to alter her brain chemistry. "The Feeling," -- in our one long moment there -- was a revelation. For Laura, it was a painful opening. An acknowledgement. Like looking at a world that might have been. A shattered world that had temporarily been glued back together, but not real. It couldn't be real. It wouldn't last. She knew that.

Her head cold soon ended, but Laura stayed with us. Everyone came to like her despite the philosophical and spiritual variances. When she finally spoke about her

political ideas we were actually pretty amazed. "I should have never let Marty go. He was either going to die, or commit immoral acts against innocent people. I should have understood that. But before he died, I never thought I had the right to question it. I believed all the answers to why we were fighting – if we don't stop Communism it'll spread to the rest of Asia, then it could spread to Europe, and then who knows, maybe here? That was the story they told us, right? But after his death, when I examined things closer, I realized it's not about what type of government runs a country, but *who* runs the system and what they do, how they use their power. That's what I know now. It's not just capitalism or socialism. Or even communism versus democracy! They can all become corrupt. Evil or good leaders. A Jesus, a betrayer. I mean, is Richard Nixon more noble or well-meaning than Karl Marx was? *I don't know*. But it also comes down to even who we choose to be qualified as our local policemen, because they're the domestic army, right? And who's chosen to train them, and who teaches the trainers. It's endless. And it's hopeless. Because the real problem is that most people are thoughtless and cruel."

Despite all the love and good vibes we freely gave to her in the following weeks nothing could prevent Laura from succumbing at times to her own sense of oppression. In a given hour, or a given day, she would feel a surge of panic

and abandon her normal sense of reality. She would pace the floor in the dark. Or she would put her face in her arms for long periods of time, saying nothing. And during those times we were powerless to help her.

Even after Woodstock, even after seeing the higher potential of love and people, and being a part of it, we all fell back from time-to-time, not as far as Laura, but back, into life as crisis, life as a darkness to overcome, and hell-bent on winning the daily games we'd all set up for ourselves.

After a while, seeing Laura's fits of panic made me fear that feeling in her. Because I realized that if something that tragic happened to me, I might not be able to deal with it any better than she could.

PART III

*Yes, to dance beneath the diamond sky  
with one hand waving free,  
silhouetted by the sea,  
circled by the circus sands,  
with all memory and fate driven deep beneath the waves....*

Bob Dylan

## Twenty-four

When my mom was four years old, my grandparents decided to move from London to the United States just so she could study violin with a teacher at the New York Philharmonic. When she was ten, she played a solo concert at Carnegie Hall. At sixteen, she graduated Julliard. Then she quit.

She'd had no childhood, not one carefree day. She had come to hate the violin, the performances, the pressure and the accolades. When she was eighteen, she became a jazz dancer at a USO club, and an ambulance driver during World War II. Her goals were simple and clear – she wanted to find an honest, quiet, handsome, hopefully tone-deaf young man to sweep her off her feet. She dreamed of living a normal life in a suburban house, away from war, and the pressure of being perfect, with a kid, and a yard, and a fluffy dog. She got it all.

Sixteen years after I was born, I found an old dusty violin in a cluttered corner of the basement. I had just started learning guitar. When I was six she played me Ray Charles records, and Dinah Washington, Nina Simone, and Etta James. At ten she played me a piano record by Peter Nero. When I turned thirteen she sat me down to watch The

Beatles sing She Loves You on the Ed Sullivan Show. But she had never suggested I be a musician myself. And no one had mentioned to me that she had ever played music herself! She preferred it to be her dark little secret. So who's violin was this?

I brought it to her room. She looked up from her novel and her eyes turned wide and wet.

"Is this yours?"

"Mmm, I used to play."

My dad pulled his bifocals down and looked at her.

"Peg, tell him."

"I used to play... a lot."

"What do you mean?"

My mom got up with a sigh and pulled an old scrapbook out from the top of her closet. New York Times entertainment section: "Peggy Weksler, 10, Wows Carnegie."

"This is a joke," I said, staring.

My mom had only wanted to forget. My dad never told me because she told him it wasn't a big deal, and he believed her. My grandparents never told me because they were still too pissed off at her ever bring it up again.

But I was impressed and inspired. That night I wrote my first song. Three chords – D, G and A, were all I needed

to write this little masterpiece. It was called “Now Let Me Tell You A Story.”

I came downstairs and asked her to listen to it. She consented. I played it tearfully – my girl had left me, and so on.

I asked her what she thought.

She said, “Do you want me to tell you as a mother or as a friend?”

“Well... both.”

“Okay, as a mother, I’m proud of you. And I hope you write many more songs, it’s a beautiful thing to do. As a friend, it stunk.”

“What?”

“Well, Jackie, all you’re doing is imitating the A.M. radio! That’s all about formula. But great songs are dreamscapes, not formulas, and not imitations of formulas. You have to follow the dream, and not force the dream to follow you, and your physical limitations. You have to eventually be able to play the chords and melodies you hear in your head. *Find them. Follow them!*”

She moved closer to me. “And as for your lyrics, I know your relationship with Sherry is very important to you, and she’s a sweet girl, but thankfully you don’t know what it’s like when someone leaves you. It doesn’t feel that simple or that easy. Write what you know about. First love,

parents, dreams, swimming in the ocean, school. Make me think, or laugh, or cry, or make me dance. Just don't ever make me bored.”

So began my career as a musician. Humbly, cautiously. By trying to write songs cool enough and sophisticated enough for my mom to like.

Now, three years later, in September of 1969, my mom was once again about to play an integral part in my life. What she did ultimately had nothing to do with politics. It was done out of a sense of necessity, an animal-like need to protect its young, at any cost. Because on a September day in 1969, I was drafted.

The official letter said I would be eligible and obligated to serve if I was chosen by “The Lottery,” which was to be held on national television December 1st. I’d heard about this latest farce, pulling birthdates out of a tumbler, but I had gone so long without hearing anything from the draft board I thought maybe they’d just lost my file – somehow I’d lucked out. Ridiculous. I was now one tumbler role away from being 1-A.

Both my parents, my mom in particular, turned fully against the war. It was exactly what happened with Laura, only at a much sooner point. There was no way they were going to let me be dragged into someone else's senseless nightmare.

My mom took me to a “C.O. lawyer” in New York, who told me my conscientious objector status should have been established as a matter of public record long before I dropped out of college. Now it was too late.

In the end, she was convinced there was only one option left: If I got unlucky and my number was called early they would bribe a member of the draft board! Pay him off to give me a 4-F.

My dad was totally against the idea, but my mom told him if he refused to do it, she’d do it behind his back. And that’s exactly what she did.

The going rate was \$10,000 cash. Of course, after December 1st, the rates would go up for those poor souls whose birthdates were picked in the first one-hundred-fifty draws or so. Get in your bribes now, while you still have some consumer leverage.

When my dad found out the deed was done, he blew his top -- thinking that some crook on the draft board just stole a large percentage of our family's money. But the next day he told me he was glad that I was safe, and not to worry about it. He knew there was a good chance if I went to war, I would never come back.

When I found out what my mom was up to, I freaked out. I told her I’d rather move to Canada than bribe a crook.

“Move to Canada if you want,” she said with a look of rock-solid determination, “but at least I know if you want to come home, you won't be locked away in a prison for twenty years.”

As it turned out, my birthdate was chosen late in the lottery. But, as they say at Christmas, it's the thought that counts. My parents had looked more deeply at the rationale behind the Vietnam War, and came to the same conclusion the hippies did. This wasn't a war that had anything to do with protecting America. This was genocide; a sin against humanity.

## Twenty-five

Throughout this strange month of September, most of us worked at separate jobs.

Misty hawked baby's breath and asters at a flower shop in Brooklyn. She and her parents had made their peace. They begrudgingly liked Lee, and saw that Misty had matured a lot. She seemed a lot happier. So they came to a reasonable compromise: Misty would live close to home at least until her eighteenth birthday, which was only a few months away. And she would agree to eat dinner with them at their house once a week, just the three of them. Misty was ecstatic and thought Lee was a miracle worker.

Jan, who loved the East Coast and wanted to stay at least until the new year, worked with me at a factory that made thermometers.

Laura got a job as a law secretary and was making a good salary, which she spent freely on us, and insisted on paying rent to Sherry's parents since she was living at their house.

Lee had to deal with a whole different set of factors because of his draft dodger status. He couldn't find serious work that matched his abilities because of the possibility of

background checks. So he combed through the classifieds until one day he saw an ad that piqued his undeniable capitalist instincts. It said, "HEAVY WORK. ONE WEEK. ONE-EIGHTY." A hundred eighty dollars a week was a very decent wage back then. The ad was submitted by one of the major temp agencies. So he called them.

"About this ad, 'HEAVY WORK. ONE WEEK. ONE-EIGHTY,' what does 'heavy work' mean exactly?" he inquired.

"Well," said the secretary, "this particular job entails going down to a mini-refrigerator warehouse and lifting the minis out of their cargo train and bringing them up to the third floor."

"And it's one-eighty, and it's just for one week?"  
"Well, it's possible if you're strong enough and you're willing to stick with it, they'll keep you on longer than a week."

"I'm strong enough, how do I apply?"

"Just go on down and sign up!"

This was perfect. No complications. Just good physical work for a good wage.

The week was challenging. Lee got razzed because of his long hair, and heard such brilliant observations as: "I didn't know fags could lift anything heavier than their

dicks." Or, "Why don't you wear a dress tomorrow, honey, maybe they'll promote you to the boss's secretary."

But Lee just stayed loose and joked back. He cursed every other word and talked all day about "those fuckin' amazing Jets," and the great Joe Namath. Could they repeat? Would his legs hold up? They finally included him as one of the guys, even though the hair jokes continued.

The work was exhausting. There were dollies and pulleys, but the heavy crates had to be lifted on and off the train. Endlessly. There was one forty-five-minute lunch break, and two short coffee breaks. But Lee really didn't mind the work. For the pay, it seemed fair.

He went to the temp agency office at the end of the week and stood at the pay window.

"Ah, yes, there you are," the clerk said, and handed him an envelope.

Lee sat down on a wooden bench and opened it. The check inside was for seventy-one dollars.

"Hold it," Lee shot up. "*What's this?* I was supposed to get a hundred eighty bucks for this job."

The clerk furrowed his eyebrows.

"I doubt that, sir. Hold on." He fingered through some file cards. "No, I'm afraid you misunderstood," the clerk shook his head in sympathy. "It was one-eighty an hour. Minimum wage."

He quit the refrigerator business on the spot and landed a job as a car mechanic in a small independent shop in Queens. He'd spent a lot of time working on his friends' used cars in Brooklyn, and figured he might not mind learning more about the subject. The money wasn't great, but he got weekends off. And that meant he would have two straight days to spend with Misty and the rest of us. It also meant he could really give Weegee the mechanical attention it needed. Though we all shared Weegee, it was officially Lee's car, his baby, and he was constantly tinkering with it.

For Sherry and Wes, September meant preparing to depart for college. Sherry had decided to go to Harpur. Wes was going to Syracuse University to study art. Their relationship remained the same throughout the summer: sometimes lovers, mostly friends. Sherry was even looking forward, in a way, to creating some distance between them.

Working prevented us from spending a lot of time together. But on weekends we picnicked or went camping. Like so many times in life, there was nothing said about the future, just an uneasy, unspoken feeling about the changes we knew were coming.

Early one Saturday morning I was sitting on the lawn in front of my parents' house waiting for Jan to come out of the shower when Wes pulled up in his parents' Chevy. He walked slowly towards me. Wes was tall, and as he came

closer he seemed even taller, standing above me, blocking the sun. His long dark blonde curls took on a halo effect. He sat down next to me without saying anything, pursing his thick Mick Jagger lips.

“Wes, what’s wrong?” I asked.

He moaned and scratched his head nervously.

“What?”

“Jackie, I have to tell you something. I can’t tell anyone else. You’re the only one. But you won’t like it.”

“Tell me, dear Wes, Dr. Jackie is listening.”

“I’m in love with Jan.”

“What?”

“She’s really amazing, just amazing. I think of her all the time. Kind of like every second.”

“Wes, you’re kidding.”

“No. I’m not. But I’m leaving. I’ll be going away soon, and there won’t be anything I can do about it, so I decided to tell you. Because it would be too hypocritical to keep it from you and still consider you my friend. Which I do. And want to be.”

Instead of feeling threatened, what happened in the following days before he left for college was that Wes and I grew closer. I respected that he had played no games with me. Besides, Jan and I were making love every night in our

attic bedroom – wet, spongy summer sex that left us high and exhausted. I had no reason to feel insecure.

In the middle of the month, just days before Sherry and Wes were due to depart, we all decided to spend a weekend at the tip of eastern Long Island in a pretty little town called Montauk Point.

Laura had been feeling pretty comfortable with her role in our group. She was the mother, the provider. She did our laundry and shopped for our food, all without us asking. And, without any extra effort on her part, she also kept us attuned to the darker side of life and the mind.

During our first night camping she gathered us together and told us that she had made each of us a gift. She told us she was planning to leave us soon – it was almost time for her to move on.

The gifts she gave to me and Lee were particularly remarkable. They were identical. Two calico-colored hand-woven ski hats. She said to us, “Now you’ll be brothers this winter.”

The gift touched me deeply, but what touched me more was the long warm hug she gave me when we were alone for a moment. She said, “You remind me of Marty in many ways.” Then she stroked the back of my hair with her hand and whispered, almost to herself, “If he had been more like

you, he'd have been a pacifist. He would never have gone. He'd still be alive...."

It was late Sunday, a few hours before we were to head back home. I was playing guitar at Misty and Lee's request. The air was uncommonly warm and the sea breeze was gentle, so Jan took a small blanket and headed down to the beach for one last visit. The beach was empty. As she lay there she unbuttoned her shirt, exposing her stomach and breasts to the last of the sun. Soon footsteps broke her reverie. It was Wes.

"Warm enough to take a final swim," he said. "Want to?"

"Maybe," she hesitated, pulling her shirt around her to cover up.

He shrugged and took off his clothes. He ran towards the icy waves and immediately dove in.

She wanted to join him. When she returned she told me all the things that had crossed her mind. She said she couldn't think of any reason on earth why she shouldn't have taken off her clothes and jumped in too. No reason except that it would have hurt me. So she sat there on the beach, envious of the wild cold, the freedom Wes was feeling.

She also told me she couldn't help but feel a bit angry about it. She felt like the jealousy I harbored was inhibiting some very natural emotions in her. It wasn't just a matter of being impulsive. It wasn't a matter of exhibitionism or desire, or "needing to be free." The whole issue ran much deeper than that.

I admitted to her that she was right—I would have been jealous. And I told her I was truly sorry I felt that way.

Her eyes flashed at me. "Does it make any logical sense for you to feel what you feel Jackie? You say you're afraid you'll lose me, but if you can't trust me you've lost me already. You can say, 'Well, it's not logic, it's *feelings*, and you can't change feelings.' But that's everybody's excuse for a lack of trust in themselves, or a trust in life."

She lowered her voice, "I know you like Laura, for instance. But it wouldn't make me feel bad if you swam naked on the beach with her, or even slept with her for that matter. I just won't spend my time thinking about what would happen if she took you away from me. I can't live like that. Something or someone *else* would pull us apart eventually anyway if we weren't meant to be together. Sometimes a person spends so much time trying to prevent bad things from happening, they stop feeling love, just fear.

"And I'm not saying I don't realize it's hard, Jackie, it can be painful. But at some point we have to just *trust fate*,

and time. We've got to try to keep ourselves living in that deeper place -- the place we felt that morning when we danced together to A Love Supreme. Remember?"

She sighed, then brushed her fingertips through my hair and said quietly, "Everything in me rebels against that jealousy in you, Jackie. But I do love you, and I want you to learn to trust me. So I didn't expose my bare skin to a friend. I knew what it would imply to you."

I didn't bother telling her that Wes was in love with her. She had a hint of it anyway, and I certainly didn't want to get her involved in all my little sick thoughts about it – the subtle manipulation of words and events. What was the point? Jan was right, I had to trust her. Wes ultimately had nothing to do with it. He was just "the next fear." Not trusting her would be forcing love to commit suicide.

I ran down to the beach with her and proceeded to take off my clothes, then hers, regardless of who was watching, and with both of us naked and cold from the now twilight winds we jumped into the sea. We laughed and tumbled while our teeth chattered.

I brought her over to a sandy corner near a high wall of rocks and put my body over hers to warm her. We sighed and our eyes closed. When we made love our minds fell

silent in the swirling peaceful darkness together. All was forgotten.

\* \* \*

It was dawn, the morning after we got home from Montauk Point. Before we went to bed we had watched the 11 o'clock news reports of more bombings – more Americans and Vietnamese killed. I suppose, to tell the truth, I had become a little numb to it all. But Laura watched with agony and horror.

We switched the channel and there were blacks rioting in the streets of L.A. They were not numb to anything. Their heroes had been assassinated one by one. Their skin color alone made them targets of the police.

Hippies, white Americans, had also had their heroes assassinated. While Medgar Evers and Malcolm X were shot and killed, whites saw President Kennedy shot and killed. Then Martin Luther King was shot and killed. Robert Kennedy, running for president to stop the war gave one of the greatest speeches in the history of American politics that night in a stadium filled with mourners. A few months later, the night he won the California primary and was becoming the Democratic nominee for president, he was shot and killed. Blacks were targeted for the color of their skin,

hippies were targeted because of the length of their hair or the clothes they wore. Obviously, hippies were well aware all they had to do was cut their hair in dress like a college kid and not march against the war and they would no longer be targeted. We also hadn't been targeted since the dawning of the American revolution. Blacks had. Marches and movements had started for all sorts of rights in the last few years -- civil rights, marches against the war, children's rights, workers' rights, animal's rights, women's rights. America was dying and being reborn right in front of our eyes. And the revolution wasn't just about the war. It was about everything.

We turned off the TV at midnight and went to bed. Laura and Jan and I slept in Sherry's living room that night. We were too tired to go home. A few hours later, I was awakened by a sound, a movement.

Out of half-closed eyes I noticed Laura getting dressed. I watched as she slipped off her nightgown. She was fully naked, her body dimly lit by an arc of light overflowing from the kitchen.

I looked at the profile of her face, her firm smallish breasts, her smooth pale skin, and a knot filled my stomach. She turned fully to me, but she didn't look down to see my face; my unsleeping eyes. It was the first time I had seen her like this. I would have become aroused if she hadn't seemed

so nervous. She seemed to be literally shaking as she put on her shirt, then a sweater, then her old lime green pants, the ones she had worn when we first met.

I heard her whispering on the phone for a moment. I couldn't quite hear all the way into the kitchen. She came back to the living room and quietly, neatly piled all her things into a corner. She slipped off a bracelet, then her hands met in prayer for a moment. She put a note on top of the pile. Then she disappeared into the kitchen again, walking around to get to the hallway so as not to wake Jan and me. She opened the front door without so much as a handbag accompanying her, and quietly slipped out.

At the time it felt like a vague dream, so I didn't get up immediately. I realized she might be leaving us for good, but if that was her decision, and her way of doing it, I didn't feel I should do anything to stop her. So I started to fall asleep again. But then I woke in an agitated state and went over to her pile of things in the corner where the note was.

It lay atop some clothes, some jewelry, her newly bought sleeping bag, and about four hundred dollars in large bills:

*Please take these as gifts. God be with you.*

*In fact, I know you are all very much with God.*

*Love always,  
Laura*

I went out the front door just in time to see her being picked up by a cab on the corner.

My first reaction was again to just to let things be. She had told us she was going to leave us soon back in Montauk. But suddenly I felt an overwhelming sense of panic. It was irrational, perhaps, but I grabbed the keys to Weegee and took off after the cab. I figured this wasn't going to be a local excursion, so I headed for the freeway entrance.

I got to there just in time to see the taxi turning west towards New York. A part of me felt like I should turn back, and I almost did, but then I remembered, or thought I remembered. . . among her jewelry? *Her wedding ring?* The panic returned and I knew I had to follow. For thirty minutes, in pre-dawn, just before rush hour, I followed the cab to the George Washington bridge. Then the cab's brake lights came on and wheeled onto the shoulder at mid-span. The brake lights went back on again twice, and I thought I saw the driver raising his fist in anger before the taxi pulled away at full speed.

My fears were well-founded. As I pulled to the shoulder, to that very spot the cab had vacated, Laura was climbing a ladder to a high railing.

I had come so very close to turning around, because I figured even if it was her wedding ring among her pile of jewelry, maybe she had left it behind as a symbol of a brand-new start. But it was an ending she had in mind.

“Oh no, Jackie!” she screamed at me, frightened and shocked upon seeing me. “GO AWAY! GO AWAY! PLEASE... PLEASE GO!”

“Laura!” my eyes were blinded by the bridge lights above her, “Don’t do this! Believe me, your life means more than this.”

She seemed to fall into a daydream. She wasn't responding to me.

Cars raced by not noticing either of us. But then one car stopped in back of mine. Two policemen got out of an unmarked car. They approached me. One of them said, “A cabbie notified us that someone...” then they spotted her.

“I’ll call,” said the other in a business-like voice, and walked away to alert the suicide unit.

“You know her?” the first cop asked.

I nodded.

“What’s her name?”

“Look, you won’t be able to help. Just let me try.”

“*What’s her name*, dammit,” he said in an angry voice.

“I’m going to talk to *her*, not you,” I shot back.

He looked up at her through the glaring lights, "Listen, Miss, I'd just want to ask you a question."

She looked down and noticed he was a cop.

"I feel sorry for you!" she yelled.

He nodded, "Okay, Okay. Why's that?"

"But I can't forgive you."

His thoughts seemed to stumble for a second. "Forgive me for what?"

"What you've done."

"What is it you think I've done?"

She didn't respond. Then she screamed, "Everything!"

The wind from that height blew her short black hair across her face. She seemed to almost lose her balance at one point, but held on to something. A handrail maybe. I couldn't tell.

He tried to speak to her again, but she stared out over the edge, lost to both of us.

Traffic had begun to back up. People were beginning to squint through their windshields at the line of cars on the shoulder.

Another police car pulled up and two more cops approached.

They didn't say one word to her before she spotted them, and she started screaming. She was cursing, which she'd never done once since I'd known her.

She moaned, "God damn you. *Why did you do it?*"

"Laura," I cried. "These guys are not responsible for anything. They're trying to help you."

"Jackie! GO AWAY! You don't understand. It's all connected. Don't you see? LOOK AT THEM! They've chosen to act this way – to follow the orders of evil people and enforce their evil laws. And break laws in private when no one is looking."

"Laura, they're not *all* evil," I didn't even know if she could hear me, the wind was picking up, nor could I fully convince myself that she wasn't right in some way.

The local police, the military, the FBI, the CIA were all following Nixon's lead. He had made it very clear through his darkly sinister speeches, and through all the carefully crafted innuendos interpreted by the press, that opposition to the war was anti-American. That all opposition to him was susceptible to IRS audits and FBI scrutiny -- even his political opponents. Blacks were thugs. Hippies were Communists, drug addicts, revolutionaries. The only true patriots apparently were those who agreed with him and everything he did. He ruled by fear and threats. How was this any different than an evil dictatorship? This was the mindset on the streets.

Most in the media were not opposing the president's ill logic. Most were cowards posing as free speech patriots.

And the public was not in the habit of questioning the media.

Among Nixon's list of deviants were "radical" church leaders, both black and white, as well as some Democratic senators who had already begun to seriously question the war and Nixon's massive bombing campaign. The TV images of the war -- pictures that came too often without opposition or questioning commentary, pushed Laura over the edge.

"You have to leave me alone, Jackie" she screamed. "You're the only good thing here. The only thing worth saving. Leave me in Hell with these murderers. Go!"

More police cars showed up with their lights blinking in a pink sunrise. The cars now included members of the suicide unit. But she was now convinced that even they were a part of the government machinery.

"Ooohaah," she screamed at the smeary sun peeking through the smog, and then she looked down at them again from the top of her perch, with her face becoming thin and angular. I could sense her fear.

One young cop lost his cool and screamed, "*Look, you stupid kid, get the fuck down from there.*"

But she screamed back, "You can't escape blame, you can't escape the eyes of God. You're fighting for the wrong side. You *hate* my friends," she pointed down at me, "You

protect evil when you should be fighting against it. You've murdered the constitution, the Bill of Rights. What happened to Marty's right to pursue his life? You took him, kidnapped him against his will. You killed him! You deserve to be blamed for everything!"

She pointed to me again, "Look at that sweet boy. You want to blame *him* now, don't you? You've killed sweet innocent people like him with your fucking lies and cynicism about the world. You are *violent bullies*, bullying innocent children and people brave enough to march against your insanity every day. But that's not what we stand for in THIS country! Stop being fucking robots and stand up for yourselves. Look in the mirror. Look into the future. It will not look kindly back at you!"

She began to scream even louder, this time without ever taking a breath for them to interrupt her, "God *hates* you, you're killing the future of this country, don't you see that? George Washington would have, would have *detested* you! He would have gone to war against you as a revolutionary! Jesus would have too!"

She finally took a deep breath, "So shoot me! *Shoot me* it doesn't matter anymore."

She was sobbing. Her words were turning totally incomprehensible. Gibberish. Fading. I saw her lift both arms into the air.

By the time a police sergeant had pressed the button on his shiny new bull-horn to speak, she disappeared from view. They flashed their lights. They looked over the railing. She was gone.

## Twenty-six

New York is well-equipped for madness. In fact, its madness has been institutionalized. It runs like a network of wires absorbed in the architecture of the buildings. There are asylums, prisons, and help hot-lines that operate in a low electrical hum across the city. You can feel the buzz, like Munch's "The Scream," if you stand still and listen closely enough. Then there are the endless sirens that crisscross the avenues like sonic lattice work, day and night.

But the Coast Guard boats operate in relative silence. We were amazed when they told us they had found Laura, barely alive, floating face up and unconscious, buoyed by the saline sludge of New York's toxic waters. It was incredible that she could not escape her fate — she was still living in pain, tortured by the remains of a poisoned world.

I gave the police all the information I could about her, and within hours of her rescue they were able to contact her parents in Kansas.

We all went to the hospital the following day but were not allowed to see her. She was wired-up, still unconscious, in the critical care unit. She had already undergone surgery, and the doctors, though they were reluctant to tell us much, did say she might have to be operated on again. She was

expected to live, but that was as far as they were willing to speculate.

Laura's parents, arriving as fast as they could, spent every day and night by their daughter's bedside. When we finally met them they were exhausted. They staggered with the weight of their own grief as they wandered the hallways.

They knew very little about our relationship with Laura. She didn't communicate frequently with them. Her occasional post cards mentioned only Jan and me by name. The father coolly and formally introduced himself as "Mr. Taber." He was a tall man with gray tightly curled hair. His facial skin was creased and tough, still dark from the last of a Kansas City summer. His eyes were slightly beady, and he had fleshy ears that reached out a little too far. His starched gray shirt and blue polyester slacks, like his demeanor, seemed ready to handle stress and tragedy in a proper and orderly manner.

Mrs. Taber was much shorter than her husband. Her face held many of Laura's features – the dark almond shaped eyes, the contours of her mouth. She wore a stiff dark blue dress with not-so-subtle white polka dots, filmy stockings and jet-black heels. She was slightly farm-girlish in her movement, despite her outfit.

After our introductions Mr. Taber asked us to explain what exactly happened, so I recounted as tactfully as I could Laura's incessant grief over Marty's death.

He said, "We knew she was upset when Marty died. But that was over a year ago. She'd been all right since then."

"No. She went up and down," I replied.

"And how did you happen to be at the bridge with her? The police told me it was before dawn."

"When I heard the door close that morning and saw she was gone I had an intuition something was wrong. So I followed her cab."

"Did you give her any dope?" he said in a cold quiet voice.

"Roy!" the mother snapped.

"I wanna know, dammit." He pointed his finger at his wife, as if this conversation had already come up between them. He turned back towards us again, awaiting an answer.

Lee said, "You're blaming the wrong people, and the wrong source."

"Just answer my question," he squinted his eyes at Lee.

"People don't wake up depressed one morning and decide to jump off a bridge!" he hissed. "Was she on dope? Was she on a high?"

Lee shook his head, "Your daughter never even took a sip of wine. She never smoked a cigarette, never cursed. She was quite possibly straighter than you."

"Come on, boy, what the hell do you take me for? What was she doing living with you people, trying to convert you to Jesus?"

"None of us were trying to convert anyone to anything!" I shot back. "And by the way, people who smoke grass don't automatically start jumping off bridges! You're missing the point."

"And what's the point?" he screamed.

"Her love for Marty is the point! Grieving that your government killed him, in a war that will historically mean nothing to anyone, and she knew that. *That's* the point!"

"Get out! All of you bastards."

The mother took him by the arm and sat him down at the other end of the room. When she returned to our group she said, "You'd better go now. We can take care of Laura by ourselves. We know you've been friends and all, but we must ask you to please not visit her again. It will just upset everyone involved. If my daughter wants to contact you after she's recovered, that's her business."

Mr. Taber remained seated, his hands covering his eyes, elbows leaning against his knees.

We found out later from the only nurse willing to keep us informed that Laura's recovery time could be six months, maybe longer. As soon as possible she was to be transferred, at her parents' request, to a hospital near their home. We found out later that the hospital was located right next to a military base. Ironically the worst possible setting for her to try to recover. We also found out Laura wasn't on their health care plan. This was going to cost them everything they had to save their daughter's life.

I thought – my God, how is Laura going to survive this without becoming even crazier and more depressed than she already was? I wanted to tell someone in charge how going back with them might be the worst thing for her, and tell them all what kind of person she really was. But there was no one there that would listen.

## Twenty-seven

The tragedy came at a time when our lives were already filled with built-in transitions. Within a week Wes left for college in Syracuse.

Days later Sherry would depart for Harpur.

It was an especially emotional time for her. She cried in my arms. What happened to Laura had shaken her up. The entire country was in an uproar over the war, and civil rights. There were protests, riots. Two friends she knew were drafted, went to Vietnam and died there. She was leaving her parents, and all of us, for a strange new life where she would know no one. I tried to cheer her up. We talked about The Beatles, and our summer swims out past the undertow on our favorite beach, back when we first met. But there was a darkness, an urgency to it all.

Appropriately, the weather had succumbed to fall. The morning of Sherry's departure brought gray freezing rain.

Before she drove me to the railway station where I would catch a train to meet Jan at work, I led her into her bedroom and sang "Sherry's Song" to her for the first time.

I had practiced it for nearly two months, changing things slightly to bring out all the nuances, and assuring

myself of enough emotional control to play it flawlessly and  
sing it with a steady voice.

*Autumn eyes,  
tonight  
we seem to be  
just so far away.*

*I don't have an answer this time,  
The thought of night-time  
never made you cry before.  
Autumn sun, very soft,  
always came for you to orange you away.*

*Beautiful times when we could clearly feel our deepest senses,  
and I always felt you'd be near me.*

*Leaves drifting apart to be alone.  
A sacrifice to help the soul to try and grow.*

*Autumn eyes,  
tonight  
do you need to be somewhere far away?  
Or should I try to reach you  
once again?*

When I finished the song, she moved close to me and sighed into my neck. "It's beautiful, Jackie. Keep writing songs. Someday people will hear how good you are."

I put my guitar down and held her. She said, "I love you," then pushed me away. "I'll write you a poem on the plane today," she said, trying to break the solemnity. "I'll call it 'Sherry's Ode to Jackie's Song for Sherry.'"

I laughed.

She nodded, "That would be Part 1. Part II will be entitled: 'Farewell to Literature.'"

"I'm sure not. You're a better writer than I am."

I felt the intense irony of *me* seeing Sherry off to college.

I thought about how many times I had left her in the past year, first to go to school at A.U. Then to go to California, twice. I thought of me and Jan, of Wes, Lee and Misty. I thought about jealousy, about how hard it is to tame your own demons – then for some strange reason, I thought to myself, "In the end, you're on your own."

## Twenty-eight

In early October, Lee, Misty (now officially "freed" by her parents), Jan and I decided to leave New York, and our jobs, and travel to Washington, D.C. to participate in the "October Moratorium Against the War."

It was also an opportunity for me to revisit American University. I would have been a sophomore now, struggling through Bach analysis and Scarlatti, and none of this would ever have happened. That seemed completely unimaginable.

Before we left, Lee found out that one of his best friends from Brooklyn High, Eddie Duranz, had been killed in Vietnam. We inevitably came around to talking about Laura. How many more would be left behind to feel that kind of pain, when someone you love who isn't supposed to die is killed in a senseless war built on lies?

All this, combined with the loss of Sherry and Wes to their colleges in upstate New York, created a very dark atmosphere among the four of us.

1969 could have been seen as a bleak year in general: the inauguration of Richard Nixon, the My Lai trial, the Chicago Seven trial, the Chappaquiddick incident, the assassination of Fred Hampton of the Black Panthers by the

Chicago police (which eventually brought about an indictment against the Illinois Attorney General) as well as the People's Park shootings, the murder at Altamont, and the insane murders committed by Charles Manson and his followers. All in one year. This was the America we were growing up in.

But some years in history take on a certain feeling very difficult to describe with facts about wars and murders. And as we drove south to Washington, D.C., our darkness was softened by the permeating mist of 1969.

Despite everything, there was a sense of wonder and hope that charged the atmosphere. We were taking part in a revolution that was spreading around the world. No more wars. No more dictators. No more racism. No more sexism. No more Nixon, and the criminals surrounding him in the White House. They had to go! By the time we hit Baltimore we were back on track and buzzing with excitement.

We entered the nation's capital with the sky a chilly metallic blue. It was only about six o'clock, but the days were getting shorter. We drove past a big green sign that read, "Welcome to your Capital," and I wondered out loud: Who are the '*they*' calling us "you?"

As we parked on a side street to eat the dinner we'd packed, we were still in a high mood. An hour later,

however, as we came to the middle of the city, our mood turned far more introspective. The Capitol Building and the Washington Monument were framed in a thousand lights. Blindingly white marble citadels that had been through endless political victories and crises. Powerful symbols of the American dream blazing against a starry sky. Somehow, despite all that had happened, we still felt America's dream at its core was a beautiful one. The founding fathers had it right, for the most part. We just had to get their intentions back into forefront, and expand it for the modern times. We felt maybe in the next few days we could find the power to resurrect everything good.

Vietnam Moratorium Day was a great success. Colleges all over the country closed down. One hundred thousand people rallied in Boston. Thousands of Wall Streeters joined in a noon rally in New York. Two hundred Vassar girls handed daffodils to West Point cadets as they sang "America the Beautiful." And in Washington 220,000 people followed Coretta King from the Washington Monument to the White House where she lit a candle for peace.

It was a moving day. But when it was over, the TV and newspapers downplayed all these things and focused on one incident in southside Chicago where someone had burned a police car. We felt like nothing had really changed.

So with tireless conviction, we geared up for the next protest, “The March Against Death” on November 15th, which was being sponsored by the powerful “New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam.”

We had taken Laura’s four hundred dollars and put it in a bank, deciding we would either give it back to her someday, or donate it to a cause she would have approved of. Now the choice seemed clear. We gave it all to the Mobilization Committee.

Jan and I stayed at an apartment in D.C. with my ex-college roommate, Skip. Lee and Misty had befriended a male resident of the now co-ed dorm on American University’s campus. They stayed in his room some of the time, and in the van the rest of the time. For a week or so we helped organize the march.

Then, on Halloween eve, we all decided to pay a surprise visit to Sherry in Binghamton, New York, home of Harpur University.

She had been through some pretty big changes since entering college. One of the biggest was that she’d met a guy named Michael. They met the first week of school and he fell in love with her.

They decided that since they were both looking for a place to live off-campus they might as well try living together. They realized it was a risky idea, but they thought,

“What the hell?” And so far, at least after four weeks, it was working out.

It took us eight hours by Weegee to reach our final destination, creeping through the final fifty miles in a light snowstorm. None of us had ever been to Binghamton before. It was a flat, two-dimensional city, a naturally dreary place since it had one of the fewest average “sun” days per year in the whole country. Beyond the downtown district it opened up into wooded farmland owned by rugged, modest farmers who wore hunters' caps and red checkered shirts. Sherry's school was located just beyond the woodland farms amidst a few lightly scattered suburbs.

Sherry and Mike's house, a rental found through the school housing board, was beautiful. It was a small wooden A-frame with a stream running through the front yard. The backyard led directly into a dense forest.

We arrived at dinner time, parked the van on the far side of the stream and walked across a small wooden bridge that creaked under our feet. Autumn created kaleidoscopic colors. The trees nearly glowed internally with their red, orange and yellow leaves. Through the branches I could see Sherry's head peeking through the window beside the jack-o-lantern. There was a witch on the front door, and it jiggled as the door flew open.

Sherry ran outside without a jacket and hugged each of us. The atmosphere was immediately festive. The refrigerator was emptied of all its contents, and Jimi Hendrix was thrown on the stereo as our gear was unloaded from the van.

Michael was calm, intellectual, round-faced, with a trimmed beard and long brown hair. From the beginning he left no doubt that we were welcome.

We celebrated the end of Halloween eve by taking turns smoking some great Colombian pot from a four-way water pipe and crashing out together in the middle of the unfurnished living room, with blankets and sleeping bags spread from wall to wall.

It was curious to realize, but one thing that really helped us let go and unwind was that Michael had not experienced the last few months with us. He was unscathed, and unsobered.

The next morning was Halloween day. We took a morning walk in the back woods. It snowed while we slept, and the upper half of every tree limb was coated with a layer of glowing white crystals. We gathered a few dozen of the most radiant leaves and taped them, cold and crackly, to the windows. The jack-o-lantern was lit, snowflakes were brushed off the front door witch, and bags of candy were

brought down from the cabinet above the refrigerator. All was ready.

Late in the afternoon, Sherry and Michael gave us a tour of Harpur. It was a school with modern buildings and facilities, and bright young professors. Sherry told me about some of her classes: "Existential Psychology," "Eastern Philosophy," and "The Economics of War." The latter was taught by a 29-year-old wizard with the dramatic name of Marcus Dylan.

Back home we were expecting a swarm of children after nightfall. There were many young married couples living nearby and we saw skeletons, ghosts, fairies, clowns, frogs, Martians, witches on brooms, cowboys on horse sticks and a Dracula in pajamas all file by our house without stopping. Some looked in our well-lit window, stared at the jack-o-lantern and the waving witch and tugged at their mothers' arms, pointing toward us. But they were pulled onward. The hippies' house was being avoided like a house under quarantine.

We shook our heads and laughed it off, all except Sherry, who took it quite hard. All she had wanted was a fresh start. I wondered if we might have ruined things by being there.

In the morning, Lee and Misty drove Mike and Sherry uptown to the Salvation Army and neighboring thrift shops

to buy some additional furniture and odds and ends for the house. Weege would be transformed into a "powerful work-horse," actually an old horse with a slight tendency towards asthma. Jan and I stayed behind and further explored the woods behind the house. The air was still and shockingly cold. The stream was just beginning to freeze. Ice formed on its miniature shores.

About a quarter mile down the path we spotted a young deer, still as a statue, watching us with giant eyes from a cluster of shrubs. As I moved to get a closer look it flinched violently and froze again. Jan smiled. She began walking towards it slowly, palms out, then stopped. The deer sneaked up on her until it was right next to her. It's left front leg shivered nervously as Jan talked in a strange gentle babble. I decided to move just a bit closer too but as I lifted my foot the deer leaped and took off. I shook my head.

"Wrong foot," she shrugged. She laughed and pulled the ski hat that Laura had given me off my head. Then she ran through the trees. I tried to catch her, tripping on all the rocks and branches she seemed to glide over.

When we got back to the house, I lit a fire and lay down on the throw rug with my hands behind my head. Jan's hands were cold as she stroked my face. I looked into the fire for a while, then met her eyes. I lazily pulled the buttons away from the holes on her red flannel shirt. Her breasts

were winter white. I reached for the button on her jeans and she lifted her hips. Our bodies were cold as they came together. The touch, the sight, the taste of her, the feel of her hands on my body, were so fine and familiar. We made love calmly. No thought was given to that ever-constant possibility – this might be the last time. There was just *this time* again, a seemingly endless dream we were living in. We gravitated closer and closer to the heat of the fire and fell asleep.

We awoke with a start to the sound of a car door slamming. We grabbed our clothes and flew into the bathroom. The front door opened and the sound of feet came and went. When we emerged we saw a small rocking chair. Next came a dark green couch with its white innards appearing through occasional holes. Shiny utensils clanked onto the kitchen table and a few thick mugs were pulled from a shopping bag. Sherry was smiling, “Now it’s a house.”

But Sherry, I noticed, still wore a string of shells around her neck – Laura’s gift. And Lee stood alongside Misty wearing the twin of my ski cap.

Every so often there were still shadows, memories, that wouldn’t quite vanish.

The next day we zoomed back down to the frenzied capital to get back to serious business.

## Twenty-nine

November 15th started off well enough. It was a brisk late-autumn Saturday. At mid-day 250,000 people gathered at the Capital, 30 or 40 abreast, extending ten blocks up Pennsylvania Avenue to the Treasury Building and four blocks down 15th Street to the Washington Monument.

Lee, Misty, Jan and I volunteered as marshals. We wore white arm bands handed out by march committee officials and then directed the crowds throughout the march route.

For days Richard Kleindienst, Nixon's deputy attorney general, had screamed to the press of impending doom and warned of riots all over Washington. District police stood along the march route and a force of 9,000 troops stayed on the perimeters, geared for trouble. But there was peace. Joy. It was 30 windless degrees. The sky was American flag blue. The sun glared off the white marble roof tops. Banners waved above the thousands of heads, "Love Power," "Bring the Boys Home Now," "Warning: Your F.B.I. is Armed and Dangerous," "Boycott Non-Union Lettuce," "Buddha for President," "C.I.A. Out Of Berkeley," "Nixon for Mine Sweeper."

And my favorite one: "The Law Protects Us From Evil, But Who Protects Us From Evil Laws?"

New York Senator Charles Goodell spoke to the crowd: "Pride and honor come when a country that has made a mistake, recognizes it, and owns up to that mistake."

Then Pete Seeger, and Peter, Paul and Mary sang and the crowd swayed arm in arm.

Some called the peace protesters naive. But we knew most of the people there were not naive. They were making a conscious attempt to cast aside their cynicism. We attempted, en masse, to love our country despite itself. And end a war non-violently with the sheer force of numbers. We eventually succeeded. But still, a price had to be paid.

Darkness was descending by the time our work as marshals was over. We took off our official white arm bands and began walking back to Skip's house. A few blocks later we saw a few people gathered near the Justice Building.

Police had arrived and had surrounded the area.

We saw one person in the crowd begin screaming at one of the cops. He broke away from a group of police and started throwing rocks at the windows of the building.

Misty ran towards the scene, still feeling a duty as a marshal to help prevent police arrests and the inevitable bad press it was create. The rest of us followed. But suddenly a cop grabbed Misty by the arm and started pushing her towards a group of waiting police cars. Lee ran towards her, then he was stopped and dragged away as well. A large

helmeted cop grabbed Jan and me from our blind side. Jan cried, "We're marshals!" but he made no acknowledgment. He was directing us towards a paddy wagon, with his night stick poised in his right hand.

Misty and Lee were pinned against squad cars about 15 yards away from each other. Misty's cop started frisking her. As he continued to "search" her he began touching her and pulling her dress up slightly.

Misty screamed, "Hey, keep your fucking hands to yourself." At which point the cop pushed her harder against the car.

Lee was also being frisked but his eyes were on Misty. Maybe he could feel her fear and her anger, or maybe he began to remember the two creeps in Ohio, because suddenly something in him exploded. With one swift motion he grabbed his cop by the waist and exchanged positions with him, pushing him against the squad car. Then he ran towards Misty. The cop tried to grab him from behind, but Lee was not to be stopped. As he reached Misty, he grabbed the assailant-cop by the shoulders and threw him to the ground. Then he grabbed Misty by the hand and ran towards the Justice Department steps.

Other forays began cropping up here and there. The ever-present news cameras began to flash, lighting up the startled crowd with an intermittent incandescent glow.

Jan and I were desperately trying to explain our situation to our police captor, while 100 yards away Lee and Misty were being grabbed by a horde of police. Their red and blue car lights began spinning ominously. Lee's arm was twisted hard behind him as he was pounded to the ground. Misty was whisked away and thrown into a paddy wagon. By then a full-fledged riot had begun. In the end, thirty arrests were made.

After things had cooled down Jan and I finally convinced our cop that we were indeed marshals and were only trying to help, and we were released.

We rushed home and tried to get through to the police station, but the lines were busy. Jan and I had stayed up most of the night before planning and memorizing the route for the march, and now our bodies were beginning to feel the electric hum of exhaustion.

At 4 A.M. we finally got through to the central office and found out where Lee and Misty were being held. When we got to the station house, reporters and friends and family of those arrested were all crowded in the lobby. We couldn't find any official to help us until 8:30. We were then informed that we wouldn't be able to see Lee or Misty, but Jan could talk to Misty on an intercom phone for thirty seconds. They led her to a little wall phone and gave her the receiver.

"Hello?"

“Jan?”

“Misty, are you okay?”

“Yeah. Are you?”

“Yes. We didn’t get arrested,” Jan whispered.

“Jan, how’s Lee?”

“We don’t know, we haven’t been able to get a hold of him.”

“I think they really fucking hurt him,” Misty’s voice trembled.

“No, no, Misty. We’ll find out where he is and get you both out of here. Just try to keep it together.”

“Yeah. Well I’m all right Jan. It’s Lee.”

The officer interrupted. “Time’s up.”

“Hold on,” Jan snapped. “Misty, I gotta go. We’ll clear everything up. Don’t worry, okay?”

“Okay,” she was holding back tears.

“We love you, hold tight. . . .”

The officer took the phone out of Jan’s hand and hung it up.

“I’ve had it with all this,” Jan yelled at the cop. “I want your badge number.”

He turned and walked away. I grabbed Jan before she could follow him. “We can’t help them if we’re in jail, too,” I said. “Let’s get out of here.”

\* \* \*

On November 16th, we found out that Lee was being held in the prison infirmary. They had nearly broken his arm. The cop that was trying to molest Misty suffered a black eye and a broken nose. They were blaming it on Lee.

We realized that as his time in jail dragged on they would find out he was a draft evader. They had already charged him with assault on a police officer. Things were completely out of control.

## Thirty

Lee had been placed in a relatively low-security section of the hospital ward because of his injury. All of the people there were from the march. The police weren't thinking any of these injured kids were career criminals. Most of them had never even seen the inside of a jail before. But Lee knew they would eventually I.D. him and see that he had burned his draft card back in New York. He could be in serious trouble. He had to try something desperate while he still had a chance.

For hours he studied the routines and the nurses coming and going. He noticed some patients would follow their doctor into the courtyard to receive treatment in another wing of the prison. His bandaged right arm was in a sling. He practiced faking a slight limp. At the right moment he casually entered the narrow hallway, walked behind a staff doctor down the hall, and out into the courtyard where guards were gathered in small groups at each of the two entrances.

Eyes downcast, he stopped near a delivery truck, and without so much as a glance over his shoulder crawled into the back compartment. There were a few empty boxes amongst piles of dirty sheets and pillowcases. He crawled

beneath the largest box, and, for what seemed like an eternity, waited for his ride to freedom.

\* \* \*

We were sleeping on Skip's couch when we were awakened by a knock on the door. Seeing Lee standing there, his arm in a sling, shock us. But when he told us he had escaped, our shock turned to all-out panic.

He said he had to get out of the country as fast as possible. He was very nervous – the implications of what he'd just done were only now beginning to hit him.

We thought it best that Jan stay in D.C. to keep track of Misty while I drove Lee to Canada. Then we would all meet at Sherry's house in upstate New York and I'd let Misty know how to contact Lee. All of this was planned in whispers. We were completely freaked out. I was shaking slightly when I kissed Jan goodbye. I was aiding and abetting a criminal now. Our eyes met but they had no time to communicate anything.

Skip gave Lee a warm jacket that didn't match his calico ski hat at all. Lee yanked the bandages off of his arm and tried to lift his hand. He was almost able to touch his hand to his chest. He said that was good enough, and we took off.

We didn't know when the police would learn of Lee's escape, or just how serious they would consider it, but we imagined the worst. For the first few hundred miles I was constantly checking the rearview mirror. We began to feel safer by the time we reached New York, where the least and the most wanted are equally insignificant specks lost in a labyrinth of streets and highways.

We stopped off at a roadside diner where two of Lee's old friends worked. Lee was obviously not about to be put on the ten most wanted list, but we imagined the media blowing everything out of proportion – "Revolutionary Outlaw Escapes! On the Loose in Your Nation's Capital." If either of his two friends had heard anything they'd tell him, they'd warn us to leave. But we learned by subtle inquiry that they'd heard nothing. We gulped down the greasy food. Then we talked them into giving us some bread, butter, water, and a big bottle of apple juice for the road.

Four and a half hours later we were nearing Vermont. It was cold and dark. We were beyond exhausted. So we pulled into the small town of Bellows Falls, parked on a tree-lined street with cars parked on both sides of the road, and tried to sleep until daylight.

We awoke at 4 A.M. to the glare of a light. We knew what it was. And who it was. The squad car radio was crackling in the distance.

When we first got Weegee, we had torn out the back seat. Jan had made a quilted rug out of abandoned scraps from a carpet dealer's garbage bin, and I planted a cactus in the ashtray on the front dash. We'd built a fold-up bed, and made curtains for the side and back windows. Now Lee was scrambling around, attempting to hide under the bed.

"Don't hide, Lee. *Don't. . .*" He lay down curled up in a ball as I opened the door to face the officer. I was hit with a blast of Vermont winter air and started to shiver.

"Good evening. Are you from around here?" he asked, flashing his light around the side of the van.

"No. We'd just been driving all day and needed to rest awhile. . . ."

"You don't have enough money to stay in a motel? There's one right down the road. But you can't sleep in a car parked on a public street."

"We thought we'd be okay just napping for a few hours. We were just resting."

"Where are you headed?"

"Upstate New York," I said, thinking to use Sherry's address as a home base.

"Got any drugs in the car?"

"None," I said emphatically. "You can search if you want."

He peered through the back window with his flashlight. Lee moved suddenly and covered his eyes from the light with the one arm he could raise that high.

"Your friend, he looks a little nervous," the cop said, looking down at his citation book.

"Well I am too, honestly. It's scary being questioned by police in the middle of the night."

He didn't respond, he just said, "Let me see your driver's license and registration." As I pulled the official papers from the glove compartment, I saw for the first time that the registration for Lee's bus was under a false name.

He took my papers from me and returned to his squad car.

It was a bitter, blustery night, but I didn't want to get back into the van. I didn't want to have to talk to Lee. I was numb with fear. but I leaned with all possible calm against the van door.

The cop returned, handing me the two pieces of ID.

"You can't stay here overnight," he said. "Move on."

"Okay. . . . *Thank you,*" I added.

We crawled through central and northern Vermont in a raging blizzard. Our headlights reflected nothing but fog and shadows. The wheels skidded from lane to lane.

“Lee, the roads are getting rough. Maybe we should rest in a motel somewhere for a day or two. I have some money.”

He was silent.

I didn't want to press the issue, so I changed the subject. “That false I.D. on the registration was a pretty scary. I'd never noticed it before. Where'd you get it?”

“It came with the price of the car,” he said, putting his hands over his eyes as if to banish the exhaustion. “I bought it at 'Draft-dodger Motors.' They also had revolving license plates, but I couldn't afford them.”

He seemed lost in his thoughts, distant, a little too calm. Maybe he knew what I didn't know then: that crossing the border would not be just a matter of driving over a line and waving goodbye. Canadian immigration officials had for over a year watched the so-called free borders between the countries looking for draft resisters like Lee and sending them back to U.S. authorities.

“Lee, Canada can wait for a day. . . .”

“No, Jackie. No, it can't.”

He sat back, straightened his calico ski hat, and looked silently out to the road as it slipped yard by yard beneath the wheels.

## Thirty-one

On November 18th, the day after Lee escaped, Misty was released from jail.

Jan was there to meet her with flowers.

“Hey, flower child!”

“Oh God, you’re so sweet,” Misty sniffled, crying and laughing at the same time. Her eyes widened, “How’s Lee?”

Jan cleared her throat. They stepped outside the city jail, walking towards a bus stop. Jan looked around and said quietly, “Misty, Lee escaped.”

“He what?” she screamed. “Where is he?”

There was a man reading a newspaper on the corner. Jan became suspicious. “Don’t know,” she said in a voice too casual to fool anyone. They waited for the bus in silence. Misty was shaken. Jan refused to talk about it until they arrived at Skip’s house.

“Sit down, Misty.”

“Where is he, Jan?”

“He’s with Jackie. They’re on their way to Canada.”

Misty hid her face in her hands.

“The plan is to meet Jackie at Sherry’s in a few days and he’ll have the name of a place where you and Lee can meet.”

“I have a cousin in Quebec,” Misty said. “He could have gone there if he’d known.”

“Maybe it’s better he goes somewhere where his trail can’t be followed.”

Misty nodded slowly.

That evening they began their long Greyhound bus ride to Sherry’s house.

\* \* \*

Lee and I were reaching the northern-most tip of Vermont. The snow was relentless, and our nearly bald tires made driving slow and dangerous. My eyes were stinging and tearing from lack of sleep. “Talk to me, Lee. I’m getting groggy.”

“About what?”

“Anything. What are you going to do when you get to Canada?”

“I don’t fucking know. Maybe I’ll become a protest singer and marry Joni Mitchell.”

“Lee, seriously, think straight.”

“I’m gonna find a nice little town and shoot myself.”

“You could have done that 800 miles ago and saved us gas money!”

“Yup. Didn’t think of it until now. I’m a bit slow. He rubbed at his nose with his one good arm.

We were on a small desolate highway. The signs for Canada had been growing in frequency. “Pull over, Jackie. I’m gonna get out. I’ll go it by foot from here.”

“Let me drive you into the next town ahead. We’re both hungry, and I’ve got some money. . . .”

“No. It’s best this way.”

I pulled over as best I could, backing up into a small snow drift. I wondered if this might be the last time I’d ever see him. I was numbed by the long hours of driving with nothing much said between us.

“How are we going to know where you are?”

“I’ll call Sherry.”

“But Misty. . . .”

“Misty shouldn’t wait for me. She’s eighteen now. She’s a legal adult. She’s responsible for her actions. She can’t be running around with a goddamned fugitive. This isn’t a T.V. show.”

He stood outside the door now, leaning into the front seat. “They could imprison me for twenty years. I wouldn’t have the money to appeal, I’m no rich kid. But even if I did, the fact is, I’m guilty. So I have to resign myself to it. And Misty’s got to figure out her life without me dragging her down.”

Lee said all this coldly, as if he *were* in a TV show. But suddenly he put his head in his arm on the front seat. I reached to tighten the emergency brake and then slid over to him. I couldn't find words. Everything he said was true. So I just put my hand on his good shoulder.

"Things will work out, Lee."

I swallowed the words hard. I realized it was a dumb-ass thing to say. Lee used it to harden himself against me and against the situation. He dried his eyes with one swipe of his arm. Then he reached into the glove compartment and took out a slip of paper and a pen.

"I'm signing over the van to you." He handed me a wrinkled pink slip and signed the false name to it. "Put the registration in your name. And paint it another color."

He extended his hand and I shook it slowly.

"I'll be in touch," he said, and then pulled his ski cap down low.

"Lee. . . I'm gonna miss you," I whispered. But he hadn't heard me. His knapsack had slammed against the door as he was bending down to reach under the front passenger seat. He reached around searching for something. As his hand came back out it had a small cut from scraping against a loose spring. Then he reached under the seat again and I saw his hand give a quick jerk. As it emerged it held a

small black handgun. He put it in his knapsack. I was speechless.

“Peace,” he said. He disappeared behind an embankment as the snow kept falling.

## Thirty-two

After fourteen hours on a Greyhound bus Misty and Jan reached Binghamton. Jan eventually told me the details about what happened next. But by that time, the dye was set. There was nothing I could do to change it.

The two of them arrived at Sherry's house by mid-afternoon, but no one was home. The house was locked. Misty tried some windows to no avail.

They were exhausted, aching for friends and a warm house, but Jan insisted they make the best of it and take a walk through the back woods until Sherry came home, if for no other reason than to get a little exercise after the long drive. They left their gear on the porch and walked behind the house, following a path beyond where Jan and I had gone a few weeks before.

When they arrived back at the house, they saw a strange van parked outside. It was a two-seater with an empty storage area in back. Their gear was gone from the porch. They knocked on Sherry's door and heard heavy footsteps.

Wes opened the door!

He'd planned to visit because his school let out for Thanksgiving break a day before Sherry's. He'd never seen

the house or met Michael. Sherry had left a key for him hidden beneath a rock.

He greeted Misty and Jan with joy, but soon heard about Lee and was submerged in the crisis.

Sherry and Mike came home later in the afternoon and were told the news as well. The rest of the day and night went by slowly. No one went out, fearing they might miss my call to Misty. I called the following morning.

Jan answered the phone. I was almost unconscious with exhaustion. I told her I was safe and that I thought Lee was all right. That's all I could say until I saw them.

Jan told me that Sherry, Mike and Wes had planned on leaving to spend Thanksgiving vacation back home in Long Island, but they decided to stick around until they heard from me.

I told her to go back with them and wait for me at Sherry's house in Farmingdale. Then maybe we could spend Thanksgiving with my parents.

"What did Lee say about contacting Misty?"

"Just tell her to stay at Sherry's parents' house until I get there." She heard the frustration in my voice.

"Hey, Jan?"

"Yes?"

"If Lee wants to call Misty, he knows Sherry's number in Long Island. There's nothing more we can do. Just follow the plan and I'll see you tomorrow."

Little problems arose. There was not enough room for everyone with their gear in Mike and Sherry's VW bug, and Wes had to go back to Syracuse before heading south to pick up a painting that hadn't fully dried. A Thanksgiving present for his parents. Misty wanted to be at Sherry's in case Lee tried to call, so Jan went with Wes.

The two of them arrived in Syracuse and headed to the art building. They entered a large studio with a high ceiling that smelled of oil paint and turpentine. Jan looked around at some of the students' paintings.

A smock lay on a chair next to an easel. She touched it with her fingers.

"Want to try painting something?" Wes asked, but he didn't wait for a reply. He squeezed some paints onto an empty pallet and handed it to her.

Jan stood before a canvass already prepared with a gray-blue background. "You don't need to think about technique, you don't need to paint anything real. Everything's real. Any brush stroke is real. Just take these colors, mix them together any way you want to, and *see what happens.*"

She dabbed her brush into a dark color.

"You can use a delicate stroke, or just use your strength to push it into the canvas. Anything's O.K."

Wes set up a small canvas for himself and began working on his own, purposely not looking over in Jan's direction.

After an hour he walked towards her. Her painting was a brooding whirl of sky with stars that seemed to blur into ghosts, or angels.

A short while later she put her brush down and began to wander around the studio, looking through a series of canvases stacked against a wall.

Wes put his new painting in a corner to dry.

"We should get going," Jan said. "But first, can I see what you were working on?"

"How about if I show you the one that's dry? We'll need to carry it to the van anyway."

"Sure." She looked around the room to see if she could spot it.

Wes went into another room and carried a very large canvas through the doorway. He leaned it against the wall.

It was an old woman's face. From up close it looked like nothing more than brush strokes of colors fading into each other. But from ten feet away the face became hauntingly

detailed. Every line and wrinkle, every strand of hair, came alive. So did the sadness. Yet there was something more. Jan was astounded. It was like her sketch on the wall at California Street, except it was infinitely more intricate.

She flashed back to her old drawings. They had tried to convey one of her most cherished childhood revelations — that grief and ecstasy felt like the same thing in some ways: the churning in the stomach, the body tensed and awake. Only the mind, ruminating upon "implications," created the fear of one, and the desire for the other. She had always used that thought to maintain her strength whenever she heard her parents fighting. And now it all came clear, in a brilliant vision, spoken impressionistically: Wes' strange sad old woman with the euphoric sky-colored eyes.

As she helped him load it into the van, it seemed like a mirage, a lake of pastels. Even the irises, the very center of this woman's eyes, were mere impressions, mere dabs of the brush. . . .

It was getting dark by the time they exited the campus, and the roads were becoming dangerously icy from new snow.

"It might be best to stay at the dorms and travel back early in the morning," Wes offered. "It's up to you."

"I don't know," Jan said, closing her eyes as she deliberated.

"We'd probably make it back before Jackie gets there anyway if we leave early enough tomorrow."

"The weather looks pretty bad tonight," Jan said. "And I'm feeling pretty frazzled. Can I sleep in a sleeping bag somewhere?"

"Sure," Wes said.

They entered Wes' dorm room and Wes set a sleeping bag on the floor for her.

"I didn't really finish that painting," Jan said suddenly. "Actually, I should have covered it completely over and started again. I should have painted the truth."

"I thought it was. . . ."

"No. It was just a first reaction. Like the things I used to draw when I was a child. It wasn't at all what I was feeling."

"We can go back."

Jan hesitated. "Can I go alone?"

"Well, let me go turn on the lights and set things up for you."

"I can do it myself."

"O.K. If that's what you want to do." Wes pulled a set of keys from his pocket and set one apart from the others.

"Thanks. This will probably be an interesting little disaster," she laughed.

"Don't joke about it. Just do what you need to do."

She looked at Wes squarely. He was a bit unshaven, standing above her; a little too tall, leaning awkwardly on one leg.

"Don't rush," he added.

She nodded and went out the door.

It was just before sunrise when she returned, full of paint, her eyes heavy from lack of sleep. She had drawn the pain she felt, about Lee, about me, about her childhood – her fears of being caught, captured by some untrusting spirit.

She had slammed her fears against the canvas in rare bursts of anger, and cried for the elusive freedom still lacking in her life and in the world.

Then her mother's face came to her. It was an old woman's face that was her mother years from now. How could she come to forgive? She wanted her mother's face to possess the same wisdom as the woman's face in Wes's painting. But there were too many differences. Her mother's face had too many shadows, not enough light.

She was about to crawl into her sleeping bag in the corner when Wes' voice disturbed her reverie.

"Are you O.K.?" he asked from his bed.

"Yes," she whispered. But she was shaking, shivering.

He sat up. A faint light from the window revealed the outline of his face.

"I'm pretty tired. . . . But I want to paint more, from now on."

"I'm glad."

"Good night, Wes."

"Want a good night hug?" he said finally.

"Don't get up." She walked over to him and sat above the covers. He reached out to her and she put her arms around him.

"I love you," he said, sighing nervously.

Jan pulled away and looked at him warily.

"I'm sorry, Jan. I am. I've tried to stop thinking about you. But it's just been too clear to me for too long. And it's even clearer now."

He seemed near tears. For a moment she let herself feel his pain. She had always been touched by his shyness, his awkwardness, unlike his paintings which were so sure, so solid.

She looked at his mangled curly hair, her vision adjusted more and more to the darkness. She thought of letting herself go, giving in to what he wanted with her, but she knew it would hurt me. The hurt, she assumed, might be temporary, but still, she didn't want to hurt me. No. She bent over him to speak, to gently admonish, but his lips moved towards hers.

She said, "Wes, I can't do this."

But she also knew that she wanted to keep touching him, just for a moment more. She thought of that evening with him on the beach, as he went running into the ocean. And the first visit to his studio back home in Long Island. There were deeper things she had not let herself feel. But still. . . .

He moved closer to her again. He kissed her, gently. Persistently, but gently. The kisses became longer and deeper. And suddenly they were free.

## Thirty-three

My drive back to Long Island was slow and treacherous. I was lonely. And the thought of telling Misty that Lee left me no forwarding address, no contact time, pushed me to the brink of despair.

By 11 P.M. I was hungry, exhausted, and snow blind. My eyes burned so I shut them for a moment. A minute later the same thing happened.

I figured even if I kept driving everyone would be asleep by the time I could get to Sherry's, so I pulled to the side of the road. I crawled into the back, unfolded the bed, and fell asleep, expecting at any moment to be rudely aroused by the red and blue lights of the Highway Patrol.

Early the next afternoon I arrived at Sherry's parents' house. I ran to the front door and opened it.

Misty and Sherry were leafing through The New York Times at the dining room table while Michael was finishing breakfast. They ran to me and put their arms around me together. I held on to them for a moment, then slowly unzipped my winter jacket, which I hadn't taken off since Washington.

"Where's Lee now?" Misty asked in a hushed tone.

“He’s in Canada, I don’t know where. It could be a while, Misty. . . .”

“Is he gonna call?”

“Not right away.”

“Is he gonna write?”

“I don’t know, Misty. I don't.”

She looked at me coldly.

I said, “He told me we all have to live our own lives for a while, get ourselves back together, and let him find his way until he's safe. Then he'll. . . .”

She looked down and stared motionlessly at the floor.

Sherry put her hand over Misty’s hand and whispered something in her ear.

“Where’s Jan?” I asked, looking around.

“She’ll be back soon,” Sherry said. “She’s driving back with Wes.”

I tried to prevent my mind from thinking the worst. Finally, around 3 P.M. Jan arrived.

I was in Sherry’s room alone, fighting with a long strange progression on my guitar. When Jan opened the door I jumped up and walked across the room to meet her. I hugged her tightly.

“How are you?” she whispered.

“Okay.”

I looked at her face. Her eyes looked frightened. Her body was rigid against mine. She seemed nervous.

“You made love with Wes,” I said. It was obvious. She was shocked that it showed so easily, but she slowly nodded her head.

We stared at each other for a moment. I had my moment of panic and devastation, but having come from the last few days of constant crisis some other emotion took over. My sense of priorities was strangely clear.

I had been with Laura on the bridge; at the brink. I had been through Lee's struggle to escape, and kept replaying those last minutes in the car with him. I felt stronger, bigger than the wave of sadness running through me. Life felt bigger than all that. I heard myself say, “Jan, I don't care. I love you. I just want to be with you. I get it now. It's okay.”

I held her, while also holding on to all the hard wisdom life had somehow given me.

I whispered to her, “I didn't even realize how much I loved you until I was away from you.” I had more to say. But she started crying.

I knew it wasn't the kind of crying that comes from love, or happiness, or even guilt or remorse. I'd never seen Jan cry with such intensity. It was, I knew, the kind of crying that comes from something unresolved. The pieces fell into place without her saying a word.

"You want to be with him."

She was trying to regain her composure as she wiped away the stream of tears. "Something is happening between Wes and me. . ." she began, then started crying again. "I've thought so much about you; I've missed you, Jackie."

"You want to be with him," I said again.

"Yes. No, I mean, not right away, not right now. I want to spend time with you."

"No." I intended to say it as an act of gallantry, but it sounded angry. My new-found strength had crumbled. It felt like my entire life had just fallen into a vast airless void.

At that moment Sherry walked in.

"Hi," she said, her voice lowering mid-word. We shuffled our feet nervously and looked at each other in silence.

That night Wes called me. He insisted on talking though I didn't want to. "What do you want, Wes?"

"Jackie, this is not the way I wanted things to turn out."

"Really?"

"Really! You're my friend. You knew I loved her. What happened was no stoned-out little one-night fantasy. I *love* her! And whatever happens from here, I want you to know that I love you too. I've looked up to you since the day we met, and I still do. . . . I don't want you to hate me." Wes

sounded on the verge of tears. But I wasn't receptive. "Do what you need to do, man," was the best I could come up with.

I spent the following days at my parents' house. They made a gigantic Thanksgiving dinner which I ate with ravenous indifference. My entire future had burned and vanished.

Jan stayed at Sherry's. I had banned her and Wes both. Sherry said it reminded her of what she had tried to do with me when I'd come back from California with Jan. I told her it was different: she had called me back, she made the transition somehow. I admitted I couldn't do what she did. Nothing could quench the terrible fire in me.

So it was my turn now. My turn to reap the other side of what the heart sows. This fire. It raged right through my aloof observations of human pain. I was the injured one now, crawling inside of it, churning, chaotic, infinitely lonely; a place very few people have ever learned to make peace with: that central core of aloneness from which we always attempt to shield ourselves.

Jan called me every few days asking to see me. She wanted to straighten things out. She wanted to come up with a solution. But I felt if I saw her I'd probably try to kidnap her back to California, hoping she'd soon forget. . .

one of a thousand sick hopes that swirled around in my head. I knew I couldn't handle the situation with love or grace, so I removed myself from it. And by removing myself, I began to fantasize she might miss me so much it would overtake her feelings for Wes and she would come back to me. The ultimate sick hope.

The days went by with monumental slowness. Near the end of the week I received another phone call from her. She asked me to please come to my senses, to forgive her. She wanted to spend some time alone with me. She suggested we drive up to Sherry's house in Binghamton. Wes had gone back to Syracuse and she was planning to meet him there in a few days. Sherry and Mike would arrive a day later.

At first I refused, but she was persistent and I weakened. I missed her too much to keep up the game anymore.

## Thirty-four

The highway is good for dreaming. Weegee had no radio. There were only the fantasies and the music in my head, the familiar scenery running by as I drove from my parents' house to Sherry's house to pick up Jan. Might this be what it's like to win someone back? The other one would have to realize the all the love left behind. Or if she did love Wes as much as she loved me, maybe I could just deal with it and see her whenever I could. Perhaps I'd be willing to try. I realized I didn't want to be cut-off from her like this. I couldn't.

As I pulled up Jan was sitting on the front steps waiting. It felt like I hadn't seen her for months. When she opened the car door I was at a loss for words.

"Hi stranger," she said as she threw her gear in the back. She hopped into the front seat and fretted. "You look terrible," she whispered, and began to straighten out my hair. She sat as close to me as the gear shift would allow.

Then, as we reached the open road north, she asked me to tell her all about the trip to Canada with Lee.

I told her how we'd traveled most of the way in semi-blindness from the snow, how we'd been questioned by the police. And I told her how all the time I was traveling back

home I was thinking of her, missing her. I said I even missed her now, with her sitting next to me. My heart was pounding as we pulled up to Sherry's house four hours later. We had to shovel some snow away from the front door. We unloaded the bus, then brought in some wood and dried twigs from the porch to start a fire.

When we came back into the house and shut the door our faces were red, and our breathing was heavy. She took off her winter coat and her boots, then her shoes and socks. I was feeling an uncontrollable urge to grab her and kiss her, but I didn't.

After we ate dinner, we sat in the living room by the firelight. We began to talk about Lee again, remembering the life the three of us shared in California, but it only veiled those times in sadness.

Jan asked me to play a song for her, so I took out my guitar and played her a song I had written the night before.

*Star lights.*

*Shining eyes of evening,*

*whisper louder.*

*Sometimes only I can hear you.*

*Sometimes only I*

*can hear you sometimes*

*Only I can hear you....*

She was motionless, eyes closed, her head down.

“Jan. . .” I paused for a long time. “You still love Wes.”

She nodded her head yes and began to say something but stopped herself.

Somehow it had a chilling effect on me. I heard all the things she didn't say. The rest of the evening went by with both of us talking to each other as if through a thin wall. Finally she suggested we go to sleep. I agreed.

Jan pulled down the covers in Sherry and Michael's bedroom, then went into the bathroom to wash up. When she returned, I was in my sleeping bag on the living room floor with the light out.

“You can sleep with me if you want,” she said. She left the door to Sherry's room open. I listened as she unzipped her jeans. I lay perfectly still until her light went out.

A minute later I found myself walking through the dark to her room.

Jan pulled the covers down for me and I crawled into bed. She put her hand on my chest and leaned over to kiss my face.

I couldn't move.

“Jan, what's happened?” I cried.

“Shhh,” she whispered, “no, no, no. . . .” I put my arms around her. The touch of her naked body against me was electrifying.

The passion. . . that I was trying to block out. It was amazing that through an abundance of time and ease, an over-abundance of the sensual, the extracting of every erotic gradation, this uncontrollable fire I felt now could ever have turned into an everyday calmness; routine; unremarkable. It had. That frightened me.

With Sherry, I had had no fear of the calmness. How could that be? There was passion, but it had transcended the greedy hunger, the kind of sensuality that darkly controls everything else. With Sherry, I passionately believed in her life. My love for her didn't even require me to have her physical presence! But with Jan, the fear of losing her ran too deep. And unless I lost that fear I could never really love her.

I held her in the dark with eyes closed. I thought: “Don't try to change her love for Wes. Surrender the *need* to love her.”

I felt her fingers on my neck, then on my face, and they rested there. As she sighed, I felt her stomach push up against my ribs and retreat with a long exhale. I felt my will slipping.

I imagined for a moment trying to live with both of them. Maybe Sherry and Mike would want to live with us too.

But how absurd to think that what was imperfect and lacking within myself could be multiplied into perfection.

\* \* \*

I began to cry. When I opened my eyes, I saw Jan was crying too. It was as if I had spoken my thoughts aloud. Her eyes were closed. How could she have known?

I'd never seen her face look as worried as it did now. Her cheeks were wet. I felt a burning, a pulsing desire in me, but I pressed it back. Something needed to break open before it could merge. Something felt unfinished.

I touched a few errant strands of her yellow hair that had fallen across her face. My fingertips rested lightly there until they sipped in the warmth her skin held. She opened her eyes and put my index finger to her lips and kissed it, half smiling, and suddenly everything in me shattered.

She put her arms around me. I couldn't resist her.

It was indeed incredible that love could be *strengthened* to a place previously unattainable, while simultaneously falling apart.

## Thirty-five

The following afternoon I drove Jan to Syracuse to meet up with Wes. Plans had been made. Minds had been made up. I played the part I was expected to play through our goodbyes. I had no idea when I would see her again.

I tried not to think of anything as I drove back to Binghamton. I tried to concentrate on the present moment, listening to the hum of the engine as the world passed by. Of course, words finally found their way in. “Maybe Jan will come back to me tonight. . . . maybe they’ll get into a fight. Maybe Wes will turn into a jealous monster when he finds out we were together, and she’ll run back to me to escape him.

My morality had run out, my fantasies had run out, and I was left with feelings of revenge and anger. But as my thoughts filtered down, I found myself returning to a more central source. A core question: How had Sherry done it? How had she found peace despite the pain of losing the one she loved? Or was it merely her relationship with Wes that she’d used as a buffer? No. I remembered clearly all the things Sherry had done and said before Wes came along, like our dancing to The Beatles that night in her room.

Where had she found her steadiness of will?

That night Sherry and Mike tried to comfort me: Sherry with her legs spread around me from the back, arms around my waist. Mike sitting on the couch, reading bits and pieces of some wild poetry by Timothy Leary – Psychedelic Prayers.

Then Mike yawned and said he was going to bed. Sherry followed him into the bedroom for a moment and came back holding a piece of paper.

She sat down next to me. “Before I go to sleep, I thought I’d read you this,” she said. “I’ve never shown it to anyone.”

Her eyes had a way of changing hue with the color of the room, or the color of the clothes she wore. Now, at this late hour, they were very dark, an arctic dawn green.

She looked down at the paper.

“It’s a poem I wrote when I first left for Harpur. It’s about you, and the few others I truly love.”

As she spoke, I read along:

Traveling

*I am leaving.*

*I am being taken.*

*Small talk camouflages the crossroads.*

*I am escorted to the airport.*

*Lifted above the snowy inlet.*

*Ice-patched waters turn to pieces  
of moon puzzle.*

*Earlier today I drove Jackie to the station.*

*One minute rumbled down the tracks, and stopped,  
and swept him up.*

*I watched him climb the steel stairway.*

*I watched the iron cages  
smoke away with deafening steadiness.*

*Now I'm suspended here at twenty thousand feet.*

*They say it's Monday.*

*They say it's 1969.*

*I'm holding on to these umbilical cords  
to help keep my equilibrium.*

*My eyes bend towards the earth,  
holding on to roots.*

*My eyes can see the eyes  
of faces I've loved so long.*

*Each one with a voice that has sung  
me awake in our time....*

*I'm afraid now without their eyes upon me.*

*Yet they have left me their legacy.*

*Time has come to use it now,*

*I know what I must do.*

*So above these words*

*I now close my eyes*

*take a deep breath*

*and pretend*

*I have the power*

*to be transformed.*

*And I am transformed*

*– to star gazer.*

*To dream,*

*to reach out,*

*and not look back.*

PART IV

## Thirty-six

Lee slept the first nights in snowy forests off the highway. He was nearly out of money, very hungry, and had not spoken a word or saw anyone in days. He began to feel almost like an animal, unattached to the past or the future. He had never been surrounded by so much silence. All the trees, the roads, were frozen.

On the third day, as he reached the very edge of America, he had a vision. It was a specter of death: death to the Lee that had existed from the day of his birth.

If that Lee were truly a criminal, or a lonely man, desperate for a new life, he might have seen it as a rebirth. But it was a death he saw. Because even if he escaped the country of his birth would still be dying from an endless war, lost in a maze of violence. Even if he escaped, America could not escape paying for its irresponsible use of power, especially against its own people. That's how countries truly die, he thought -- when it turns against the very reason it came into existence.

Even if Lee escaped, America could not. He felt the responsibility weigh upon him. At that moment he foresaw the part he was to play. It was small but necessary.

He quickly turned away from Vermont's northern border and headed south, ready to risk his life to save America from itself.

## Thirty-seven

Lee spent two weeks working nights as a dishwasher in a nameless Vermont town. He studied in its small library during the day.

At last he bought some new clothes, cut his hair to medium length, and took a bus to Boston, a city saturated with colleges and universities. There, with materials bought in a few different hardware and drug stores, he built a small but potent pipe bomb and one rainy evening blew a hole in the Cambridge draft board.

Of course, it was unoccupied. But the records of all the city's draft eligible teenagers were lost forever. Cambridge would have to start the process of selecting its victims all over again.

He had stayed a little too close to the blast. His body shook and ached mercilessly for a few days, but he was just learning, and this was only the beginning. His plan was to travel the whole country, burning down and blowing up as many draft boards as he could along the way.

He figured if he couldn't outright prevent the country from dragging its teenagers off to an immoral war, then he could at least put a wrench in the gears and make a point at the same time.

As one man alone he would be difficult to track down. The F.B.I. might, if he was tricky with his methods and times and places, even consider each act a separate incident caused by separate groups of students and subversives. This would be all the better. He wanted no credit at all.

The press and public would, no doubt, interpret such acts as growing and widespread protests over the war. They would sense the erosion of authority – and have to absorb into their consciousness a violent unwillingness to serve.

Even though he was one of the very few with enough courage and discipline to act so boldly, many others might mirror his defiance with uprisings and protests of their own.

After this first bombing, Lee felt no speck of remorse. No hesitation. He had been pushed beyond his limits of tolerance. He had grown hard and sure.

He was living proof that a police state always creates more subversives than it subdues.

At the bomb site he left a type-written note. It said this:

*Those who march blindly to the drumbeat of law and order  
will soon be marched to their own front door,  
and to the doors of their children.*

## Thirty-eight

In December, resolved to make a fresh start, I moved to Boston.

Of course, I didn't know Lee had recently been there. In fact by the time I'd heard that the Cambridge draft board had blown up he was already in another state, and every anti-war activist *but* him was trying to claim credit for the bombing.

I had come to Boston because of the thriving coffee house scene. I wanted to start singing my songs in public. This was my latest fantasy, and Boston had replaced San Francisco as the place to be. But, really, it was equally appealing simply because it wasn't San Francisco, or New York. I didn't want to be reminded of people and things before. I had to find a new life, a new and unconnected life. So I moved to Boston as if it were a distant island.

I found a small one-room flat in a rundown mansion in Cambridge called Kirkland Manor. In fact, Kirkland Manor had island qualities: it consisted of two separate mansions that, like an archipelago, were connected by an often rain-flooded driveway.

There were twenty rooms in all, each rented by the week, in some cases for years, by many of Cambridge's

finest hippies. But there were also the lost, the stranded, the mentally ship-wrecked. They would float in and out of their allotted days and nights there, never saying a word, never to be seen again.

The Manor was in a perfect location – two blocks from the Harvard campus, catty-corner to an Irish Pub, and one block from Mama Savenor’s Market. (Mama used to play with our often joint-fogged minds by never giving us exact change: either plus or minus two or three cents, but always keeping track, and breaking even by the end of the day.)

I had moved into my room the night before. A room on the third and uppermost floor, with a slanted roof, a desk, and a thirty-year-old lamp. The floor was covered with an old fake Turkish rug, under which was god knows what (neither my curiosity nor my cleaning habits would ever lead me to find out). There was a walk-in closet, which, rumor has it, was once inhabited by a couple and their two cats. A painting of Harry Truman hung above the desk and carried the burden of a few colorfully irreverent graffiti. There was also a 1914 wall calendar, which I found out one stoned evening while inspecting the small print, was made in 1968. The bed was slightly lopsided, situated beneath a large window that overlooked the quiet environs of Kirkland Street itself.

It was 8 a.m., day one, and I felt empty and refreshed. The sun was shining brightly. I walked downstairs into the common kitchen located in the basement. Not a head turned. Five people were gathered near the stove, fighting over a small, dark bottle.

“Hey, listen guys, I’ve done it like this before. It tastes better. It’s a spice.”

“That shit’s not going in my eggs!”

“Come on Jerry. Turn towards the garbage can and take a jump shot, I won’t block it this time. Look, my hands are down.”

“But it’s *food*. I’m not gonna throw food in the garbage. It’s a sin.”

“Get serious, M.S.G. is not food.”

“No, but it’s a taste enhancer. My mom uses it all the time,” Jerry shot back, amazed that he had actually brought his mother into this.

“It a thickener alright -- it thickens the pockets of companies that don’t give a fuck about you. It thickens a coat of poison in your fucking kidneys. Ask Mama Savenor. She wouldn’t sell that junk.”

“She *would!*” yelled Jerry. “She goddamn *did!*” He began searching his pockets for the receipt – proof positive that Mama Savenor was on his side.

“But she wouldn’t have approved it as *food*. She probably thought you were trying to exterminate rats,” came another response. “That’s what *my* mom uses it for! Rat poison.”

“That’s it!” shrieked the main cook – a redheaded girl, with a baby staring wide-eyed and silent over her left shoulder. “That’s the solution, Jerry. You don’t want to just throw it away. Sin of sins. But we don’t want it in our eggs. And I don’t want it in you either, cause if it gets in you that means eventually it’s going to get in me!”

“True,” smiled Jerry.

“So,” continued the redhead, “pour it around the trash cans down here and let the rats enjoy the US corporate version of The Last Supper.”

A politically conscious compromise having been reached, I took the opportunity to introduce myself. I was warmly greeted by all. I shared their eggs while they filled me in on the dramas of the house. There was the old landlord who lived in Boston proper, who visited once a week to personally collect his rent. There was a resident handyman who lived in a room off the kitchen-basement who did very little handiwork but was exiled to the basement because he couldn’t pay his rent upstairs and wouldn’t leave.

The mother-cook, Samantha, was introduced to me as “the beautiful red-haired witch who can wiggle her nose just like Elizabeth Montgomery.” And the father was Jerry. He was older, maybe thirty, a school bus driver, who was obviously still learning about natural foods.

Samantha said, “We heard you playing your guitar last night. The walls are like rice paper in this place. You’re *really* good.”

“Thanks,” I tried to blush.

“You are hereby nominated to be our resident minstrel.”

“I accept.”

“And we're all in luck," said Samantha, "because today I'm on my *minstrel* cycle, so that means you need to play music for us every few hours."

Everyone but Jerry laughed at the joke.

I was feeling good when I left the kitchen. There would be a lot of interesting people to get to know. Especially one. A quiet blonde girl who was introduced to me as Robin.

The next two nights were taken up with auditions at local clubs. I did well, but it all came down to, “how many people can you draw?” Everyone was willing to give me a try, but if I didn't pack the house it might be the last time. One club owner said I was great, he loved my lyrics, and that I reminded him of “a female Dylan.” He meant my

songs were socio-politically hip, with provocative imagery, but I had a sensitivity that most male songwriters didn't possess. (At least I hoped that's what he meant.)

After my first performances friends began to invite their friends. They weren't just the Kirkland Street crowd anymore. Some were strangers who had heard me by chance and were coming back. The club owners were happy, and I began to get bookings on a fairly regular basis.

But folk music has rarely been a lucrative art form. In the '60's there was Dylan, Phil Ochs, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Peter, Paul and Mary. But my music was not like that. It was a folk-rock jazz hybrid, less "accessible," with long forms, asymmetric rhythms, and odd chord voicings. Sometimes there was no repeating sections. I was taking chances. I was hearing arrangements in my head, except I couldn't afford a band. Maybe if I'd already been famous it would have been described as unique or original. But as things stood, it was merely eccentric, too complicated, and I was running out of money.

I had a small handful of fans that "got it." And a few club owners willing to endure a show where the back rows were empty. But I knew I couldn't keep going like this without finding another kind of work. The kind of work where you actually made money beyond fifty dollars a gig plus what was put in the tip jar.

It was a week before Christmas when Robin first saw me play. She was shy and had avoided coming to see me play because she didn't like crowds. I thought I was probably too outgoing for her, so I hadn't pursued her even as a friend. But eventually she came to a show with Jerry and a few others. It was a Friday night at The Unicorn. I was opening up for John Lee Hooker that night. I played my songs for Robin as a silent dedication. I wanted to see if my music could move her. I took it as a challenge. I had a new muse.

After hanging out with John Lee and his band for a while I came home and found the Kirkland crowd gathered in the kitchen, smoking a joint, listening to the radio. Robin wasn't there. I went up to my room and caught her coming down the stairs. She froze. I continued to come up, looking at her, but she didn't move. As my eyes looked past her, I saw a note pinned to my door with a flower in it. I put my guitar down at the door and looked at her again. She had turned to watch me. I read the note from her telling me how much she liked the show. So I went over to her and kissed her on the cheek to thank her. Much to my surprise she grabbed me and pushed me into my room. We made love on the Turkish rug because the bed seemed too far away.

Robin was a book lover, a bird lover, a lover of romantic classical music, and soft folk songs. I liked her quietness, her sad eyes and nervous hands. I liked the timbre of her voice, her halting, intellectual words, which did not melt me, or probe me.

By Christmas we were living together in my little room. It just kind of happened, without much talking about it. We were spending almost all of our time together anyway, so it seemed to make sense to split the rent. The closet was full. The rug was swept. The walls were covered with artsy photographs, and the desk and dresser were covered with vases full of flowers.

One Sunday she took me to an indoor bird sanctuary. This was her domain. She knew so much information about every species, I was positively dazzled. "They all look pretty much the same to me," I admitted, scratching my head. "They fly, they eat, they mess up my car windshield." (I was after all, born in New York. She shouldn't have expected much more of me.)

"Look there," she said. She squeezed my hand and my eyes followed to where her other hand was pointing — gliding above me were birds of all shapes and colors perched at the top of the cage. Their songs moved me -- a chorus of tonal chaos. I didn't know if they were singing or

laughing. She told me the name of one species. It made me smile.

“There are funnier ones than that,” she said. “Like Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Chimney swift, and Golden Plover! Then there’s the Great Auk.”

“The Great Auk? Robin, are you serious? Who named these things? Captain Kangaroo?”

“No,” she said in a serious tone. “There are beautiful names too. Like Ivory Gull, and Lapland Larkspur, and Indigo Bunting. . . .”

That night I played at a club in the city. Robin came to give me an honest appraisal of my night’s work. After we came home, we talked and made love until the sun broke through, bringing the reality of time to bear, causing a final exhaustion and a winding down of our bodies.

But hours later, upon waking, I felt something essential was missing in me. . . . And almost every night thereafter I felt the same way. I would try to feel for Robin the love I’d felt for Sherry and Jan. But as Sherry once told me, “It’s not possible to love someone by comparison, the heart is always somewhere else.”

## Thirty-nine

It was four nights past Christmas, and all through the house not a creature was stirring, except Samantha who was stirring soup. Jerry was sitting at the long kitchen table strumming a beat-up guitar. I was teaching him how to play and write songs, though somehow my mother's methods did not work as well for him.

"I'm going home for a few days," I announced.

Jerry looked up at me, still strumming. "What? And miss the New Year's Eve bash?"

"Well, Robin's going up north to Rockport to visit her parents. They're having a party and she promised she'd go, but I don't want to. I've done the Rockport scene with her before. Nice seaside town, you should check it out sometime. But I want to go home and visit some old friends."

"Well don't be gone long," Samantha said. "You can't leave Jerry like this. He plays two chords over and over again and he's driving us crazy."

"It's a rough stage," he admitted, still strumming.

I left for home on a seasonally typical New England day. A clean clear sky with a bitter chill in the air. I left Kirkland Manor, and Robin, behind me. There were no real

connective threads. No bridges to cross, or burn. All roads led back to where I started.

I arrived at my parents' house at eight in the evening. Weege looked like its typical non-sequitur, sitting in their suburban driveway. Candy barked and nipped at me as if I were a stranger. She was getting old and senile. But she was a survivor in the suburban jungle – great helpless prey of fatty meat hung from dangling fingers under the table, which she would ruthlessly tear at in a crouch. Gobs of left-over potatoes and gravy were served up in her glorious yellow bowl in the kitchen. There was plenty of sustenance. She had my parents eating out of her hand. She was determined to outlive us all.

My parents greeted me warmly. My dad's hair had grown out a little. I laughed when he told me that his new haircut was created "by just not going to the barber anymore."

Shortly after I got upstairs, I called Sherry's parents' house. Sherry was home from school, as I'd expected. She was ecstatic to hear I was back. "Yes, come over tomorrow night," she told me. "There's going to be a very special New Year's Eve party."

My parents counter-offered with bribes of a free meal at The North Shore Steak House, and an invitation to the “wingding of a party” that was to follow, but I passed.

The next night I arrived at Sherry’s just in time to say hello and goodbye to Izzy and Bess, who were going to an all-nighter at a neighbor’s house.

The living room was decorated with a floor full of just-laundered clothes, some dirty dishes, and a table of yet to be blown up balloons. “Welcome to our house cleaning party,” Sherry laughed.

Mike bounded down the stairs to greet me, and as he did, the doorbell rang. “Our other guests,” he smiled. As he opened the front door my heart leaped – it was Jan and Wes.

She was startlingly beautiful as she walked in. She was mesmerizing, glowing, modelesque, graceful in her multi-layered, multi-colored second-hand clothes. Her yellow hair gave her the look of a summer angel. Her skin was cool and rosy from the winter night. She smiled her smile – with those perfect white teeth – that boyish Jan grin, which was always in direct contrast to her creamy soft features.

I realized, to my amazement, my love for her had grown, without contact, without nourishment, and without my consent.

She stood facing me, looking at me shyly, and then kissed my mouth.

Wes came over and gave me a strong hug. His dark blonde hair had become much longer, comprised of a thousand curls. The hair, in combination with his square jaw, his clean-shaven face, and his large blue eyes made him look like an artist, an intellectual. He had carefully honed his style.

He asked me about Boston, I told him things were fine, then he touched my shoulder and told me he missed me.

As we gathered in the living room, I realized how good Jan and Wes looked together. Then Sherry came over to me, her green eyes flashing in an acknowledgment of my suffering, and she put her head in my lap. I said to myself—this is my family, these are my best friends. Rejoice, you jerk. *Rejoice!*

With that, the evening officially began. Mike got us overwhelmingly stoned on Columbian grass as the record player churned out The Supremes, followed by some wild jazz (the perfect New Year's music). Then we decided, in a burst of adventurism, to drive into New York City.

On New Year's Eve every corner of Manhattan is aflame with life. Christmas lights are still up and shining and everyone on the street is laughing and frantic. Cabbies are honking with a shade of joy mixed in with their usual rage (which means as they screech by, they curse at you with

little smiles on their faces). The vagabonds and the drunks feel at ease because they know, for this one night, everyone will be as blasted as they are. They walk down the street guiltlessly, sifting through garbage cans with aristocratic carelessness. Bejeweled middle-class women in their thin tight dresses and minks swing their hips even more flamboyantly than usual. And the hippies sway down the street arm in arm (in arm) with stray dogs wagging behind them. Even hippies this night are hurrying somewhere.

We waded our way through waves of traffic in order to see the greatest of all the '60's protest singers perform at a huge loft in the Village. His name was Phil Ochs, and his fans were so avid that when he played a guitar interlude a little too long, they knew he'd forgotten the beginning of verse ten of one of his hundred epics, and everyone would start singing and screaming out the words until he took up where he left off. His lyrics were brilliant and powerful as he moved from issues of civil rights to war to government oppression. But his love songs were equally powerful. As his stories unraveled my mind floated through a world of powerful imagery. "There But for Fortune." "I Ain't Marchin' Anymore."

I thought of Lee, where he might be on this night. How lonely he must be. And I felt Jan's presence next to me,

pouring into me like some mystical elixir, through time and changes.

The concert let out just before midnight. Cars began to honk, and church bells sang. We were high in so many ways, running madly around the streets of Greenwich Village.

We arrived back at Sherry's about 3:00 a.m. and gravitated into the living room. We sat in a circle and the atmosphere settled. Though we had talked about Lee through the night, the conversation became more focused.

"If he were living in Canada, you'd think we would have heard from him," Sherry said in a worried tone.

"He must still feel unsafe," Mike said, fingering his beard.

"Or he is unsafe," Wes said.

"I've tried to contact Misty," Sherry frowned. "So has Jan. Her mom says she's somewhere in New York, but she doesn't know where, or she won't tell us. But then again, Misty hasn't called us either."

"Maybe she got in trouble too, from all of this."

"They're both safe, I can feel it," Jan announced quietly, her gray-blue eyes glowing. "It's a new year; it's a year that's going to be good for all of us, you'll see, and I just want to say I love each one of you incredibly. You're more than family."

She was looking directly at me now and a strange helpless feeling overtook me.

Wes said something to Sherry, and at the same time I said, almost under my breath, "I missed you, Jan."

She heard me, leaned over and kissed me and put her hand in my lap. A few strands of her hair were braided, melting into the yellow cotton of her shirt. "You know, Wes and I have been thinking how great it would be if we could all live together!"

I laughed nervously.

"Don't you think?" she began to laugh too.

I mumbled, "You can't multiply imperfection into perfection." But she didn't hear me.

The first afternoon of the New Year found me asleep in the attic of my parents' house, sleeping where I'd slept the majority of my life since I was three years old, curled up in a ball, fighting off numerous unnamable demons.

According to the Chinese calendar it was now The Year of the Dog. I read an article in Newsday about it that evening which pretty much summed up my current life:

"Born with a good nature, Dogs do not tend to be criminals or seek dishonest gain. They just need a quiet life and a good family, so as to forget the ugliness and evil on earth."

## Forty

I was down to my last hundred dollars, Robin, who worked only part-time herself, offered me a loan. But instead of taking her money I found a job as a part-time library assistant at the Harvard Library. From 4 to 6 pm Monday, Wednesday and Thursday I sat around and did absolutely nothing while the real librarian took a break. My only function was to put returned books in a neat pile behind the desk and to pick up the black intercom phone if any trouble occurred.

The walk from Harvard Yard to Kirkland Manor was usually my only exercise of the day. Through the crisp wind under bright cerulean skies, or through the white world of high winter clouds, or through the large strong snowflakes that refused to melt on my jacket, I'd walk, staring at Harvard's two hundred-year-old buildings of red brick, covered with ivy and moss.

As I looked at the vein-like patterns of the vines coated with ice and snow I wondered with awe where they found the strength to live and thrive through such corrosive seasons.

Then, in late January, I got a big surprise – Misty called.

I said, "Where are you?"

She said, "Where I've been!"

"So where *have* you been?"

"Living in a flat in New York with my friend, Claudia." Working. But let's not talk about that, Jackie. Drudgeville. In fact, I've been living most of my time in Drudgeville."

"How come you haven't kept in touch, girl?"

"Complications," she said simply. Then there was silence.

"Well, have you heard any word from you know who?" I asked softly.

She paused. "No."

"Well," I realized she was too uncomfortable talking about it. "Have you heard about Jan and me?"

"No. What?"

"She's with Wes now."

"But you were inseparable."

"Well now we're very separable."

"I'm sorry. But hey, Claudia saw a picture of you and thinks you're cute. Want a date?"

"I'll be right over."

"Promise?"

"Is she crazy like you?" I asked.

"No. Super together."

"Then forget it!"

I heard her laugh.

I could see so vividly her wild bright eyes, her freckles, and the mass of soft red hair being constantly pushed aside by her excited hands. It was a nice image. I missed her.

She asked me what I was doing in Boston and I told her I was writing songs and playing in coffee houses. "I'm also working at the Harvard Library, *don't cha know. . .*"

"Oh? What's the political scene like there?"

"Well, I've read about some marches," I said with some hesitation, "but I didn't go. There's lots of activity at Harvard and M.I.T., lots of speeches and brave talk. And just before I moved here a draft board was blown to smithereens.

Personally, I'm probably not doing enough."

"Your songs are enough."

"I don't know. Singing won't change anything."

"Will marches?"

"I guess if enough people get together, things could change eventually."

"Or we'll all end up hunted down, like Lee," she said. "I've been reading the history books he talked about. I've been reading about the great minds, what happened to their lives, what they got in return for their greatness. It's all pretty ugly."

When we met, she could hardly read, but now she was a student of history and politics, devouring books that a year ago would have looked like hieroglyphics to her.

I countered, "Lee also had some really optimistic stories too. Like the Golden Age of India. . . ."

"Yeah, I know. But the Golden Age was the creation of a few great kings and a handful of wise men," she shot back. "There'll always be individual genius and greatness. You can't kill those things off completely, although it's been tried. But the human race as a whole looks to me like a bust. We can't survive ourselves, our own insanity."

"So what do we do about it?"

"I don't know," she said. "Personally, I'm going to just lay low and wait for Lee to call. After reading about all the superstitious hogwash that's come down through the ages I hate to sound 'mystical,' but I know somehow Lee is gonna call me and we'll be together again."

"I hope he's alright, I'd give anything to know. . . ."

"He's alright," Misty said emphatically.

There was a silence, a tension. My ears began to pick up on the hiss and clicking of the long-distance wires.

"I talked to him, Jackie," she whispered. "That's all I can say. . . . God, I hope this line isn't tapped."

I felt closer to understanding all of Misty's dark reactions now. She had, by association, become yet another enemy of the State.

We quickly and awkwardly changed the conversation. Finally she said, "Look babe, I love you, but I gotta go. This call is gonna be expensive."

"I understand, Mist."

Then, as a sincere afterthought, she added, "But, listen, if you want a date with Claudia, I'm serious. She's only a couple of inches taller than you, and a real fox."

"I miss you," I laughed. "Take care of yourself."

"You too, maestro."

"Yeah, don't worry about me."

## Forty-one

After Misty's call a change came over me. I started to borrow books from the Harvard library, mostly philosophy books. I was trying to find the source of inner strength. But the authors seemed to describe the deeds, or the faith, or the power of "will," but never how to get to there from here.

I had also been playing quite a few gigs around town. But things felt different. My lyrics were changing. Going more inward. I didn't want to write protest songs, and never liked simple love songs. But the audiences weren't relating to my more abstract musings. I was writing songs that had lyrics like:

*In the sun that shines I feel just energy, the grace to be  
simply a joyous feeling without which the search  
doesn't mean a thing.*

*On the outside where reason dissolves with space and time  
there are no answers there that  
need questions to analyze the sky.*

*There shines throughout  
the love that reason only talks about as some vague destiny.  
Some eyes perceive it as truth  
some as God  
and some feel free.*

The music itself was jazz rock, but without a band to give it power. Overall the feedback I was getting from fans, and club owners too, was that my music was too esoteric. My thoughts and feelings were too abstract. Why couldn't I show more raw emotion or just take a stand? Even if it was a controversial one? Stand for something? Say something, or do something on stage people can relate to?

So I decided to move in a different direction: I would start a non-profit natural foods co-op. I would turn my past experience into something positive. I also liked the idea because it was more than a protest. It was a way to make people's lives better, and healthier, without getting involved in debates and philosophical arguments.

I also figured if enough non-profit natural foods stores were created around the country maybe it would force chain food stores to sell better food to compete, and maybe even - to try and win the hearts and minds of our always hungry generation - they would lobby against the war. An extension of Harris Durant's idea - chain supermarkets sending anti-war lobbyists to Congress. My idea was getting me more excited by the day.

Every free hour for the next week I looked for a possible store front. In the bleak winter days, nothing looked warm and cheery. There were old rundown warehouses and one recently bankrupt shoe store; a commercial duplex, and

a rat-infested supermarket. But finally, I found what I was searching for, right between Harvard Square and Inman Square. It was a small storefront in the middle of a triple intersection, which is why, after considering The Alternative East as a name, or just The Co-op, it was christened Munchers a Trois. (But soon shortened, for obvious reasons, to Munchers.)

By mid-February, enough members had been found, including Robin and all the crazies at Kirkland Manor, to pay the first and last month's rent. Very different problems arose than the problems "The Alternative" had encountered. For instance, when the owners of some of the straighter neighboring stores caught wind of what was going on, they became upset. It wasn't just that hippies were moving in. Two neighborhood grocers complained the nature of the store itself would be "unfair competition." Co-ops were non-profit. They had families to feed.

As we began to fix the plumbing and shelving, city inspectors began to enforce city codes with relentless strictness. But all of these things, in my eyes, were just interesting tests of will, trials to overcome. I remained calm and forged ahead. They weren't about to get to me.

The store was due to open March 15th. The produce had been ordered and much of the grains and honeys and

bulk oils had arrived. The codes and all of the licenses had been taken care of. The store was just about ready to go.

On a sunny spring-like morning I picked up the day's work crew from their different locations around town and we charged off to work in Weegee, hobbling on its last legs, as usual. But when we arrived, we found a group of squad cars, their lights flashing. The windows of the store had been smashed and the insides were totally ransacked.

The police told me it was vandalism, but not the kind a group of kids might plan. They said it was too professional, too methodical. The tools and instruments used to destroy the vats of oil and pull down the shelving were sophisticated and expensive; not the makeshift kind of gadgetry carried around by a bunch of punks.

There were no fingerprints, no leads, no clues. The soul and spirit, as well as the innards of Munchers had been thoroughly and anonymously destroyed.

On an unseasonably warm Ides of March afternoon the co-op members solemnly gathered together in the Kirkland Manor basement.

Several of the most active community residents were present. One kid named Alex, a heavy-set fellow with a long black curly beard, considered himself a Marxist. Another, a black girl named Janet, went to school at Boston University and had worked long hours helping to construct the store.

Her friend, Sandra, was a short girl with cropped blonde hair and a thin face. Sandra wasn't about to take any shit from anybody. In that way she reminded me of Misty.

"So I guess we need to figure out where to go from here," I began.

"Back to Safeway," Jerry quipped.

"That's exactly what they want us to do," I shot back.

"What do you want us to do, Jack? Start again?"

"Maybe."

"Fuck that shit," said Alex. "We ought to find out who did it. If the neighborhood stores hired somebody, then it was the neighborhood stores. But maybe it was someone else. Maybe it was the police themselves."

"I don't think so," I said.

"How the fuck do you know?" he yelled. "Do you have any idea how far cops will go?"

I almost fell off my chair. He had no idea.

"And how about all the time and money we put out trying to make this happen?" said a tall kid named Andy. He had lent us his truck for a month. "Are we supposed to just forget about what happened and pay membership fees and put out all that energy all over again?"

"They'll just fuck with us all over again," said Janet. "If they want to, they'll get us. But you know, maybe Jackie's right. Maybe we should just start over and do it anyway."

"It's easy for you man," Alex looked at me, "Whatever happens, it's good publicity for you. You'll pack your coffee houses. . . ."

"You've got to be kidding!"

Sandra interrupted, "And about the money, did the store have insurance or anything? I mean if we do start over we'd have some money. . . ."

"Insurance? Fuck that. Capitalist cop-out. . . ." Alex muttered under his breath.

I ignored him and turned to Sandra, "No, but I was about to."

Andy moaned, "About to?"

"We had limited capital. It wasn't a priority."

"That was stupid," he kicked. "And you know," he pointed to me, "Jackie, if you're going to start something, and pull people together and ask for their time and money maybe when things fall apart you should do more than just fucking talk about starting over. And Janet's right, they're not going to stop hating. Are you just gonna take it and walk away? I mean like, are you going to be a leader or a fucking coward?"

Robin stood in the corner crying.

I found myself tapping my fingers against my legs. My harmonic thirds exercise was getting faster. But to them it

must have looked like the beginning of a nervous breakdown.

Samantha, who had started to make these "new friends" some orange juice, shook her head in disgust and threw all the oranges back in the fridge.

"Jack's a cop-out. All words and music. No balls. The whole game is dead, man," Alex leaned back, lighting a cigarette.

"Well, what are we going to do?" Andy moaned. This sucks."

Alex jumped back in, "I say we find out who did it and kick the shit out of them. After we do, then Jack here can go ahead and write a poem to Gandhi and his little band of angels up in heaven and tell them their way doesn't work. Maybe it never did. I'll tell you what I really think - I think the government wants us to believe non-violence works so they can *use it* to control us! I don't see them putting down *their* weapons. Why should we put down ours?"

Things were obviously disintegrating. That night I thought about giving up gigging. Giving up songwriting. What was the point? I'd hit yet another all-time low.

A few days later Robin went home to Rockport to visit her parents, and I was glad.

When Robin returned from her visit, I told her I wanted to split up. I nearly invented lies, excuses, in order to

prevent a scene, but fortunately I didn't sink that low. I remembered what my great grandma had said to Sherry and me about being honest. So I tried to tell Robin everything. All my doubts about her, and all my doubts about me. I told her maybe I had given Jan, and the co-op, too much of me, all I could give. But even if I did, in the end, it wasn't enough. I had failed everyone. All I was doing was adding Robin to my list of failures.

She told me she could understand my anger and self-doubt, but that I was wrong to blame Jan or the co-op, or the people that destroyed it, for the magic our love lacked.

I then came to the conclusion that I actually had no idea why I felt what I felt, and I admitted it to her.

"Now that's being truly honest," she smiled while a tear fell.

She stayed a good friend of mine for many years after that. I really never deserved her.

## Forty-two

I decided to move from the Manor.

I found an old rundown rooming house just a few blocks away. The rent was cheap. My room was on the middle of three floors. It had two windows, one overlooking the main street, and one overlooking an alley complete with its own fire escape. The “living room” had an old gas stove and a mini-refrigerator. There was a shared bathroom at the end of a long dark hallway. I deemed myself completely self-sufficient. I was ready to focus again on my music career.

The only person in the building I related to at all during that time was John Brakke, a tall, thin, beer drinking, cigarette smoking poet with the face of Aragon, long Duane-Allman-like blonde hair, and cat-green eyes. The first day we met it was an unseasonably warm morning. He was sitting in a rocking chair on the porch, shirtless, his tattooed arms behind his head, and his feet propped-up on the balcony railing. A few beer bottles surrounded him, along with an ashtray full of butts. It was about 10:30 in the morning. I sat down in the chair next to him to read and he greeted me with a nod and a slow smile, but remained silent. After about half an hour he had hardly moved, and I began

to feel an admiration for his calm, thoughtful demeanor.

“How long have you been sitting out here, man?” I asked finally.

“Oh, since about 7 o’clock,” he sighed.

“Four straight hours, eh?” I exclaimed.

“Nope,” John said, “Fifteen.”

After we became friends, he told me he had gotten out of the Navy by ceremoniously shooting up a moderate dose of L.S.D. in front of his commanding officer. “A logical remedy for an illogical time,” he said.

The winter weather soon returned. It was a cold April evening and I had just gotten off from work. Harvard Yard was gold shadowed and brittle as the sun set in a Mars red. I watched the students scurry by with clouds of breath escaping in intervals.

One person, head buried inside a long black overcoat, seemed to slow down as I walked by.

I imagined he’d recognized me as a singer, had seen me in some club and liked the songs. I was still an optimist. They couldn't beat it out of me.

I thought, now if I were in California he would come up and introduce himself, and something amazing would happen! I walked on, hearing the footsteps behind me diminish in number as I crossed down darker less

frequented streets. They faded to the footsteps of one. As I turned into my doorway, I stopped to watch this one stranger pass. It was the guy in the overcoat, but as soon as he noticed me looking back at him he averted his eyes and quickly turned the corner.

The city suddenly felt frightening to me. I sensed a gray frigid hopelessness. In that moment I considered moving back to San Francisco. I was regressing here, losing the mental war – as much as I loved Jan, I was afraid to see her again. And as much as I wanted to participate in the world, I felt a growing fear of it. In San Francisco I could meet new friends, start a band, write some rockin' music and play in the bigger clubs there. It might all be so much easier than this.

I pondered this as I headed up the stairs to my room. My frozen fingers skimmed over the loose paint-chipped handrail to the middle floor. The hallway light had burned out again, so it was almost completely dark. As I took out my key I felt as if someone was hiding in the back of the hallway. But there was no movement, no sound. I felt a little shiver as I entered my room. I locked the door behind me.

As I flicked the light on, I looked around for a moment. The streetlight sparked against my window. My guitar lay across my bed, a piece of paper with morning scribbles lay

beside it: more big-minded philosophies that I can't pull off myself. I sighed. Back to work. Then there was a knock.

"Who is it?" It was probably Brakke, I thought. Or maybe Jerry – he was prone to visiting occasionally, thrashing through some newly learned folk song. I'd have to guide his fat fingers onto the right strings. His ears couldn't hear the difference.

"Hey, who's there?"

I thought of the shadowy presence in the hallway: Was that real? Could it be a robber? A ghost? I heard a whistle on the other side of the door. Whoever it was either felt like messing with me or didn't want his voice to be heard.

Against my better judgment I opened the door.

"Lee!"

For a moment we stood there motionless, then I pulled him inside, locked the door behind us, and hugged him.

"Wow, Lee! My God! How can it be you?" I stammered.

"That's a pretty rough first question," he laughed.

I observed his face in more detail now, as he stood unflinchingly beneath my bare light bulb. His hair was shorter, and he was trying to keep his goatee well-trimmed. But no one would have mistaken him for a member of the middle class. His clothes were dark and rumpled and his

skin was tough. He looked exactly like what he was – an escapee, a renegade.

“You don’t approve?” he said, stretching his arms out, looking down at himself.

“No, I do. . . .”

He looked around the room, taking in the details. “So, wow, home sweet home,” he said, as he sat down on my only chair. He looked at my bare walls; a mattress on the floor.

“Lee, what are you doing here? I thought you'd be in Canada.”

“No, I’ve been in Boston,” Lee grinned.

“All this time. . . ?”

“Chicago, too. And Denver.”

His tone became deadly serious as his voice quieted.

“I’ve been wasting draft boards, Jackie.”

“What?”

“Yeah.” His eyes looked down to the floor, then back at me. He waited for me to say something, but I was stunned into silence.

“You don’t know much about my life lately, but I know a lot about yours. I know Jan’s with Wes. Misty told me. And I know about the co-op too. Nice try, man. I’ve been keeping tabs on you since I came back to town.

“Why didn't you come see me sooner?”

"I didn't think it would be safe for me to do that. Now it's different."

"How so?"

"'Cause now I *know* it's not safe," he laughed. "The game's up. They know I'm in Boston, and I think from time to time I've been followed. I'm going to try to get out of the state, but, you know, once they're this close it probably ain't gonna happen." He shrugged, but his nervousness was apparent. "So I'm here to say hello, and goodbye, and if they catch me here, then fuck it. I couldn't just run off without seeing you."

"What about Misty?"

"What about her? I still love her. But there's nothing I can do about that."

"Why?" I responded. "Why don't you just go to Canada and take her with you?"

"And then what?"

"What do you mean 'then what?' You live there together!"

"Happily ever after?"

"Yes!"

"In the suburbs, and have kids!"

I stared at him.

"I can't do that, Jackie. It's too late for that."

But then I added, "Lee. . . Misty's not exactly helpless, you know? Remember when she bit the shit out of that guy in Ohio?"

"Oh yeah, I've still got some marks on my neck from a few passionate interludes. Sharp eye teeth!"

"She could help you, Lee. She's strong."

"I *know* she's strong, Jackie. But shit, I can't possibly get her involved in this unless I'm willing to risk her life. And I'm not! She's safe where she is. So let's just drop it."

He went over to the window in a crouch and looked in both directions.

"You've changed. . . a little," I whispered.

"Yeah. I guess I'm not a hippie anymore."

"Were you ever?"

"I tried! You made it look very appealing."

He looked at me and his eyes narrowed, "You know, we used to talk about violence versus non-violence in hypothetical terms, but I never really understood violence before. Not the insanity, *or* the bravery of it. The smell in the air. The terror you feel. I've learned to see with the eyes of a soldier."

I remained silent.

"You don't approve?" he said, and sniffed.

Before I could say anything, he said, "Well, don't feel any obligation, Jackie. I didn't expect your approval. In fact,

I'll tell you, for a while I wandered around out there angry not only at them, but at you! Because I *knew* you would never help me with any of this. You wouldn't change. You could never be a soldier in a revolution. The pacifism you and Jan feel excludes the possibility of 'rational violence.' All violence to you is irrational, even when non-violence is irrational!

"Then I began to wonder what would have happened to you if this were 1942. Because I knew you wouldn't have signed up to fight in World War II either. You'd have been quoting Einstein back then, instead of Harris Duran or Dick Gregory. But in the end, you would have been considered by almost everyone in this country to be a traitor.

I knew he was right, and I felt a wave of shame flood over me.

"But after a while, maybe it took me months to realize this, Jackie, I started to realize that in World War II you wouldn't have fought for the Germans either. You would never have succumbed to their madness. And that was a revelation to me. Because I knew then, that in a truly noble and great country you would be revered, idolized. You would be worth protecting and fighting for, without demanding you choose sides. Because without people like you, who truly believe in peace and already *live* that way, what's the point? To create entire nations of soldiers? You

can't save humanity by killing the soul of it. You can't fight for freedom by imprisoning those who don't want to play."

I could almost see his brain switching back into reality. He looked out the window again, then lowered his voice to almost a whisper, "Hey, it's good to see you again, Jackie. I think about you a lot. I've missed you. But I have to go now."

"Lee," I said. I had to tell him. "I'd love to believe what you say about me. But I don't know what I believe anymore. I guess I'm not evolved enough yet to know how to deal with all this."

"I don't see things in terms of evolved or not evolved," Lee replied impatiently. "We've got to deal with the world as it's given to us."

"That's just it, Lee, I can't do that! *I can't find the strength.* I just can't find it in me. . . ." Something had suddenly gushed open. I was shaking.

He tried to fill in the time we'd missed together: "Jan, she hurt you bad." he whispered.

I closed my eyes. "Yeah. But no, it's more than that. Life feels totally out of control. My thoughts are out of control. And I can't seem to do what you've done. I can't rise up and face the world by matching it blow for blow. . . . Go ahead, Lee, *blow up the fucking madness!* It's probably the only way to survive in this world. But I. . . did it ever occur to you that

maybe I'm a pacifist because deep inside I know I have no choice? Maybe I *am* a coward! Maybe that's just the truth of it."

He rubbed his arm in a quick up and down motion, as if trying to warm himself from a sudden gust of wind. Then he became very still, and a strange crooked smile appeared on his face, "You know, you can't be a pacifist and a coward at the same time – you can't! Because once a coward is pushed beyond his limits he lacks the strength and the will to remain peaceful. He lashes out, he becomes crazy, mean, violent, with no sense of reason or justice, because hatred overwhelms his fear. I know you're not like that, Jackie."

"But, my God, Lee, after you've tried and failed a hundred times, how the hell do you keep going? Why the hell would you even bother anymore?"

He shook his head, then stroked his chin, "You really haven't figured it out yet? Look, there's a simple secret to the strength you're after. The *source*. And that is. . . it's a total fake!"

He nodded, as if enjoying the answer he'd just come up with. "We're *all* frightened, we're all too alone, too helpless, when it comes right down to it. But at some point you just have to say '*fuck you*' to yourself. I mean, you still have to accept the fear for what it is, and it's probably true that in the end none of this matters anyway, honestly. But you can't let

yourself live *there* all the time. . . it'll kill you before you die. So you just have to keep saying '*fuck you*' to yourself over and over again, and live your life the way you know you should live it, despite the doubts."

He grabbed a pencil from my bed and tore out a sheet of paper from my notebook and wrote "FUCK YOU!" in huge letters. It took up almost the entire page.

"Here's something to remember me by. When you get a little down, look at this, and say it out loud. No mercy!"

I took the piece of paper and laughed.

But I couldn't end it there. Something was still missing. "But if faking strength fails you over and over again, even if you say '*fuck you*' to yourself, then what?"

"Well, that leads to the *other* secret." He left a dramatic pause.

"Which is?"

"Oh no, not both secrets in one day!" he moaned.

"Lee!" I almost laughed again.

"Look, you don't want to turn out like Nixon, or Agnew, or a fucking Evangelist or something, do you?"

I shook my head, but I didn't get the point.

"They know how to fake strength with the best of them. But they're completely flipped-out and vengeful when they lose, which of course they always will, in the end. They're

strong, but they hate life unless they win. And in the end, that's the biggest weakness of all. It'll destroy Nixon too."

"But aren't *you* trying to win?"

"Of course! I want the war to stop. And I want to have a president who's not insane. And if congressmen are so damn sure they want us to go to war, then I'd like to see a law passed that says whoever votes for the war has got to immediately enlist as a private in the army! I mean what true value do most politicians have anyway? They're easily replaceable if they die on the front lines. But I also know that I can't win the game if I get too hung up on the end result. Because the game is too big for one person. . . . So the key, the other secret, is to just stay fluid.

*"That's the second secret. . . . Try to help, Jackie, try to love, try to care. But don't make winning the end game. Stay fluid. Because just by trying to move things in the right direction - you win."*

He made so much sense to me at that moment. I was searching for something profound to say to him in return. Because I knew he had to go.

But then suddenly I realized, he couldn't leave.

## Forty-three

"Lee, I think somebody followed you here."

Across the street stood two men. One was the stranger in the overcoat that I had passed by walking home. He was talking into a little black box now.

Before Lee had a chance to say anything we saw the other guy cross the street toward us.

"Quick Lee, follow."

"No, Jackie."

"Yes! I know a way." I hustled him to a closet door next to my room. It was marked, "Poison. Dark Room Materials. Stay Out!" It was locked but I opened it with a key. It was an empty closet where I sometimes locked my guitar when I went out. The sign was the creation of a previous tenant who locked *his* guitar in there when he went out.

I pushed Lee inside and locked the door behind him, then hid the key in a pair of jeans in my closet. I opened the back window, then I took the piece of paper Lee had written "FUCK YOU!" on, and threw it onto the fire escape.

Soon the knock came.

"Who is it?"

"Police."

"What?"

*"Open up!"*

I opened my door and the guy flashed a badge in my face along with a warrant for Lee's arrest. He said he'd obtained emergency authority to enter. He pushed me out of the way and started to look around. There was no place for anyone to hide in here. Only a mosquito could hide in a place this small. He looked in the bathroom behind the shower curtain. He opened the refrigerator. No one and nothing was in there. He looked behind the clothes in my closet. Then he turned to me, "If you're harboring a fugitive you're in a hell of a lot of trouble."

Then this local force detective, dressed in plain-clothes, wiry, fairly good-looking, but with horribly short hair and graying temples, said, "No games. No bullshit. Where is he?"

*"Who?"*

*"Lee Silver! You got five fuckin' seconds."*

I lowered my eyes, defeated, and pointed reluctantly to the open window. He looked out and shined his flashlight down the fire escape.

He saw a piece of paper lying on the first iron steps zig-zagging down to the street, so climbed out the window and picked it up. He shined his flashlight on the words. It said, "FUCK YOU!"

He clicked on his walky talky: "Search the back, and the connecting yards," he snapped. I wondered how many more men were out there.

He began to look around the hall and passed by the "dark room" closet.

"What's in there?" he asked.

"I have no idea," I said. "It's been locked ever since I moved in. There are closets like that on every floor."

He looked at more doors, realizing each one was someone's private room. He looked down the hall and saw another closet locked from the outside with a peace sign on it. It was a goddamn hippies' nest, a maze.

"Shit," he muttered.

At that moment another cop came flying up the stairs.

"No sign of him, sir. We looked in the basement, and on every other floor. We also searched the perimeters of the building."

"He may have stolen a car and gotten away. Tell Jensen to widen the search beyond the neighborhood. And check the stolen car reports every few hours. We'll need a license plate."

The cop nodded and bounded back down the stairs.

"Get back in there," he said to me, pointing to my room.

He followed me in and pushed me down on my bed. I nearly landed on my guitar.

"What was he doing here just now?"

"Asking for a place to stay."

"Yeah, go on."

"Well, I told him there was no way I could do that."

"Why?"

"*Why?* Because I was scared! I don't want anything to do with him."

"Why not?"

"Because he's crazy."

"Crazy? Or a criminal?"

I pretended not to understand. "I don't know."

"How long have you lived in Boston?"

"Since December." He was writing everything down in a little notepad.

"Ever been to Boston before that?"

"No."

"Do you know anything about the bombing of the Cambridge draft board?"

"No."

At this point another cop came into the room to confer with the gray-templed interrogator.

I figured they didn't have a clue about Lee blowing up other draft boards in other states or it wouldn't have been a

local undercover detective up here, it would have been the F.B.I. And I would be asked the other obvious questions, “Ever been in Chicago? Denver?” The questioning might have gone on for hours.

“All right Dan, let’s go,” graying temples barked.

Then he turned to me, his eyes narrowed, his face became rigid, and he hissed, “If you know something we don’t and you’re trying to pull something, we’re gonna get your ass! This is no peace march, motherfucker! This is the real deal.”

I closed my eyes until I heard the bottom door slam. I felt myself on the edge of going blank with fear. We were trapped. I figured someone would be watching the house for at least a few days. Maybe longer.

But then I started to come up with the outline of a plan. It was like coming up with the first moment of a song. . . . It was crazy and dangerous. I needed to think it through.

In the end, I knew my chances of helping Lee escape were absurdly slim. I also knew that even if he did escape, he wouldn't run away from all of this. He would stay in the country. He would continue to do whatever he thought he had to do to stop the war. And therefore, his chances of remaining free for long were also slim.

I let time pass to ensure that graying temples and his gang were not going to be popping in and out of the house unannounced, and to work out all the details of my plan, step by step. Moment by moment.

I entered the hall with my coat already on and inspected the upper and lower floors carefully. Then I went to the closet and unlocked it.

Lee squinted at me, shading his eyes from the light.

“Lee, can you stay in here for a few more hours?” I whispered.

“Jackie, whatever you’ve got in mind, forget it. I’m not about to get you in trouble. I’m just gonna leave and take my chances.”

He began to step out of the closet, but I pushed him back. “Lee, I have to help you. Don't blow *my* chance, okay? I need to do this. Trust me.”

He shook his head and sighed, “Can I have a sandwich? I get hungry in the dark, it reminds me of being at the movies.”

I had already thought of that, and in a flash he had some dry cereal, bottled water, a blanket, and a pillow.

“It should be about four or five hours before I get back. If I’m not back by morning you better try to break the door down because that means something’s gone wrong.”

I was tempted not to re-lock the door, but I knew it would be too risky. It wasn't just a police search I was concerned about. I figured Lee might try to escape, or surrender, just to get me out of trouble.

I went out into the night.

I hope it's warmer than this tomorrow, I thought to myself, and walked to Harvard Square to a night club called "Passim's."

## Forty-four

"Hello, Sherry, it's Jackie."

I was calling from the "employees only" area of the club. The bartender knew me because I played there all the time. He considered my request for the private pay phone amusing. Maybe he thought I was calling my secret lover.

"Sherry, I need your help," I said. "I need you to drive to Boston, actually an hour north of Boston, to a little town called Rockport. Then I want to buy your car from you because you'll probably never see it again. You'll have to take a bus back to Binghamton. Then I'll come to see you in a few days and explain everything. . . ."

"Jackie, slow down! What the hell? Are you in trouble?"

"Not exactly. . . ."

"My God, is it Lee?"

"Sherry, Sherry, would you just do it? Please. Don't try to guess. All I can tell you right now is, you just really love me, right? And you'd want to help me if I needed you," I knew I was babbling a bit, but I was thinking of every possible way I could to protect Sherry from getting in trouble legally, just in case her phone was tapped. If it was, my plan was doomed from this point anyway – but at least she wouldn't

be seen as being an accomplice. It didn't matter how paranoid my thoughts were, I was determined to stick meticulously to my plan.

“. . . All right, Jackie. Say it again.”

“Drive to Rockport, an hour north of Boston. Leave your car near the "Lighthouse Restaurant," it's right near the town pier. Leave it there by 7 a.m. at the latest. And leave the keys in the ignition. Then take a bus home. I'll come up to Binghamton in a few days.”

“Okay, Jackie. Okay, I'll do it.”

I hung up and walked back into Passim's busy front room.

“Was she home?” the bartender asked me, winking.

“Yeah, she was home,” I said, and forced myself to smile. I looked around at the tables. Half of everyone there looked like they could have been undercover cops. I decided to just keep faking it. I got up on stage during another folk singer's break and sang a few songs. If they were out there watching, they were going to think I was either out of trouble, or totally out of my mind.

I stayed at Passim's until after midnight. The streets would be emptier then, and I could more easily check to see if I was being watched.

I walked home under a full April moon. The sky was clear, but winter was still in the air. I thought how much more insane my plan would be if it were to snow tomorrow.

When I got home, I saw a man sitting in a tan colored car across the street. It was almost 1 A.M., so I felt sure he was a cop. I tried to look around back to see what else I could see, but I figured he was watching me, and I didn't want to cause further suspicion.

I walked up the steps to my room slowly, looking for more possible spies. I opened my door and switched on the light, took my toothbrush from my desk drawer and went to the bathroom down the hall. I walked past the closet Lee was in and kept on walking until I switched on the bathroom light -- just in case someone outside might be watching the lights flick on and off, timing my moves. Then I doubled back to the closet and opened it.

Lee had been sleeping. "Hey," he said hoarsely. "So what's going on?"

"Okay, Lee, this is the hardest part. Here's the key to the van. It's parked in back of the house. Somehow, you've got to sneak out there and hide underneath the fold-up bed until I come out tomorrow morning. You can't leave with me. It's got to be before morning. Leave the key in the ash tray. There's at least one cop in an unmarked car out in front of the house, Lee, so be careful."

I'm sure he was thinking he shouldn't let me do this, but then our eyes met for a moment and he mockingly shook my hand, "Hey, you're an official revolutionary now."

"Give me back my blanket and pillow," I said. "You've been lounging around long enough."

He handed them back to me.

"And Lee, give me the ski hat Laura gave you."

He looked perplexed, but he reached into his overcoat and handed it to me.

"You can't wear this anymore. It might be a way to identify you."

I crawled in bed and turned out the light. I heard Lee come in a minute later. He crouched down low and looked out my window to the street below.

Then he whispered, "Peace, Jackie."

"Peace," I whispered back.

And the door shut.

## Forty-five

I didn't get a minute's sleep. First I was listening to hear if Lee would make it unnoticed to the van. I didn't hear any commotion. . . . Then I thought through the rest of the plan over and over in my head.

6 a.m. -- the sun was rising. I washed my face and brushed my teeth, as absurd as that seemed to be. I was overwhelmed by the realization that I might die today.

I went to my closet and put on my oldest lightest pair of jeans over the wetsuit I'd brought from California. I thought I might use it for a horizon swim one day, like the adventurous swims Sherry and I used to take back in Long Island. But I never got around to it. I put on my winter jacket, then put Lee's ski hat into one pocket, and my twin ski hat in the other.

I walked briskly to the van in the back parking lot, took the keys from the ashtray and started Weegee's engine. I was hoping beyond hope that I could catch the cop across the street sleeping, but no such luck. I drove toward the freeway and he began to follow at a moderate distance.

"Lee," I called out, looking straight ahead.

". . . . Yeah," his voice was muffled.

“We’re going to Rockport.” I was shouting above the roar of the engine. “When the van stops, wait ten minutes before you come out. Sherry’s car will be there for you. You know, the beat-up green Bug? The keys will be in it. It’s yours Lee, Sherry’s gift to you. But you’d better dump it in a few days, or get rid of the plates, or roll it into the ocean. Whatever you do, don’t use it too long. Because eventually these guys are going to figure things out. We’re being followed right now but I’m going to try to lose them.”

“What the hell are you doing, Jackie?” his voice boomed.

“I’m going to be your decoy,” I said. “Don’t worry Lee. I’ll be fine. I know Rockport really well. A girl named Robin introduced me to the place. It’s got a pier, a boat launch, lots of rocks overlooking the ocean. . . .”

Lee was silent.

If he had had more time, or knew enough details about the plan to inspect the odds, I’m sure he would have considered all-out surrender, for my sake.

I roared off the exit at Rockport and tried to drive as fast as I could the rest of the way.

I looked back and saw that I’d advanced farther ahead of the undercover cop. But now another tan car followed him. I figured that there would be more than one before long. It was still early, a little before 7 a.m., so most of the

parking spaces near the pier were empty. I saw Sherry's car, its windows frosted, and saw that I could park almost directly across from it.

Then: "Lee, just do what I told you. Sherry's car is directly across the street, but wait the full ten minutes before you get out. And Lee. . . write to Sherry if you make it."

I came to a screeching stop before he could say anything. I put Lee's ski hat on my head and jumped out, running as fast as I could towards the pier.

I tried to imagine what would be going on behind me. I heard the tan cars screeching up to the pier; people running at me from thirty yards back.

"Stop!" a heavy voice shouted.

Then I heard a warning shot.

I'd expected that.

And this—I came to the edge of the rocks, and with the vast dark blue ocean sprawled in every direction below me, I took a deep breath and jumped.

## Forty-six

I had already told my mind what to expect, what to think, during every second of the journey. I considered myself a great swimmer, master of the Long Island coastlines, the undertows, the long distances. But no matter how well prepared I'd imagined myself to be, nothing could have readied me for the arctic cold that engulfed my body.

For a while everything passed like a movie reel slowed to half speed. After another few seconds I became so disoriented it seemed like the reel had turned upside down.

Lee's soaked ski hat came off my head and I let it float away. Then I took the twin ski hat from my jacket pocket and let it float away next to his. They started to sink to the bottom.

I couldn't swim in all the clothes I had on, so I struggled to take off my sneakers and jeans. I had to touch my wetsuit to make sure it was actually on. It felt like I was naked in an ocean of hot ice.

I started to sink below the water against my will. I saw one of the ski hats float by in front of my eyes along with a piece of seaweed. I hadn't made any progress; I was swimming in place.

My lungs breathed so rapidly when I finally surfaced, I couldn't take in a full breath of air. But I knew I had to start swimming *right now!*

Calm down! Think it through! I took a short breath of frigid air and felt my arms and legs start to gain motion.

Slowly my consciousness returned, and my arms and legs took on a familiar rhythm. Okay, okay. . .

They were behind me on the pier watching. Maybe they even thought I was Lee because of the ski hat. That would certainly be the best scenario. But it didn't matter in the long run. The fact was, I'd gotten their attention.

I figured that soon they would scurry along the steep rocks down to the beach to watch my attempted escape and to try and find a way to capture me. They might find it easy to pry the motorized lifeguard boat away from its lock and start its engine. I knew it was there. Robin and I knew that beach well.

I wondered when or if they would realize I might be heading for a little inlet a half mile south, impossible to reach by car from where they were now. I took one brief moment to look back and saw them pointing and talking on their walky-talkies. The plan was working, I hoped.

I felt numb all over. I felt like I was swimming in a sea of Novocain.

Think other thoughts: where was Lee now? Still hidden in the van, counting the last minutes down. If any cops had bothered to inspect the van, the possibility of them lifting up the sleeping bag, the foam, then the plywood of the bed, and looking under it, was pretty small. What would they be looking for, why would they be hanging around the van when the guy they were following for the last hour had just jumped into the ocean before their very eyes?

The biggest gamble was just that -- that I had actually diverted all of them to the beach and away from the van.

It would be just a little longer until Lee could make his getaway. Hopefully, I wouldn't drown in the meantime.

The second I thought the word "drown," something happened. Reality pounded into my brain. The raw power of the cold overtook me. The wetsuit, it seemed, was doing me no good at all, because my head and feet and hands were aching, pulsing, especially my head. The muscles in my neck felt like they were about to cramp. Suddenly I knew for certain I wouldn't make it across to the inlet, and I doubted if I could even make it back to the beach where the cops were.

But if I *did* swim back the plan would still succeed. . . . maybe. I tried to ride the waves towards them, or anywhere that had *land*. But no, my God, I was out too far.

At this point everything began to slow down and my mind began to wander.

## Forty-seven

The age of Aquarius. . . an Aquarian planet. . .  
Aquarian beings. I imagined all the people, tucked away on  
warm dry land this morning, rushing to work, to love, to eat,  
marching to war, or to protest war. Some had a larger vision,  
most did not.

I understood Jan's '*dream*' now. I could feel it. Here at  
the edge of death it all made so much sense.

We lived on a fragile blue ball floating in space, a  
colorful exception to nothingness. How in the world could  
living dots, existing for such a brief time, end up killing each  
other for land, for power, for love?

Did it come down to survival and security at all costs?  
Even if the costs were as steep as losing human sanity, or  
inner freedom, or world peace, or the survival of our race?

Self-preservation had gone out of control.

What an outrageous waste of the gift.

The gift! Gifts wasted. . . Sherry's poem, "Traveling,"  
tried to tell me the same thing Lee told me: "I take a deep  
breath. . . and pretend I have the power to be transformed.  
And I am transformed."

Suddenly the truth was clear. When I thought of Jan's dream, her vision, my generation's vision — my jealousies and fears made no sense.

Why had I felt so unbearably sad about love? Jan's love? If she'd had ten other lovers, or a hundred, what would it really have mattered? Why should it have had anything to do with the love I felt for her, *if* what I felt for her was actually *love*?

She had tried to give me so much more than sex and security unto death. So much more than a way to show her off, or avoid feeling alone. She had tried to give me *the right, the joy*, to move through the chaos of this life with my heart and mind and senses wide open, instead of being enslaved by them.

It was chaos that surrounded us, yes. But I saw the truth beyond chaos now: "Reality" was the fake. Reality was whatever feeble illusion we believed it to be at the moment we decided. Nothing more.

What an awesome power to have in our hands! Yet, without a larger vision, our eyes only seemed to focus on shadows.

We keep narrowing our sight in a mad attempt to dissect the meaning of shafts of light escaping from the darkness. Cosmic breadcrumbs. Never lifting our heads to truly see *the entire thing!* The whole sky!

The mind was mostly made of madness.

Chaotic sounds of anger gurgled up now from deep inside my brain.

I could hear the machine guns exploding in a death-like rhythm in the fields of Vietnam; the churning vibrating moan of a helicopter engine rattling off a thousand rounds of fire, coming closer, and closer.

But it didn't matter anymore. I was locked in a deep, passionate embrace, just below the surface. Water currents were being stirred up, circling and shifting like a tornado above me.

I saw images of those holding me up for so long— crystal-like visions of my parents, my great grandmother, Sherry, Jan, Misty, Lee. . . I was locked in an eternal embrace.

There, *right there*, a moment from death, listening to the sounds of war transforming into the motor of a lifeguard boat, I finally had within my grasp the power to expand beyond it all, and burn like the sun against all the illusions of this world; against all the big lies we tell ourselves; against all the nightmares and daymares that had nearly drowned me back on land, while I was still in the world of the living.

## Forty-eight

When they hauled me up they felt no joy, no sense of victory. The effort these agents had made to capture whomever they thought I was, was far too difficult and time-consuming. One of them discussed throwing me back in and letting me sink to the bottom, but they knew it would be better to bring me back for interrogation.

“Goddamn son-of-a-bitch,” was the next thing I heard in my semi-conscious state.

“Mother-fucking hippie bastard,” screamed another sentient being, swaying above me, shivering his ass off in the wet sea wind.

It was at that moment that I threw-up all over their shiny black shoes.

\* \* \*

Back on shore I fell onto the sand from exhaustion, or from being pushed. It didn't matter. I kissed shelly grains of landfall. I never, never wanted to be wet again.

My head ached and pulsed as if there was a balloon inside my skull, being blown-up and deflated a couple of times a second.

The main detective with the graying temples had arrived now, scurrying over from a series of squad cars back at the pier. When they took me by the arms and dragged me over to him, he looked at me and cursed.

“What the fucking devil. . . what’s going on here? This isn’t him. *THIS ISN’T HIM!*”

It was at that moment I knew for sure that Lee had gotten away. He was free.

\* \* \*

They brought me down to the Rockport police station, a small beach town office with little partitioned compartments filled with the clicking of typewriters. There was a room with an outside lock that they used as a cell. I sat inside in a chair next to an old rusty sink – water was not what I wanted to be reminded of. I rocked in the small white plastic chair, icy wet, shivering frantically, until the detective came in.

“Jackie Rose – age twenty – born Manhattan, NY, 1950; college drop-out; 4-F. That you?” He snapped the piece of paper he’d been reading angrily down to his side.

"Didn't miss a thing," I said.

"Where is Lee Silver?"

"I don't know."

"When is the last time you saw him?"

"At my apartment, jumping out a window."

"What?"

"The fire escape."

"The fire escape," he repeated.

"Yes."

"Where was he going?"

"I don't know. I hadn't seen him in months. He came to visit but I didn't want him to stay, and when he saw he was being followed he ran off."

"Really! He just ran off and disappeared."

"Really."

"If what you're saying is true, then answer me this: what in hell's name were you doing jumping into the ocean on a winter's day at 7 o'clock in the *FUCKING MORNING*?"

"Suicide," I said, quietly, humbly.

". . . . Fuck."

I nodded my head, "I'd had it with everything. I was trying to kill myself."

## Forty-nine

After a day and a half of recuperating, and explaining “the Age of Aquarius,” including how I’d always detested fishing with worms, to a perplexed doctor at a Boston psychiatric hospital, I was officially released. The last thing he told me was that he knew I wasn’t really trying to commit suicide.

He knew that, he said, because of the wetsuit.

When the interrogator first asked about the wetsuit I shrugged and said I wanted to swim out as far as I could. I wanted to die in the deepest part of the ocean.

“Wouldn’t have been anybody’s loss if you had,” he replied.

To which I simply whispered, “Exactly.”

But the shrink had a different explanation. Apparently, he saw the wetsuit as a creature comfort that a truly suicidal person wouldn’t have considered.

“You *cared*, you see?” he said to me. “You ultimately did care on some level about yourself. Some part of you wanted to live. . . . So I want you to think about that.”

I told him our little talk was having quite an impact.

He seemed pleased.

I drove Weege home and packed some things, calling Sherry first to assure her I was safe.

I gave some thought to the possibility that they might follow me to Binghamton. But why would I care if they did? I was going to visit my ex-girlfriend. They weren't going to find Lee there.

I was now officially just another freaked-out hippie wandering around aimlessly without a job.

\* \* \*

Binghamton was covered with a thin layer of snow. It was April 10. I had met Jan exactly one year ago, and met Lee a few days later. So for me it was New Year's day. My calendar didn't synchronize with Julius Caesar's anymore. He had had his reality, I had mine.

Sherry ran out to the van as I drove up. Michael had gone home for the beginning of Easter break. It gave Sherry and me the opportunity to be alone together for the first time since she'd left for college.

We cooked dinner, then sat together at her rickety kitchen table. I began to recount everything slowly. But my thoughts became jumbled.

"I can't quite explain — all the things that Lee said, the things I experienced that last minute in the water. It's like a

little explosion of the actual truth occurred in my brain. And now I keep trying to remember how to get back there."

"Try," Sherry said softly. "Tell me."

"I was in this dream state when I was in the water. But the dream was so much more real and beautiful than what I feel now. It was much more lucid and luminous than any previous moment of my life, or any acid trip. Because it wasn't a hallucination. It was the truth. It was the ultimate sanity. And I was drowning in it!"

I stared down at my plate of food without picking up my fork. "The worst thing, Sher, is that I can feel all the 'normal' feelings coming back now, slowly, like a march of ants invading a cosmic picnic. I think of Jan and I feel tiny flashes of jealousy again! Wanting, wishing. Or, I think of the Boston co-op and I just want to kill whoever destroyed it. The truth is so close to being drowned out again."

Sherry nodded, "I know that dream state you're talking about, Jackie. But you can't expect to be there all the time."

"But being there all the time, that's the ultimate goal, don't you think?"

"Maybe. . . . A famous Buddhist teacher came to our school last month. He said, 'There *are* no enlightened beings, there's only enlightened action.' So, maybe the goal is to *act* in an enlightened way as much as we can every day, and be flexible enough, fluid enough, to keep trying when we fail."

*Fluid!* I had to laugh. That was the word Lee used in his final farewell to me. But also, I was still picking sand from my ears. Any more fluid and I would have become an hors d'oeuvre for a family of sharks.

I also realized as I was talking with Sherry that I had a new image of myself politically. I was no longer a coward. I was officially a co-revolutionary now, by helping Lee escape. Yet that didn't make me any less of a believer in non-violence. Or any less of a pacifist. I did what I did out of love for my friend. He did what he did because he was cornered into it by the government. There was no other way out for Lee except a total surrender of what it meant to be an American. He deserved to be free. As it turned out, neither of us surrendered.

Around midnight Sherry put on a pair of pajamas that had little repeating tigers all over them. Their heads and bodies were folding in and growing out of each other. We both had a good chuckle about them. She joked, "They're like an Escher drawing without any talent."

She hugged me and rubbed my back until we fell asleep.

A few hours before dawn, I awoke and gazed out Sherry's window.

The stars were strobing through a frozen layer of sky. Tens of thousands of galactic giants were blinking in and out of existence through light-years of time.

Suddenly it all came back -- in that single moment of wakefulness. I felt it again, my vision at the edge of death—the dream, the awareness of something else. . . .

For a long moment that starlit feeling in me outshined all the other realities weaved within it. It short-circuited all the normal mental chatter and tunnels of doubt. I shivered from the intensity.

I looked at Sherry, asleep in her tiger pajamas, and softly touched her hair.

Her eyes opened. "Hi," she said dreamily. She squinted at me half asleep, trying to imagine what was going on in my head.

She looked at my wide eyes. I wasn't able to speak.

"Hey, sometimes it's nice to feel, and wonder," she said, "but sometimes it's nice to just be warm."

She pulled me closer to her, "Come back to me."

I put my head down beside her.

## Fifty

The next morning, we climbed aboard Weege. Amazingly, it was still winter in Binghamton. We weaved randomly down quiet country roads, walled with barren crystallized trees, until we arrived in town and pulled into its only used-car dealership. There I spent almost all the money I had on an old beat-up VW Bug and gave it to Sherry to replace the one she'd had “stolen.”

A day later it came – a letter, post-marked Washington, D.C., no return address. It said this:

*Jackie and Sherry,*

*Worry not about my safety. Or about my loneliness – M is with me!*

*To have her, and to know both of you, makes me feel equally lucky.*

*As far as what you did, Jackie, your suicide attempt was buried on page 16 of the Boston Globe. (Paradoxically, just four pages away from the entertainment section – You're getting closer!)*

*They said you were some suicidal nut on drugs, but I know what you were really up to – unfortunately, you can't make the Olympic swim team by jumping off a pier in front of the F.B.I.*

*And dear Sherry – I'm sorry I had to "off" your car. It was disposed of rather unceremoniously.*

*I will dedicate all my future modes of transportation to its memory.*

*Thank God, it's the only one among us who didn't make it.*

*-- Peace*

## Fifty-one

Sherry and I stood on her icy front porch. My guitar was in its case, propped up against the door. My knapsack lay beside it. Her head was resting on my shoulder.

We heard a lone bird singing from the rooftop.

"The season's turning, Sher," I whispered. "Spring is coming."

She kicked a clump of snow on my sneakers.

I had decided to go back to San Francisco. I wanted to write music, to protest the war, to start my life again. It was April, 1970; a new era was upon us.

Her face didn't try to hide the sadness as I kissed her goodbye. She knew it would be a long time before we would see each other again.

I thought of all the years that lay in front of us.

Another decade of change.

Decades of changes. . . .

But one thing wouldn't change: It would still be up to us to make the dream come true.

~ GM