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From the Foreword by David Nichols, Ph.D., Professor of Medicinal Chemistry, Purdue University.

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# PiHKAL

A  
CHEMICAL  
LOVE STORY

Alexander              Ann  
Shulgin              Shulgin

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PRESS

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**phen-ethyl-amine** \ fen-'eth-al-a-,mēn \ n. [*p*henyl fr. F. phène, fr. Gk. phainein, to show (from its occurrence in illuminating gas)+ ethyl (*ether + yl*) + amine fr. NL ammonia] 1: A naturally occurring compound found in both the animal and plant kingdoms. It is an endogenous component of the human brain. 2: Any of a series of compounds containing the phenethylamine skeleton, and modified by chemical constituents at appropriate positions in the molecule.

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## FOREWORD

This book will be different things to different people. There has never been a work like it, and since recent legislative acts in this country have closed off the avenues of inquiry that made this one possible we may not soon, if ever, see another of its kind. Although it is doubtful that it will ever make the best seller list, no library of psychedelic literature will henceforth be complete without a copy of PIHKAL.

For nearly thirty years one of the authors, Dr. Alexander Shulgin, affectionately known to his friends as Sasha, has been the only person in the world to synthesize, then evaluate in himself, his wife Ann, and in a dedicated group of close friends, nearly 200 never-before-known chemical structures, materials expected to have effects in man similar to those of the mind-altering psychedelic drugs, mescaline, psilocybin and LSD. On the west coast, Sasha has assumed almost folk-hero status. Others regard him variously as courageous, foolhardy, or downright dangerous, depending mostly on the political persuasion of the critic. However, all would have to agree that Sasha Shulgin is a most remarkable individual. This writing collaboration with his wife Ann will be enjoyed, not only by their friends, but also by those who have heard about "Sasha" but don't have a clue as to who he really is. More importantly, this is a tale of self-discovery, accompanied by the faint stirrings of a technology that is yet to be fully born, much less developed.

The beginning of PIHKAL is autobiographical, detailing the lives of two fictional characters, Dr. Alexander Borodin, known to his friends by the Russian diminutive "Shura," and Alice, later his wife. In the first two parts, Shura and Alice describe the individual life paths which led each of them to a fascination with psychedelics and, ultimately, to their fascination with each other. In Part III, they chronicle more than a decade of their adventures together, journeys often catalyzed by the ingestion of one of Shura's new chemical compounds.

One cannot be certain of the exact extent to which Shura and Alice mirror Sasha and Ann, but the richness of imagery, detail of thought, openly expressed emotions, and moments of intimacy clearly give insight into the personalities of the two people I know. These details serve to

show that Shura and Alice's research has been an honest search for meaning in life. Their pain in lost relationships, in failed marriages, and their love and caring for each other paint a picture of two extraordinary and very feeling human beings.

The second half of the book is an almost encyclopedic compendium of synthetic methods, dosages, durations of action, and commentaries for 179 different chemical materials. These essentially represent transcriptions of Sasha's laboratory notebooks, with some additional material culled from the scientific literature. Some day in the future, when it may again be acceptable to use chemical tools to study the mind, this book will be a treasure-house, a sort of sorcerer's book of spells, to delight and enchant the psychiatrist/shaman of tomorrow.

David E. Nichols, Ph. D.  
Professor of Medicinal Chemistry  
West Lafayette, Indiana

## NOTE TO THE READER

With this book, PIHKAL, we are making available a body of information concerning the conception, synthesis, definition, and appropriate use of certain consciousness-changing chemical compounds which we are convinced are valuable tools for the study of the human mind and psyche.

At the present time, restrictive laws are in force in the United States and it is very difficult for researchers to abide by the regulations which govern efforts to obtain legal approval to do work with these compounds in human beings. Consequently there has been almost no clinical research conducted in this area for almost thirty years. However, animal studies can be done by the approved and qualified scientist who finds sources of research funding and who appeals to and obtains his supplies of drugs from an appropriate government agency such as the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Approximately half of the recipes in Book II of PIHKAL have already been published in a number of respected scientific journals. The rest will be submitted for publication in the near future.

No one who is lacking legal authorization should attempt the synthesis of any of the compounds described in the second half of this book, with intent to give them to man. To do so is to risk legal action which might lead to the tragic ruination of a life. It should also be noted that any person anywhere who experiments on himself, or on another human being, with any one of the drugs described herein, without being familiar with that drug's action and aware of the physical and/or mental disturbance or harm it might cause, is acting irresponsibly and immorally, whether or not he is doing so within the bounds of the law.

We strongly urge that a continuing effort be made by those who care about freedom of inquiry and the search for knowledge, to work toward changes in the present drug laws, particularly in the United States. Open inquiry, and creative exploration of this important area of research, must be not only allowed but encouraged. It is essential that our present negative propaganda regarding psychedelic drugs be replaced with honesty and truthfulness about their effects, both good and bad.

There is much that we need to understand about the human psyche, and this book is dedicated to the pursuit of that understanding.

## SEARCH FOR A TITLE

In trying to settle on a title for his book, a writer aims for something which both author and reader will find appropriate and easy to remember. For this book, I had originally considered something more academic than autobiographical, like "Hallucinogenic Phenethylamines," (hard to pronounce or remember, unless you're a chemist), but not only does that bear a close resemblance to "The Hallucinogens," by Hoffer and Osmond, it makes use of a word neither Ann nor I feel is appropriate in describing the effects of these materials. "Hallucinogenic," is probably the most commonly misused word in this field, so why reinforce what we regard as an inaccuracy and a misconception?

A title such as "The Psychedelic Phenethylamines," also very academic-sounding, was too close to books like "The Psychedelics," by Osmond, or "Psychedelics Encyclopedia," by Stafford; besides, with the loaded word, "psychedelics," in its title, such a book might prove difficult to stock in the bookstores of the Mid-West, even less likely in those of Russia; in Canada, quite impossible.

So when the words, "Phenethylamines I Have Known and Loved," popped into my mind, and I realized that the acronym was PIHKAL — which looks and sounds manageable — I got up from my desk and went to find Ann. I asked her, "What comes to mind when you hear the word, Pihkal?" She repeated, "Pea-KAHL? An ancient Mayan city in Guatemala, of course. Why?"

"No," I replied, "That's Tikal. Pihkal was the ruling lord of Palenque. He was entombed with six human sacrifices and a pile of jade, as I'm sure you now recall."

"Why do I have this funny feeling that you're not telling the absolutely precise truth?" asked Ann, who used to believe implicitly every word I uttered.

"You're right," I said, "I got carried away there, for a moment."

When I told her what P-I-H-K-A-L really did stand for, it took a while for her to stop laughing, leading me to the inevitable conclusion that my quest for a title was finally at an end.

## PREFACE

The book should actually be titled "Phenethylamines And Other Things I Have Known and Loved," because, although Book II contains only information on phenethylamines, the story includes some descriptions of the effects of other classes of psychedelic drugs, as well.

Part I is told in the voice of Shura Borodin, a character based on myself, and traces the story of my life from childhood through the death of my first wife.

Part II is told in the voice of Alice Parr, later Borodin, a character based on my wife, Ann, and tells the story of our relationship, and the development of our love for each other.

Part III takes both of us, our voices alternating, through the later years and certain experiences from which we, and members of our research group, continued to learn about ourselves, gaining insight and knowledge through changes of consciousness which were sometimes aided by the psychedelics and at other times catalyzed by no drug at all.

Book II should be of interest to chemists and all who love chemistry, but the comments at the end of each recipe might also prove interesting to the reader who understands no chemistry whatsoever.

Most of the names in this story have been changed to protect personal privacy and to allow us freedom in the telling of our tale. Certain characters are composites.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE WRITING OF PIHKAL

I am a pharmacologist and a chemist. I have spent most of my adult life investigating the action of drugs; how they are discovered, what they are, what they do, how they can be helpful — or harmful. But my interests lie somewhat outside the mainstream of pharmacology, in the area I have found most fascinating and rewarding, that of the psychedelic drugs. Psychedelics might best be defined as physically non-addictive compounds which temporarily alter the state of one's consciousness.

The prevailing opinion in this country is that there are drugs that have legal status and are either relatively safe or at least have acceptable risks, and there are other drugs that are illegal and have no legitimate place at all in our society. Although this opinion is widely held and vigorously promoted, I sincerely believe that it is wrong. It is an effort to paint things either black or white, when, in this area, as in most of real life, truth is colored grey.

Let me give the reasons for my belief.

Every drug, legal or illegal, provides some reward. Every drug presents some risk. And every drug can be abused. Ultimately, in my opinion, it is up to each of us to measure the reward against the risk and decide which outweighs the other. The rewards cover a wide spectrum. They include such things as the curing of disease, the softening of physical and emotional pain, intoxication, and relaxation. Certain drugs — those known as the psychedelics — allow for increased personal insight and expansion of one's mental and emotional horizons.

The risks are equally varied, ranging from physical damage to psychological disruption, dependency, and violation of the law. Just as there are different rewards with different people, there are also different risks. An adult must make his own decision as to whether or not he should expose himself to a specific drug, be it available by prescription or proscribed by law, by measuring the potential good and bad with his own personal yardstick. And it is here that being well informed plays an indispensable role. My philosophy can be distilled into four words: be informed, then

choose.

I personally have chosen some drugs to be of sufficient value to be worth the risks; others, I deem not to be of sufficient value. For instance, I use a moderate amount of alcohol, generally in the form of wine, and — at the present time — my liver function tests are completely normal. I do not smoke tobacco. I used to, quite heavily, then gave it up. It was not the health risk that swayed me, but rather the fact that I had become completely dependent upon it. That was, in my view, a case of the price being unacceptably high.

Each such decision is my own, based on what I know of the drug and what I know about myself.

Among the drugs that are currently illegal, I have chosen not to use marijuana, as I feel the light-headed intoxication and benign alteration of consciousness does not adequately compensate for an uncomfortable feeling that I am wasting time.

I have tried heroin. This drug, of course, is one of the major concerns in our society, at the present time. In me, it produces a dreamy peacefulness, with no rough edges of worry, stress or concern. But there is also a loss of motivation, of alertness, and of the urge to get things done. It is not any fear of addiction that causes me to decide against heroin; it is the fact that, under its influence, nothing seems to be particularly important to me.

I have also tried cocaine. This drug, particularly in its notorious "crack" form, is the cause celebre of today. To me, cocaine is an aggressive pusher, a stimulant which gives me a sense of power and of being completely with it, on top of the world. But there is also the inescapable knowledge, underneath, that it is not true power, that I am not really on top of the world, and that, when the drug's effects have disappeared, I will have gained nothing. There is a strange sense of falseness about the state. There is no insight. There is no learning. In its own distinctive way, I find cocaine to be as much an escape drug as heroin. With either one, you escape from who you are, or — even more to the point — from who you are not. In either case, you are relieved for a short time from awareness of your inadequacies. I frankly would rather address mine than escape them; there is, ultimately, far greater satisfaction that way.

With the psychedelic drugs, I believe that, for me, the modest risks (an occasional difficult experience or perhaps some body malaise) are more than balanced by the potential for learning. And that is why I have chosen to explore this particular area of pharmacology.

What do I mean when I say there is a potential for learning? It is a potential, not a certainty. I can learn, but I'm not forced to do so; I can gain insight into possible ways of improving the quality of my life, but only my own efforts will bring about the desired changes.

Let me try to make clear some of the reasons that I find the psychedelic

experience a personal treasure.

I am completely convinced that there is a wealth of information built into us, with miles of intuitive knowledge tucked away in the genetic material of every one of our cells. Something akin to a library containing uncountable reference volumes, but without any obvious route of entry. And, without some means of access, there is no way to even begin to guess at the extent and quality of what is there. The psychedelic drugs allow exploration of this interior world, and insights into its nature.

Our generation is the first, ever, to have made the search for self-awareness a crime, if it is done with the use of plants or chemical compounds as the means of opening the psychic doors. But the urge to become aware is always present, and it increases in intensity as one grows older.

One day, looking into the face of a newborn grandchild, you find yourself thinking that her birth has made a seamless tapestry of time as it flows from yesterday to tomorrow. You realize that life continuously appears in different forms and in different identities, but that whatever it is that gives shape to each new expression does not change at all.

"From where did her unique soul come?" you wonder, "And, to where will my own unique soul go? Is there really something else out there, after death? Is there a purpose to it all? Is there an overriding order and structure that makes sense of everything, or would, if only I could see it?" You feel the urge to ask, to probe, to use what little time might be left to you, to search for ways to tie together all the loose ends, to understand what demands to be understood.

This is the search that has been part of human life from the very first moments of consciousness. The knowledge of his own mortality — knowledge which places him apart from his fellow animals — is what gives Man the right, the license, to explore the nature of his own soul and spirit, to discover what he can about the components of the human psyche.

Each of us, at some time in his life, will feel himself a stranger in the strange land of his own existence, needing answers to questions which have risen from deep within his soul and will not go away.

Both the questions and their answers have the same source: oneself.

This source, this part of ourselves, has been called by many names throughout human history, the most recent being "the unconscious." Freudians distrust it and Jungians are enraptured by it. It is the part inside you that keeps watch when your conscious mind has drifted, that gives you the sense of what to do in a crisis, when there is no time available for logical reasoning and decision-making. It is the place wherein are to be found demons and angels and everything in between.

This is one of the reasons I hold the psychedelic drugs to be treasures. They can provide access to the parts of us which have answers. They can, but again, they need not and probably will not, unless that is the purpose

for which they are being used.

It is up to you to use these tools well, and in the right way. A psychedelic drug might be compared to television. It can be very revealing, very instructive, and — with thoughtful care in the selection of channels — the means by which extraordinary insights can be achieved. But to many people, psychedelic drugs are simply another form of entertainment; nothing profound is looked for, thus — usually — nothing profound is experienced.

The potential of the psychedelic drugs to provide access to the interior universe, is, I believe, their most valuable property.

From the earliest days of his time on earth, Man has sought out and used specific plants which have had the effect of altering the way he interacts with his world and communicates with his gods and with himself. For many thousands of years, in every known culture, there has been some percentage of the population — usually the shamans, the curenderos, the medicine men — which has used this or that plant to achieve a transformation in its state of consciousness. These people have used the altered state to sharpen their diagnostic abilities and to enable them to draw upon the healing energies to be found in the world of the spirits. The tribal leaders (in later civilizations, the royal families) presumably used the psychoactive plants to increase their insight and wisdom as rulers, or perhaps simply to call upon the forces of destructive power as allies in forthcoming battles.

Many plants have been found to meet specific human needs. Unwanted pain has been with mankind forever. Just as we today have our heroin (or Fentanyl or Demerol) users, for centuries past this analgesic role has been played by opium of the Old World and datura of the New World, mandragora in Europe and North Africa, as well as henbane, belladonna and mandrake, to name a few. Countless people have used this way of deadening pain (physical and psychic), which involves escape into a dream world. And, although these tools have had many users, it apparently has been only a minority that has abused them. Historically, every culture has spun these plants into its daily life, and has had more benefit than harm from them. We have, in our own society, learned to deaden physical pain and debilitating anxiety with the medical use of drugs which have been developed in imitation of the alkaloids in these plants.

The need to search out sources of additional energy has also been with us forever. And, as we have our caffeine and cocaine users, for centuries the natural sources have been mate tea and the coca plant of the New World, the khat plant of Asia Minor, the kola tree of North Africa, kava-kava and the betel nut from Eastern Asia, and ephedra from all parts of the world. Again, many kinds of people — the peasant, stooped under a bundle of firewood, trudging for hours on a mountain path; the doctor on

emergency duty for two days without sleep; the soldier under fire at the front, unable to rest — have sought the push and prod of stimulation. And, as always, there have been a few who have chosen to abuse the process.

Then, there is the need to explore the world that lies just beyond the immediate limits of our senses and our understanding; that, too, has been with mankind from the first. But in this case, our non-native North American society has not given its acceptance to the plants, the chemicals, that open up our seeing and feeling skills. Other civilizations, for many hundreds of years, have used the peyote cactus and the psilocybin-containing mushroom, the ayahuasca, cohoba and yajé of the New World, the harmala, cannabis and soma of the Old World, and the iboga of Africa, for this inquiry into the human unconscious. But our modern medical profession, as a whole, has never acknowledged these tools for insight or for therapy, and they have remained generally unacceptable. In the establishment of a balance of power between those who heal us and those who govern us, it has been agreed that the possession and use of these remarkable plants shall be a crime. And that the use of any chemical compounds which have been developed in imitation of these plants, even though they might show improved safety and consistency of action, shall also be a crime.

We are a great nation with one of the highest standards of living ever known. We are proud of an extraordinary Constitution that protects us from the tyranny that has torn apart lesser nations. We are rich in the heritage of English law that assumes our innocence and assures us our personal privacy. One of the major strengths of our country has been in its traditional respect for the individual. Each and every one of us is free — or so we have always believed — to follow whatever religious or spiritual path he chooses; free to inquire, to explore, to seek information and pursue truth wherever and however he wishes, as long as he accepts full responsibility for his actions and their effects on others.

How is it, then, that the leaders of our society have seen fit to try to eliminate this one very important means of learning and self-discovery, this means which has been used, respected, and honored for thousands of years, in every human culture of which we have a record? Why has peyote, for instance, which has served for centuries as a means by which a person may open his soul to an experience of God, been classified by our government as a Schedule I material, along with cocaine, heroin and PCP? Is this kind of legal condemnation the result of ignorance, pressure from organized religion, or a growing urge to force conformity upon the population? Part of the answer may lie in an increasing trend in our culture towards both paternalism and provincialism.

Paternalism is the name for a system in which the authorities supply

our needs, and — in exchange — are allowed to dictate our conduct, both public and private. Provincialism is narrowness of outlook, social unification by the acceptance of a single code of ethics, the limiting of interests and forms of experience to those already established as traditional.

However, the prejudice against the use of consciousness-opening plants and drugs has the major part of its origin in racial intolerance and the accumulation of political power. In the latter part of the last century, once the Intercontinental Railway had been built and the Chinese laborers were no longer needed, they were increasingly portrayed as subhuman and uncivilized; they were yellow-skinned, slant-eyed, dangerous aliens who frequented opium dens.

Peyote was described, in various publications of the late 19th century, as the cause of murder, mayhem and insanity among the shiftless American Indians. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was determined to stamp out the use of peyote, (which it consistently confused with mescal and the mescal bean, in its publications), and one of the most consistent pressures behind its efforts is made clear in this partial quotation from a letter written by the Reverend B. V. Gassaway in 1903 to the BIA, "... The Sabbath is the principal day for our preaching services and if the Indians are first made drunk on mescal (peyote) they cannot then be benefitted by the gospel."

It was only with tremendous effort and courage on the part of many people of conscience that the use of peyote as a sacrament in the Native American Church was permitted to continue. There is now underway, as you know, a renewed effort on the part of our present government to eliminate the religious use of peyote by our Native Americans.

In the 1930's, there was an effort to deport Mexican laborers from southern agricultural states, and racial prejudice was again deliberately encouraged, with the Mexicans being described as lazy, dirty, and users of that dangerous stuff called marijuana. The intolerance of black people in the United States was aided and abetted by stories of marijuana and heroin use among black musicians. It should be noted that nobody remarked on such drug use by black people until their new music, which they called jazz, began to attract the attention of whites — at first only white night-club patrons — and there began the first stirrings of awareness of the indignities and injustices being suffered by black Americans.

We, in this country, are all too painfully aware of our past sins in regard to the rights of various minorities, but we are less conscious of the way in which the public attitude toward certain drugs has been manipulated. New positions of political power and, eventually, thousands of new jobs, were created on the basis of the perceived threat to public health and safety posed by plants and drugs whose sole function was to change perceptions, to open the way to exploration of the unconscious mind, and

— for many — to allow a direct experience of the numinous.

The 1960's, of course, delivered a powerful blow to the psychedelics. These drugs were being used as part and parcel of a massive rebellion against governmental authority and what was believed to be an immoral and unnecessary war in Vietnam. Also, there were too many loud and authoritative voices claiming that there was a need for a new kind of spirituality, and urging the use of psychedelics to make direct contact with one's God, without the intervention of priest, minister or rabbi.

The voices of psychiatrists, writers and philosophers, and many thoughtful members of the clergy, pleaded for study and investigation of the effects of psychedelics, and of what they could reveal about the nature and function of the human mind and psyche. They were ignored in the clamor against flagrant abuse and misuse, of which there was more than ample evidence. The government and the Church decided that psychedelic drugs were dangerous to society, and with the help of the press, it was made clear that this was the way to social chaos and spiritual disaster.

What was unstated, of course, was the oldest rule of all: "Thou shalt not oppose nor embarrass those in power without being punished."

I have stated some of my reasons for holding the view that psychedelic drugs are treasures. There are others, and many of them are spun into the texture of this story. There is, for instance, the effect they have on my perception of colors, which is completely remarkable. Also, there is the deepening of my emotional rapport with another person, which can become an exquisitely beautiful experience, with eroticism of sublime intensity. I enjoy the enhancement of the senses of touch, smell and taste, and the fascinating changes in my perception of the flow of time.

I deem myself blessed, in that I have experienced, however briefly, the existence of God. I have felt a sacred oneness with creation and its Creator, and — most precious of all — I have touched the core of my own soul.

It is for these reasons that I have dedicated my life to this area of inquiry. Someday I may understand how these simple catalysts do what they do. In the meantime, I am forever in their debt. And I will forever be their champion.

#### THE PROCESS OF DISCOVERY

The second most often asked question, after, "Why do you do the work you do?" is: "How do you determine the activity of a new drug?"

How does one go about discovering the action, the nature of the effect on the central nervous system, of a chemical which has just been synthesized, but not yet put into a living organism? I start by explaining that it must be understood, first of all, that the newborn chemical is as free of pharmacological activity as a newborn babe is free of prejudice.

At the moment of a person's conception, many fates have been sealed, from physical features to gender and intelligence. But many things have not been decided. Subtleties of personality, belief systems, countless other characteristics, are not established at birth. In the eyes of every newborn, there is a universality of innocence and godliness which changes gradually as interactions take place with parents, siblings and the environment. The adult product is shaped from repeated contacts with pains and pleasures, and what finally emerges is the fatalist, the egocentric, or the rescuer. And the traveling companions of this person during his development from undefined infant to well-defined adult, all have contributed to and have been, in turn, modified by these interactions.

So it is also with a chemical. When the idea of a new substance is conceived, nothing exists but symbols, a collage of odd atoms hooked together with bonds, all scribbled out on a blackboard or a napkin at the dinner table. The structure, of course, and perhaps even some spectral characteristics and physical properties are inescapably pre-ordained. But its character in man, the nature of its pharmacological action or even the class of the action it might eventually display can only be guessed at. These properties cannot yet be known, for at this stage they do not yet exist.

Even when the compound emerges as a new substance, tangible, palpable, weighable, it is still a tabula rasa in the pharmacological sense, in that nothing is known, nothing can be known, about its action in man, since it has never been in man. It is only with the development of a relationship between the thing tested and the tester himself that this aspect of character will emerge, and the tester is as much a contributor to the final definition of the drug's action as is the drug itself. The process of establishing the nature of a compound's action is synonymous with the process of developing that action.

Other researchers who taste your material will include some (most, you hope) who make separate evaluations after the fact and will agree with your evaluations, and it will then appear that you defined (developed) the properties accurately. Other researchers (only a few, you hope) will disagree, and they will privately tend to wonder why they failed to evaluate the material more accurately. You might call this a no-lose situation, and it is the reward for personally following all three parts of this process, namely conception, creation, and definition.

But it must be kept in mind that the interaction goes both ways; the tester, as well as the compound being tested, is molded by it.

I determine activity in the most ancient and time-honored way, established and practiced for thousands of years by medicine men and shamans who had to know the effects of plants which might prove useful in healing. The method is obvious to anyone who gives the matter some thought.

Although most of the compounds I investigate are created in the laboratory, and I seldom taste plants or fungi found in nature, there is still only one way to do it, a way that minimizes the risk, while maximizing the quality of the information obtained. I take the compound myself. I test its physical effects in my own body and I stay attentive to any mental effects which might be present.

Before I elaborate on this old-fashioned method of discovering a new drug's activity, let me explain how I feel about animal testing and why I no longer rely on it in my own research.

I used to use animals, when I worked at Dole, to detect toxicity. Obviously, drugs which promise to have clinical utility must, and should, go through the established procedures of IND (Investigation of New Drug) permits and clinical trials prior to large-scale studies in humans. But I have not killed mice experimentally for two decades, and cannot foresee any need to do so again. My reasons for having decided against the use of test animals are as follows.

During the time when I routinely tested every new, potentially psychoactive drug in mice to establish the LD-50 (the dosage level at which 50% of the test animals die), two generalities became obvious. All of the LD-50's seemed to group in the area between 50 and 150 milligrams per kilogram of body weight. For a 25 gram mouse, that would be somewhere around five milligrams. And, secondly, the number gives no prediction of the potency or character of action the drug could eventually show in man. Nevertheless, numerous compounds have been "established" in the scientific literature as being psychedelic in their action solely on the basis of animal assays, without any human evaluation having been performed. I believe totally that assays such as nest building among mice, disruption of conditioned response, grooming, maze running, or motor-activity have no value in determining the psychedelic potential of a compound.

One form of animal study does indeed have merit, and that is the cardiovascular monitoring and eventual pathological examination of an experimental animal which has been given an increasingly large dosage of a test compound. The animal I have used has usually been the dog. This form of testing is certainly useful in determining the nature of toxic effects that should be watched for, but it is still of no value in defining the subjective effects of a psychoactive drug in a human.

My usual starting point with a new drug is some 10 to 50 times less, by weight, than the known active level of its closest analog. If I have any doubts, I go down by a factor of 10 again. Some compounds that are closely related to previously assayed drugs of low potency have been started at the milligram level. But there are other compounds — those of an entirely new, unexplored class — which I may start nibbling at levels even below a microgram.

There is no completely safe procedure. Different lines of reasoning may lead to different predictions of a dosage level likely to be inactive in man. A prudent researcher begins his exploration at the lowest of these. However, there is always the question, "Yes, but what if —?" One can argue AFTER the fact that—in chemist's jargon—the ethyl group increased the potency over the methyl group because of lipophilicity, or decreased the potency because of ineffective enzymatic demethylation. My decisions, therefore, have had to be a mixture of intuition and probabilities.

There are very few drugs that, upon structural change by a single carbon atom (this is called homologation), change their pharmacological potency by an order of magnitude. There are very few compounds that are orally active at levels much below 50 micrograms. And I have discovered that the very few drugs that are active in the human central nervous system which turn out to be dangerous to the investigator at effective dosages, have usually given some preliminary warnings at threshold levels. If you intend to continue being a live, healthy investigator, you get to know those warning signals well, and immediately abandon further investigation of any drug that presents you with one or more of them. In my research, I am usually looking less for indications of danger than for signs that the new drug may have effects that are simply not useful or interesting to me.

For instance: if I'm trying a new drug at a low dosage level and find myself showing signs of hyper-reflexia, an over-sensitivity to ordinary stimuli — getting jumpy, in plain English — this could be a warning that the drug might, at higher levels, cause convulsions. Convulsants are used in animal research and have their legitimate role in medicine, but they just don't happen to be my cup of tea. A tendency to drift into reverie might be a warning sign; daydreaming is normal behavior when I'm tired or bored, but not when I've just taken a smidgin of a brand new drug and am watching for indications of activity. Or perhaps I become aware that I've been falling into brief episodes of sleep — micro-naps. Either of these signs could lead me to suspect that the drug might be a sedative-hypnotic or a narcotic. Such drugs certainly have their place in medicine, but — again — they're not what I'm looking for.

Once it's been established that the chosen initial dose has been without effect of any kind, I increase the dosage on alternate days, in increments of about a factor of times two at low levels, and perhaps times one and a half at higher levels.

One has to keep in mind that, if a drug is assayed too often, a tolerance to it might develop, even if there is no perceived activity, so that increasing doses may incorrectly appear to be inactive. To minimize this potential loss of sensitivity, no drug is repeated on sequential days. In addition, I periodically give myself a week to being completely drug free. This is

especially important if a number of different drugs of similar structural properties are being screened within the same period.

The problem of cross-tolerance — the body having become tolerant because of a recent exposure to a close relative of the drug — is thus avoided.

Over the years, I evolved a method of assigning symbols which refer exclusively to the perceived strength or intensity of the experience, not to the content, which is evaluated separately in my research notes. It could just as well apply to other classes of psychoactive drugs, such as sedative-hypnotics or anti-depressants. I use a system of five levels of effect, symbolized by pluses and minuses. There is one additional level I will describe, but it stands by itself, and is not comparable to the others.

(-) or Minus. There is no effect noted, of any nature, which can be ascribed to the drug in question. This condition is also called "baseline," which is my normal state. So, if the effect of the drug is minus, it means I am in exactly the same state of mind and body I was in before taking the experimental drug.

(±) or Plus-minus. I am feeling a move off baseline, but I can't be absolutely sure it's a drug-effect. There are a lot of false positives in this category, and often my report concludes that what I interpreted as signs of activity were, in fact, products of my imagination.

Here, I will describe briefly something called the "alert." It is some small sign which serves to remind me (in case I have become distracted by phone call or conversation) that I had, indeed, taken a drug. It comes early in the experiment, and is the prelude to further developments. Each member of our research group has his own individual form of alert; one notes a decongestion of the sinuses, another has a tingling at the back of the neck, still another gets a brief runny nose, and I, personally, become aware that my chronic tinnitus has disappeared.

(+) or Plus-one. There is a real effect, and I can track the duration of that effect, but I can't tell anything about the nature of the experience. Depending on the drug, there might be early signs of activity, which can include nausea, even active vomiting (although these are extremely rare). There could be less disturbing effects, such as lightheadedness, compulsive yawning, restlessness, or the wish to remain motionless. These early physical signs, if they arise at all, usually dissipate within the first hour, but they must be considered real, not imaginary. There can be a mental change, but it is not definable as to character. There are seldom false positives in this category.

(++) or Plus-two. The effect of the drug is unmistakable, and not only can its duration be perceived, so can its nature. It's at this level that the first attempts at classification are made, and my notes might read something like this: "There is considerable visual enhancement and much tactile sen-

sitivity, despite a light anaesthesia." (Which means that, although my fingertips might be less than usually responsive to heat or cold or pain, my sense of touch is definitely heightened.) At a plus-two, I would drive a car only in a life-or-death situation. I can still answer the phone with ease, and handle the call competently, but I would much prefer not to have to do so. My cognitive faculties are still intact, and if something unexpected should arise, I would be able to suppress the drug effects without much difficulty until the problem had been taken care of.

It's at this stage, plus-two, that I usually bring in another experimental subject, my wife, Ann. The effects of the drug are distinct enough at this level for her to be able to evaluate them in her own body and mind. She has a metabolism quite unlike my own, and of course a very different mind, so her reactions and responses constitute important information.

(++) or Plus-three. This is the maximum intensity of drug effect. The full potential of the drug is realized. Its character can be fully appreciated (assuming that amnesia is not one of its properties) and it is possible to define the chronological pattern exactly. In other words, I can tell how soon I get an alert, when the transition stage ends, how long the plateau — or full activity — is in effect before I sense the beginning of a decline, and precisely how steep or gentle the decline to baseline is. I know what the nature of the drug's effects are on my body and mind. Answering the phone is out of the question, simply because it would require too much effort for me to maintain the required normalcy of voice and response. I would be able to handle an emergency, but suppression of the drug effects would require close concentration.

After Ann and I have explored the plus-three range of the new drug, establishing the range of dosage levels at which we get this intensity of effect, we call the research group together and share the drug with them. More will be said about this group in a moment. It is after the members of the research group have submitted their reports on the experience that the synthesis of the new drug and its human pharmacology is ready to be written up for inclusion in a scientific publication.

(++++) or Plus-four. This is a separate and very special category, in a class by itself. The four pluses do not imply in any way that it is more than, or comparable to, a plus-three. It is a serene and magical state which is largely independent of what drug is used — if any drug at all — and might be called a "peak experience," in the terminology of the psychiatrist, Abe Maslow. It cannot be repeated at will with a repetition of the experiment. Plus-four is that one-of-a-kind, mystical or even religious experience which will never be forgotten. It tends to bring about a deep change of perspective or life-direction in the person who is graced with it.

Some 30 years ago, I shared my new discoveries with an informal group of about seven friends; we didn't meet together as a single group,

but usually in clusters of three to five, on occasional weekends, when they could spare the time. Most of my exploration was done, at that time, by myself on myself. These original seven have gone on to other things; a few of them have left the Bay Area and dropped out of touch, others have remained good friends whom I see occasionally, but now for dinners and reminiscences, not for drug explorations.

The present research group is a team which numbers eleven when everyone is present, but since two of them live quite far from the Bay Area and cannot always join us, we are usually nine. They are volunteers, some of them scientists, some psychologists, all of them experienced in the effects of a wide number of psychotropic drugs. They know the territory, and these particular people have been working with me for about 15 years. They are a close-knit family whose experience in this area allows them to make direct comparisons to other, familiar altered states, and to equate or critically compare some particular property of a drug's effect. I owe them all immense gratitude for having given me many years of trust in their willingness to explore unknown territory.

The question of informed consent is completely different in the context of this kind of research group, doing this type of exploration. All of our members are aware of the risks, as well as the potential benefits, to be expected in each experiment. The idea of malpractice or legal redress is without meaning within this volunteer group. Every one of us understands that any form of damage, either physical or psychological, suffered by any member as a result of experimentation with a new drug, would be responded to by all other members of the group in any way required, and for as long as it would take for the injured person to regain health. All of us would give financial aid, emotional support, and any other kind of assistance needed, without reservations. But let me add that exactly the same kind of support and care would be given to any member of the group in need, if the circumstances had no relation whatsoever to drug experimentation. In other words, we are close friends.

It should be noted here that, over the course of these 15 years, no physical or mental damage has occurred to any member of the group as a result of drug experimentation. There have been a few times of mental and emotional distress, but the person has always recovered by the time the drug's effects had dissipated.

How does a researcher rank the intensity of a drug's effects, as he perceives them to be? Ideally, such measurements should be objective, free of any opinion or bias on the part of the observer. And the experimental subject should be ignorant of the identity and the expected nature of action. But in the case of drugs like these — psychoactive drugs — the effects can be seen only within the subject's sensorium. Only he can observe and report the degree and nature of the drug's action. Hence, the subject is the

observer, and objectivity in the classic sense is impossible. There can be no blind studies.

The question of blind studies, especially double-blind studies, is pointless and, in my opinion, verges upon the unethical, in this area of research. The reason for "blindness," in an experiment is to protect against possible subjective bias on the part of the subject, and objectivity — as I explained earlier — is not possible in this kind of exploration. The subject may well be promoted into an altered state of consciousness, and I consider the idea of failing to advise him of this possibility to be completely improper.

Since the subject in such an experiment has been advised as to the identity of the drug, and the general kind of action which can be expected at the dosage levels which Ann and I have found to be active, and since he knows the time and place of the experiment, and his own dosage, I use the term "double-conscious," instead of "double-blind." This term was originated by Dr. Gordon Alles, a scientist who also explored the realms of altered states with new drugs.

Certain rules are strictly observed. There must be at least three days free of any drug use before the experiment; if one of us is suffering from any kind of illness, no matter how mild, and especially if he is taking medication for it, it is understood that he will not participate in the taking of the experimental drug, even though he might choose to be present during the session.

We meet at the home of one or another of the group, and each of us brings food or drink of some kind. In most cases, the host is prepared for everyone to stay overnight, and we bring sleeping bags or mats. There must be sufficient room to allow for any one of us to separate from the rest of the group if he or she wishes to be alone for a while. The homes we use have garden space where any of us may go to spend time among plants in the fresh air. There are music tapes and art books for whoever might wish to make use of them during the experience.

There are only two procedural demands enforced. It is understood that the words, "Hand in the air," (always accompanied by an actual raising of the speaker's hand) preceding a statement means that whatever is stated is a reality-based concern or problem. If I call out, "Hand in the air," and then go on to state that I smell smoke, it means I am genuinely worried about a real smell of smoke, and not playing some sort of word-game or pursuing a fantasy of some kind. This rule is re-stated at the beginning of each session and is strictly observed.

The second is the concept of veto. If anyone in the group feels discomfort or anxiety about a particular proposal concerning the way the session might go, the power of the veto is complete and is respected by all. For instance, if one person suggests the playing of music at a certain time in the experiment, and is joined by others who like the idea, it is understood

that the vote must be unanimous; one person feeling uncomfortable about hearing music assures that it won't be played for the group. This rule doesn't give rise to the problems one might expect, because in most houses which are large enough to accommodate a group of eleven people for such an experiment, there is usually an extra room in which music can be played without disturbing the quiet of other rooms.

There should be something said here about sexual behavior. In our group, it was clearly stated many years ago, and has been understood and observed ever since, that there will be no acting out of sexual impulses or feelings which may arise during an experiment, between people who are not married or in an ongoing relationship with each other. It is the same rule that applies in psychotherapy; sexual feelings can be discussed, if there is a desire to do so, but there will be no physical acting out of such feelings with another member of the group who is not the appropriate object. Of course, if an established couple wishes to retire to a private room to make love, they are free to do so with the blessings (and probably the envy) of the rest of us.

There is the same understanding in regard to feelings of anger or impulses of violence, should they arise. This allows for an openness of expression, and a complete trust that, no matter what kind of unexpected feeling or emotion comes onto the scene, no one will act in such a way as to cause regret or embarrassment, at that time or in the future, to any or all of us.

The researchers are used to treating disagreements or negative feelings the same way they would deal with them in group therapy — by exploring the reasons for the discomfort or anger or irritation. It has long been understood by all of them that exploration of the psychological and emotional effects of a psychoactive drug are, inevitably, synonymous with exploration of their individual psychological and emotional dynamics.

If everyone is healthy, there is no one in the group who does not participate. An exception was made in the case of a long-time participant, a psychologist in his 70's who made a decision during one experimental session to stop taking experimental drugs. He wished, however, to continue participating in the sessions with the rest of us, and we welcomed his presence with enthusiasm. He had a fine time with what is known as a "contact high," until his death a few years later, following heart surgery. We loved him and miss him still.

It's an admittedly unusual structure, but it has worked well in the evaluation of over one hundred psychoactive drugs, many of which have found their way into psychotherapeutic practice of a new and different kind.

Alexander Shulgin, Ph.D.

# BOOK I

THE  
LOVE  
STORY

**PIHKAL — A Chemical Love Story**

## **Part One:**

### **Shura's Voice**

## CHAPTER 1. THUMB

I was born on June 17, 1925, in the progressive city of Berkeley, California.

My father was Theodore Stevens Borodin, born in the early 1890's. He was the first son of Stevens Alexander Borodin, who was, with the strange logic of the naming hierarchy of the Russian culture, the first son of Alexander Theodore Borodin. As I was a first son, I received my great-grandfather's name, and also became Alexander Theodore. And, in keeping with the Russian custom of giving feminine diminutives to all children (as well as to pets and other loved ones regardless of their sex) I answered to the name of Shura Borodin.

My father was the stern parent who was assigned the role of disciplinarian, although I can't remember his ever having used the oft-threatened belt on me. He had authority, however, and he kept it honed as a teacher of history and literature in Oakland, where the students were mostly Portuguese, and he also taught gardening to the rowdy, school-hating kids. He must have impressed them somehow, because the school garden produced magnificent flowers and you took your life in your hands if you stepped on one of the plants that his students had cultivated and tended.

My father's friends were mostly Russian emigres who had come to this country at the same time he had, in the early twenties. Most of them had escaped Bolshevism by moving eastwards through Manchuria, then south to Japan. And with the opening of the immigration doors by President Harding, many came to San Francisco to start a new life. In this circle there were also the families of his friends, the wives and children. My parents moved in these spheres, which had a Russian flavor, and so did I. I cannot remember any personal friends of my mother, apart from these allies of my father.

I truly believe my father was proud of me, but I'm not sure just why I'm left with that impression. He liked to refer to me as his "son and hair,"

but he never told me anything about his childhood or his private thoughts. All I knew about his family was that he had five brothers and six sisters, all of whom had been raised in Chelyabinsk, and all of whom were still in Russia. He read avidly, most easily in Russian, and always from pulp-paper books with imprints on the inside cover that said Riga or Moscow. The house was scattered with these plain brownish paperbacks with stark titles, published in some unknown country.

My mother, Henrietta D.D. (for Dorothy Dot), was also born in the early 1890's, in a small town in Illinois. Her studies were in literature, at the state college in Pullman, Washington. She had traveled widely, and chose to express herself with the writing of poetry. Her writing was done on a giant typewriter with a fast unevenness which she always claimed was sufficiently distinct that it would serve her as well as any signature. She had one brother and two sisters, all living in California. In fact, one sister (and her husband and two children) lived near us in Berkeley, on Milvia Street, but we hardly ever saw them. One Christmas, when we were over at their house, I discovered the basement, and there I found the greatest of all possible subterranean treasures — a complete pipe organ in ten million pieces. I dreamed of putting it together some day without telling anyone, finding and connecting an air compressor, and then hitting and holding a full stop B-flat minor chord in the middle of the night, just to see how long it would take to empty the house. I asked Uncle David where the organ came from, and he said he had no idea; it had been there when he bought the house. When he died, the house was torn down for an apartment building, and the beautiful pipe organ pieces were lost and gone forever.

Most of my impressions of my father came from stories told and retold to me by my mother. There was a trip we had all taken when I was very young, to the Great Lakes area, where we picked up a brand new car in Detroit. We drove across the southern tip of Ontario and re-entered the United States at Niagara Falls, in upstate New York. Apparently the immigration people were alerted by the fact that we were driving a spanking new car, and they stopped us and asked questions.

"Are you American citizens?" asked the official at the border station.

"We are," answered my father, who had a clear, distinctly Russian, accent.

"Oh," said the official, aiming his question directly at my father, "Where were you born?"

"Chelyabinsk," was the answer, with an unmistakable touch of pride.

"And where is that?"

"In Russia." I can imitate the accent when speaking the word, but in writing, it's not easy. It comes out with a lightly tongue-trilled "R," followed by a broad, extended vowel, with the texture of the letter "A" in the word

"cart." Something like "Rashia," or, better, "Rrraaaashia."

My mother spoke up, trying to explain that my father was indeed born in Russia, but that he had come here in the early '20's and he had sought and received American citizenship. That did it. We were invited to come into the shack that was the immigration office, and answer more questions. Apparently, suspicions are aroused when a wife answers the questions posed to her husband.

"Do you have your naturalization papers with you?"

"No, there is no reason to carry them everywhere," said my father.

"What is the number on your citizenship paper?"

"I have no idea."

"What evidence do you have that you are a citizen?"

"I am a member of the California School Teachers Association. You have to be a citizen to teach in the California public schools."

"How do I know that?"

"Everyone knows that!"

The conversation came around to our Canadian entry. The final exchange was a classic.

"If you are carrying no evidence of U.S. citizenship," asked the aggressive official, "How is it that the Canadian authorities allowed you to enter their country in the first place?"

My father's response was clear and unanswerable, "Because the Canadian authorities are gentlemen."

That did it. Apparently the government man simply hung up his jock, realizing that no one but a genuine American citizen would display that particular kind of arrogance. We were very quickly on our way, in our crisp new 1929 Model A Ford.

Another incident involving my parents painted a somewhat different picture of my father. Around the time I was ten or so, there may have been a period when my father was involved with another woman. I did not know the meaning of the word, "involved," in that context, nor the meaning of "another woman," but something was going on which was uncomfortable for my mother. I was enlisted in a strange little plot. We drove to a motel on San Pablo Avenue, down near the border between Berkeley and Oakland, and my mother asked me to go up to a certain car parked there and to let the air out of one of its tires. That done, we drove back home. Much later that evening, my father returned from his school board meeting with the complaint of having been held up by an unexpected flat tire. I was mystified. Were there some exciting goings-on about which I knew nothing? It was all very intriguing, but it involved my father in some unknown way, and that wasn't comfortable for me.

Again, as with the border incident story, I was seeing my father through my mother's eyes, and now, viewing all these things from the point of

view of an older man, it seems to me that they give me as much a measure of her as of my father, some insight, for instance, into her insecurities and her dependence on others.

My pre-college schooling occupied the expected amount of time minus a couple of years for skipped classes, but most of it is lost in a sort of amnesic cloud. Big hand-waving events can be recalled, probably because of re-telling and thus reinforcement, but the day-to-day detail is totally gone.

I can remember which schools I went to, but not a single classmate's name, and there were only three teachers whom I now remember. My mother taught my junior high school English class one year, and my mother's brother, Uncle Harry, taught my algebra class in high school. I also remember that when he had completed the writing of the rough draft of an algebra text to be published for his students, he asked me to read through it and look for errors, which was quite a compliment. The third teacher, Mr. Frederick Carter, was not a relative, but he taught all the music classes, conducted the school orchestra, and led the ROTC band. Music has always been a valuable part of my life.

Come to think of it, there is one student's name that pops up out of the fog. Rick Mundy. He was a noisy show-off, who loved doing suggestive things with uncooked hot dogs at the little lunch counter across Grove Street from University High.

Before high school, I was a little-too-tall, little-too-young, little-too-smart kid who slipped over from the comfortable "me" of pre-adolescence into the terrifying "I" of being a real person who existed apart from everyone else. I didn't see it coming and I wasn't really aware of it when it occurred, but somehow, very gradually, there was a change. Where, earlier, I might get hit by something while playing and I would look down at my leg and think, "Oh, there's blood; the stick did that and my leg hurts," now I began to think in terms of, "I've been hit by that stick; I am bleeding, and I've got a painful leg."

The terrifying aspect of it was the realization that I had to take responsibility for what happened to me. Before, it had always been my parents who fixed things, solved problems, and took care of me. As the ego-awareness (if that's what it's called) came about, I interacted less passively with other people.

I was a child prodigy. I never thought of myself in terms of intellect or intelligence, but I knew that my mother considered me quite advanced and more capable than the others in my age group. I could do this and that on the piano and the violin, and I wrote poetry. As I was growing up, the atmosphere around me always carried a certain expectation that I could do more and do it better.

I hated fights. I saw nothing wrong in getting away as fast as I could

from any situation that was building up to one, because physical violence wasn't part of my world; it didn't belong in it, and if I was called names for leaving the scene of a battle, that was okay. I just didn't get any satisfaction out of hitting or getting hit.

Somewhere around age five or six I discovered marbles. There was a marble run next to the fence in the school yard. The structure was the classic one: three holes out from home, then back, then out again and one more, then home (and if you're first, you win some marbles from the other kids). I had a good span, so I could get a slight advantage on my second shot. And some days I would win an aggie, a real aggie. You couldn't tell if your marble was a real aggie unless it would break an ordinary marble, and if it was yours that broke, it wasn't an aggie and you were out a marble for trying.

There were too many older kids there at the school, so I made a marbles course of my own at home in my back yard. After putting a lot of work into it, I had a course superior to the one at school, and I became quite proficient.

My back yard had a fence that ran between our place and the back yard next door. It was completely covered with honeysuckle so that the fence couldn't be seen. The plant held up the fence more than the other way around. It was an immensely high, immensely thick, immensely long mass of what appeared to be free-standing honeysuckle vine, covered with small leaves that grew in opposite directions from one-another, and millions of tiny flowers everywhere.

Of course, I knew that there was really a fence under it all, because I had a secret entry to my tunnels inside the honeysuckle mass, tunnels that no one else knew anything about. This was my own private place. I would go inside my tunnel on one side, through a small hole where a few fence boards had disappeared, to a parallel tunnel on the other side. When I was in there, inside my capsule, I would nip off the base of a blossom and taste the droplet of sweet nectar that oozed out. It was absolutely quiet; even the street-cars that normally rattled up and down Rose Street couldn't be heard. I did not need to move my eyes to see everywhere about me. I didn't need to breathe. I could see no one, and no one could see me. There was no time here. Little bugs that should have been crawling along the stems or on the old, broken boards simply didn't move. Of course, when I would pay attention to something else, then look back, they were in a different place, but while I was looking at them, they didn't move. The only things moving were fantasies, and memory pictures of my past and future, when I was in the honeysuckle place.

The taste of the honeysuckle was a magical connection with this world where every leaf and insect was a friend and I was an intimate part of everything.

Someone decided, one day, that the fence was just too rotten and that everything, old wood and old plants, had to be replaced with something new and clean and certainly safer. I was devastated. When I cried, no one understood why.

But there were other places where I could go and be in my private world. I became a specialist in basements. My mother called it hiding, but I thought of it as escape. From what? Well, for instance, from having to practice the piano. Every day, as soon as I had completed an assignment, a practice run-through of an exercise which was supposed to be done twenty times daily, I could move another toothpick from the right hand treble clef ledge to the left hand bass clef ledge. But my mother never seemed to look at the size of the "completed" pile; she only looked at the shrinking "to be done" pile. It wouldn't have been ethical to move a toothpick from one ledge to the other — that would have been cheating — but if a toothpick accidentally slipped down between the keys, my conscience was clear, and that did seem to happen occasionally.

Other than my uncle David's basement, the first one I truly got to know well was that of our neighbor, the co-owner of the honeysuckle fence. It belonged to an old, old man whose name was Mr. Smythe, pronounced with a long "i" and a soft "th" to rhyme with blithe or scythe.

He was a book dealer, and the agent through whom my father bought his pulp-paper books. But he had received many volumes of Russian literature through Mr. Smythe as well. I remember the complete writings of Tolstoi, some fifty thick volumes of footnotes and memos and laundry-lists, in which just about the only words I could read were the non-Cyrillic imprint of the publisher on the first page which stated that the volumes were the *Edition d'Etat* and were published in *Moscou*. My ancient neighbor lived with his daughter, and some of her family as well. I never got to know any of them.

But I certainly got to know the unbelievably large collection of books in the basement of that house. Thousands of books, all in dusty rows side by side, in neatly stacked wooden orange crates. Every nook and cranny revealed something new. I was always welcome to snoop and explore, and when I would run into Mr. Smythe he would always say: "Shake my hand, young man, and you will be able to say that you have shaken the hand that shook the hand of Mr. Lincoln." It seems that when he had been a small child, his father had taken him to Lincoln's inauguration. So I would shake his hand, and smile, and run away to wait for another day to continue my exploration of his magic collection.

At about this time, I had developed a passion for stamps and stamp-collecting. I routinely visited the big offices of the Bank of Italy (it is now the Bank of America, I believe) and the secretaries would allow me to sift through the wastebaskets and tear off and take the big denomination

stamps that never came in the day-to-day mail that my parents received. My mother had many letters and covers saved from her college days at Pullman and from her visit to Egypt, and these had really old stamps, from before I was born, which I carefully floated off and identified in the Scott's catalog. Then I discovered the wastebasket beside the desk of Mr. Smythe, and it was filled with the wrappers of books shipped from around the world. Stamps from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and many other unimaginable places.

Mr. Smythe caught me one time with my nose down in his wastebasket. I was petrified that he would think me a spy or a misbehave of some sort, but to my great relief he was amused that anyone would find value in the mailing covers of books rather than in the books themselves. He said that he would be happy to tear off the stamps from his mailings and save them for me in a little box that he put on a shelf alongside his desk. I would always look in that box when I wanted to further the stamp exploring adventure, and it was always filled with marvels of strange faces and strange country names. I don't think I said "Thank-you," but I certainly added many new, unknown countries to my collection.

I have for the last few years kept a small cardboard box in the closet of my office, and whenever I receive an interesting cover or package through the mail, I take my scissors and clip off the stamps that are on it and slip the clipping into this box. Someday, somebody visiting me here just might have a six or eight year old along with him who has discovered the miracle of stamps. He will get the whole thing as a present from an old man to a little kid. He may remember me only as that funny old gray-haired person who had a lot of books in his office and got a lot of mail from around the world.

And maybe, I just might shake his hand as well, and tell him that he will now be able to say that he had shaken the hand that shook the hand that shook the hand of Mr. Lincoln.

We had a basement in our own house as well. In this well-explored space, the front part was a concrete room where I set up my first chemistry lab. I think it was called Gilbert Chemistry Set and it contained real chemicals such as bicarbonate of soda and dilute acetic acid, and unfathomable mysteries such as logwood. I haven't, to this day, figured out what logwood is or what one is supposed to do with it. But I kept adding everything I could find to this collection. Stuff from the grocery store down the block, powders and liquids I found in garages and hardware stores. Things would fizz, and smell, and burn, and turn colors. I knew that if I could gather together enough different chemicals, every combination would be new, and would produce wonderful new results.

The back of our basement, the area under the front of the house, was a somewhat mysterious place, and pretty much out of bounds. A friend of

my father, a Mr. Peremov, was in some kind of furniture making business, and in our basement he kept large gunny sacks full of hardwood scraps, in many different shapes and sizes. That part of the basement had a bare dirt floor which sloped downward, and the big sacks promised magnificent things — stacking and building and all sorts of great possibilities — but when I tried to put their contents to use, my father found me and I was told the sacks were not to be touched, although I was never given a reason why. I developed a theory that basements were places where treasures could be found, be they pipe organs, stamps, or wooden blocks, especially in the back corners.

Just four houses up the block was another basement, and it was so dark and scary that I persuaded a friend named Jack to go with me and we managed to find and light a small kerosene lantern and we explored the place to the very back wall. No treasures were to be found that time, but we were very lucky anyway, because when my mother found us later, we were both soaked to the skin with kerosene and it was a miracle we hadn't ignited ourselves. The axe came down pretty heavily about basements in general, for a while.

Some years later, I was offered the chance for a private tour of a basement across the street from my uncle's house. The invitation was extended by a girl who was a couple of years older than I, and I was scared in an entirely new way, but intrigued and ready to explore the new kinds of mysterious things that might turn up. But my mother again appeared on the scene and the program was aborted.

A psychologist with nothing better to do might have fun explaining why I decided to put three basements in the house I helped my parents build, just before World War II, here in Almond.

My violin teacher was a Russian gentleman, a compatriot of my father, and connected with the Orthodox Church. I had to play in recitals in strange living-rooms, and turn pages for the accompanists to the first-generation Russian-American daughters who sang. My Russian language tutor was one of my father's co-emigres, and it was not until my fourth (and final) lesson that I provoked him to such fury that he tried to kick me (I had retreated under his dining room table) and I succeeded in biting him on the shin. What had triggered all this violence had been his insistence on my learning the structure of the female gander, and it was only much later that I unraveled the whole thing and realized that what he meant was, of course, gender.

I had another favorite escape which was also a self-challenge, and that was to try to get from Spruce Street clear down to Walnut Street, through Live Oak Park, going from branch to branch in the tops of the trees, without letting my feet touch the ground at all, except for when I had to cross under the street to get to the other side. Once, I grabbed a branch that

wouldn't hold my weight and fell with it to the ground and scratched up my knee, but I didn't mention it to anyone.

One day, I went into the men's room in the park. There were remarkable pictures drawn on the walls, and I felt an uneasy guilt at having seen them. I never told anyone about that, either.

I think my parents were in absolute terror that I might possibly learn any little something about whatever went on in the area of sex. Each felt that this aspect of my education was the responsibility of the other. I tried to piece it all together from the obvious mechanisms of masturbation, but there was nothing I could find in my parents' library that brought the female half of it into any logical focus. It was a time of prudery and total modesty and there were no clues, or, if there were, I didn't recognize them.

I slept in a wide bed on the sun-deck on the west side of the top floor, in our house at Rose and Spruce. It was half open to the elements, and the other half was covered and protected. My father slept on a narrower bed across from me, and my mother had her double bed in the big bedroom just inside. They never slept together, to my knowledge.

I had no close friends my own age, and I probably wasn't considered anyone else's best friend, either, but I knew some interesting older people. When I was around eight, there was a boy named Franklin who lived down on Oxford Street and he was all of 14. He built fantastic model planes made of balsa wood and rice paper, held together with airplane cement, which he flew overhead in the air. He would go across the street to Live Oak Park and turn the propeller around and around, until the internal rubber band was triple knotted, then he would put a little magical liquid paraffin on the tail surfaces and strike a match and start a small fire. When it was properly burning, he would let it go and we would watch the streak of orange going across the sky to crash in flames.

My mother had felt it best that I attend the schools that reflected the system's dedication to the "modern" aspects of education, such as experimental teaching methods and child psychology. There was one school at each level that was assigned this state-of-the-art role, and I hit each one. Most of these avant-guard experiments eventually went belly-up, along with the other experimental phenomena which were, and still are, so much a part of the Berkeley philosophy.

Like most other bright kids, I learned not to volunteer answers in class when it was obvious that no one else had them. It caused resentment and fierce looks from my classmates, and made me stand out, and I didn't want that. So I challenged myself in a way that nobody else had to know about. I would try to come up with answers at test time without having more than glanced at any of my books, relying only on what I'd learned from the blackboard and discussions in class.

In Junior High, my only pleasure was in the music and poetry classes.

And mechanical drawing. I can't remember anything else.

In high school, I did well in everything that was simple and obvious (such as chemistry and physics and mathematics and, as I have already mentioned, music) which would flow with no work at all, but anything that required arbitrary and illogical organization (such as grammar and history and spelling) would defeat me, since they were unpredictable and capricious.

An interesting measure of this dichotomy could be seen in my senior year of high school, where I took two examinations in preparation for college. One was called Subject A, a University of California requirement, given to everyone who might actually be admitted to the university, to assure the admission committee of one's basic literacy. Can you spell? Can you make subject and verb agree? Do you split infinitives? Can you write an essay? I totally failed this exam, so I had the pleasure of looking forward to the taking of "Bone-head English" in my freshman year at Berkeley if, indeed, I were to go to the University of California.

However, the second exam was a competitive contest for a National Collegiate Scholarship for a tuition-paid enrollment at Harvard University. This one I managed to pass; in fact, I passed it with a sufficiently high score to win an all expense paid scholarship to Harvard. I accepted the scholarship and went east to Cambridge, Massachusetts. I was 16 years old.

At Cambridge I took lodgings in Wigglesworth Hall right on the Harvard campus itself, and enrolled in freshman courses in math, chemistry, physics and psychology, with a secret desire to really connect with organic chemistry. I found myself a student in a social system which was completely alien to me. Everything was measured on the basis of who your family was, where you'd taken your preparatory studies, and just how much money your family had. My family was unknown, I had gone to a public high school, and neither my parents, as teachers, nor I, as the son of teachers, had any wealth or any immediate prospect of acquiring it. Hence, I rated as a non-person. Furthermore, I was younger than most of the others, so I spent the year without developing personal relationships with anyone. I was a fish out of water, and I was miserable.

The United States was involved in World War II, and the armed services gave the music of adulthood and independence. In my second year at Harvard I joined the U. S. Navy's V-12 officer's training program, which would lead to a commission if I could only complete my baccalaureate in some subject. But my scholastic record was abysmal, and I knew I could never survive another two years. I abandoned officerial hopes and found myself at Pier 92, the enlisted man's gathering point in New York City. I survived six weeks of mid-winter boot camp at Sampson, New York, and manipulated myself into a training course at Norfolk, Virginia, emerging with a third-class fire-control rating.

My involvement in World War II was an experience that included some adventures, certainly, but there were so many negatives that I would just as soon not recall most of it. One event, however, I will always remember, because it led to an observation that shaped the rest of my life. I discovered the remarkable world of psychopharmacology and, most important of all, the power of the mind over the body.

I was on a destroyer escort (the USS Pope, DE-134) in the middle of the Atlantic in the middle of winter, in the middle of the anti-U-boat campaign, in the middle of the war. We had just finished making an anti-submarine search in the area of the Azores. All during this part of the war in the Atlantic, one of the centers of military activity was the port of Ponta Delgada, in the Azores, where the United States made available a large supply of fuel to the neutral Portuguese who, in turn, made it available to anyone who chose to pay for it. So the German U-boats came in and fueled, then the U.S. destroyers came in and fueled. The only rule was that no two different flags could fly in the harbor within 24 hours of one another. The cat and mouse game in the Atlantic, just outside the harbor, was extremely dicey, and led to all kinds of nasty military interactions. But, now, having fueled up and gotten back out to the open sea intact, we set a course for England. There was a lot of boredom, and some moments of acute fright, then something happened in the way of a personal trauma. About a thousand miles off the coast of England, I developed a severe infection, from some unknown source, on the face of my left thumb. It localized itself at this unusual place and went down through the flesh and tissue directly to the bone. It was very painful, and I was being attended to by our ship's medical corpsman, affectionately referred to as the Chancr's Mate.

The course of treatment had a simple goal: I was to be protected from pain. Surgery was said to be absolutely necessary, and there was no way to perform it at sea. So my thumb problem got worse and worse, as did the chop in the Irish Sea as we approached England, and I was given, with regularity, modest injections of morphine.

This was my introduction to the effect of a drug on the perception of pain. The man with the needle would interrupt a good rolling poker game to ask me how I was feeling. I would look at my thumb and say, "It's a little worse," or "It's a little better," and put my arm out for another morphine shot, then immerse myself again in the poker game. I knew the pain was there, and I could report on the intensity of it with accuracy, but it didn't bother me. I could play poker, I could deal, I could judge the opposition, and I could bet shrewdly, and I came out ahead more than behind. My left thumb was viciously painful, but the pain just didn't get in my way. It was fascinating to me that one could be hurting, in agony, and that the administering of a little bit of a chemical that came from some

poppy flowers somewhere, could make it all quite unimportant.

This is what is meant by central analgesia. The pain is not deadened; it is still there. The site of action is not the thumb but, rather, the brain. The problem is simply no longer of concern. Morphine is a pretty remarkable drug.

When we docked at Liverpool, I learned that the Navy hospital no longer existed and that the Army was now running things. Their hospital was located at Watertown, near Manchester, which was quite a way inland. I was scheduled to be taken there by ambulance — not right away, but pretty soon. In the meantime, my own personal home, the USS Pope, was tied up just outboard to the British counterpart vessel, a frigate which had been christened the HMS Wren. And since I was a petty officer, and there were allied petty officers aboard the Wren, I was invited aboard to share rum and companionship.

I remember myself in snug quarters, rum in hand, being given moral support for my imminent relocation to some remote hospital owned and operated by the Army. The memory is of friendship and laughter. Rum, too, is a pretty effective drug.

Then came a big monster of an ambulance which took me from Liverpool to Watertown and delivered me to a white-coated Army staff. A young nurse volunteered to make me comfortable with a glass of orange juice, to relieve my thirst, but at the bottom of the orange juice I saw an unmistakable layer of undissolved white crystalline solids. I wasn't going to be hoodwinked by a bunch of soldiers! The juice was obviously a sophisticated cover-up for the administration of some dramatic sedative or presurgical anesthetic which was expected to render me placid and unconcerned about the medical procedures they had planned for me.

I resolved to prove my masculinity and control of the situation by simply denying the white crystals their power. I would drink the whole mixture down, but I would stay awake and alert. I would be wheeled into the surgical bay as an attentive sailor who would challenge the Army surgeons with analytical perception and penetrating questions which would reveal to them the integrity of my mental status.

It didn't work. The drug that rested undissolved under my orange juice was undeniably a pretty effective drug, because I succumbed to it and went completely unconscious. I have no memory of the intravenous Pentothal anesthetic that was administered to me for my surgery. And I was later told of the unprecedented half-hour I required for recovery from it.

The bone infection was surgically removed, and to this day my left thumb is almost a half-inch shorter than my right.

Now I found myself somehow attached to the Army during my convalescence, stationed far from the coast of England and, again, a fish out of

water. I was a sailor in an Army installation. I discovered that the Army pay-code identification number was exactly one number longer than that of the Navy pay-code, so I quite logically added one number to my identification and spent Army money in all the local bars. The people who lived in the area were familiar with the Army crowd, but not used to a Navy uniform in their neighborhood. However, since I was wandering about without any attention from the local military police, it was presumed that I was with some allied military force — the Dutch, maybe, or the Free-French. In any case, there was no way that I might be one of the enemy. And since my left hand and arm were all bundled up in a monster sling and bandage, I was undoubtedly someone *hors de combat* and the buying of a drink for me by the local gentry was the least they could do for a swab who had given his left arm for the Motherland. Nice duty. Eventually I healed, and had to become reoriented to military reality, but in the meantime I had learned a couple of facts.

The first was simple and not exactly surprising: there was no communication between the Army and the Navy, which meant that the pay chaos which I had instituted by the addition of a small integer was safely lost in the shuffle.

The second fact was not expected at all, and it was this that started me on my career as a psychopharmacologist. I was told that the white "drug" which was undissolved at the bottom of my orange juice glass, and which had finally plopped me over the line from being an alert and defensive surgery candidate to being a comatose subject available to any and all manipulation by the operating physician, was nothing but undissolved sugar.

A fraction of a gram of sugar had rendered me unconscious, because I had truly believed that it could do just that. The power of a simple placebo to radically alter my state of consciousness impressed me deeply. The contribution of the mind to the observed action of a drug was certainly real, and I decided it was possible that this contribution was a major one.

Over the intervening years, I have come to believe that the mind is *the* major factor in defining a psychoactive drug's action. One has been taught to assign the power of a drug to the drug itself, without considering the person into whom it goes. A drug by itself can be a powder, a spoonful of sugar, without any curative value whatsoever. But there is a personal reality of the recipient of the drug that plays a major role in the definition of the eventual interaction. Each of us has his own reality, and each of us will construct his own unique drug-person relationship.

The shock of the orange juice sugar caper led me to try to explore any and all tools that I might use to define that relationship. And when the tools that are needed are not, in fact, known, they must be discovered or created. They might be drugs that alter the states of consciousness (such as

sugar when it is believed to be not-sugar), or they might be states of transcendence reached in meditation. They might be moments of orgasm, or fugue states, or day-dreams that take you momentarily to a rewarding fantasy and escape from responsibility. All of these are treasures of the spirit or psyche that allow exploration along paths which are undefined and completely individual.

I decided right then, and with total conviction, that drugs probably represented the most predictable and reliable tools for such studies. So I would become a pharmacologist. And, considering that all of the action was located upstairs in the brain, I'd better make that a psychopharmacologist.

I eventually returned to the West Coast and entered the University of California at Berkeley. They had lost all records of my Subject A trial, and allowed me to repeat it. I failed it again, but — pleading various stresses and infirmities expected of a World War II veteran — I was permitted to let it drift for another year. My third effort was a rousing success, as I was by then completely familiar with the structure that was expected. My prepared essay (it dealt with a hypothetical pre-Egyptian nuclear civilization) was perfect in tense and subject agreement, and immaculate in punctuation.

## CHAPTER 2. MESCALINE

Mescaline: a magic name and a magic compound. My first encounter with this word was just after World War II, when I returned to Berkeley and managed to work my way into the University of California, finally to become located in the Chemistry Department. The usual process for undergraduate students in chemistry was to pursue a mountain of highly technical courses, and get a B.S. in Chemistry, within the College of Chemistry. I chose, rather, to explore a wider variety of topics, and to accept an A.B. in the College of Letters and Science. From there, I wandered over towards the more medically directed disciplines, and explored the area of biochemistry.

I had learned a valuable lesson as a violin player who loved to play in string quartettes. There are a lot of violinists, and most of them are very good. But every quartette needs one violist, and there really aren't enough of them. As a so-so fiddler, I was hard-put to participate in chamber music, but as a so-so violist I got a lot of invitations to play. The parallel to chemistry is exact. As a so-so chemist, I found myself accepted but rarely in demand. But in the area of biochemistry there were very few chemists (at least at that time) and I became a top-flight student. After a few years of courses and an uninspired research project, I wrote a dull thesis and emerged with a Ph.D. degree from a major academic institution, the University of California.

During this 1940-1950 period, there was almost no attention being given to the alkaloid, mescaline. In fact, the entire family of compounds of which mescaline is a part was virtually unknown. A few articles had appeared which talked about the "mescaline psychosis," and several publications had been widely circulated decrying the evils of Peyote as made evident by the ruin which had befallen the "simple" American Indians. In the area of serious and thoughtful texts, there were the writings and the famous maps of Alexander Rouhier in 1926. There was the treatise

by Kurt Beringer, which described the responses of many scores of subjects to effective doses of mescaline, administered almost always by injection. His book, "Der Meskalinrauche siene Geschichte und Erscheinungsweise," (1927) has never been translated into English. Weston La Barre wrote in 1938 of the Peyote religion. That was pretty much it.

I was completely intrigued. Here were cultural, psychological, and religious describers of the action of a compound that appeared to have magical properties. The material could be easily synthesized. But I remained obedient to an invisible hand which rested on my shoulder and said, "No, do not taste yet." I read all the more recent literature about it that had appeared, the essays of Aldous Huxley in the mid-1950's (the exuberant *Doors of Perception* and the more cautious *Heaven and Hell*) and the generally negative reflections of Henri Michaux (*Miserable Miracle*). But it was not until April of 1960 that a psychologist friend of mine, Terry Major, and a friend of his who was studying medicine, Sam Golding, reinforced my interest and provided me with the opportunity to be "babysat" on an experience with 400 milligrams of mescaline sulfate. It was a day that will remain blazingly vivid in my memory, and one which unquestionably confirmed the entire direction of my life.

The details of that day were hopelessly complex and will remain buried in my notes, but the distillation, the essence of the experience, was this. I saw a world that presented itself in several guises. It had a marvel of color that was, for me, without precedent, for I had never particularly noticed the world of color. The rainbow had always provided me with all the hues I could respond to. Here, suddenly, I had hundreds of nuances of color which were new to me, and which I have never, even today, forgotten.

This world was also marvelous in its detail. I could see the intimate structure of a bee putting something into a sack on its hind leg to take to its hive, yet I was completely at peace with the bee's closeness to my face.

The world was a wonder of interpretive insight. I saw people as caricatures which revealed both their pains and their hopes, and they seemed not to mind my seeing them this way.

More than anything else, the world amazed me, in that I saw it as I had when I was a child. I had forgotten the beauty and the magic and the knowingness of it and me. I was in familiar territory, a space wherein I had once roamed as an immortal explorer, and I was recalling everything that had been authentically known to me then, and which I had abandoned, then forgotten, with my coming of age. Like the touchstone that recalls a dream to sudden presence, this experience reaffirmed a miracle of excitement that I had known in my childhood but had been pressured to forget.

The most compelling insight of that day was that this awesome recall had been brought about by a fraction of a gram of a white solid, but that in

no way whatsoever could it be argued that these memories had been contained within the white solid. Everything I had recognized came from the depths of my memory and my psyche.

I understood that our entire universe is contained in the mind and the spirit. We may choose not to find access to it, we may even deny its existence, but it is indeed there inside us, and there are chemicals that can catalyze its availability.

It is now a matter of history that I decided to devote whatever energies and skills I might possess to unraveling the nature of these tools for self-exposure. It has been said that wisdom is the ability to understand others; it is the understanding of yourself that is enlightenment.

I had found my learning path.

### CHAPTER 3. BURT

In the late 1940's I married a fellow-student at University of California named Helen. We were both active members of a small social collection, a Tower-and-Flame/Honor-Student/Phi-Beta-Kappa group, that had a couple of small meeting rooms buried in an old campus building known as California Hall. In fact, we called ourselves the Cal Hall crowd, and we all shared the common characteristics of being reasonably intelligent and socially awkward. The beginning of my relationship with Helen, interestingly, had a certain chemical component, in that one day I came into Cal Hall reeking of vanillin (the essential component of the extract of vanilla) which I had been using in large quantities up in the chemistry labs. She liked the smell, and we soon became a going-steady twosome. She was also a single child, of Scottish descent, and she had red hair.

We were married in the face of some rather strong parental objections on both sides, and about a year later, we had a son whom we would have named Stevens Alexander, had we followed the old Russian traditions dealing with the first-born. But we decided on Theodore Alexander instead, in honor of my father, and the nickname Theo has stuck. When, a few years later, I earned my Ph.D. in Biochemistry, Helen graduated with a A.B., having majored in Slavic Languages. Her Russian was very good; in fact, it was a lot better than mine.

I was offered, and accepted, a position as a chemist with Dole Chemical Company, and within the first couple of years I made the powers that be very happy by predicting the structure of, and synthesizing, an insecticide that actually went into commercial production. In return for this they granted me freedom to research and develop anything I wished. This is the ultimate reward for any chemist.

And what I wished to do, as a result of my remarkable mescaline experience, was to explore the world of centrally active drugs, with a special emphasis on the psychedelic drugs. I launched into a number of

synthetic variations of the mescaline molecule, but a most unusual problem was becoming apparent. There is no animal model that has ever been developed or, as far as I can predict, will ever be developed, for the characterization and evaluation of a psychedelic drug. Thus, all discovery must use the human animal and I was, by default, that animal. Quite simply, as I developed new structures that might show some interesting action in the realms of thought or perception, I used myself as the experimental test subject to determine these actions. Although there were a few of the people I worked with who were aware of my tasting techniques, most were not. I had to construct some scientifically justifiable procedures that could be looked at, discussed, and rationalized as providing the evidence that might at least seem to answer the question, "How much does it take?" And that would be an infinitely easier question to pretend to answer than the obvious follow-up, "What does it do?"

I read what little literature there was, on the effects of LSD-like drugs on experimental animals. I needed some scientific looking experimental structure, so that when the research director would bring by some visitors whom he wished to impress, he could point to the laboratory and tell the visiting firemen, "Here is where all the research on psychedelic drugs is done!" The two most popular small-animal demonstrations of the time were Siamese fighting fish and spiders. The spiders were reported to weave dose-dependent construction errors into their webs as a measure of the intoxication of LSD. And the fish (they were called *Beta splendens*, as I remember) were presumably quite sensitive to LSD, and would do something strange when small amounts of it were put in their water; swim backwards or upside down, or something else equally bizarre.

Not wishing to set up cobwebs, I chose the fish route, and sent off to Van Waters and Rogers for several big battery jars, to the local pet store for a supply of fighting fish, and to the Swiss pharmaceutical house, Sandoz, for a gram of LSD. Everything arrived promptly, and along with it all came my dear friend Burt from the analytical department. He was a careful and most conservative gentleman, but he was also the most naturally curious person in the whole building. He had a continuing fascination with the strange goings-on in this "psychedelic" laboratory. He had seen the opened package from Sandoz Labs, which contained a small double-ended vial which, in turn, contained a glass ampule labeled, "Lysergide, an experimental compound, etc." He helped me in trying to establish normal behavior patterns with the fighting fish so that abnormal changes might be seen that would reflect exposure to a drug. He became, as a matter of fact, my constant companion.

Well, the lab soon looked like an aquarium. Bell jars on all lab benches. Aerators bubbling and lights shining. Fish were being transferred here and there, in a very scientific manner, from the big tanks into beakers with

graded amounts of LSD in them, while Burt and I watched and watched. We never saw anything occur that was even slightly suggestive of a drug effect.

One thing that did become rapidly apparent, though, was that the growth of algae was not inhibited in the least by either the fish or the LSD, and soon the tanks were thickly green with fuzz. This led to the discovery that small snails could control the algae, but there was nothing that could control the snails. Anyone guiding a tour of the lab had to somehow improvise quite creatively to explain the assay procedures being used in the exploration of psychedelic drugs, since the fish could no longer be seen for the forest of competing wildlife which had taken over.

At about this time, I had need of a reference sample of psilocybin, so again I called upon Sandoz for a gift. In a few days, Burt wandered into the lab carrying a small double-ended vial that contained, in turn, a glass ampule labeled, "Psilocybin, for experimental use, etc." My gram had arrived. We fed it in varying amounts to the fish-algae-snails, but it did no better than the LSD.

One morning, a couple of weeks later, I took a small, double-ended vial to Burt in his analytical lab down the hall, and asked him to please weigh out for me a small quantity of material into a separate container. The actual amount was not important, a few milligrams; what was important was that I wanted the weight accurate to four places. He disappeared for a few minutes, then reappeared with the vial I had given him and also a weighing container holding a small amount of an almost white powder.

"Here is 3.032 milligrams, exactly," he said, adding, "And it's slightly bitter."

"How do you know?" asked I.

"After I weighed out the psilocybin, there was a trace of dust on the spatula, so I licked it off. Slightly bitter."

I asked him, "Did you read the label carefully?"

"It's the vial of psilocybin you just received, isn't it?" he asked, looking at the funny-shaped tube still in his hand. He read the label. It said Lysergide. He said, "Oh."

We spent the next several minutes trying to reconstruct just how much LSD might have been on the end of the spatula, and decided that it was probably not more than a few score micrograms. But a few score micrograms can be pretty effective, especially in a curious but conservative analytical chemist who is totally drug naive.

"Well," I said to him, "This should damned well be a fascinating day."

And indeed it was. The first effects were clearly noted in about twenty minutes, and during the transition stage that took place over the following forty minutes, we wandered outside and walked around the pilot plant

behind the main laboratory building. It was a completely joyful day for Burt. Every trivial thing had a magical quality. The stainless steel Pfaudler reactors were giant ripe melons about to be harvested; the brightly colored steam and chemical pipes were avant-garde spaghetti with appropriate smells, and the engineers wandering about were chefs preparing a royal banquet. No threats anywhere, simply hilarious entertainment. We wandered everywhere else on the grounds, but the theme of food and its sensory rewards continued to be the leitmotif of the day.

In the late afternoon, Burt said he was substantially back to the real world, but when I asked him if he thought he could drive, he admitted that it would probably be wise to wait a bit longer. By 5:00 PM, he seemed to be happily back together again, and after a trial run — a sort of figure-eight in the almost empty parking lot — he embarked on his short drive home.

Burt never again, to my knowledge, participated in any form of personal drug investigation, but he maintained a close and intimate interest in my research and was always appreciative of the slowly evolving picture of the delicate balance between chemical structure and pharmacological action, which I continued to share with him while I remained at Dole.

One periodically hears some lecturer holding forth on the subject of psychedelic drugs, and you may hear him give voice to that old rubric that LSD is an odorless, colorless and tasteless drug. Don't believe it. Odorless yes, and colorless when completely pure, yes, but tasteless, no. It is slightly bitter.

And if you ever hear a rumor that marine snails can be used to assay psychedelic drugs, don't believe that, either. It was probably started by one of the visiting firemen touring my lab.

## CHAPTER 4. TMA

It is 1960. Here I am, with my mescaline experience dramatically fresh in mind, a burning desire to explain its profound action to myself and the rest of mankind, and there is a total world inventory of, at best, a dozen such drugs known. And only two of them, TMA and MDA, have phenethylamine structures that in any way resemble mescaline. (Actually only one was known to me at this time, since the book in which the MDA report appeared didn't get into my hands for another two years.)

So there was one analogue of mescaline known, and what was known about it? TMA had first been synthesized some 12 years earlier by a chemist named P. Hey at the University of Leeds. His literature presentation was pure, cold chemistry, but he must have tasted it, for the Peretz and Smythies group in Canada alluded in its report to a private communication from Dr. Hey that he had been impressed with its euphoric properties. In the Canadian study, TMA was administered in the 50 to 100 milligram range to nine subjects. There was noted at about an hour a transient headache and slight nausea which could be avoided by pretreatment with Dramamine. At two hours there was the onset of giddiness, an increase in movement and communication and some loss of inhibition. Some later trials involving dosages of up to 125 milligrams were coupled with studies involving stroboscope-induced "hallucinations."

So this is where I started. The drug was easily synthesized, and my preliminary assays largely paralleled the Canadians' findings. At the 140 milligram level, I watched three close friends have three distinctly different experiences. Terry Major had a brief period of nausea, which evolved into a very euphoric and responsive mood. The talking of the two others bothered him and he spoke sharply to them; his exact words were, "Please shut up!" This was his only show of aggression. Sam Golding was free of nausea, and had much eyes-closed patterning. At about the four hour point, he became extremely talkative, and was the primary inspiration for

Terry's spurt of irritability. These periods of talkativeness alternated with periods of reverie and ceiling-staring. Sam's over-all conclusion was that the drug was not completely pleasant, as it allowed him too intimate a view of himself. I refrained from editorializing on this remark, though sorely tempted. Paris Mateo, a psychiatrist, was also free of nausea, but he was very lightly affected. His major interest seemed to be in my reactions to his reactions (I was the control observer in this experiment, forgoing any personal imbibing). The consensus of all three was that the effects were of a potency almost twice that of mescaline, and that mescaline was to be preferred.

About a month later, I took 225 milligrams of TMA, having already taken 50 milligrams of Marezine (an anti-nausea drug) one hour earlier. This drug mixture is a process that I have long since abandoned. If nausea is to be part of the drug's effect, then let it be experienced and assigned. And when one is exploring a new drug, why complicate any observations by superimposing a second drug? Drug-drug interactions are a complex study unto themselves.

I had two baby-sitters, Helen and my old friend, Terry Major, again.

About three-quarters of an hour after taking the TMA, I experienced a moderately severe nausea, but this didn't last long. During the period of peak intoxication (from about the one and a half hour point to about four hours) there was only a modest color enhancement, and several of the other mescaline-like features were also noted. There was some slight change in the perception of motion and time, and some loss of physical coordination. But it was my mental attitude, and responses to, and identification with external stimuli (primarily musical) that were the most startling. While reading Bernstein's "Joy of Music," I felt, with great delight, that I could actually hear every musical phrase mentioned, but Helen claimed that I was making pugnacious and condemnatory remarks about what I was reading.

I turned on the radio to a music station, curled up and closed my eyes. Rachmaninoff's second piano concerto provided me a structure from which I could suspend myself so as not to touch the ground, holding on to the finely woven strands of arpeggios which were knotted with chords.

Then, after some commercials which annoyed me, came the rather noisy and strident music-poem, "Slaughter on 10th Avenue," which proved to be an unfortunate choice, because I went somewhat sociopathic. Helen remarked on the don't-cross-me-if-you-know-what's-good-for-you look on my face.

I was handed a rose (which under mescaline would have been precious and entrancing) and was asked if I could hurt it. I crushed it without hesitation. At that point, Terry asked me if I might consider taking a small amount of a tranquilizing medication. My response was a thinly veiled

threat to push him downstairs if he tried to medicate me. He didn't pursue the subject.

Shortly thereafter we all headed for the open spaces of Tilden Park (I remarked grimly that it was just as well there was a car which could serve to protect other people from me) and, once there, I discharged the anger with a couple of thrown rocks and a stick (barely missing Terry's car, not out of consideration for him, but because I knew that making a dent in it would cause me all sorts of problems later, such as having to pay for the damage). This acting-out period passed and the nicer aspects — visual fun and games, for the most part — remained uppermost for the rest of the day.

This was an immensely important learning experience for me. My earlier mescaline experiment had been full of beauty and light, and I had rejoiced that this was what my soul contained, deep within, that this sensitivity and compassion was what had been brought to the surface by that simple catalyst. Yet here was a substantially identical molecule that produced something, at least in me, quite opposite. It was only after a great deal of introspection that I realized that mescaline no more produced beauty than TMA produced anger. Just as the beauty was always within me, so was the anger.

Different drugs may sometimes open different doors in a person, but all of those doors lead out of the same unconscious.

Paris conducted twelve additional experiments with TMA in South America, all in the 150 to 200 milligram range. He sent back reports that strongly emphasized color effects, and made considerable comparisons to LSD, equating the effects to the one hundred to two hundred microgram range of the latter drug.

All of these findings, taken together, led to a research paper that was published in the British journal Nature, in which the psychedelic properties were discussed for audience appeal, but the aggressive potential was specifically mentioned as an observed reaction. It was my first publication in the area of the action of psychedelics in man.

Some 17 years later, with more experience behind me, I tried TMA again to get a feeling of just how I might have changed in my responses over time and with repeated exposures to these materials. This recalibration is a process that I do periodically. It is something like going to the firing range or your internist once every ten years or so, but always with the same pistol (and the same body). It is good to get an objective evaluation of changes that have occurred in yourself as you age. This is especially true when the response to a drug is strongly colored by attitudes and interpretations, which are invariably tempered by the passing of the years.

Anyway, I re-titrated TMA from the lowest levels all over again, and got to a plus two at 130 milligrams, the very level at which my three allies

had found it interesting but not particularly exciting. The observed chronology was unchanged, but the qualitative aspects of the experience were indeed not too pleasant. Two adjectives are sometimes used interchangeably: psychedelic and psychotomimetic, the first denoting a fundamentally benign alteration of consciousness, and the other (literally, the imitation of psychosis) implying a lack of empathy and caring. I have limited my use of the latter to titles of articles that are to be published in journals that might look upon the use of the term "psychedelic" as advocacy. But I still feel that TMA might show hints of the latter meaning.

I was also aware of a considerable body discomfort and physical side-effects such as muscular twitching, and I was relieved when the experiment was over. Having safely exited the world of TMA, I could think of no compelling reason to enter it ever again.

## CHAPTER 5. BLACKWOOD ARSENAL

It was somewhere around 1960 that I met a brilliant neurologist, Harry Bush, who had become totally fascinated by lichens, and had invested much effort in their identification and characterization. I learned much from him about the symbiosis between algae and fungi, and I learned that some of the chemicals contained in lichens can easily be brought to react with certain essential oils from natural sources, to make a synthetic tetrahydrocannabinol or THC (the active component of marijuana). There was considerable satisfaction for me, and more than a little humor, in the knowledge that, by wandering around a camp ground and mixing an extract of the colored scabs flicked off a big rock with some orange peels from the nearest garbage can, in the presence of phosphorus oxychloride (you would have to bring that yourself), and finally putting the cleaned-up product on parsley and rolling it into a kind of cigarette, you could produce a potentially psychoactive smoke.

All this led me to a lot of literature searching and quite a bit of chemical diddling (I was still working at Dole), and it was through this that I was introduced to the wonderful world of plant products. I was already well aware of the strongly alkaline compounds known as the alkaloids. These were the nitrogen-containing products most often responsible for the biological activity of the plant. Drugs such as nicotine, strychnine and quinine are famous, and even the psychedelic area is well represented by indoles such as DMT, 5-methoxy-DMT, psilocin, psilocybin, and our archetypal phenethylamine, mescaline. But I began to appreciate other families, usually neutral compounds that were inactive, but which smelled nice and were potential starting materials for chemical synthesis. There were terpenes which are the sharp smells of conifers and camphor. And there are the magnificent essential oils that are the smells of the spice cabinet; the oils of nutmeg, clove, parsley, dill, and apiole. And on and on. This little-studied collection of chemicals proved to be an unending source of ideas

in the psychedelic area.

Then, three things occurred in rapid sequence. First (and of interest mostly to people who fool around with chemistry), I sharpened up the lichen/orange peel strategy and found that the condensation product from olivetol (which could actually be isolated from certain lichens that I collected just north of Ottawa) and pulegone (a terpene from pennyroyal, a peppermint-like plant that can be found growing profusely near Alamogordo in New Mexico), produced a sizable quantity of the marijuana-like material resembling THC. The groundwork for this chemistry was laid by Roger Adams, at the University of Illinois, before World War II. He, and A. R. Todd at the University of Manchester, in England, had a vigorous rivalry being waged in the chemical literature as to who could get closer to the chemical duplication and animal demonstration of the active components of marijuana. The culmination of Adam's work was the preparation of a mixture of synthetic products that proved, in his dog model, to be many times more potent than the natural drug. This has been called, "Adam's nine-carbon compound," since it has, not surprisingly, a nine-carbon unit in the terpene half of the molecule. This point is mentioned here only because it will reappear a little later in this account. An interesting sidelight is the fact that the precise structure of THC was still unknown at this time (some twenty years after the conclusion of Adam's work).

Secondly, it occurred to me that Mother Nature, which thoroughly loves alkaloids, kind of blew it in letting the Cannabis plant make a psychoactive compound devoid of nitrogen (the necessary component of an alkaloid). What would THC look like pharmacologically if it were a phenethylamine? I said to myself, "Let's make it!" So I hied myself off to the library to begin unraveling some possible paths to the synthesis.

And thirdly, a group of researchers (men with cautious faces, wearing proper suits and ties) from the Blackwood Arsenal, the chemical and biological warfare branch of the U. S. military, visited Dole to meet with some of the company's scientists in a brain-storming session. The visitors had some synthetic problems which could only be stated in the most general of terms, as they involved compounds that could not be explicitly described, having been assigned some classified information status, and some of us who were present did not have any kind of security clearance.

Anyway, the sum total of their query was neatly organized on a slide which showed a reaction scheme down the left-hand side of the screen, leading to the penultimate compound A, and another scheme down the right-hand side of the screen, leading to the penultimate compound B. The product (from A reacting with B) was not on the screen at all, since it was considered secret. Their questions centered on the two displayed sequences. Could any of us come up with some jazzy ideas for easier or better syntheses of either A or B?

Ideas were bounced around for a while, then I got into one of my more manic moods and grabbed some chalk. I said, in essence, that although none of our visitors were prepared to say just why it was they wanted efficient ways of making A and B, it seemed an interesting coincidence that the simple coupling of A and B (using the phosphorus oxychloride procedure that worked so well with the lichens and citrus fruit) would surely produce "Adam's nine-carbon compound," which was (in case they were not aware of it) some five hundred and twelve times more potent in the dog motor ataxia test than the synthetic THC analog which was being used at the time as a reference standard.

Silence.

I bubbled on — having written the structure of this obviously classified compound on the blackboard — that if one were to conduct the synthesis as had been suggested on the slide in any way other than the explicit procedure described by Adams, one would end up with a mixture of products which would (due to the fact that there are several optically active centers involved) produce a mixture containing a total of eight isomers. And if any deviation were to be made from the original synthesis, the ratio of these isomers just might be radically changed, with a resulting biological activity that might be radically different from that observed by Adams (the 512 times potency job).

The silence was thicker.

More manic yet, I went on to say that, to be completely scientific about it all, these eight compounds should each be explicitly synthesized as individuals, and should each be separately assayed as unique entities. And, as a throw-away, I mentioned that if they really wanted to remedy Nature's sloppiness, they should consider synthesizing this unnameable target compound with a nitrogen atom in it, so as to emulate an alkaloid. That, I added in conclusion, might be a really super-potent phenethylamine!

The silence persisted for a few moments, and when the talking eventually resumed, it wended its way into other areas, and eventually the visitors returned to Maryland.

The entire incident was forgotten with the trauma that accompanied the unexpected and untimely death of my mother, while she and my father were at their summer cabin at Lake Tahoe, high in the Sierra Nevadas. It was a difficult transition for Helen and me, but especially so for Theo, who had developed a close and intimate relationship with his grandmother. As to my father, I noted signs of a subtle deterioration which we all saw as progressively robbing him of both spirit and motivation.

Finally, I said Enough! Let's all go on some sort of short get-away, to give ourselves a chance to repair. Where should we go? It didn't matter, I said; I'll take care of it. So my father put a clean pair of socks and a change of underwear into a satchel, and all four of us set out for San Francisco,

supposedly headed for San Diego. In actuality, unbeknownst to my father, I had arranged to have the house sealed off for a long absence, and I'd gotten tickets on the P & O ship Chusan for a trip, not just to San Diego, but past it to Panama, then to Trinidad, Barbados, the Canary Islands, England, and on to France, where we would stay for a year. The true unrest cure, as in the wonderful short story by H. H. Munro.

(The plan worked. My father had to buy a whole new wardrobe; he re-established contacts with Russian-speaking friends whom he hadn't seen for a quarter of a century; he completely severed himself from his grief-obligations, rediscovered his identity and his energy, and he later remarried, opened a restaurant, and lived another fifteen years. But that, as they say, is another story.)

Back to the beginning of our trip. We were about a day out of Port-au-Prince when the first bird from the Blackwood Arsenal nest came home to roost. It was about five in the morning, and Helen and I were sound asleep in our dark inside stateroom on D-deck, when there was a rapping at the door. I got up and uttered a very bad word; I had forgotten I was in the upper bunk, so my step down to the floor was a four-foot jolt. I opened the door to meet, face to face for the first time, Mr. Munoz of the radio room.

"I have a radio communication from RCA International for you," he said, handing it to me. I found a flashlight and read it. Some 500 words from a Dr. Frederick Pearsman at A.R.L. Company in Cambridge, Mass., saying — nay, demanding — that I call him from Trinidad collect when I arrived (we were due there the next day). I had no sooner gotten back to sleep, than there was another knock on the door. Mr. Munoz, again. He said that he had just received another radio communication for me, this time via ITT or something, but not to bother reading it as it was, word for word, identical to the first one. "Okay, okay," I muttered, "I've got it: I'm supposed to make a call from Trinidad."

Morning came, and with it came Trinidad, along with heat and humidity. I spent almost an hour in a telephone booth, talking to Fred Pearsman at A.R.L.

Dr. Pearsman said something like this, "We have been asked to submit a contract proposal, by a group which we can't really identify, to synthesize a nitrogen-containing phenethylamine analog of THC. You will be arriving in London at such and such a time on such and such a day (he was correct to the minute) and we want you to please send us a complete synthetic procedure at that time by airmail special delivery the very minute you arrive. It will get to us here just in time for our submission."

"But," I protested, "I'm aboard a luxury liner, and the most up-to-date reference book in its library is an 1894 edition of Roget's Thesaurus!"

"Then write it out from memory," said he, and that was that. I cannot begin to describe what forty minutes in a Trinidad telephone booth at 90%

humidity and 92 degrees temperature can do to one's rational defenses.

So, for the rest of the way across the Atlantic Ocean, I reviewed, with what modest photographic recall I could muster, the appropriate texts of Beilstein and Chemical Abstracts, and put together a chemical flow-sheet and proposal for the phenethylamine analogues of THC. It was mailed from London and got to A.R.L. Company apparently in time for the contract proposal to be awarded to them. It must have been somewhat successful in showing CNS activity, since Dr. Pearsman left A.R.L. and became the founder of a consulting group in Boston that promoted nitrogen-containing THC analogs to industry, apparently with some success.

I got my name on a patent that was subsequently issued to the Simpson Winter Corporation, and for which I received a token dollar; that is the way things are done when one works for industry. I never found out what the connection was between Blackwood Arsenal, A.R.L. and Simpson Winter. I also never met the man I privately dubbed "Frantic Freddy," although I did run into people at several scientific meetings in following years who knew him. His company has continued to grow, and today it is pursuing a large number of research projects in the area of pharmaceuticals. Their work occasionally touches the THC molecule with imaginative variations, but as to the putting of a nitrogen atom in there, not much more has been done. I did put out a few more materials with that THC-nitrogen combination from my own lab sometime later, which earned me a trip to Sweden. But I found nothing of psychedelic interest. Maybe nature wasn't being sloppy by leaving it out. I suspect she knew it wasn't worth it and was simply saving her energies.

The rest of the ocean passage to Europe (the time not spent in writing the rough draft of the government grant) was spent in developing the art of playing Ping-Pong on a rolling ship, and learning about the initiation rites of obscure African tribes from our radioman Mr. Munoz, who evolved into an interesting and constant pre-dinner cocktail companion.

I have lost all touch with Mr. Munoz; I do not know if he is even alive today. The P & O Lines certainly did not survive.

## CHAPTER 6. MMDA

I had a number of projects that I wished to pursue in France. I wanted to learn to speak the language, I wanted to break my father loose from his grief over the death of my mother, and especially, I wanted to put a methylenedioxy group in place of two of the methoxy groups in TMA. The three methoxy groups of mescaline and of TMA have oxygen atoms that are sticking out from the benzene ring all isolated like islands. They are not interconnected. If two adjacent ones were to get a bridge between them, be tied together, then a very subtle change in the geometry of the molecule would result. The name of the bridged analogue would be MMDA.

All of this grew out of nutmeg. At Dole, having seen the effectiveness of TMA, I put myself to searching in catalogs, in books, on shelves, in plants, for anything that resembled it and which thus might indicate where I should go next. I discovered a few mentions in the literature of an intriguing compound called elemicin. It was an essential oil (a new term to me) which was one of a large class of compounds responsible for the flavors (the essences) of many of our food stuffs. So it looked as if plants were the direction to go.

Elemicin looked (in the structural sense) almost identical to TMA. Through the magic of blackboard and chalk, I could add a molecule of ammonia to a molecule of elemicin and get a molecule of TMA. And if it could be done on a blackboard, maybe it could be done in the liver. Was there any suggestion or report, I wondered, anywhere at all, suggesting that elemicin had psychoactive properties?

Off I went to an exciting few days in the published literature, during which I learned a great amount about the intriguing world of essential oils. They were everywhere, wonderful structures to be found in spices and related plants, with names that often reflected their origins: elemicin, apiole, dill-apiole, safrole, eugenol, anol, croweasin, myristicin, asarone, and

on and on. A wealth of obscure, unexpectedly magical chemistry completely ripe for exploration and exploitation.

Well, although I could find no specific mention of any psychopharmacology of elemicin, it is one of the major components of nutmeg, and there was a vast anecdotal literature concerning nutmeg. It had been used for everything from inducing abortions and reinstating missed menstrual periods, to attempted suicide and curing baldness. And bingo! It also had a wide reputation as an intoxicant.

Apparently, nutmeg has been used as a "kitchen narcotic," in prisons, and a scatter of medical reports have appeared describing several patterns of drunkenness or psychic disorder. It contains elemicin, which is structurally almost identical to TMA. What else might be in nutmeg that could cause or contribute to its folklore reputation? I pursued the answer by the straightforward process of buying ten pounds of high quality Oil of Nutmeg, and fractionally distilling it through a super-efficient still into some three score fractions. What a treasure of compounds! In fact, several of them had never been observed in this plant extract before.

A major component present was myristicin, a known close relative of elemicin. If one could stir simple household ammonia into elemicin to convert it to the strange and challenging psychedelic TMA (at least in theory), then a similar stirring of ammonia into myristicin should give rise to the unknown base, 3-methoxy-4,5-methylenedioxyamphetamine, or MMDA.

In principle, I thought the synthesis of MMDA should be simple and straightforward. Just take the correct starting aldehyde, myristicinaldehyde, and follow the standard procedures. Which is something like the famous recipe for hippopotamus soup: take a mature hippopotamus and follow the standard procedures. There is no obvious way of getting hold of a hippo, and I was going to discover that there was a similar problem in the getting of myristicinaldehyde. It was simply not available, and extraordinarily difficult to make. But I was totally determined to make MMDA and discover whether it was active and, if so, just what the action would be.

Arrival for a year's stay in France can be somewhat traumatic even if there are reservations and arrangements and places to go and people to contact. In this case, there were practically no plans whatsoever. We (my wife Helen, my son Theo, and my grieving father) found our way to London to pick up a new Volkswagen (that much had been arranged), and we piled all our belongings on top of it and headed for the English Channel. Across it we went, on the night ferry, and roared south to Paris the following day.

So there we were, with no place to go and no person to contact. We found the American Express office up near the Opera, and there were no messages for us. But, then, we hadn't really expected any. Clearly, we had

to spend a year in some location, but the most immediate problem was where to spend a night while we searched for the place to spend a year.

It was already late afternoon. I vaguely remembered that there were some neat hotels somewhere around St. Germain des Pres, and we found that the Hotel aux Deux Continents had a room on the fifth floor. On the top of the Volkswagen we had a giant tea case and three suitcases, which carried all of our needs for the year. I managed to convey to the manager of the hotel that my father had an extremely weak heart (necessity is the mother of many little fibs) and that his walking up to the fifth floor and down again might seriously threaten him. And certainly his carrying baggage to the fifth floor would be even riskier. The manager then just happened to discover a room on the ground floor which, by good fortune, had a large window which opened out onto the street, so we passed in all the luggage from the sidewalk through it, and settled in for a while until we could find an apartment.

The complete absence of available downtown Paris rentals soon became apparent, so we finally located ourselves in the suburb of Meudon. I immediately set out on the quest for myristicinaldehyde and a laboratory where I might convert it to MMDA. What I found was that the French have a way of regarding academic positions and related research projects in a framework that is completely alien to an American. One cannot simply go into a university and say, "I am me, and I would like to meet you." All doors are locked and no one responds to telephone calls. One *must* go through channels.

My breakthrough came at the Pasteur Institute, where I ran into a post-doc who was a visiting scientist there for a year from the United States; he had, in that time, pretty well unraveled the French academic pecking order. His advice to me was, "Devote a few days to getting introduced to people who might be willing to meet you. Let's start at the lowest possible level, and work our way up." We did just that, and gave it a lot of patience.

First, I let him introduce me to a number of his peers. He had told me that one of them would try to establish his somewhat more prestigious position in the scientific community by introducing me to one of *his* peers. My post-doc had advised me: dump everyone else including the presumptuous introducer, and let the somewhat higher level person take you on the rounds of *his* peers. After a few introductions over a couple of days, the shift upwards will happen all over again. Dump, and follow the new Very Important Person.

It was a fascinating social structure and it produced, in a couple of weeks, a meeting with a Dr. Richard Sett, who had his own laboratory associated with the Sorbonne. He also had some extra space for a visiting nut such as I. He had a marvelous compassion for people who wanted to

research new areas. He was at Gif-sur-Yvette, outside of Paris, but still part of the Sorbonne, and I now had my place for the investigation of my obsession, MMDA.

Almost immediately I made the astounding discovery that myristicinaldehyde was commercially available at a chemical supply house in Paris. I placed an urgent order for 100 grams and was pleasantly surprised to have it in my hands within the week. But there are unexpected surprises to be found in the French language, as well, which became clear when I discovered that the terms myristicinaldehyde and myristaldehyde are interchangeable in French. I had the latter compound which was totally unrelated to MMDA. I could find no use for it at all.

So the time I had invested advanced the cause of MMDA not a whit, and I spent the rest of my year in the chemistry of Dr. Sett's favorite project, the organic reactions of elemental cesium. And we conducted similarly intensive investigations into the comparative merits of all the local wines and pate's within a twenty-mile radius of Gif-sur-Yvette.

At the mid-point of our stay, Helen's father died and she returned to the United States. Theo and my father took advantage of my son's still being under 12 and thus able to get half-fare, and off they went, back to the United States the long way — around the world — on another P & O Line ship, the Canberra. I was left to have the unparalleled experience of breaking a lease in pidgin French. I escaped intact, returned to the U.S., and to my research position at the Dole Chemical Company.

I decided to use nutmeg as my raw material, and everything fit together beautifully. I got my myristicin from the natural oil, and its conversion to MMDA was without trauma.

MMDA was a truly fascinating compound. It did not have the bells and whistles, the drama of mescaline, but was considerably more benign. It was (I thought at the time) my first truly new discovery, and I moved very carefully with it into my small group of colleagues.

The most moving description of its effects was made by a very close friend of mine, a poet who took approximately 160 milligrams orally, in a group of several friends, and he sent me this report.

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#### MMDA / Miniature High

I use the word *miniature* in the same sense that I would describe a piece by the jazz pianist Bud Powell as a miniature.

Comparing a Beethoven piano sonata with *Autumn in New York* as played by Powell would be analogous to comparing mescaline

and MMDA. MMDA comes through as a miniature high — everything is there but in lesser quantity and duration.

MMDA stops barely short of the Olympian Universe of time-ceasing and the appearance of organic and inorganic radiances. The immediate part of the high is about two and one half hours in duration. Rather than a cessation of time as there is with mescaline or psilocybin, there is a kind of *timelessness* during the first malaise-like hour of the high. There is more a feeling of stupefaction than there is with most highs.

In a car climbing the Berkeley foothills I went into a terrible fear. It only lasted a few minutes — but it did not matter in the timelessness how long the panic lasted — it was eternal. I looked out onto the grassy hillside at the dead silver-brown grass. In the expanse of field I could see each separate blade of grass gleaming and the trillions of brown-silver blades blended together into a vast wavering fur. Far below was the panorama of foggy Berkeley and Oakland and the bay. It all began to loom in timelessness and beauty. I thought that I was going to enter the Olympian Universe. I WAS NOT PREPARED FOR THE OLYMPIAN UNIVERSE. I had been expecting something like a marijuana high. I realized that if I entered the Olympian that I hadn't yet recovered sufficiently from the last high to hold myself together.

Heat swelled in my genitals and rose to my stomach. I felt agonizing and perfect fear. I wanted to ask the others to go back so I could take Thorazine. I couldn't talk. The car swerved around a hairpin bend in the road giving me another view of the silver-brown grass-fur and the vast *unwanted* dearness of the view.

Suddenly I was fighting with 'Captain Zero' — I mean the whole disordered and eternity-seeking consciousness that is no longer mammalian in nature but belongs to the order of molecules and inert matter! I decided that all I could do was to go with it — to let Zero take over, but then I was sure that I would not come back. I tried to hold back the high but realized I would do myself damage that way. Then I tried to get on top of the whole high and control it. All in all, I tried perhaps fifteen or twenty unrecallable or almost indescribable means to control or escape the high.

During this time I believed that I was going to pieces and I would possibly never be with the human-world again. My insides were

going wild and my conscious mind seemed to be the only force holding me together. At one point I managed to ask how the dosage had been figured. I was reassured by comparing the dosage to mescaline dosage. For a moment I grasped the fact that I could go through three hours of the fear. Then my insides and mind went wilder. *Jesus, I could not enter Olympia again.*

When the car stopped, I was in control and the aroused molecular consciousness had dissipated. The number of exits and ordinary animal powers that I tried had given me control. I account the sudden gaining of sureness to experience with hallucinogens. I don't think that any of the methods that I tried worked — but the number of possibilities gave me an assurance that I could control me even in Olympia.

I told the others what had happened and felt that I could enjoy some of the day, and in a moment I felt the joy of relief. (Interestingly, none of the other participants got to the Olympian Universe during the high. I account the fact that I touched the body of it due to the predisposition deposited in my body chemistry through earlier experiments with peyote and psilocybin.)

As we walked up the footpath over golden brown dust I saw footprints of birds, tennis shoes, and bare feet. The frightening nature of tracks and artifacts began to overwhelm me. As I walked I tried to insulate myself from the sight. To my right was the dream panorama of hundreds of square miles of enchanted cities and dream-reality of fog pouring upon them from the bay. I was not interested and only cared about keeping myself together and not slipping back to meet Captain Zero.

The short, eternal, uphill walk exhausted us and we fell on the ground in a tiny stand of trees. I still wanted the experience to end and to return to the meanings of daily loves and realities. I had adjusted enough to make it through the high. My companions closed their eyes and began having brain movies. (Earlier my eyes had been forced shut many times by the euphoric hallucination pleasure.) Now I held my eyes open not wanting brain movies or visions. When I closed my eyes experimentally I saw only glorious and pleasing blackness.

We talked desultorily and dozefully and I realized that I was able to see through the eyes of my companions. They were seeing

stark reality exactly as I saw it. I wanted to talk to Terry and find out who he was. I found talking too difficult. My eyes were beginning to close again with exhaustion and pleasure.

When I lit cigarettes, I could not find my lips well and they were numbed. Matches kept blowing out in a wind that was not strong enough to blow them out. We wobbled as we walked.

We stayed in a little stand of trees. I sat for a while, then got up and sat in another place. Then I got up again & etc.

Except for visual sensation which was just on the verge of mescaline or psilocybin in vision and clarity, I seemed to be sealed from sensation and living in a kind of hyper-lucidity of sense — a pleasant paradox.

I lay back and closed my eyes and practiced raising the goddess Kundalini (The Serpent Power) from the base *chakra* and through my body. I succeeded in raising the power, for the first time, past my shoulders and into my head. I realized, as I did it, that I was not truly raising the Serpent Power but rather cleaning the nerve tubes. However, I achieved grayish-clear affective pictures of the *chakra* nerve centers. It was a good feeling.

The crystal clear air gave bright green sharpness to the evergreens. Looking at trees, or leaves of plants, was like a mild mescaline high. Fir trees became living, green, modern sculptures of strange Indian rococo beasts — as if the sculptor Lipschitz worked at their trimming.

The malaise-like feeling began to end and the dozeful feeling left with it.

I walked to a redwood copse where other members of the party were sitting. I was struck by the absolute and superb beauty and clarity of the people and the trees and air and the music that played over the portable radio. I felt close to the children and admired their beauty. At this point I realized that I was simply sitting and enjoying a Sunday noon in its full pleasantness. Ordinarily I would have been bored without more to do. The next couple of hours became a pleasant and beautiful picnic. The come-down was abrupt but not unpleasant. I was ready. Time passed with swift rapidity for the rest of the day. Two hour periods

would flash by. Late that night I was kept from sleep for half an hour by brain movies — little crocodiles running across dusty roads through spotlights in the darkness, magic evergreen trees fading into and out of reality, and anecdotal sequences of brain visions.

#### AN OBSCURE FOOTNOTE

A week after taking MMDA I woke in the middle of the night and as I awakened I felt that there would be no reality but only nothingness. I was horrified and threw myself bolt upright in bed and opened my eyes instantaneously.

Shelley says:

Lift not the painted veil which those who live  
Call life; though unreal shapes be pictured there,  
And it but mimic all we would believe  
With colors idly spread, — behind, lurk Fear  
And Hope, twin Destinies; who ever weave  
Their shadows, o'er the chasm, sightless and drear.

The awakening I had was definitely a reaction to the MMDA. Yesterday I talked with a man who had taken too much LSD. I tried to avoid speaking on hallucinogens but he was insistent. As I described some post-hallucinogen states of extreme anxiety regarding the nature of reality the man began to writhe in his chair, wring his hands, and temporarily lost the ability to speak. I have been in that state. While speaking with Sam he identified it as an anxiety state and pointed out that it is not only related to hallucinogens, but is a not uncommon state for those who have not had drugs.

Sam accounts the state to an arising of unconscious material to the surface.

That seems fine and true enough — as good a name for what is happening as any other. What it does not clear up is the intuitions that I have that strengthen and contradict each other. I am aware of two feelings: That the 'material' is of a repressed psychological nature in the Freudian-Reichian sense, and that it is also another order of 'material' confronted. The other order is that of the molecular level of consciousness. I mean a part of ourselves more

related to the *philosophical consciousness* of sea urchins and sponges — who are no more than the tugs of their desires and hungers and the consciousness of their motions and withdrawals — who are an actual conscious part of the physical universe and the actual being of their protoplasm in the 'Surge of Life.' It would be interesting if what we so surely call the 'Unconscious' were in reality two or more vastly divided parts of our being that are commonly inaccessible.

I am not saying this to strengthen my argument that I confronted the molecular consciousness on MMDA. I was in too much of a fear state to be definite of anything when I think of it now two weeks later.

But I am intuitively sure that we are meeting two unknown areas — both repressions and a molecular-philosophical-Universe consciousness. I have a strong feeling that the second of these should be left untouched by both psychiatry and happy-day investigations. We mess with some structure that should remain unknown, because it is known by *being*. Unless the experimenter is aware of the risk and goes slowly in an investigatory manner with caution.

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This report was a treasure to me, in that it gave an articulate and unmistakable "outside" verification that MMDA was indeed a psychedelic. It was (at least, for that time) a drug of unprecedented potency, and proved that it was not only mescaline that had psychological complexities. I have personal reports from perhaps another half-dozen subjects who have explored the 160 to 200 milligram range, and the psychiatrist C. Naranjo devotes nearly a fourth of his book, "The Healing Journey," to his clinical experiences with MMDA.

But the story of MMDA closes on a poignant note of sadness. I had learned that the world-renowned psychopharmacologist, Gordon Alles (the discoverer of the action of amphetamine and of MDA) had been following exactly the same reasoning path as I, and had independently worked up nutmeg and synthesized MMDA. He had actually given it the same initials I had, and had discovered its action in himself. It was with joyful anticipation that we made a date to meet and talk about the many interests I am sure we shared.

A month before our appointed meeting, I heard of his unexpected and tragic death, apparently of complications of diabetes. As he numbered among his accomplishments not only an enthusiastic interest in self-experimentation, but a broad reputation as an expert on insulin, I speculated

(futilely) about what he might have been assaying at the time. I contacted his graduate student but he had no idea, and I fear I shall never know either. Through his widow's private physician, I extended an offer to organize and publish his research notes in a commemorative volume under his own name, but these efforts were rebuffed. I fear that all the ideas and observations he had had are now never to be found. I regard his death as a severe personal loss, although I never met him.

## CHAPTER 7. THE CAPTAIN

It was the mid-1960's and the time had come to change my employer. I had worked for the Dole Chemical Company for ten years; during that time I had developed a comfortable stride as a chemist, and added a lot of words to my vocabulary in the languages of research and laboratory technique. But it was becoming gradually apparent that both of us — Dole as employer and I as employee — were no longer entirely at peace with our relationship.

No one could deny that I was extremely productive. A continuous flow of new and potentially patentable compounds were being synthesized and spun into the biological screening processes. These were the intermediates which were the stepping stones to the target materials that I really wanted to make and explore. But the final products themselves, compounds that briefly modified the sensory world of the consumer and perhaps his interpretation of it, were unmarketable. Not that there wasn't a market out there for psychedelic drugs; it was just not the kind of market that could be openly courted by a kosher industrial giant that created and manufactured insecticides for the agricultural world and polymers for the artificial fiber world, as well as herbicides for the military world. This was, after all, the era of our Vietnam adventure, and immense pressures were being brought to bear on big industries everywhere throughout the country, to direct all their energies towards the government's needs. Psychedelic drugs were not exactly what Washington had in mind.

From my point of view, it was becoming increasingly clear that the corporate attitudes toward my work were shifting from encouragement to tolerance, which would in time — I suspected — become disapproval and eventually, of course, outright prohibition. Since my end products were seen to be of no exploitable value, there had been no restrictions on publication, and I had in fact published, in several first class scientific journals, a goodly number of papers describing the chemistry and the activity in

humans of new psychedelic drugs (I still called them psychotomimetic drugs in those days because that was the scientifically accepted euphemism). But the point at which the writing on the wall became obvious was the day I was asked to no longer use Dole's address on my publications. What I held to be exciting and creative was clearly being seen by management as something that would reflect badly on the corporate image.

So I started putting my home address on scientific publications. And, since this implied that the research was being done at home, it seemed like a great idea to begin setting up a personal laboratory on the Farm, which I had long dreamt of doing. And if I were to actually do the research at home — so went my reasoning — I would no longer be working for Dole, but for a new employer. Me. That would be quite a move to make. I would retire myself from Dole, which is to say I would be self-employed, which is to say I would become a consultant, which is to say (as I eventually discovered) that I would emerge in a totally new role: unemployed scientist.

I left Dole at the end of 1966, with all the usual parting rituals observed when a long-time employee retires. There were goodbye lunches with many drinks, there were certificates of acknowledgment with many signatures, and presumably there was the customary changing of all the outside locks.

I had quite a number of plans already in mind. The first was to broaden my educational basis. Having always been a test-tube and Bunsen burner person, I knew that I had the art in hand for making new and fascinating compounds. But I had very little background for evaluating the biology of their action. Since the scene of that action was the human body, one of my earliest plans was to go to medical school and study the where's and the why's of the complex wiring patterns in the human brain and nervous system, all of which play vital roles in this activity.

I realized that if I hoped to survive as a consultant I would have to acquire some vocabulary in a number of fields such as biology, medicine and psychology, so I applied for, and received, a government grant to help pay the tuition. Helen was completely supportive; she said she wanted me to follow the path I believed in. She was working as a librarian at the University of California at Berkeley, loving the job and the economic independence it gave her. Between my grant and her salary, we figured we would manage adequately for the time necessary.

The next two years were totally committed to the San Francisco campus of the University of California, as I learned what I could of medicine.

But there was yet another language, that of power and politics, which I was destined to learn in a totally unexpected way. I had completed two years of medical studies which equipped me with a sound understanding of the normal functions of the cerebral red and green wires, and was on the

verge of deciding whether or not to continue with the next two years (which would have given me a look at their abnormal functioning) when the decision was, in a sense, made for me.

I received an offer to become a consultant in the area of research in psychedelic drugs. It came from a gentleman I'd never heard of, who ran a one-man analytical laboratory located in a storefront down on the San Francisco Peninsula.

My first response was that I had no particular desire to become involved with someone else's lab, doing what might be interpreted as controversial research at a time when it seemed the whole nation was becoming increasingly polarized against recreational drug use. It was being broadly associated with hippies and liberals and academic intellectual types who were against the war in Southeast Asia. But when I finally talked with this person, I discovered that his role was only that of a finder — what is now known as a "head-hunter." He told me that he had been retained by a big government operation specifically to locate scientists from many disciplines as potential members of a research team for an unusual project that was of super-importance.

He explained, carefully: "There will be situations in the future in which astronauts might well be exposed to long periods of sensory isolation and all the potential mental developments that might come along with that particular territory. There is being set up a research program geared to develop chemicals which could be used to train those astronauts who might be subjected to long bouts of sensory deprivation. Teach them to roll with the altered states of consciousness that could very well be a consequence of that isolation."

He emphasized that I would have a free hand to establish instrumentation, choose personnel, and equip my own laboratory. Would I be interested in setting up a research project to develop such chemicals and describe their activity and maybe even to contribute to the design of the clinical experiments?

Does a bear like to shit in the woods? Yes, yes, most certainly yes!

Of course, my local contact, the store-front laboratory gentleman, was not the person who was running this astronaut-in-outer-space project. The head honcho was a Captain B. Lauder Pinkerton, who was the central hub of many different branches of biological research at the major laboratory for space research, called the San Carlos Aerospace Laboratory, which was under contract to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, or NASA. This was located nearby, in a town called Sunnyvale.

Captain Pinkerton was many things; he was a Captain in some branch of the military, he was an intelligence officer in some corner of the government, possibly NSA (National Security Agency) and he was a millionaire, thanks to genes he shared with the inventor of a famously successful

household appliance. We met, we talked, and I think it safe to say that — at the time — we had the good instincts to respect one another, but not to indulge in anything as inappropriate as mutual trust.

Having taken the bait, I was off into a new area of interaction. I was now a consultant, successfully launched on my new career.

At Aerospace, I was hailed as the shining light of psychotropic medicine. There was a whirlwind of accolades as, one after another, people came up to me and said they had been reading my articles for years and thought I was doing important and fascinating work.

So I materialized at Aerospace every morning, and began ordering glassware and instruments and mechanical things for the new laboratory, which I was told was not yet available, but would be shortly, as soon as certain necessary shifts and changes had been made. In the meantime, I explored every hallway and workroom and lab, meeting and interacting with some of the resident scientists, most of whom seemed to be gentle old-timers who had been there for years. Gradually, it became apparent that there were two entirely different worlds in coexistence at Aerospace, both under the very firm direction of Captain Pinkerton.

One of these was the new-lab-spectroscopy-psychadelic-drug-outer-space world, most of which had not yet taken any kind of tangible form (but undoubtedly would very soon), and this world included a regular weekly summons into Pinkerton's office for an intense, highly charged conversation on some topic that was always unexpected, and sometimes completely off the wall.

I might find myself having to deal with the nature and structure of scientific imagination and how it could be channeled. Or Pinkerton might bring up the subject of mental telepathy and the possibility of successfully influencing another person's thought processes or behavior from a distance. Once, it was an exploration of the kind of mental role-playing one might have to do in order to understand somebody else's perspective and motives, as symbolized by the old saying, "It takes a thief to catch a thief," or another old saying (which was new to me), "It takes a Turk to know a Turk."

This was rich and tantalizing fare, as entertaining as it was unpredictable, but somehow it never seemed quite appropriate to the role that I understood myself to be playing, as an organizer of a research center for creativity in the development of psychedelic drugs, among other heady things. Was I being used as a sounding board for Pinkerton's strange flights of fancy? Or was I being probed as to my positions on some kinds of moral or ethical questions tucked in between the lines? I thought it probably wisest to be supportive of the concepts he expressed unless I disagreed, in which case I chose to remain silent.

The only things I was totally sure of were that Captain Pinkerton was

a shrewd, intelligent man, and that I hadn't a clue as to what was really going on.

But there was the other world to be seen and explored. This was composed of the many biological research projects in other areas, which had already been established by Pinkerton. Here were arcane projects such as black membrane dynamics, and studies of the influence of gravity on plant growth, the relationship between magnetic fields and the blood-brain barrier, and the effects of radiation on fertility. All were intriguing studies, and all were being run in well equipped laboratories by extremely competent scientists. But I found myself being reminded of an old-person's home. There was activity, but there was a prevalent sense of disinterest. The excellent quality of the work on the workbench was obvious, but when I would go to lunch with one of the resident mavens, the talk would be of such stuff as his forthcoming retirement. There was no excitement; just a sense of tiredness. Remarkable, I thought; all this under the same leadership as the psychedelic project?

The glassware and laboratory equipment were slow in arriving, I was told, and things hadn't quite straightened out yet in the assignment of space for my new lab, but it would all come together soon. Just be patient, they said. I ran a few experiments on equipment available in other labs, and kept busy.

A few months into my employment at Aerospace, I was invited to Pinkerton's home, which was located in the wealthy suburb of Santa Maria, to share a dinner with him, his wife, and what I was given to understand was his "acceptable" son, a boy in his late 'teens. But it so happened that, this particular evening, his other child — the twenty-year-old-hippie-druggie who had been at some point outcast and disenfranchised — had taken it into his head to drop by. (He himself told me, many years later, that it was not accidental at all; he had heard about me and decided to check things out for himself.)

It also happened that he played excellent Ping-Pong, and I was informed that he routinely beat his father (there were hints that Father found this intolerable) and by fluke chance I just happened to beat the son with serves which were only marginally legal. So, a dissymmetry was established between Pinkerton and me by the inference that I could probably beat him at Ping-Pong (this was never tested, by the way). I am sure all of this was completely incidental to the direction that our relationship soon took, but the memory of that evening does nonetheless persist.

Within the week I was called into the office of an administrative ally of Pinkerton, who had been pleasant and friendly to me and with whom I'd had several energetic conversations. He told me that he was required to process everyone who was a consultant on any of the Captain's research projects for some sort of secret clearance. The clearance level had a color or

a letter attached to it, I don't remember which. Apparently (so I was told) all the people who were presently employed at Aerospace had already received it, except for me.

This security clearance would allow me access to all research related to my own that had already been done. But it was clear that my access to these unknown treasures could only be had in exchange for my agreeing to allow my own thoughts and creative processes to be similarly classified and controlled. I also knew that a security clearance mandates one's absolute silence for the rest of one's life in regard to anything and everything seen, heard and experienced during the time of employment by the government agency giving the clearance. I had no choice. I declined the opportunity.

In a few days I was gently informed that I was no longer a part of the research group.

In the months that followed, I maintained contact with some of the other scientists I had come to know at Aerospace, and eventually I learned that the funds which were available from NASA for this psychedelic study were most probably from the Department of Defense, although nobody had absolute proof, of course. In retrospect, I could see where much of the research that was going on there might well be of interest to the military and chemical warfare side of things.

I also began to understand why the promised laboratory, glassware and equipment — not to speak of astronauts — had never materialized. Whatever it was that Pinkerton thought I might bring to his program — or add to his own professional luster — had first to be wrapped safely, tied down and secured with the ropes called Secret and Classified.

I left with questions that are yet to be answered, and most probably never will be. Was my Captain Pinkerton a recruiter of scientific minds for what he saw as patriotic necessities? Was he a modern-day Machiavelli with some personal agenda that he chose not to share with anyone? Maybe he was simply a selfish collector of interesting and colorful people, like the art lover who has five original Van Gogh's in his personal gallery, where no one else can see them.

In any case, I was out of the San Carlos Aerospace Laboratories, and I was out of the academic world as well. By good fortune, I had continued to build and use my own private laboratory during the time I was at Sunnyvale, so my die was cast; I was now officially a scientific consultant, and I was going to have to make every effort to survive in that role.

## CHAPTER 8. MEM

Just what is a C-natural quarter note? A musician might define it as a little solid-black circle with a vertical arm sticking up from it, located on a line below the treble staff. But then he is stuck with having to define words such as natural, and staff. A physicist might try using the image of a sinusoidal wave on the oscilloscope with a period of something under 4 milliseconds lasting for a short while. But what is a sinusoidal, and what is a millisecond? From the neurologist, one might hear something yet different involving hairs on the cochlea and neurons in the auditory cortex area. A yet different view with a different and equally arcane jargon. All are right, and yet each can be incomprehensible without extensive further definition.

I am faced with an equally difficult problem when I am asked, just what is mescaline? The person who swallowed it might recount its effects, the distributor who packaged it might describe its taste and color, and the chemist who synthesized it might speak in terms of molecular structure. Perhaps it is my prejudice, but I always tend to the molecular structure as I truly believe that it is one of the few consistent and incontestable definitions. But, oh my, it does require a certain leap of faith to accept the picture that is offered!

The molecule is the smallest chunk of something that still is that something. Anything smaller, and there appears a bunch of atoms with a complete loss of the original identity. You don't see a molecule. It has an atomic connection scheme that is inferred from a lot of reasoning and a century of experimentation. But it remains the only valid vocabulary for the design of new drugs. I don't want to launch into a lecture in chemistry, yet I truly want to share the magic of the "4-position."

Chemistry is a maddeningly discontinuous art. Things can only change by whole atomic jumps. There are no smooth, continuous variations. A compound (drug, chemical, solvent, gas, smell) is composed of unimaginably large numbers of molecules, all of them identical. If you

looked at just one of them through some alchemist's microscope, you would see, maybe, 35 atoms all hooked together in some cohesive way. Some would be carbon atoms, and others would be hydrogens. In the case of TMA, you would find one nitrogen atom and three oxygen atoms as well. The identity of a compound depends on exactly how many atoms there are in that invisible minimum piece of it, and on exactly how they are hooked together.

The number of atoms must change by a whole numbers; this is what is meant by the absence of any continuous variation. One cannot make a molecule larger by a little bit of an atom. You can add an entire oxygen atom, but there is no meaning to adding 17% of an oxygen atom. A homologue of a given compound is a new compound that has been made bigger (or smaller) by the addition (or subtraction) of three atoms, one carbon and two hydrogens. Nothing can ever be created that lies part way between a drug and its immediate homologue.

Or, if one were to keep the number and identity of the atoms the same, a new compound can result simply by changing the way that they are hooked together. Move an atom or a bunch of atoms from here to there. An isomer of a given compound is a new compound that has an identical weight (at the molecular level) but the atoms have been reorganized.

My earliest manipulations of molecular structure had concentrated on making isomers, on rearranging the locations of atoms rather than adding or taking away specific atoms. The ring component of TMA (called a benzene ring) has five different positions where atoms can be located. The count starts at the one-position, where the rest of the molecule is attached. Thus the second is identical to the sixth position (both at 2 or 10 o'clock), the third is identical to the fifth (both at 4 or 8 o'clock) and the fourth (at 6 o'clock) is as far from the rest of the molecule as you can get. This is the 4-position.

TMA (like mescaline) has a bunch of atoms (called methoxy groups) at the 3-, the 4- and the 5-positions. I synthesized isomers, with these three bunches in all the other possible locations. There were two patterns that really boosted the potency of the resulting amphetamine. One was when the groups were in the 2-, 4- and 5-positions (TMA-2) and another when the groups were in the 2-, 4- and 6-positions (TMA-6). TMA-2 was the new and most satisfying discovery, being some ten times more potent than TMA. Settling for a while on this particular ordering of groups, why not try using the homologue argument and add a three atom chunk to each of these methoxy groups? Thus, one has ethoxy homologues, with the ethyl group at either the 2-, the 4- or the 5-position. If one were to call a methoxy an "M", and an ethoxy an "E", and if one were to name a compound around the ring as the groups appeared (from the 2- to the 4- to the 5-positions), one would have EMM, MEM, and MME as code names. The

middle letter is, of course, the group at the 4-position.

I had completed the teutonic discipline of preparing all the three possible ethoxy homologs of TMA-2 at just about the same time that I decided to leave Dole and go to medical school. Suddenly, I didn't have a worried administration looking over my shoulder as to the chemistry and its patentability but also, by this same argument, I had no base of operations from which I could begin to document pharmacology, and especially psychopharmacology.

Since much of the synthetic work, at least of the M's and E's, had been done while I was still at Dole, I supposed that all this chemistry was still their property. But I also concluded that they were undoubtedly so relieved to be rid of me — especially as the parting had been friendly and at my own request — they probably wouldn't mind at all if I were to assume the synthesis and ownership of the M's and E's. So this would be my first solo flight, and I would not only publish from my home address from now on, I would do the chemistry there as well.

The early trials of the mono-ethoxy compounds, EMM, MEM and MME, showed no mental activity. EMM was inactive in the twenties-of-milligrams, and I took it on up to 50 milligrams, still with no effects apparent. MME was also inactive in the twenties-of-milligrams, but at 40 milligrams it gave me a 1.5 plus.

The treasure turned out to be MEM, with the ethoxy in the 4-position. Perhaps the term, "4-position," which comes up again and again in this chemical story, may be now a little less mysterious. Again, it is the place on the ring, opposite the rest of the big collection of atoms on the molecule, where the action takes place. There is true magic there, and it was with the MEM that it first became apparent. MEM was clearly active at 10 milligrams. The activity was only marginal, but it was unquestionable.

Just before a full half-hour had passed following the taking of 10 milligrams, I felt a dizziness, and had to get up and move about to offset some tension in my legs. There was no nausea. About 15 minutes later, I was clearly intoxicated (in the ethanol sense) but there were absolutely no apprehensions. There was a very slight eye dilation. From the two-hour period on, at least at this dosage, I felt that I was pretty much repairing mentally, but could not seem to shake a slight residual physical distress. I knew I had an active material here, and that I should proceed with caution.

The first thing I did was to give a good supply of it to my psychiatrist friend, Paris Mateo, with whom I had worked with TMA. He had a long history of fruitful investigations into the uses of psychoactive drugs of various kinds in therapy. Paris explored MEM with seven willing patients. He reported the effective range to be from 10 to 40 milligrams. He concluded that it was certainly more potent than TMA-2 quantitatively, and that it produced a more defended attitude than TMA-2 in his patients.

My friend the psychologist, Terry Major (also familiar with TMA), assayed MEM at 20 milligrams, and reported the chronology as peaking somewhere around the third hour, and out at about the eighth hour. The qualitative effects, he said, were along the psychedelic line (color, visual intensity, wavering of the visual field, emotional euphoria), but that he was also aware of slight but real extra-pyramidal tremors.

This was clearly the most active of the mono-ethoxy compounds. I wrote up a short note in which I described all eight possible permutations of M's and E's, and sent it to the Journal of Medicinal Chemistry. It was accepted.

I explored MEM quite thoroughly in the 20 to 30 milligram area, in these early years, and found it to be a most impressive psychedelic. In 1977, I went up to 60 milligrams and found it not to be the profound self-analysis drug I had hoped it would be, at least not for me. But I also became aware that I was a little bit insensitive to this material, so I learned to recommend dosages in the 20 to 30 milligrams area for other explorers.

From late 1977 to mid-1980, I did eleven experiments with MEM with a total of nine members of my research group (usually in threes and fours), all in the 25 to 50 milligram range. In general, we found that there was always some body discomfort, extreme anorexia (loss of appetite) and frequent reports of color enrichment and eyes-closed fantasy. The material insists on being complex, but seems nonetheless to leave you in charge. In general, the effects drop off between the sixth and tenth hour, but sleep — even some hours later — can include disturbing dreams. It was not too restful for a number of the experimenters.

I abandoned MEM in 1980, choosing to spend my time on other more intriguing compounds, but not before a couple of important experiences had taken place with the drug. One involved another psychiatrist friend of mine, who was so impressed with his observations of an opening of easy communication, that he decided to spin MEM into his practice, in a very limited way, using it with those patients he felt might benefit from it.

The other was a day I will never forget, a day that I spent with a woman in her late forties, Miriam O. She had had a few, largely unimpressive, earlier experiences with psychedelics, but her interest in working with psychoactive drugs had been rekindled by an experience with MDMA. She wanted to try something new, and I suggested MEM. I met her in Marin County one clear and not very cold December morning. I took 50 milligrams and she took 25. I had already asked her if there was any particular question she wished to address, and she said no, it was simply to be an adventure in altered spaces. The results were a reminder of the old but good maxim in the area of psychedelics: there are no casual experiments.

At about the one hour point, we were well into the effects, around a

plus one and a half. We wandered into the Green Gulch Zen Center just in time to attend a half-hour meditation session and to buy a loaf of home-baked bread. Thence on to Muir Beach and to a rolling plus-three.

For a while, it was theater time. Sam Goldwyn was running the show, directing Miriam's poses and gestures, her entrances and exits, while I played the role of the laughing audience. When we were tired of making movies, we started up toward the top of a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean, with a broad view of the surf below. After climbing a bit, we turned toward the ocean and came upon a barbed-wire fence. I suggested we crawl through it and find a place to sit and look at everything and talk

"I can't," was the reply, "My legs don't seem to work."

Her step was wobbly, and once she had reached the fence, it was clear she was having a really difficult time getting a foot raised to stick it between the two strands of wire.

"I've lost control of my bottom half!"

I helped her through, despite her apparent inability to make anything work too well, and we reached a sitting down place on the grass and sand.

"My legs are paralyzed," Miriam said, "I'm being poisoned, and I want out."

Something was developing, and I didn't know what it was she was headed for, but this "paralysis" and "poisoning" was obviously part of what was on its way up to the surface.

"Well," I offered, rather unsympathetically, "If you really want to dump the poison, concentrate it into one place, and if it's high enough, you can vomit it out, and if it's low enough, you can shit it out."

"I'm not fooling around," Miriam protested, "I'm really being poisoned and I want out."

"Then get yourself out. You're in charge."

There was no comment for a minute. Then she said it.

"Can you give yourself cancer?"

"You certainly can. Almost everyone who has cancer has gotten it for some reason that seems quite adequate. Where is yours?"

"In my stomach."

With her "paralyzed" legs stretched out in front of her, she gently touched her stomach to indicate the site of the enemy. She then unfolded one of the most complex stories I had ever heard, all of which boiled down to the fact that she'd had stomach cancer for some time, and always carried around in her purse some thirty Dilaudid tablets, so that if the pain got too much, she could end the whole thing.

I asked the only question that occurred to me.

"Why do you need cancer?"

That broke the dam. She dissolved in tears and blurted out her secret. Many years before, her mother had suffered from cancer of the stomach

and was in such intractable pain that, finally, Miriam and her stepfather had smothered her with a pillow, releasing her from the agony. She was a teenager and she had helped kill her mother. She told me that she'd had total amnesia for all events in her life from that time until her early 20's.

I wept with her.

Later, we retraced our steps down the hill, reintegrating by revisiting each locale along the way which represented stages of the drug development, until we were back to the point where the entire experiment had started.

Of course, Miriam did not have cancer of the stomach. She also had no residual leg paralysis. What she emerged with was an understanding of how the repressed grief and guilt had planted itself in her own body, giving symptoms which were signals to her of something dark which needed to be exposed and opened up to consciousness before she did, indeed, succeed in giving herself her mother's cancer.

When we talked again, several days later, she told me — almost casually — that she had thrown away the Dilaudid. I could only say a heartfelt thank you.

I had developed a keen respect for MEM.

## CHAPTER 9. DOM

DOM appeared on the street in the 1960's under the name of STP and it proved to be for quite a while my hair shirt or, as Albert Hofmann would say later about his discovery, LSD, my problem child.

In the early 1960's, when I had satisfied myself that the effectiveness of TMA-2 was intensified by the structural change that gave MEM (but not EMM or MME), it seemed a logical question to ask: was this because of the nature of that group in the magical 4-position? This 4-position substituted drug might have maintained its activity specifically because of the fragile nature of these groups, which would allow their easy removal by the body (or within the body) and the formation of some metabolic product that just happened to be much more potent. The human body has excellent facilities for changing molecules, and it usually changes them to make something less threatening. But in this case the change just might have achieved some upgrading of potency.

Or maybe that group at the 4-position was not easily gotten rid of. Then one could argue that an indestructible molecule got settled in the receptor site, and simply stayed there. The new compound is fully as potent as the old one, because it gets in there and cannot be removed metabolically for some time. The easiest way of answering this question was to construct a molecule with a group at that position which could not be easily displaced or changed.

I said to myself, let's replace the 4-methoxy group (of TMA-2) (or the 4-ethoxy group of MEM) with a methyl group. We will call it DOM (for TMA-2 without an oxygen atom but with a methyl group, desoxymethyl). The methyl group (at the 4-position) cannot be removed easily by any of the usual metabolic procedures. Thus, if this compound (DOM) is of reduced activity, the metabolic removal of some 4-position group seems a reasonable explanation of biological activity. And if the compound (DOM) maintains activity, it would argue that TMA-2 and MEM are intrinsically

active, and something in the 4-position is instrumental to the expression of central action. In simple terms, the 4-methoxy group is fragile, and the 4-methyl group is solid. If the active 4-methoxy compound (TMA-2) becomes inactive with a 4-methyl group (if DOM is of decreased potency) then fragility (metabolic change) is needed for activity and the intrinsically active form is to be found somewhere down the metabolic pathway. If, on the other hand, the activity is maintained with the 4-methyl group (if DOM is fully potent) then the primary agents (TMA-2 or DOM) are the responsible factors, and metabolism only serves to inactivate these drugs.

The very first step toward this noble end-product DOM was actually taken by my son, Theo, who was with me late one evening at Dole, on June 22, 1963, to be exact. Having him with me was probably against all the rules, but he was in a period when he wanted to become a chemist, so at about 9:00 p.m., with my blessings, he dumped 100 grams of 2,5-dimethoxytoluene into a mixture of 225 grams of N-methyl-formanilide and 255 grams of phosphorus oxychloride, thus launching the synthesis of a precursor for what was eventually to be DOM. He ended up in the early hours of the morning with some 54.9 grams of an aromatic aldehyde that did the job. We had our precursor.

(Theo's interests in chemistry have largely flagged and he has found his metier in marine biology and superb poetry, with a garden full of lovingly tended chrysanthemums and dahlias affording him hours of peaceful contact with the earth and his own inner being.)

I completed the nitrostyrene synthesis on July 7th, and finally got back to this project on the 30th of November, to finish the reduction to the final amine. The next day, at 3:22 p.m., I tried 200 micrograms of the white solid and, as there was no effect whatsoever, I let the whole matter drift over the holidays. On January 4th of the new year, I rather heroically upped the dosage to a milligram and, to my total surprise, found activity there. This was the first time ever that a phenethylamine had been observed to be centrally active at such a minuscule dose.

Although there was no response by the end of the first hour, I noted a dryness of the mouth at around the third hour, and my eyes were extremely dilated. I had an eerie over-all feeling that lasted for a couple of additional hours, but eating seemed to clear it up, for the most part. By the seventh hour, everything was repaired, back to normal, and I decided to doubt the validity of any of it.

I noted some residual muscular pains which I readily ascribed to having hiked six miles the previous day. It was during this period of my employment at Dole that I established patterns of hiking to work, and then driving — each on alternate days. I would meet with other co-workers who were also outdoor types along the way, and, unbeknownst to them, I would often have a new level of a new compound on board. We would

pick up Al at the drainage ditch, Bob at the edge of the Bainbridge Ranch, and all of us hiked along the canal until we were opposite the back parking lots of Dole. We would cut in opposite the electron accelerator and head for fresh coffee, they with wet feet and incipient muscle tiredness, I with wet feet, incipient muscle tiredness and a possible plus-one or plus-two altered space.

Five days later, I tried a slightly increased level of DOM and recorded in my notes what was probably my first plus-2 experience on a material that was this much a stranger to mescaline. At about the 1-1/4 hour point, I was talking to a friend in his office when I became aware of a warm flushing and tingling sensation in my genitals, which occasionally was a prelude to nausea. My mouth was dry. The nausea did not develop. At the 2-hour point, my teeth were what I call "rubby," which means that I'm suddenly aware of them and they have the feel of being squeaky clean. I was aware of some pressure in the ears.

Two points deserve comment here. One is that with every new drug, at the low levels where there is clearly some action, but the nature of that action cannot yet be defined, one reads every unknown possible complication into one's responses, often recording a syndrome that can never be repeated. The second point is that, at the time, I was still most naive in the area of drug effects, and just a bit frightened, so I'm sure that I often mentally promoted signs and symptoms that were not valid.

Between the third and fourth hour, I wandered out to the little greenhouse I had put in near the parking lot, where I had planted some *Salvia divinorum*, and relaxed in the pleasure of watching things grow. I knew that at higher dosages plants would creep and crawl, but now they were just visibly growing. Between the seventh and tenth hour, I recovered a good baseline and brought my notes to a close, before heading home.

Through the year 1964, DOM was being evaluated by several of my allies, in the dosage range of 2 to 4 milligrams. I was still dedicated to marginal threshold dosage evaluations, unwilling to dip into the spring deeply. I admire, to this day, the brave souls who worked with me to explore the nature of this material. My friend, Terry, evaluated 2.3 milligrams. and reported an extraordinary mood elevation, with no indication of any nausea whatsoever. In the third hour, he found a pronounced enhancement of odors and of emotional interactions, with a richness of empathy. At the eighth hour there was an unmistakable decline, and a 3/4 grain of seconal was needed for sleep at the tenth hour. He did a later experiment with 3.8 milligrams and reported that it showed its maximum effect at the fifth hour, with a peaking from there to the eighth hour, and a gradual decline on into the 12th hour. This was the first clear portrayal of the very long time course that this drug shows.

The first full "psychedelic" experience of DOM was reported by an-

other friend, Mark, at 4.1 milligrams. For him, the effects were noted at about half an hour, and between 1-1/2 and 3 hours there was a matter-of-fact but impressive recounting of visual and interpretative effects similar to those of mescaline. It wasn't until his fifth hour that these really broke through, and his notes are replete with superlatives. For him, there were colors and textures without precedent, as he had no past experience with color effects from mescaline.

It was many years later, in 1967, that some unknown enterprising chemist introduced DOM onto the street, where it was called STP and, unfortunately, it was distributed in doses of up to 20 milligrams. When you consider that the active level, a plus three effect, is closer to 5 milligrams, it is not surprising that the emergency wards of numerous hospitals began seeing young people in states of confusion and panic. They had taken the new drug and, when nothing seemed to happen within the first hour, some of them believed they had taken too low a dose, and took another pill. The hippies and street people were used to drugs like LSD, which come on relatively quickly and are completely developed by one hour. The person responsible for this debacle must have realized his error, because within a relatively short period of time, he had put out new tablets which were only 10 milligrams each. This was still a whopping amount.

While I was in medical school, I heard the rumors and the reports about something called STP and wondered, along with everyone else, what it was. Initially it was thought to be some scopolamine-like drug, but then its nature became more evident. In time I learned that it was, indeed, DOM. Maybe it had become known from a seminar I gave at Johns Hopkins, months earlier, in Baltimore. Maybe the patents had been read and duplicated. Maybe someone had followed the same quite reasonable line of reasoning that I had. But, my challenge to the meaning of the 4-position was now public property, and there was no remaining question as to mechanistic logic. The unchangeable group at the 4-position gave a compound not just of similar potency, but of greatly enhanced potency. Clearly, that 4-position needs to remain untouched, metabolically, (for a while), if a compound is to be active.

In going through my files recently, I discovered a handwritten note that had come to me not long after the first trials with this material. It was short and impressive. I have no idea from whom it came, so no answer could ever be sent. It implied an experience that had several faces:

"If on this page I shall have expressed it to you, then it is true that DOM has the glory and the doom sealed up in it. All that's needed to unseal it is to surround it with a warm living human for a few hours. For that human, for those hours, all the dark things are made clear."

## CHAPTER 10. PETER MILLE

A few years after I had left Dole and taken the initially rather scary step of setting myself up as a scientific consultant, I had completed the creation of my own small laboratory in what remained of the basement of my parents' original home on this gentle hill; the house had burned down during one dry August, leaving only a few charred pine trees and the big stone basement room with its fireplace. I covered the room with a roof of 2x4's and aluminum sheeting, then moved in a solid table that was my chemical workbench. Next came water by way of plastic pipe. Finally, I built a rack of cross-hatched tubing out of inexpensive gas pipe from the local hardware store. The laboratory quickly became, and has remained, a place of exploration and excitement, resembling — according to Alice — one of those late-night-movie laboratories in which a mad scientist with wild hair and blazing eyes attempts to wrest from the gods that which no mortal can be allowed to discover, et cetera. She says the only difference is that there are no piles of dried leaves on the floor in the movie labs. There certainly are in mine.

Not long after I'd put the lab together, I received a call from a colleague in Sweden who said that he was currently the scientific organizer of an international symposium on marijuana, to be held in Stockholm. He said that he would love to have me come and present a paper on my work. As modesty has never been one of my strong points, I gave dark and subtle hints that of course I had successfully tied the marijuana world to that of the phenethylamines (this was the substance of the Trinidad adventure aboard the Chusan). However, I told my caller, I just didn't have the money needed to accept his offer.

I was unaware of the fact that the Swedish Government had just nationalized the pharmacy industry, and one of the rationalizations they had advanced for this heavy-handed action was that now the profits from this health-industry could be directed towards research and education. "Re-

search" included such things as sponsoring international meetings on drug-related projects. And "drug-related" included such things as marijuana.

I received a call back in a couple of days saying that a round-trip ticket was on its way, that hotel reservations for a five-day meeting had been made for me, and that they were looking forward to my research report on nitrogen analogues of marijuana. I was screwed.

So, for the next two-score days, I squirreled myself away in the lab thinking up, making, and tasting new compounds that could be seen as nitrogen analogues of marijuana. I didn't want to rekindle the in-the-ring structures which had been the principal actors in the A.R.L. and Frantic Freddie circus, so I designed a new class of analogues with the nitrogen atom outside of any ring. These would be THC-like compounds with the phenethylamine chain hanging off the aromatic ring. I put together a series of furanyl and pyranyl analogs and wrote it all up as a paper to present in Stockholm. None of the compounds had any activity, so it had to sail on its chemistry, and that was frankly not too well polished.

As with most such ventures, the real reward came from an unexpected direction. After I had given my paper, I was approached by a middle-aged gentleman, wearing a tie and expensive clothes, who spoke excellent English. He said that he was most appreciative of work such as mine, in part because it had been carried out in a private laboratory, without outside financial support.

I acknowledged his appreciation and volunteered that, should he be in the United States some day, he might like to visit my place. He accepted my offer, but then told me that he had a lab of his own, and would be most honored if I would visit it. Alarm bells rang; I did not really wish to be caught in the basement of some brownstone residence outside of Stockholm, admiring a bubbling flask filled with LSD.

Well, I said, someday maybe, eventually, next time, when we are all under less social pressure. No problem, my well-dressed gentleman said; now was the perfect time.

So here I found myself, being swept out of the conference room and into his car. We dropped by the Karolinska Institute to visit my friend and colleague who worked there. He knew my companion, so I had my very first hint that his invitation was on the up-and-up. We left the institute and drove on into the center of the city, and the next thing I knew, we were pulling up in front of a two-storey building in downtown Stockholm. A guard ran out to the car, opened the door for us, and let us into the building that was surely a block by a block in size. A little while later it all became clear. I had just been given a midnight tour of the Swedish equivalent of the FBI laboratories. My host was Peter Mille, the head of the Narcotics Lab in Stockholm, and what he had called "my own little lab" was the state Big Thing!

I had never seen so many instruments, so much equipment, so many reference samples and such a professional dedication to excellence. There were instruments which would document indentations from scratch pads, and which could lift fingerprints from Styrofoam cups. There were the spectra of dust from carpet sweepings, and the chromatograms of the fumes from arson cases. But I was especially taken by a display of drawer after drawer of tablets, pills and capsules which he showed me. In Sweden, he said, there are, or have been, some 70,000 varieties of items that have been legally available for health purposes. Here, he said, embracing the entire collection with a flourish of his hand, is a reference sample of each. I was totally seduced. When I finally got back to the United States, I vowed that I would make such a collection, from the prescription world, from the over-the-counter shelves in the local drug store, and certainly from the health food suppliers and supermarket outlets that were, after all, the major distributors of our popular medicines. Get one of everything. I found out that we had in the United States, not thousands, but millions of different types of pills and capsules easily available. I have collected and organized a few thousand of them, but my collection is far from being complete, and I now know that my project is too large to ever be completed. The numbers are immense. We are truly a nation of drugs.

The personal treasure of the experience was Dr. Mille's invitation afterwards to come to his house, meet his wife Celia, and share dinner. After a modest but excellent meal, I went upstairs to Celia's private quarters where there was a piano and several musical instruments. Peter lowered a canoe-like structure from the ceiling and lit a large number of candles in it. I tuned up the violin that their daughter had left behind when she went off to school, and Celia and I played Mozart violin sonatas for several hours while Peter listened quietly from the downstairs living room.

Years later, I did indeed have the pleasure of showing my friend Peter my laboratory, here on the Farm. It was certainly more modest than his, but no less loved by its owner.

## CHAPTER 11. ANDREW

One evening, in the late 1950's, I was invited to a musical soiree at an old, comfortable home in the Berkeley Hills. I brought my viola with me, as there was a promise of some string quartet sight-reading. The only person I remember from that evening was a handsome, proper gentleman with a small gray moustache and the residues of an English accent. During coffee, after the music playing was over, he struck up a conversation. He asked me if I had ever heard of the Owl Club, in San Francisco?

I had not, so he began painting a picture of a rather fascinating group, with many interests in all areas of art, drama and music. He mentioned that there was a need for a viola in their symphonic orchestra, and would I want to sit in for a couple of evenings (they met once a week for a little bit of rehearsal, a lot of talk, and too much gourmet food and wine) to see if I liked them and they liked me. It sounded like quite an adventure, so I readily said yes.

The Club proved to be a group of gentlemen from a broad array of political and professional backgrounds, leaning somewhat towards the political right and the well-to-do. The regular members carried the major share of the operating expenses, but for the actual participants in stage and concert shows, playwrights and composers, those who contributed time and effort to Club activities such as the orchestra, a couple of bands, and a chorus, the costs were largely subsidized by the Club itself. I found the camaraderie to be extraordinary. The modest time investment was completely rewarding, and I developed a number of close friends.

On my first evening at the Club, I met a Dr. Andrew Walker Scott, who proved to be an interesting collection of contradictions. Among the rituals attendant upon joining this group of rather conservative gentlemen — with whom I still regularly break both bread and Bach — was the indoctrinating lecture explaining the rather rigid behavior patterns expected of new members. Andrew was appointed my *pater familias*. He was a retired

member of the medical community and had the stern, authoritative demeanor necessary to thoroughly intimidate a young, impressionable neophyte.

I eventually saw the human side of Andrew. One year, at the summer Owl Encampment (which takes place in a quiet forest preserve about two hours from the Bay Area and lasts two weeks), he came up to me (I had been in the Club for a few years, by then, and although still relatively young I was not the neophyte anymore) and asked if I would like to play a Beethoven quartette.

"Sure!" I knew he was a dedicated amateur (in both the English and American senses of the word) second violin player, but had in recent years been finding fewer and fewer volunteering co-quartetters with whom to share his enthusiasm, possibly because he was not the world's best violinist, to put it gently. He often explained that the difficulties he was having were due to the fact that he was sight-reading the music (for non-musicians, this means you're seeing it for the first time and playing it as you read).

I grabbed my viola and we were joined by two others for a little chamber work.

"What shall we play?" he asked.

"Whatever you'd like, Andrew," I replied, "Perhaps one of the middle quartettes?"

"No," he said, "Since I've never seen those quartettes before, maybe better an early one; it's probably easier. How about Opus 18, Number four? I just happen to have the music here with me."

"Sounds good to me," said I. We started sawing away, and about halfway through the first movement, during a brief lull, I glanced at his music sheet and saw that all the bowing and fingering had been carefully written in for the second violin part, and in Andrew's very own hand. Sight-reading indeed! I was careful not to let my eyes stray in that direction again, but found myself smiling at the thought of this very proper old gentleman's little pride-saving maneuver.

But I also had the pleasure of seeing his innocent side.

With my mother's death and the year's stay with my father, wife and son in Europe, I had arranged an extended leave of absence from the Club which, as it worked out, evolved into a period of several years. This was, in effect, tantamount to a resignation.

During these years, I was uncertain as to just how I should carry on my research work in the area of the psychedelic drugs. There were good arguments for remaining above-ground, publishing everything, and staying in intimate touch with the positives and negatives of the scientific community. There were also good arguments for going underground — the political climate being what it was — suffering isolation from fellow scientists, but never again required to explain, justify or defend my interests.

I had not yet made my decision.

About this time, I received a request to give testimony to Representative Claude Pepper's traveling road show, the House Committee on Crime in America, which was holding a series of public forums across the country. Did I say "request?" I should have said that I received a subpoena to present myself and answer questions. It was my first, and presumably my last, opportunity to get a close-up view of the body politic in full function.

I had the pleasure of meeting the investigating counsel in his office ahead of time. He sat behind a desk in an anteroom to the public hearing chamber (all this was on one of the top floors of the Federal Building in San Francisco), and as I sat there, an aide brought him a mountain of papers. I guessed that they had something to do with me. The lawyer began leafing through the stack. A court reporter sat nearby with fingers poised over the keys of his magic machine. I watched and waited.

He raised his head and glanced at me, "You know that you have the right to have a lawyer present with you?"

"Why would I need a lawyer?"

He didn't bother answering; I hadn't expected him to. With an efficient sweep of head and hands, he returned again to browsing through his paper mountain, while the secretary tap-tap-tapped, recording these priceless comments for history.

A photograph came out of the mountain. It was handed to me; a picture of the already rather famous Augustus Owsley Stanley, being led in handcuffs from his Orinda LSD lab in a recent arrest.

"Do you recognize this man?"

"I believe that is the picture of Mr. Stanley which appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle a few days ago, in conjunction with his arrest."

"Why would you invite a known felon to your home?"

"Who?"

"Mr. Stanley," said the lawyer.

"Mr. Stanley has never been to my home," I said calmly and truthfully.

Our eyes met. The only sound was the tapping of the court reporter's keys. Then another paper from the stack. This one was not shown to me, and there was no way I could see it.

"Why would you turn down six million dollars to set up a lab in Jamaica?"

Well, well, well, thought I. The question had brought back an interesting memory. A few years earlier, when I was still employed at Dole, I'd had a visit from a couple of rather young entrepreneurs, one small and dark, the other tall and red-bearded. They told me they were interested in setting up a "legal" laboratory for the production of psychedelic drugs known and unknown, and they were offering me the chance to do the setting up. It would be on the island of Jamaica, and I was to be paid three

million dollars now and three million more upon completion of an operational lab.

When I asked who was proposing to pay for this venture, my visitors said that it was a group of businessmen. They didn't volunteer names, and I didn't ask for any, since I wouldn't have recognized them anyway. I didn't have much information about the world of business. But I did have instincts, and they were telling me that there was something not exactly kosher about either the young men or their proposal.

Although Barbarossa tried to convince me that this was the chance of a lifetime, I declined, very politely. I had a perfectly fine job, I said, with a very good chemical company, and didn't really want to relocate to another country right at the moment.

Not until now, staring across the desk at the hard-faced lawyer, had I been given a clue as to the true source of the offer! I wondered what department of the government had set up what was probably some sort of "sting", and what exactly they had expected to accomplish.

My reply to the lawyer was simple, "What would I do with six million dollars?"

The flavor of my forthcoming testimony had been established.

The actual hearings were well attended, but I suspect that the audience was not completely unbiased. This was San Francisco, after all. The act directly ahead of me was the testimony of the famous Art Linkletter, at that time widely regarded as an expert on LSD use, due to the tragedy of his daughter's death, which — although it had occurred some time after her taking of the drug — was blamed by her father and the press on an experiment with LSD.

I was nervous and didn't pay much attention to his testimony, except for an exchange concerning hippies and long hair.

Mr. Linkletter asked the congressmen if they knew why all hippies had long hair, held tightly with a rubber band?

"No," replied a suddenly interested Honorable Claude Pepper, "I've often wondered about that."

The audience sensed something dramatic about to happen, and began quieting down.

"It is really rather straightforward," said Mr. Linkletter, "It has to do with psychedelic drugs."

The audience was completely quiet now.

"When the hippie gets high, he can undo the rubber band, let his hair loose in all directions, and shake his head vigorously — , " here Mr. Linkletter shook his head energetically from side to side, in view of perhaps 200 fascinated listeners, some half dozen congressmen, and one attorney, " — to unleash the windmills of the mind."

Laughter erupted across the room, and the gavel pounded for order.

I was to be the next witness. Quite an act to follow.

My testimony began with some brief formalities, such as birth, education, and employment history, then quickly got to the subject most dear to their hearts: drugs. Much of the question and answer exchange has been lost to memory; I was in a sort of shock and responding from an instinctive urge to survive. Eventually, at one point, the lawyer asked me a question that was reasonable, but he asked it in a way that gave me control.

"How can you call yourself a scientist," he demanded, "And do the type of work you do?"

Never ask a witness on the stand a question that requires more than a yes or no answer. It is called "giving the witness the chalk." He can then suggest to the magistrate (or chairman, judge, member of Congress) that to give a meaningful answer, a little background would be needed, and ask for a bit of extra time, and he will almost always receive it. I suggested, asked, and received.

I started at the beginning. I talked about the family burdens of schizophrenia, the social costs of the hospitals and the welfare costs associated with depression and alcoholism, and I might even have talked about the heartbreak of psoriasis, although I don't specifically remember. A tear for every eye. Then, on I went to tell how recent research with the neurotransmitters was starting to bring understanding of the mental processes. And how an understanding of drugs that affected the integrity of the human brain in a controlled way might give insight into the processes of mental illness which are defined by just this type of disruption. I asked that this and that paper published in the scientific literature be entered into the record. I was just getting into the actual answer to the original question itself, when a recess was called.

I had no way of knowing what was discussed during the break, but when the hearing was reconvened, I was quickly thanked for my contributions and told that my testimony had been completed.

As I started to leave the hearing room, I was approached by a tall, well-dressed man with a neatly trimmed Van Dyke beard, and an air of total self-confidence.

"I am Doctor Paul Freye, he said, extending his hand. "And I am the head of the Narcotics Lab here in the Bay Area. I very much appreciated your contributions to today's hearings, and I'm very glad to meet you."

I said hello and shook his hand. I felt an immediate liking for him. We exchanged addresses and phone numbers, and agreed to meet again in the near future. I had no way of guessing that he would become one of my closest and most valued friends over the years to come, and that we would share many delightful hours in my laboratory, where he would occasionally come on a weekend to "get his hands wet," with the chemical manipulations that continually fascinated him.

Paul loved the chemistry of the psychedelics, but was absolutely adamant in his refusal to entertain the idea of altering his own consciousness by nibbling the resulting materials. "Call me chicken," he said once, laughing, "But the very thought of taking one of these drugs makes the hair stand up on my head!" I reassured him that I had no intention of trying to persuade him to take any kind of psychedelic, and that I didn't think of him as chicken at all. We both knew that it was just as well he wasn't tempted to become that kind of explorer, because his position within the establishment would have been severely compromised by any such undertaking.

But that was the only pleasant note on what was otherwise a very difficult day.

I avoided the press and television people outside the hearing chambers, but when I got home that evening there were more of them at the entrance to the Farm. I simply drove on by and waited them out, down at a nearby coffee shop.

The next day, there was a short report on the hearings in the morning paper, with my photograph, and a brief account of the regrets of a drug researcher concerning any of his discoveries which might have become social embarrassments.

There were very few comments made to me about the hearings or the publicity that resulted, but one of those few was from my long-ago quartetting companion, Andrew. He phoned a few days later to chat, and mentioned that he had for some reason thought of me recently. He had remembered, he said, that I used to play viola in the Club, and wanted me to know that there was a need of another fiddler, and might I be interested in considering re-activating my association with them?

Here was the innocent side of my conservative friend. He had indeed seen my picture in the paper, but hadn't bothered to read the text (perhaps because members of the Club often appeared in the newspapers for a variety of reasons). With his invitation, and without being in the least aware of it, he had decided for me the above-ground/under-ground issue. I knew that in the long run, my relationships with people would be more trouble-free and much more valuable, if they could be based on honesty rather than being clouded with deception and manipulation. I wanted, and I needed, an affirmation of my own integrity. I happily rejoined the Owl Club and, to this day, I put on a polite shirt and tie and carry my viola to the City and play in the orchestra every Thursday evening, without fail.

I should add that I am the only Club member who wears, and always has worn, black sandals instead of shoes, having decided a very long time ago that sandals were infinitely healthier for my feet than the airless, moist environment offered by the kinds of footwear worn by my fellow Owlers. They are used to my sandals, by now, and they are used to me.

## CHAPTER 12. MDMA

It was in 1967, Y.F.C (Year of the Flower Children), that I attended a conference on Ethnopharmacology that was held in Cole Hall, at the Medical School in San Francisco. The Medical Center was almost exactly in the center of the hippie movement, being only a very few blocks from the Haight Ashbury. The conference was conceived of by a marvelous curmudgeon and iconoclast named Daniel Efron, with whom I had an especially warm relationship. He balanced two roles with great skill. As the chief honcho of the Pharmacology Section of Psychopharmacology at the National Institute of Mental Health, he was an important voice in the directing of governmental funds to grant-seekers and, because of his influence, he was always being lionized wherever he went. But he was also very much an underminer of sacrosanct ideologies, as illustrated by the organization of this conference on ethnopharmacology. Our friendship was unique in that I had never applied for any government grant, thus had no self-serving reason to befriend him, and he knew it.

Once I had gone to a pharmacology meeting at Stanford where he was chairing one of the afternoon sessions. I sat in the audience, in the front row, and at one point caught his eye as he scanned faces. After the last talk, I met with him, whisked him away from the professional pharmacologists, and took him off to the Farm, followed by a friend, Saul Snowman, who came in his own car. Dr. Snowman was at that time an assistant professor of pharmacology at a well-known medical school on the East Coast, and this was one of our few meetings in person; most of our communication had been by letter. On the way Danny asked to stop at a store where he might find a box of candy for my wife Helen because he felt he was certainly going to be imposing upon her as a guest.

At the Farm, we all collapsed into chairs, and everyone seemed suddenly to become human again. Danny announced that, (1) he had always wanted to see my lab, and (2) he used to play the trumpet in high-school in

the eastern Europe of his childhood. So we went to the lab where my son Theo had prepared a fire in the fireplace, and Danny had his first view of it. There was a nice, crackling fire. Lichens appeared to be growing on a separatory funnel (they had been glued on years ago) which I had attached to the top of a metal rack; it also bore a funny face drawn in ink by the friend who gave it to me for good luck. The combination of face and greenish-yellow lichens had caused many a stranger to take a sudden surprised step backwards at the sight. Something was stirring and bubbling in a beaker on the bench, there were empty wine jugs on the floor, and innumerable bottles of chemicals on shelves overhead. To complete the picture, there was a beautiful colony of slender-legged, fragile spiders — the kind called Daddy Long Legs — moving ever so gently over the collection of clean round-bottomed flasks. Danny stood at the doorway looking in, cane in his right hand, the left extended, like Balboa viewing the Pacific Ocean.

"I have —" he said with an accent that defies transcription, "— spent *meell-yons* of dollars in *meell-yons* of laboratories, out of which has come *nott-ing*, and here is a laboratory in which I have spent *nott-ing* out of which has come *everry-ting!*" I was flattered.

When we returned to the house, I unearthed an old trumpet of mine with valves that luckily still worked, and offered Danny a chance to loosen up with Haydn's fourth concerto, my job being the piano reduction and Saul's role being that of attentive audience. Helen looked in now and then to check on our supply of wine and nibble-food. A couple of hours later we were happily exhausted and Saul, bless his heart, drove Danny home.

With his death, in 1972, Danny's protege, Earl Usdin, carried forward many of the projects that they had worked on together, and remarkably found yet additional energy to initiate some of his own. He, too, is now part of history. These two close friends contributed in untold ways to the science of psychopharmacology in this country.

The 1967 conference was entitled, "Ethnopharmacologic Search for Psychoactive Drugs." This meeting was, to my knowledge, the first time that most of the explorers in the area of psychedelic drugs were assembled in one place. And what a collection of rich interactions came from it!

Claudio Naranjo, a psychiatrist-anthropologist who had made his way years before through South American jungles to discover the Ayahuasca vine, gave a passionate talk which transmitted the excitement he felt about the jungle images of Ayahuasca-induced intoxication. In his experience, and in the experience of his patients, according to Claudio, the taking of plant extracts that contained harmaline invariably brought about visions of jaguars and other fauna and flora associated with the jungle in which the vine grew.

Also at the meeting was the well-known and respected botanist, Richard

E. Schultes of Harvard, and I had heard from him that he had never experienced these particular types of visual images with Ayahuasca.

I had the pleasure of introducing them, and mentioned their common interests. Claudio opened the conversation:

"What do you think of the jaguars?"

"What jaguars?"

A small silence.

"Are you personally familiar with authentic *Banisteriopsis caapi*?" asked Claudio, his voice slightly strained.

Richard looked at him closely. "I was the person who assigned it its name."

Claudio went on. "Have you ever taken the plant decoction itself?"

"Perhaps fifteen times."

"And never jaguars?"

"Sorry, only wiggly lines."

Claudio turned away. To my knowledge, they have not talked since.

And there was Chauncey Leake who started things on a loose note, talking of the primitive state of pharmacology at the turn of the century when just about the whole practice of medicine depended on the contents of two barrels in the basement, one labelled "Antiscrof" and the other, "Antisyph." The toxicologist and explorer Bo Holmstedt reviewed the history of the discovery of medicines in plants. There was Steven Szara of DMT fame, and Andy Weil, Gordon Wasson, Nathan Kline, Harry Isbell, Danny Freedman, and piles of others who have always been interested in, and have contributed to, this area of pharmacology. Several Russians couldn't make it for political reasons and, interestingly, neither could Albert Hofmann, the discoverer of LSD, due to the company policy of Sandoz, by whom he was still employed. A book came out of all this, published by the Government Printing Office, with a gentle disclaimer from the Public Health Service section of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. But very few outside of the group that was in attendance there really cared, and the meeting has now been virtually forgotten.

I had presented my paper on nutmeg and was wandering around the lobby outside where the real action was taking place, and a friend introduced me to a young professor of chemistry, Noel Chestnut, who expressed a general dissatisfaction with everything he had heard so far, except for one paper on essential oils and their conversion to amphetamine derivatives. He said he would like to meet the author. I said, "I am the author," and thus began a friendship which has lasted to this day.

Noel saw that the unusual potency of my drug DOM, and its deceptively simple structure, could be the basis of a hypothesis. If the compound were converted, through some form of metabolic oxidation, to a chemical class called quinones, then a reasonable end-product would be an indole.

And one of the principal neurotransmitters in the human, serotonin, is an indole. This all just might have value in the area of mental health, which could lead to new grant applications and grant awards, and thence to the funding of graduate students and post-doctorate scholars doing marvelous metabolic studies.

A young chemist who had graduated from a large university in the Midwest came to San Francisco to take a post-doctoral position with Noel at about this time. His name was Dr. David Ladder, and when we met, flint was struck and fire found. My relationship with David developed into a productive union which still exists today. He is a shy, gentle, brilliant chemist, and we have published countless papers together and will, I hope, continue doing so in the future.

While Noel was wandering around the world on lecture tours and occasional sabbatical leaves, he appointed me a sort of surrogate "daddy-in-residence," for his graduate students at the University of California in San Francisco. One of these was a dear, dear sprite appropriately named Merrie Kleinman, who told me that she had done an experiment with two very close friends of hers, and that they had used 100 milligrams of N-methylated MDA (MDMA). She shared very little about the experience, but implied that it was quite emotional, and that there had been a basically good reaction from all three of them.

This was not the first time I had heard mention of MDMA. In fact I had synthesized it back at Dole in 1965 but had never before met someone who had personally tried it. I resynthesized it and found it unlike anything I had taken before. It was not a psychedelic in the visual or interpretive sense, but the lightness and warmth of the psychedelic was present and quite remarkable. I began collecting comments concerning its effects from a number of subjects under a variety of circumstances, and I developed a great respect and admiration for the material.

I had begun giving a course in forensic toxicology on the Berkeley campus of the University of California. It usually gathered between 20 and 30 students, and over half of them managed to stay in there with me to the very end of the course. I doubt that any of them were a great deal wiser in matters of forensic toxicology, but most of them had been exposed to what I considered very useful and important information and had been adequately entertained. One of my more devoted students was a sweet youngster, a guitar player, who had the world's most devastating stutter. Just before most words that starting with a vowel (or, for that matter, with any one of several consonants), he would tie up completely until he either (1) inhaled and exhaled at a measured pace several times, or (2) jerked his head to one side and changed the starting word. His name was Klaus.

Klaus was intrigued with MDA and, for some reason, with its N-methylated homolog, MDMA. He actually arranged to find lab space

somewhere in the Life Sciences Building and set up a summer project to work out useful procedures for making MDMA. He was in perennial torment with his speech impediment whenever I happened to see him — which was rarely — and after a while, I lost all contact with him.

It was some time later, as I was bouncing across campus to a meeting, that I spotted him, and — with only a moment's pause — remembered who he was.

"How are you?" I asked, awaiting the breathing pattern or the shift of head.

"In excellent spirits," came the reply, with only a suggestion of a rolled R in the word, "spirits."

"And your music?" I continued bravely, now doubting that I had identified him correctly.

"Only once in a while." The O's in "only" and "once" were each being held just a mite too long, so I was reassured that this was indeed my Klaus.

"But," he added, without breaking stride, "That methylated MDA allowed me to do new things with myself."

"What, for example?" I asked.

"Well, for one thing, I have some control over my talking for the first time. And I've decided to take up a new career."

"And that is — ?"

"Speech therapy."

I have lost track of Klaus, but I believe that his was one of the earliest clues I had that there was something akin to snake-oil — in the sense of an apparent cure for anything that ails you — about this elixir called MDMA.

Another early trial showed yet a different view of its action.

A good friend of mine, Charles Miller, had been following my research for many years, and he occasionally asked if I thought it might be useful to him to someday have an experience. I had always put such ideas off to some undefined future time, as I felt uncomfortable with what might come up from his unconscious in any opening experience. Although he was a gentle and giving person, he was strongly opinionated — actually inflexibly opinionated — and a committed alcoholic. And with his daily change of state with alcohol, there was a daily change of personality, revealing towards the end of the evening an outspoken, largely anti-everything person; especially anti-intellectual and anti-homosexual.

That is a combination that has always been a danger signal to me, and I slowly came to believe that Charlie had in some way come to peace with many of the difficulties that had surely tormented him in his youth. Not necessarily resolved them — but at least gotten them buried deeply and safely into the unconscious. And I was not at all certain that I wished to be the person who provided the instrument to unearth any of it.

His wife, Janice, had never expressed any interest in such exploration,

although she too knew intellectually of my research interests. But it was she who called me one day asking if she (and her younger son) might use a few hours of my time — to answer a question or two. It was Janice who had the questions; her son was apparently coming along to give her moral support, as he was quite worldly in the drug area. I suggested that afternoon. They accepted. As I have often noted, when the time is right, it becomes unmistakably obvious that it is right.

Janice, her son, and I, all three of us, took 120 milligrams of MDMA in the early afternoon, and the son went off by himself. At about the half-hour point, the usual "awareness" time, Janice gave no indication of effects, nor were there any changes at the 40 minute nor at the 50 minute point. A few off-hand comments were offered.

"My throat is dry."

"I'll get you a glass of water." Which I did. It did no good.

"I'm having trouble breathing."

"So, breathe as best you can." I noticed by the reflection in the window where we were, at the back of the house, that she had no difficulty breathing when I wasn't watching her.

We walked up the hill, to an area I had leased out to the condominium builders on the neighboring land for the storage of lumber. There were several 'no smoking' signs around as fire warnings.

"Do you think I smoke too much?"

"Do *you* think you smoke too much?"

"I don't think so."

"Then the answer is: probably not."

It was now an hour into the experiment, and still no acknowledgment of any activity from the MDMA. Then, came the unexpected question, the "off the wall" question.

"Is it all right to be alive?"

"You bet your sweet ass it's all right to be alive! It's a grace to be alive!"

That was it. She plunged into the MDMA state, and started running down the hill, calling out that it was all right to be alive. All the greens became living greens and all the sticks and stones became vital sticks and stones. I caught up with her and her face was radiant. She told me some of her personal history which she knew well, and which I knew well, but with which she had never come to peace.

She had come into the world by an unexpected Caesarean section and her mother had died during the delivery. And for fifty years she had lived in the guilt of having had her life given her at the cost of her mother's life. She had been in therapy with her family physician for about three years, largely addressing this problem, and apparently what she needed was the acknowledgment that it was all right to be alive.

I didn't hear from her for a couple of months. When she did call, she volunteered that she still felt very much at peace, and had discontinued her therapy.

In most of my own early experimental trials, I concentrated on the area of 80 to 100 milligrams, and I used the word, "window," in my notes to describe the effects. It enabled me to see out, and to see my own insides, without distortion or reservations.

Helen and I would occasionally take a 6:00 PM Friday to 4:00 PM Sunday trip with our friends — George and Ruth Close, whom we had known from the old Cal Hall days — on a special train out of Oakland called the Reno Fun Train. As the train proceeded eastwards across the Sierras, the mass of people would get increasingly noisy, with much food and drink, and even dancing in a music car. (After some thirty hours in the gambling casinos, the return trip was considerably more subdued.) Helen was basically uncomfortable with drugs, but perfectly at ease with an occasional drink; the Closes were, at that time, naive about any altered states except those induced by alcohol. On one of our trips, during our private foursome dinner with the cracked crab and avocado dip in the noisy car, I asked them if they would be offended if I filled my glass with quinine-water and the contents of a small vial, rather than with a martini. Why? An experiment, I said. Okay, they said, why not!

It worked. It seemed that my gradual intoxication locked into theirs very smoothly. They forgot that I was using a chemical rather than vodka. So, for a while, I referred to MDMA as my low-calorie martini.

Not long after that, I met and became very close to a likeable couple of professional researchers and teachers from Germany, Ursula and Adolph Biehls, who were studying for a year with Terry Major. Dolph, as he called himself, had taken a modest dosage of LSD one day and his experience had been extraordinarily complex, difficult and frightening. He continued for several weeks having problems with reintegration.

I suggested, after considerable thought, that — although a new psychedelic experience would certainly not be appropriate — MDMA might be of some help to him. It was not a psychedelic, I emphasized, and explained the "window" concept, and why I thought he could perhaps use it to repair himself.

I shared the experience with the two of them. It was a memorable day. There was verbal honesty without reserve, and the experiment led to an intimate friendship which would last between the three of us for several years. Dolph's LSD trauma was resolved in those few hours, and he emerged, in his own words, newborn. Another hint of snake-oil. MDMA, it was beginning to be apparent, could be all things to all people.

There is another part of the MDMA story which should be told, and it concerns a kind, elderly psychologist who was everyone's idea of what a

grandfather should be, both in looks and demeanor. He listened intently, laughed heartily and often, and — as Alice says — gave you the kind of hug you wanted to stay in forever.

Adam had his practice in Oakland, on the second floor of a house which had been converted into office spaces. For the most part, his therapy was of the usual fifty-minute variety, but a small part of his practice followed quite another path, and was kept secret from all but his closest friends — and those with whom he chose to do his special work — until his death. It is still kept secret by those who knew and loved him, and will undoubtedly remain so.

This quiet practice involved the use of psychoactive materials which would allow the client to step around his psychological barriers and address himself and his unconscious directly. The use of such drugs followed a technique which he had evolved over a couple of decades.

Adam would go to the house of the client for these sessions. He always arranged ahead of time that the person taking the journey would have available family photographs which could be used to stimulate associations and prod open memories of childhood. He also told his client to frame for himself, before the day of the session, questions to which he wanted answers. After the drug had been given, Adam — not taking anything himself — would sit nearby to give assurance and a comforting touch of the hand, if needed, or to help untangle any knot or problem that might arise during the experience. The hard work was up to the client, and the answers to questions had to come from within the client's own psyche.

Adam used a range of materials, from the relatively gentle MDA, to LSD or ibogaine, which he used for an all-out assault on psychological resistance. His sources of drugs were seemingly impeccable, usually reputable chemical supply houses, but it was in his nature to verify everything, and he would often call upon me to inspect a new material for final word as to identity and purity.

In 1977, age was sneaking up on Adam and he was allowing his patient load to dwindle by attrition. I knew that he was getting ready to gather in his shingle and let the lease lapse on his Oakland office. One day, he asked me to drop by to see if I wanted to accept some of the unusual mementos which he had acquired over the years. There were bits of bark from here, and strange powders from there. He had small twigs and roots of Iboga, and discovery samples of the first collections of Yajé from South America. I spent a couple of hours with him and gratefully accepted his botanical museum.

I had decided, on this occasion, to bring with me a small bottle of my "low-calorie martini," MDMA hydrochloride, to tempt him to try something new. Knowing his fondness for MDA, I assured him it had some of the

virtues of MDA, without the "stoning" properties, and it had something extra, a special magic, which just might catch his attention. He told me that he might or might not try it, but that if he did, he would let me know what he thought of it.

He phoned me a few days later to tell me that he had abandoned his plans for a quiet retirement. I know none of the details of the increasingly complex network which he proceeded to develop over the following decade, but I do know that he traveled across the country, introducing MDMA to other therapists and teaching them how to use it in their therapy. They all had to begin, of course, by learning its effects in themselves. Adam believed (as do I) that no therapist has the right to give a psychoactive drug to another person unless and until he is thoroughly familiar with its effects on his own body and mind.

Many of the psychologists and psychiatrists whom Adam instructed developed small groups or enclaves of professionals who had been similarly taught, and the information and techniques he had introduced spread widely and, in time, internationally.

It is impossible to ever know the true breadth of therapeutic MDMA usage achieved by Adam during the remaining years of his life, but at his memorial service, I asked an old friend of his whether she had a guess as to the number of people Adam had introduced to this incredible tool, either directly or indirectly. She was silent for a moment, then said, "Well, I've thought about that, and I think probably somewhere around four thousand, give or take a few."

It has proven to be such a valuable psychotherapeutic adjunct, I truly believe it will persevere in therapeutic use for a long time to come, despite the structuring of the law that has come about in many countries to prohibit its use and discourage its study.

As one psychiatrist put it, "MDMA is penicillin for the soul, and you don't give up penicillin, once you've seen what it can do."

## CHAPTER 13. TIME-STOP

I realize that, for many people, pot — marijuana — is of value primarily as a drug that relieves stress and smooths out tensions. In general, I have regarded pot as a disappointment and a waste of time. It has, for me, really only two rewards: food tastes exceptionally good under its influence, and time slows to an extent that makes it possible to play clock-stopping games.

Once, I chose to use it just as a de-stressor, after a somewhat brittle experiment with a new drug combination, and found myself — not by choice — in a time-stopping experience that was truly frightening.

This particular day in April, sometime in the 1970's, Theo was away at college and Helen was visiting a relative for a few days, so I had the house to myself. At that time I was occasionally using either of two interesting experimental procedures. One of these, which I called "priming," was the taking of an active drug at a certain interval of time following an inactive one. If the observed effects of the "active" drug (the primed drug) are different due to the presence of the inactive drug (the priming drug) then some understanding of the process of potentiation might be gotten. The other of these, which I called "piggybacking," involved the taking of an active drug during the drop-off phase of another, different, active drug. The use of such a "false supplement" can reveal differences of qualitative action that can help define both drugs more accurately.

On this occasion, the first (and active) drug was MDOH, and the piggyback drug was MDA. I had always had a feeling in the back of my mind that these two materials might somehow merge their identities in the course of being metabolized in the body; they have very similar actions and very similar structures. They differ only by the presence of an oxygen atom, and the body is quite capable of adding (or removing) an oxygen atom in the normal process of biotransformation.

So, at 2:00 PM, I had taken 100 milligrams of MDOH, and had re-

corded a typical chronology and response to it. Later in the afternoon, as the effects were receding — at 4:30 PM, to be exact — I took a similar dose of MDA. Would they see each other? Would the MDA be similar enough to the MDOH to act as a supplement, and rekindle the now-waning effects of the MDOH? Or would there be some refractoriness from the first material which would make the MDA relatively ineffective? Or, for that matter, might there be an exacerbation of effects that might indicate some sort of synergy?

The effects were largely additive. At the usual awareness time of MDA — about a half-hour — I noted a familiar skin-crawling, and a quiet entry into a pretty stoned state. The expected spectrum of physical annoyances common to both drugs was there, the teeth clenching and irregularities of the motor muscles of the eyes. It was quite easy to trigger nystagmus. My handwriting was going downhill, and my motor coordination on the piano was compromised.

Another hour, and I found that there was a little time-slowning and I could play some visual games; I could get the shapes created by light and shadow from the setting sun (shining through tree leaves) to take on human forms.

By 7:00 PM, I was back down to a plus-one and at 8:00 PM, I was essentially baseline, with a somewhat sore jaw from the teeth clenching, and a weary psyche from the rest of the day's activities. That is why it was one of those rare times when I chose to use a little marijuana, to escape the stress. I smoked a 200 milligram sample of a gift material which had been sitting around, unused, for a couple of years. This was at 8:15 PM, and what followed was simply incredible.

By 8:28 PM (thirteen minutes had elapsed), I was aware of the first indications of marijuana effect, which was, for me, about the expected time. This first alert was followed by a sequence of waves of sensation, each wave bringing with it an increased slowing of time. It was uncanny, how these seemed to be evenly and regularly spaced, but as I looked at the clock's second hand, I noted that the waves must have been getting closer and closer together. Actually, this impression was due to the fact that the second hand was moving ever more slowly, rather than that the waves were different in their spacing.

My note, written at 8:31 PM, stated that there was considerable subjective time passage, out of proportion to the clock's activity, but that the music on the radio had no pitch distortion at all.

The next entry was made a couple of weeks later, at 8:35 PM, and I had just felt another wave of slowing hit me. And, just as the second-hand finally made it all the way around the clock face to 8:36 PM, there was yet another wave.

I was getting scared.

What was the status of my body? I tried to take my pulse, which is a totally ridiculous thing to do, when it takes forever to go from one heartbeat to another. You lose track of one thump-pa by the time you think that another thump-pa has just taken place. And the actual thump-pa itself is, of course, spread out across the countryside and is awfully difficult to identify. Is it the thoo- or is it the ump- or is it the -pa that counts? I noticed that there were three sounds that occurred during the time that the slow second-hand moved from one mark to another, so maybe my pulse was 180. Maybe not. There was no way for me to find out.

It was now 8:38 PM and I knew intellectually that only twenty-five minutes had elapsed since I felt the first effects. Twenty-five days seemed a better estimate. I got up and went to the piano and tried some of the Chopin First Nocturne. My fingers were somewhat sloppy, but the pitch was absolutely correct. I thought, if a second takes so long to pass, why doesn't the pitch, at so many vibrations per second, seem to be way down there, basso? Could it be that the sound receptors in my ear are also somehow slowed down, so that everything is right back up there in sync again? That makes no sense.

I abandoned the piano and returned to the couch and clock. In spite of my having played for quite a while, it was now only 8:41 PM. I thought, I am so far above a plus-three, there are no valid numbers. I can't use the plus-four symbol, since that stands for something quite apart from a stoned psychedelic state, so let's call this a 3.7 plus. Try the pulse again. Now, there is nothing to be heard at all, so either the heart has stopped beating (is that what happens if time comes totally to a stop?) or the rumble sounds are so diffuse, they cannot be identified. But, then, why should a piano sound be okay, but a heart sound be screwy? Should I call for help?

By 8:53 PM, I had made my way through miles of house to the dining room where the phone was located, and dialed the number of my friend, George Close. It was with horror and dismay that I discovered the phone was dead. There was absolutely no sound on it. I let my gaze drift around the room, looking for something to quiet the rising panic. I wasn't certain just what I was looking for; something that would tell me which way to turn, what to do. I was forever captive in the house, and as it had taken me so long a time just to go from one room to the next, I knew that I could never get as far as the car, let alone drive it! What kind of extraordinary experience would it be, to drive a car with such extreme mis-estimating of time! I certainly didn't intend to find out.

And then it happened. I was startled back into the moment by the sound of the phone ringing in my ear. The connection had just been completed, and the Close's phone was ringing. Forever went by, then there was a second ring. Forever again, then a third ring. Ruth answered and her voice sounded normal (so voices as well as music didn't observe

the changed time rules).

I spoke into the phone, "I'm in a funny place, Ruth, and I'm a bit scared. Could George come out and make sure that I will be findable, if things progress much more?"

I knew that made very little sense, but Ruth assured me that George was on his way, and I decided to stay on the phone and use her voice as an anchor in this strange storm.

I had never before been involved in a conversation that lasted for a century.

Now, my self-classification was at a 3.9 plus. I remember, at one point, asking Ruth to stay on the line while I went to the office for a piece of paper and a pen, and to note how long I was gone. I wanted to get a current estimate of how long something seemed to take, having her as the objective time-keeper. She said she would hold on and wait for my return. My plan was to start my internal subjective stop-watch and try to deduce just how much time it would take me to reach the office, pick up something, and return to the phone. Then I would get the real elapsed time from Ruth, and divide one into the other to get my "slowing factor."

I put the receiver down on the table and headed in the direction of my office. There will never be a way of reconstructing the myriad thoughts that went through my mind as I walked down the hall. One thought did stick in my mind, though. How can a person address, objectively, the subjective time-passing sense? How could I attend to an internal clock with some accuracy, so that I might give Ruth a really close guess as to just how long my round-trip really took me, subjectively? Estimating seconds by the one-thousand-and-one, one-thousand-and-two process was no good, since apparently the flow-of-words clock appeared to be running at about the right rate; it was the elapsed-time clock that was slowed down.

I reached the office, and for the life of me could not remember what it was I had intended to get. I looked around for something that I might be able to use to shed light on one clock or the other. Had I intended to type something? Calculate something? Read something? The world around me was colorful and moving, but — enjoyable as visual synthesis might be — I didn't want to let it take over. I had to stay in verbal contact. Which reminded me that the phone was off the hook and Ruth was at the other end, waiting. I had completely forgotten her, and hoped that she had waited for me.

I made it back, and she was still there.

"Sorry to be so long. I got distracted."

"How long do you think you were away?"

"Twenty, thirty minutes?"

"You were gone one minute, or a few seconds more than a minute."

So the factor was about 20 to 1 between the clocks. I knew that there

had been no more waves of slowing for quite a while now, and somehow I sensed that there was repair on the way. After some long and complex discussions on the phone about the essential nature of the universe, I heard George drive up, and I let Ruth go on to bed. George came through the front door in great good humor, checked my pulse (it was about 110) and in general found me to be in an okay physical place. I'm pretty sure — now — that my heart had been all right throughout the evening.

I survived. I still have no idea how two clocks (the word-sequence and pitch clock, and the apparent-elapsed-time clock) could run at such different rates at the same time, and still both always point to the same hour.

A few days later, I re-assayed the same amount of the same marijuana lot (without the other drugs on board, of course) and there was a modest intoxication, but negligible time distortion. It must have been that combination, or me that day, or the relative positions of the planets. I will probably never know.

## CHAPTER 14. ALEPH-1

It was in the year 1976 that I synthesized the first sulfur-containing psychedelic, called para-DOT, working at a distance with a friend, Dr. Charles Wyndham Mantle, who was a Professor of Chemistry at a large university on the East Coast.

The name I used for this group of the 4-position sulfur-analogues of TMA-2 was the Aleph family, calling upon the Hebrew alphabet. Using this code, the first and simplest base was Aleph-1, and with the dutiful preparation of simple homologues, these could then be named in sequence, i.e., Aleph-2, Aleph-3, etc.

Aleph-1 was, as I said, the first and simplest of the group, but my experience with it was far from simple. In fact, it was my first exposure to a state that was one of the most delicious blends of inflation, paranoia and selfishness I have ever experienced. It was a rare and prized occasion, neither predictable nor repeatable.

I hadn't named the family yet, at the time that I took the drug. The name was chosen because, with a reasonably modest dosage of para-DOT, I found myself in an extraordinary place which left me quite in awe of the chemical. It proved, as one could reasonably expect, to have been a *sui generis* occasion, but at the time I thought it might be a property of para-DOT (and perhaps even of its homologs) and, if so, the effect needed a name all its own. Hence, Aleph — the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet — and the first component of a new vocabulary.

The best explanation of that Aleph experience are my notes, written in real time (during the experience) which speak for themselves. Interestingly, as to level of effect, the experiment ranked about a plus two (the character of the effect can be defined, but it does not have an intensity that interferes with speech and function), from the sensory and physical point of view. From the mental point of view, it was certainly a full plus three.

It was extraordinary because of the strength and persistence of the

many concepts which paraded past me as a sequence of distinct entities. Each was fully realized in an instant, then immediately succeeded by the next. The cascade was not only unceasing throughout the several hours of the experiment; it held me in a state of continuous, exhilarating energy for which only one word seems appropriate: power.

I have not edited out any of the apparent nonsense because it belongs here as much as does the occasional valid insight.

My notes follow, including comments and explanations inserted at a later time, which are in brackets:

I took 5.0 milligrams of the hydrochloride salt of 2,5-dimethoxy-4-methylthioamphetamine, or para-DOT (Aleph-1) in water at 10:50 AM on July 2, 1976. Three hours since any food. It is now the (0:00) hour of the experiment.

(0:50) Warmth in lower legs.

(1:10) Walked out to the highway for the mail.

(1:35) Warm all over. Effects developing nicely.

(1:50) Very real effect! Quite nice. No sense modality emphasized. Not yet, anyway.

(2:30) Sat outside and got the concrete bag to float above the ground for a moment [*this was a bag of dry Portland cement, full, with a logo on it that showed a bulging bicep*]. Man on sack — Act of Power — but the act is not told, or it then would be only a Tale of Power. Or at best, a Tale of an Act of Power. An Act cannot be saved, relived — only the Tale persists. The act is past.

(2:33) How long does it take to assimilate an act? The act itself, an *augenblick* [*a quick glance*], is like a drug effect, in that to assimilate it is to recall the wave of concepts that flooded over you. They must be sifted, reconstructed, as best as can be done from memory.

But that is only the immediate drug effect. There are aspects more broad. The drug may be just the prototype of a family, the trunk of an as-yet-unexplored tree with an unknown number of limbs, more branches yet, and an infinity of leaves.

And we can explore the infinity on many levels but we all too often choose just one, the immediate present. One can pass an opened door again and again, each time seeing new things, but always the same doorway, the same door.

Go through — don't just look through. Looking is like a tale of power;

to go through is the act of power. And suddenly a new dimension of doors, each unexplored.

In this way the  $\text{SCH}_3$  becomes the SR [*the  $\text{SCH}_3$ , a methylthio group, is a clump of atoms found on the 4-position of Aleph-1. The "R" in SR symbolizes any of an infinity of other clumps that can be located there other than the  $\text{CH}_3$ , such as ethyl, propyl, etc.*]. It was lucky that the first door,  $\text{SCH}_3$ , was the revealer of the fact that there was an infinity of additional doors that might otherwise live to blush unseen. [Mixed metaphors are not uncommon in notes I have written under the influence.]

I am being inundated with "concepts" which are coming too rapidly to write down. This is not a verbal material, *ergo*, tales cannot be told.

It would be exhausting to go at this pace for long. Music is being ignored. Try eyes closed. Nothing.

Why pursue new things when I have the clues at hand — discovery is no longer needed.

This is a truly conceptually exploding experience. How can one ever hope to record this kind of intellectual supernova? If I were a historian I could be busy for life, writing down these scattered-about concepts, but that would be to no avail, as they would only be tales, and who would read them and who would believe them?

(2:45) Theo came over to the lab, and for a few minutes we discussed the problems associated with vacuum pumps. It was a laborious exchange of words when what was needed was an exchange of concepts. I knew immediately what I wanted to impart, and was terribly impatient and not too sociable. But imaginative expansion must be a private act.

There is the value of the tale. It is the history. The record contains the details, origins, interpretations and nuances — all the things that can be explored at one's leisure, later. But if the application to the real moment is valid, a simple allusion to it is all that is needed. This approaches non-verbal communication. The thumbtack which holds the message to the bulletin board. Too many people are preoccupied with the message; it is the thumbtack that is indispensable.

Can't write fast enough.

Next time try tape recorder.

With a variable speed as well as a start-stop.

No — don't need the stop.

True, I could talk faster than I could write, but talk is too slow and too noisy. Maybe just record key words and fill in the details later at leisure. But what if there were no later, since later there would be yet more key words. And who would want leisure anyway? If you did anything with it, it wouldn't be leisure. Therefore there is no leisure. Q.E.D.

Prokofiev's "Classical Symphony," on KKHI is somehow appropriate.

(3:00) This material is truly psychedelic. There are no sensory traps to catch your attention. My searching has been for better traps, more interesting and entertaining traps. But here there are no traps. It is certainly intriguing from the neuro-anatomical point of view, to continue the studies of SARs [SAR is the abbreviation for "structure-activity relationship," the correlation of biological action with chemical structure.] This is the intellectual psychedelic — no seductive sidelines to capture your interest. I want an hour to expand upon each minute.

How to record concepts?

One can't even record music without a time-dimension. But concepts are in no time — timeless, thus lasting, but untellable, only actable. Therefore, concepts are acts, acts of power.

This drug, too, shall pass. I want to scream about it to the world, but that would destroy it. This drug is power. I will talk about its effects, but I must not reveal its identity. I will have to explore through the open doorway alone.

I will put these concepts down as C's so that I can keep track of them later.

C: There must be an optimum RS to reveal the universal HS. [R, again, is any of the infinity of atom collections that could be put on the sulfur atom. If it were to be metabolically removed, an H would result. Perhaps all of these unknown modifications might give rise to a single "active" product.]

C: Maybe there is a personalized RS for every person! How can one tailor the identity of the R in the RS to fit the person, if the only endpoint is universality? Obviously, it must be done by individualizing each product. I must make all possible RS's.

(3:25) Let me try to write this up later tonight, when things slow down. For the moment, stick with concepts.

C: Music is basically like a tale. It must be transferred from the beginning to the end over time. Music CANNOT be POWER. History also involves time in its recording as well as in its recounting. History cannot be power despite what Toynbee says.

Concept = intensity = power. Tell NO ONE about this drug so that it can never be identified and there can be no moves made to destroy it.

C: \_\_\_\_\_." [I apparently censored this concept because it was so personal and private, I simply refused give anyone the right to it, including myself!]

Everything I turn to MOVES, not in the physical or visual sense, but in the conceptual and constructive sense. One can create a concept from anything, a speck of dust, an insect —.

Try eyes closed. Looks like cottage cheese, nothing there.

C: There are hints of this in all other psychedelic drugs, but always

lost in some sensory dimension.

C: This is what Huxley was trying to pick out of LSD and mescaline.

This is each of those — LSD and mescaline — devoid of the entertainment; pure conceptualization. It is frightening.

C: Try lab work. Why? I would merely prove I can do what I already know I can do. To what audience?

(3:38) On the radio, there is the news. Each item gives rise to concepts worthy of an essay. Repeal of the anti-capital punishment law allows, not systematic, but —, lost word — proceeding with capital punishment. See — there is no record of the lost word. It was an act and it's gone.

C: The record, the tale, is still needed, to provide recall. It must be valuable, otherwise why all of this scribbling? Let's try it without scribbling. Lie down a while.

(3:40) Conceptual cascade. I must record or, like a dream, all will be lost, and any personal value would be lost too.

C: I would like to call this the infinite 40 minutes but is it 85? I know when it started, but when does it stop? Only when I start to write history, not MAKE history.

C: How can this capacity be promoted? Controlled? Held? Recorded? Valued? And not made into an intellectual bomb? Does it even HAVE value?

C: Maybe like diabetes — with no insulin one spins one's wheels in an intellectual sea of conceptual glucose. Time is needed as insulin in the uncontrolled energy of concept.

C: This drug is like uncoupling phosphorylation at the intellectual level. [*The phosphate group is one of the body's ways of storing energy*].

C: Other drugs have the virtue of providing their own escape hatches, the sensory diversion. Therefore, this one is especially dangerous.

C: The thing to do is to focus one's diversions into a single sense — like the western world being glued to its T.V. or radio. McLuhan had it right.

Lying down is too much. I am out of control. It is better to be ambulatory so that escape can be made with visual input.

(3:55) La Bohème, rather surprisingly, is not maudlin but a true friend. And accents in written French express hand movements. The accent *aigu* closes off a vowel sound; the accent *grave* extends it. My concept cascade is truly schizophrenic. I am now wondering in whom I might confide this. David would understand the chemistry but not the content. Who would understand the content?

C: I am perhaps the Rosetta stone. The chemistry translates to the

concept, which translates to what? The power to act? There is a bit of tooth-rubby, and slight body warmth. Pulse is equal to Puccini exactly. Temperature is lab temperature, of course.

Maybe I had better not connect too closely with what is going on currently in the opera — locking pulse to music at the death scene?

Or is one not master of one's own fate?

**BIG C:** Feather. [*At this place in the notes there is a quail feather taped onto the margin*]. Here I have gone beyond my general limits. What Tim [Leary] said about exceeding one's genetics is right.

Music. The Sorcerer's Apprentice is appropriate. I am living my music.

C: Are we not all living our sensory environments? Not in them, but THEM (direct object).

C: And the role of words (I am going too fast again) such as Bonsai, Gestalt, Dharma! We all live our language and are captives of our language. Slaves to words which have no equivalent in another language. Therefore non-verbal is the only way.

C: I was concerned what music would come next, what mood would be next. Why not put on a tape loop? This to guarantee eternal stasis, i.e., reading history. But we'll never discover, that way. Creativity requires a knowledge of the past, then an ignoring of the past. The tape loop is the birth, growth, life, decline, death and reincarnation cycle. One must explode out of it non-verbally and instantaneously.

C: Is creativity the making of a thing or a revealing? If we have revealed it, it existed all along. We are never creating if all is contained in all of us. Only revealing. If all this is in all of us, it must be everywhere in the galaxy. And if non-verbal insight can be triggered chemically, then its chemistry must be universal. Intergalactic. The infinitely effective catalyst. This is the truly intergalactic communication — by chemistry. Not radio, or light, or X-rays, or binary codes. Chemistry.

(4:20) The pace begins to slacken. Ziegfried Idyls playing. How appropriate.

C: Sanity, right now, is the ability to avoid concepts for awhile. Find a mental tape that is comfortable and stay in it. This all started back at (2:30) therefore 110 minutes of infinity. I must write this all down. Spin into the 110 minutes my whole life philosophy. And add appendices with details, such as THIS RS, THIS dose, THIS identity. Why a scientific paper, anyway? They must be written, but no one reads them. The main value is in the writing of them, so they are of value only to the writer.

I am feeling most benevolent and empathetic.

If I do write this, it becomes another tale of power. I must keep my ACTS personal, and powerful, and private except when needed.

(4:30) Clearing fast. Back again. How can I go out and chop weeds without a note-pad? I might conceive of something and lose it (like so many unrecalled dreams). Maybe, all for the best. Madness would be the complete re-dreaming of one's dreams of a lifetime. At a single moment. That — the gestalt recall — would be an ACT. Power. The replay, event by event, is the TALE.

I hope I will be largely unable to decipher this later tonight.

Obviously still not down — going down maybe — not down. So, it is more than 110 minutes of infinity.

(4:40) Why fight to change Theo? He is my own genetics. Peace be made with the little time left. We will be dust again. Make light with what intellectual glimmer we can come forth with, during our brief passage from darkness to darkness.

(4:50) Must shut it off. Too exhausting. Call it 160 minutes of infinity.

#### STOP IT

— and so it came to pass. I am aware of my body, really, for the first time during these last 3 hours.

(4:55) Note a slight tremor, slight teeth clamp, body warmth, pulse a little slow, respiration normal, music Mozart.

Coming down nicely.

**LAST C:** I wonder if I will have a compensatory swing to intellectual sloth as reaction to all this?

How can one ever put "last" to a Concept? And on that I will rest. One CAN put last, by physical work.

(5:10) In good shape — toyed with a couple of concepts — dismissed them. I am repaired. My work is now ahead of me.

(1) Writing all this up as a private essay.

(2) Persisting in scientific publication in all peripheral areas as subterfuge, diversion. Keep all progressive work in my appendices. Code them "SH" — too informative.

(5:25) Quite clear. I can recognize the intellectual counterpart of the sensory power of DOM. I will keep this aspect of paradox to myself.

(6:10) Helen back home. All out.

And that's the body of the real-time notes from the Aleph-1 experience. I am sure a shrewd psychopathologist would have no difficulty in coming up with a clean-cut diagnosis. Of course, a second psychopathologist would probably come up with a different one.

In any event, these notes stayed completely untouched for a full decade. And it is interesting to see what that decade did bring in the area of the Aleph family. A total of three have been studied at some depth. All three are completely fascinating.

Aleph-2 (the RS where the R is the ethyl group) is a good representative to show the positives and the negatives. The effective dosage is somewhere between 5 and 8 milligrams. The individual experiences range widely from extraordinary imagery, to childhood events reliving, to hibernation, to intense intellectual confusion. Different things for different people. The dosage requirements turned out to be unpredictable as well. For instance, (and this was perhaps the stinger that put the whole area on ice for the decade) was one friend's comments on his para-dot experience. At 10 milligrams, he reported, it had mild effects, which he found rather uninteresting.

Perhaps there was a grain of truth in the concept that stated a possible need for the designing of each compound to fit each person. I abandoned the Alephs, eventually, in favor of the 2-carbon counterparts, the 2C-T's, which were thoroughly rich compounds in their own right, but a lot more predictable as to potency and quality of action.

However, for me, Aleph-1 was still the start of a whole new alphabet.

## CHAPTER 15. TENNESSEE

My wife, Helen, died on Sunday, September 11, 1977. A few days earlier, she'd had a stroke, a massive pontine hemorrhage, which hit her while she sat at her desk in the university library (she had only time to say to a friend, "My arm feels funny," before she lost consciousness). She had lost all vital abilities and was put on full life-support. I watched the sensitive encephalographic instruments being used to look for traces of brain activity. None were there. Increasing the sensitivity of detection in the search for some residues of brain function, only the heart signals could be seen; it alone remained strong. Breathing was done almost entirely artificially, by a large, impersonal machine that blinked its red light at some clock-run intervals.

There was no comfort I could give by staying in the hospital. I would accept a dinner with a friend here, or a family there, or simply stay at home, but always with a phone number and my exact whereabouts being left with the supporting crew in ICU. There were heartbreaks, "Her kidneys have failed," and there were hopes, "Urine is flowing again," and with each change I would rush to her side and watch the respirator breathe for her. But there was never a hint of brain activity.

I made a decision to place a long distance call to Germany to let Ursula and Dolph know of this tragedy. I knew they were about to leave for a trip to the Sahara. I also knew, from Ursula, that they were hoping she would return from the trip pregnant, thus strengthening a sometimes faltering marriage.

All I could think of was that I had to get hold of them before they left for the desert, to warn them of what was undoubtedly going to happen while they were away, out of touch.

It was only much later that I was able to acknowledge my real motives in making that call.

Soon, I faced a third and most difficult decision. The doctor who was

in attendance in ICU had the terrible task of objectively explaining to me all the likelihoods and unlikelihoods, the possibilities and impossibilities. Now, he told me, "Life may be maintained indefinitely, but there is no possible way that a dead brain will live again. What is to be done, and when it is to be done, is in your hands. I can't decide for you. No one else can decide for you."

The simplest way was to let her try to breathe without mechanical help, leaving it to her own body and soul to decide her fate. I asked to be alone with her, and I reached out to her silently, just touching her hand. It was warm, but there was no reflexive response of any kind. I asked her to tell me what to do. There was no audible reply, but her answer was there in my mind, clear and matter-of-fact, "I've done all I can for you and Theo. It's now time for me to go on to things I really want to do for myself."

I joined the doctor and said the hardest thing I've ever had to say in my life, "Take her off the machine, and let her choose," and he quietly gave the order to have the respirator removed. I stood and watched the gradual simplification and the shrinking of her heart wave on the monitor over her head. At some critical point, an alarm buzzer sounded, and my white-coated companion reached up and turned a switch. The horizontal green wave continued to flatten, until finally it was a straight line. The oxygen-starved heart had ceased to function. *Ma femme est morte.*

The next two or three days were chaos, and they will remain largely lost to memory. I cannot recall the details of any of it; the conventions of advertising of the death, the disposing of the dead or the mourning for the dead.

I was lost; I was liberated.

I felt, at times, the kind of despair that threatened a permanent darkness inside me, a grey Hell in which nothing moved, or would ever move. At other times, a surge of something came over me which I felt as liberation; it told me I was free to discover, to form new purpose, to live among the living. I didn't know which was true, which could — or should — be my reality, and for a while it didn't matter what I thought, because I had to experience whatever imposed itself on me and, in between, get up in the morning, put my clothes on and trudge to the end of Borodin Road for the Chronicle, pay the bills, eat some food, and go to sleep. I drank a lot of wine in the evenings.

Maybe I should become a hermit, stay in the lab, pretty much avoid the outside world. It would be an uncomplicated life, and most changes would be of my own making. No surprises. Set up my own schedules and find regimens that were comfortable. Or maybe not. Should I try to maintain interactions with the outside world, rejoin friends, and risk making new ones? It was a choice, a question, that I never clearly stated to myself, but it was there.

I could not foresee that I would find an answer some two weeks later, on the other side of the country.

Six months before, I had fallen deeply in love — for the first time in my life — with Ursula, the wife of Dolph Biehls, of whom I was very fond, and who considered me one of his best friends. While they had been studying with my friend Terry, for almost a year, I had found myself responding to the gentle, soulful affection that Ursula had shown me from the beginning of our friendship. When I had tried to express my confusion of feelings, perhaps hoping that she would snap me out of it with a sharp, unmistakable rejection, her response was, instead, one of passion and frank expression of desire.

Dolph and Ursula had become not only my friends, but friends of Helen as well, and I marveled at Ursula's ability to continue interacting with both Dolph and Helen as if there had been no change of any kind in her relationship with me. I learned to be casual, when the four of us were together on a beach in Mendocino County, laughing and shouting to each other over the sound of the sea, picking up driftwood and seashells, and I learned not to seek to meet her eyes, and not to hesitate in putting my arm around her as I would around the other two.

We met, Ursula and I, two or three times in some inn or private place sufficiently far away from the Bay Area to minimize the possibility of being seen by a friend or acquaintance, and I discovered for the first time what it was to feel unashamed, uncensored, joyous sexuality.

Being in love, like any other kind of consciousness alteration, makes small but real changes in the way you view things about you, and in the way you behave around others. Over the years, my friends had come to accept me as what they affectionately called a "difficult genius," and were quite used to my habitually ironic humor, cutting commentary, and somewhat sour view of the world. One of the hardest things I had to do, in my unaccustomed role of secret lover and beloved, was to avoid giving expression — in the company of family or friends — to the feelings of optimism and even outright niceness which overtook me now and then, and which I knew would cause some degree of concern if they were detected.

I knew my wife very well, and I know that she never suspected any of this. Helen and I had lived together for 30 years, and our relationship had become a comfortable, uninspired, non-confrontational acceptance of mutual disappointment, not unlike most of the marriages we saw around us. She had been supportive of everything I had wanted to do, including changes in career which might well have daunted a less courageous wife, and I was grateful for this attitude and for what I felt was her belief in my ability to succeed. But we had not shared excitement.

One day, a number of years earlier, I had been on my way to Stanford

to give a lecture on something-or-other and, on the Highway 101 freeway headed south, found myself caught in impossibly slow traffic. By the time I got to Foster City I was way, way too late for the seminar, and I saw a sign on an airplane hanger, "Learn to Fly — First Lesson Free." I turned in on impulse and accepted the lesson.

Within a few weeks I had soloed and done stuff like cross-country navigating and cross-wind landing. But I also learned to say little or nothing to Helen about my progress, or about the extreme pleasure I experienced in the little training plane. She was terribly afraid of the possibility of accidental death or injury. Even going out for a day's sail on our little 20-foot sailboat was a strain on her, and after a while, she would beg off from sailing with Theo and me. I did not try to persuade her, knowing full well the phobias she lived with.

After the birth of Theo, she had told me that she did not want to go through childbirth again; it had been too painful and frightening for her. This was an immense disappointment to me, since I had been raised an only child, and had hoped to spare my son that particular kind of loneliness. We never discussed adoption. With time, even the excitement and physical openness of love-making was interpreted by her as a threat, with her fear of physical or emotional vulnerability, and our relationship in this respect had become, sadly, more and more careful and restricted.

So it was that, after her death, I relived the shutting off of Helen's support system with more than the usual agony. I had, after all, been emotionally opened by my relationship with Ursula, and although I knew deeply and surely that the decision I had made in the hospital had been unavoidable, there was a persistent cloud of doubt that further darkened my grief, forcing me to wonder how pure my motives had been. I was always asking myself questions such as, would I conceivably have decided differently, if I had never developed an emotional intimacy with Ursula? I always worked through to the same answer. There could not have been a different decision, given Helen's state. But the dark doubts would still descend on me when I least expected them.

Some time before Helen's death, I had accepted an invitation to participate in a seminar in Birmingham, Alabama, with the understanding that it was to be followed, a couple of days later, by a lecture to the biochemistry students at the University at Memphis, in Tennessee. There was no question but that I could renege on my agreement, having an excuse that would be sympathetically accepted, but I decided not to do so. The thought of traveling to a place I had never seen before, and interacting with people who had no previous connection to either Helen or me, gave a distinct lift to my spirits, and presented itself as a possible first step on the road to healing.

It was thus that I found myself, only a couple of weeks after the

funeral, laying out my travel clothes and dusting off some of the potentially impressive psychedelic compounds which I had toyed with over the past couple of years, but had not moved up into any reasonably high priority. I planned for myself a program of serious assaying which, in retrospect, might be seen as being somewhat too demanding, considering my emotional fragility. My rationalization of all of this was that, by insuring that my attention would be focused on the drug assays, I would have less time for memories and grief.

I began my tasting program on the following Saturday with a new level of 4-thiomescalin, 40 milligrams, and found it impressively rewarding. The next Wednesday, I was on the red-eye flight to Atlanta, and tried a new level of 2C-B, 16 milligrams, sitting in first class with a totally unresponsive crowd of fellow travelers of the airplane sort, rather than of the psychedelic sort. I learned the hard way that one should never try to evaluate a new level of a drug in the environmentally dull atmosphere of a midnight flight. It was a waste of time and a waste of energy. I squirmed in my seat for hours, feeling utterly stupid, since all I could do was sip orange juice and wish I could find some way to get to sleep.

Two nights later, having explored the city of Birmingham by bus and by foot, I tried to recapture my sense of equilibrium. It kept eluding me. I took 140 milligrams of MDMA, and the only result was that I found myself pacing my motel room, unable to sleep for the rest of the night. I was certainly giving maximum expression to the stimulant component of any drug I tried.

Saturday was my day to meet my hosts, Professor Pelletier and his wife, at the airport in Memphis. Despite a driving rainstorm and broad electrical power failure, they were there to greet me. Off we went to their home, and I settled in for the weekend. I was looking forward to the next day, Sunday, when my assay program dictated the trying of a new level of 2C-E, 20 milligrams. I had no lecture obligations until Monday, so why not? I was staying busy.

Charles Pelletier's home was a comfortable place, large enough to be called a mansion, with a sprawling garden and an atmosphere of relaxed ease. After a good, quiet night in their guest room, I decided to take a walk into the center of Memphis, to see the waterfront and to get the feel of the city. I started off just before noon, and as soon as I was out of sight of the house, I took out of a pocket my assignment for the day, the 20 milligrams of 2C-E, opened the vial and swallowed its contents.

I continued into the center of the city and, as I looked across the Mississippi river, I felt the first tinglings of effect. It seemed very important that I was standing at the interface between two states. I was here, and Arkansas was over there, and between us, surprisingly far below me, flowed the river. Tom Sawyer probably drifted down thataway, and just a

few miles to my left he would have found himself in the State of Mississippi.

A strange sense of decadence came over me. I realized that I was alerting with the 2C-E, and feeling a hint of discomfort. I turned and walked the mile back to the house, to my nest in the pretty guest room.

When I reached the house, it was the one-hour point after ingestion of the drug, and I was fully aware that the next hour would take me into new territory. Lunch was being served, and my hostess, Marlene, called me into the dining room to join the family in eating. I managed to carry it off reasonably well, despite the growing awareness of visual changes, which were rapidly becoming visual distortions, some of them disturbing, most of them hilariously funny. I knew that I had to get out of there and be by myself; there was no way of guessing where all this would lead. I excused myself with some muttered words about needing to be alone for a while and rest. Everyone knew me to be in mourning, so there were no protests, only understanding murmurs. I began the third hour of the experiment safely in my room.

The hours that followed proved to be a time of concepts, revelations, compelling fantasy and authentic memory that was very frightening and yet, in retrospect, of extraordinary value. What I faced, over those three or four hours, were some impressive angels and demons, and I asked questions and experienced insights that went to the roots of my psyche.

My notes begin with the number of hours since ingestion of the little vial's contents. And my retrospectives follow each of these directly.

[2:45] "Lunch over. Charles' backside! Child's face!"

As I retreated from the company of lunch, I looked about me and saw the backside of Charles, who was at that moment standing at the sideboard, and I was amazed at the fact that a man who was not only the head of the Department of Psychopharmacology, but also a deacon in his local church, could have such a rear end! It appeared to be monstrous. It dominated the room. The word steatopygia reverberated in my mind. And the face of one of his daughters surprised me with its revelation of boredom and chronic resentment underneath what I had previously seen as an expression of good-humored pleasantness.

[3:15] "Completely out of control. About equal to 300 mikes of LSD. I have cracked up. I must control. Am scared shitless. I have made a fool of myself. Am I catalytically fixed? I am counting the minutes — entertainment long gone. I must not try to go to sleep, as I don't dare lose the visual connection to sanity. I see myself dying."

When I lay on my bed, I saw myself as an old, old man, many years in the future. I was appalled to see my forearm as a withered, dry-skinned, almost-bone which could only be that of someone dying. I looked down at the rest of me, and I was thin, emaciated, brittle, shallow. I knew I was alone in this time of my life, this time of my death, because a long time ago, back when my wife had died, I had chosen to be alone. Who was I? I was seeing myself, but why was I seeing me here, now, at this dying stage of life? Was I sharing the experience of dying with Helen; was it some kind of final obligation I had, to share death with her this way?

[3:45] "A nihilist illusion, consummated by a nihilist organism — a nadir of nothingness. If I can conceive of such nonsense, I must be repairing. I hope. I am extremely scared. God help. This is the insanity game."

Within those few minutes, I became a nihilist. (The seeds from which this evolved must have been there for quite a while.) But I thought, if I can recognize this insanity, if I can identify my nothingness, I must be doing it with something that exists. I called to Ursula for help, then realized with a shock that I had a bond to her which could influence my world. Had it influenced those fateful last moments with my dying Helen? Was I my own agent after all? Was there even a "me" there? I was fully aware of the layer upon layer of these thoughts, and strangely enough, these layers gave body and, in some sense, substance to a me that was feeling essentially non-existent.

[3:50] "Okay again? Not okay again. Was the Vermeer scene out of the window real? Still life? What an intellectually shitty way to commit suicide. Why not with a gun like a man?"

I had gotten up and looked at the window, which was the same as looking out of the window. I was looking at a painting of a window, through which there could be seen a girl outside who was holding a watering can full of water, intent on watering some flowers in the garden. But as I looked, I saw that it really was a window and the painting of the watering-can girl was on the outside. How could that be? And when I looked back at the outside painting a moment later, it was still the same artist's style but the girl had been relocated. It was my hostess Marlene with a sprinkling can, watering flowers in the garden below. But she was frozen, from scene to scene, each different, each without life or motion. I could see the brush strokes, and the entire image was done on a flat canvas with cool and friendly colors. A 17th century lady (whose name was Marlene) with a tight-fitting head-scarf was standing over a geranium

with a watering pot, obviously watering it, being watched through the window by me, and she and the window were both part of the painting. If things were moving, it was in somebody else's time.

The entire mood was one of death, or dying. I felt that I was avoiding the final act by letting time and nature do everything for me; making the world about me inanimate and letting myself deteriorate. By living, I was somehow escaping the inevitable.

[4:00] "Possibility of repair? No, I have lost it again."

[4:20] "More okay than out, but when out, really out. The window is a sense game. Fine. This is stark insanity. My father, clear, immediate, right there, speaking to me in Russian, reading to me, with his patient voice. I am very little, sitting on his knee. I was not hostile, just arrogant."

I was a two-year-old child on my father's lap, being instructed with love in the Russian words that illustrated the alphabet, from a child's book of Russian letters. I heard my father say the letter, then the word, and I was repeating both while squirming in his lap. I thought, he is surely trying to perpetuate himself through me, and this is not love but, rather, selfishness. But I had it all over him, because I was a strong, determined person who had no intention of learning his mumbo-jumbo.

How can one be so arrogant at the age of two! One certainly can be. I was. Does a state of mind as an infant dictate the final form of the adult? But right now I was the child, not the adult. This was not a memory of being two years old in my father's lap; this was actually *being* two years old in his lap. I was looking out of two-year-old eyes at the pages of the book and I could see the colored letters on the paper, in a room which was extremely high and wide and long.

Why, I thought, did he sometimes threaten me with with his belt? I don't think he ever actually did spank me, but he might as well have; the scars are right there to be seen.

[4:45] "I may have destroyed Helen with my arrogance — must I destroy myself? Yet it is this very arrogance that has made me what I am, that has permitted discovery, invention. I have experienced the birth of that arrogance and the death of it. At the moment, I am recovering the central control of it."

I thought, Helen left us all without a lasting trace, and so shall I. Another generation, and another and another, and I will be, as will she, a nothing bump on a nothing record. Did I bring about her death by my assurance or ignorance? I remember I had been told that the little light on

the respirator came on when she made some effort to breathe for herself. And when I was standing beside her in the intensive care unit and the light came on, I sent her silent messages to do more, keep doing more.

Or was it that the light came on when the machine did the work of breathing? Could my messages actually have been accepted by her as encouragement to let the machine do the job for her? Did I for some selfish reason work against her survival? Did I need to escape her world?

[5:00] "Recovering control. Know where I'm going. Not hungry."

As I lay on the bed, I realized a decision had been made by some part of me, during the last few hours. I was going to return to the world of meaningful exploration, the world of the MEM's and TM's and especially the 2C-E's. I sent a message: thank you, Helen, if you've helped me in coming to see where I have to go.

Before her death, I had spent several months pedantically making and tasting some 15 to 20 close analogues of MDMA, finding only that the whole family, from MDE to MDOH, were either simply intoxicants much like MDA, or they were not potent enough to bother with. I now understood I'd been wasting valuable time.

[5:15] "Rapid improvement. Better now than when I went to lunch at 2 hours."

The world began to reintegrate. The pictures on the walls of my room became, very gradually, less active and more solid. I began hearing voices downstairs; people were putting dinner together. I inspected my body and I seemed to be all right.

[5:40] "Might almost consider venturing into the kitchen."

Finally, I emerged from my room into a small crowd of guests. I talked casually with my hostess (now without medieval head-cover and watering can) and ended up helping to make an apple pie. Then I got into a lively conversation with the widow of a publisher I had known, and this delightful lady wanted to learn English as keenly as I wanted to learn her native language, French. We got into a marvelous, slightly off-color discussion that brought together the words for the flattening of automobile tires and the passing of gas, and I knew I would be in good shape for tomorrow's seminar.

This was an extraordinary day, with a maximum dosage level and a maximum number of pluses. These notes are personal treasures for me, and even now the experiences at which they hint are vivid in my mind.

They were the stepping stones that led me to a complete conviction as to where I wished to go with my work, and how I intended to get there.

And I had made another decision, perhaps the most important of all. I would not cut myself off from the richest resource I had. I would stay with people, work with people, and learn from people. Mine was a world of exploration of new chemicals, and I could not be the only crucible. I thought, others will see things differently from me, and I must acknowledge their views as being equal in value to my own. I cannot, just by personal experience, satisfactorily define a drug. The definition of a drug's action can only come from a consensus amongst the users of that drug, and the larger the number of people contributing to that definition, the closer it will be to the truth.

Needless to say, there were no more experiments in Tennessee.

## Part Two: Alice's Voice

## CHAPTER 16. SPIRAL

When I finally gave it a name, I called it the Spiral.

This is how it was. Lying down for nap time (as a child) or at night for sleep, I would have reached that point of relaxation where one is not very much aware of the body. The small itches and discomforts have subsided, and the mind is beginning to drift. When I sensed it beginning (I never knew when it was going to come), I would immediately snap into alertness, excited and pleased, then I would just lie quietly as it unfolded.

The first thing that happened was a change in my breathing. It became increasingly shallow, to the point where my rib cage was barely moving at all.

If someone came into the room and talked to me, as sometimes happened, I could open my eyes and answer normally; the experience continued uninterrupted inside my head.

Every part of it, every stage, was the same each time. It was always in black and white. There was no color anywhere, and try as I did, especially around the age of fourteen, I could not force color to come onto the screen. And I could never extend it, by so much as a few seconds. When it was finished, it was finished.

First came the image-sensation after which I named the entire experience — the spiral. I felt my entire self drawn rapidly into a tiny point which kept shrinking, until it could shrink no further, at which time the microscopic point became a tunnel in which I continued traveling at great speed, inexpressibly small and implacably diminishing.

Simultaneously, I was expanding. I was expanding to the edges of the universe, at the same tremendous speed as that of the shrinking, and the combination, the contraction-expansion, was not only an image, it was also a sensation the whole of me recognized and welcomed. This experience of myself as microcosm-macrocosm lasted exactly four minutes.

The image of the spiral is found everywhere that the human has left

his mark on earth. It has been cut into rock faces, painted on huts and clay pots, traced on the walls of initiation caves. I'm certain that it has been important to all the races of man because it is a symbol for the experience I'm describing, and for the concept, the understanding that the intellect forms out of what is initially not an intellectual, but a soul experience of the Alpha and Omega.

The next stage came abruptly, as did all the changes. I was looking at standing figures which were vaguely human, dark thin figures being pulled into elongated shapes, like the sculptures of Giacometti. They stretched out, arms and legs like black string, until it seemed they could elongate no further, then the scene changed and I was watching obscenely rounded bodies, Tweedledums and Tweedledees without costumes, their small heads and legs disappearing into their puffed, bloated flesh.

The sensation accompanying this stage was one of discomfort, unpleasantness, a feeling of something grating on my soul. I once timed this part and the one that followed; they lasted a total of six minutes. I disliked them intensely.

Abruptly again, the inner screen became white, a horrible dead-white, nasty and aggressive like the underbelly of a sting-ray. After presenting itself for a few seconds, the flat white began to curdle from the outer edges into black, until finally the screen was totally black. A thick, awful, dead black, a pool of tar in an unlit cave deep underground. After another brief pause, the black began to curdle at its edges into the white again. This process repeated itself once, and the sensation was similar in every way to the previous one: irritating, grating, a feeling of unpleasantness that approached repugnance. I always endured it with a mental gritting of teeth, knowing it had to be gone through because that's the way it always went and it was not to be changed.

And then, finally, I broke out into the last stage, the final part for which I had always been and always would be willing to undergo the middle parts.

Now I was at the edge of an unseen cliff, looking out into a very different blackness, the deep, cradling blackness of the infinite universe, of space which stretched without end. I was completely happy and comfortable in that place, and would have stayed there indefinitely, had I been allowed, breathing in the beautiful darkness and the exquisitely familiar sense of infinity as a living presence, surrounding me, intimate and warm.

After a moment of this pleasure, came the greeting. From the upper left-hand corner of the universe there came a greeting from Something which had known me, and which I had known, since before time and space began. There were no words, but the message was clear and smiling: Hello, dear friend, I salute you with respect-humor-love. It is a pleasure-with-laughter-joy to encounter you again.

That which greeted me was an entity so far removed from anything in human experience that I concluded, when I was an adult, trying to find a way to describe it to myself, that even the word, "entity," could not be applied; a word creates boundaries, it says this is the shape of what you are describing, as different from other shapes which are bounded by other words. It had no shape, no form, no definition, no boundaries. It was. It is. It was my oldest friend and it greeted me as its equal. I always replied to it with a rush of love and delight and my own laughter.

Then it was over.

It had taken exactly twelve minutes.

It was something I'd always experienced, taken for granted, and had given no thought to when I was very young. Not until age fourteen did I take a good look at it and recognize it as unusual, something peculiarly my own, my secret private treasure. I also got very analytical about the whole thing, began my habit of timing it and made the first of my unsuccessful efforts at altering it. But I didn't decide on a name for it until many years later, discarding "Microcosm-macrocosm," as too long and unwieldy, and settling on the simpler "Spiral."

It had probably been going on since I was born. There's no way to be sure, of course, but because it had been part of my life ever since I could remember, I tend to assume it was familiar to me from the very beginning. My mother said something once about having seen a change of some kind coming over me occasionally when I was a baby; she said she didn't worry about it because when it passed, I appeared to be quite normal.

It always (with one single exception) came under the same circumstances, when I had settled down in bed for a nap or for the night's sleep, but well before sleep itself took over.

The one exception happened when I was around fifteen, shortly after my father had been transferred to Santiago de Cuba as American Consul. We were staying in a hotel, while those responsible for helping us find a home were still busy with their search. My father and mother, my brother Boy and I were having lunch in the hotel dining room and my eyes focused on the butter plate on the table. In the exact center of the round plate was a single pat of butter, and somehow the sight triggered the familiar feeling I associated with the beginning of the Spiral. I was surprised and very pleased, because it was a new thing to have it start under such unusual circumstances.

I was also pleased because it was my special thing, and in asking to be excused from the table to go up to my room, I felt a certain sense of importance, which was rare when I was with my family. I said just enough to make it clear that my strange "thing" was beginning, and my parents grudgingly gave permission for me to leave. I reached the room upstairs in time for the completion, the wonderful last few moments. It turned out

to be the only time it ever happened that way — when I was out of my bed, involved with ordinary matters of daily living.

I tried to make it come, searching out all sorts of images of round space with dots in the center, but nothing worked. I never found a way to make it happen. It came when it chose to, unexpectedly, once in a while. The times it chose had no apparent connection to anything else that was going on in my life, either generally or in particular. In twenty-five years, believe me, I looked for every possible connection; I found none. When I was very little, I think it might have happened as often as once a week or so, but as I grew older it came less and less often, until around age twenty-five, when it happened only twice in one year, then never again.

The discovery that I was not alone in my journey into the interior cosmos came as a complete surprise. It gave me a great deal of excited pleasure and opened up a whole new series of questions. It happened when I was around twenty two, and — interesting enough in itself — the two proofs came to me within a single four month period.

The incidents were astoundingly similar.

The first one took place one evening when I went to a party given by a friend in San Francisco. I was in the host's kitchen with several of the other guests, doing what people usually do in strange kitchens at informal parties — talking, drinking and munching potato chips and carrot sticks — and after a while one young man named Evan and I found ourselves alone, deeply involved in a conversation about unusual experiences, mostly read about or heard from others, the kind of conversation that seems to come about more easily, somehow, in the midst of a high energy, noisy party than at any other time.

Suddenly Evan was telling me about what he referred to as "a really weird thing," which had been happening to him ever since he was very young. I remember the prickling that spread up my back as he began describing it, and I understood immediately the look that gradually came into his face, a mixture of embarrassment and anxiety (She's going to think I'm crazy; why am I talking about this?). I tried to make it easier for him to continue by nodding encouragingly and once — when he faltered briefly — I volunteered what I knew was going to be the next image, and he looked startled, almost frightened, drank a bit from his glass, muttered, "Yes, exactly," and continued to the end. His end was not mine; his journey came to a close after the black and white curdles. I thought, with a touch of pity, that he seemed to have missed the best part, although he did have the wonderful spiral at the beginning. I was glad I hadn't prompted him further. When he'd finished his story, I told him I'd had every one of the images he had described, and that he was the first person I'd ever met who shared the experience. I said nothing about my own different ending.

He was staring at me, and I wasn't sure he'd really heard what I'd

been telling him. Finally, he smiled and said that I was the first person he'd ever told about this private, "crazy thing," and he couldn't believe — it was so extraordinary — that I actually knew what he was talking about. He said that he had always wondered if the experience was a sign of insanity of some kind, and it was such a relief to know that somebody else had had it. Neither of us felt it necessary to add that, in a situation like this, it was also reassuring to see that the person who shares your strangeness appears to be relatively sane and reasonably functional.

I smiled back and said I understood exactly how he felt. We left the kitchen and joined the rest of the party. I never saw him again, and didn't particularly expect or want to. It was enough to have heard one other person repeating what I knew so well, and it was intriguing to know that my journey, or process, had gone farther, longer, than Evan's; after all, although I was more than willing to give up exclusive rights to the whole thing, I didn't mind retaining a little bit of superiority.

The second incident was almost identical to the first, the only difference being that the young man (whose name I forgot almost immediately) was talking to me in somebody's living room, instead of the kitchen, in the middle of another noisy party, when he began describing the "strange vision" that he, too, had had ever since he was a small child. His, also, ended short of where mine did, and he was astounded and obviously very relieved to know that there was somebody else in the world who knew about it.

Both young men seemed quite unremarkable, although pleasant enough and intelligent. I never saw the second one again, either.

I remember wishing briefly that I could put an ad in the Chronicle or Examiner, something along the lines of, "Seek contact with others who have experienced..." and of course, the imaginary ad stalled there.

It happened — my beloved Spiral — for the last time when I was twenty-five. I had no way of knowing, of course, that it would not come again. It may or may not have been a coincidence that, within three weeks of the last time, I had my first encounter with a psychedelic material, the Divine Cactus, peyote.

## CHAPTER 17. CACTUS

In the late 1950's, I was working at the University of California Medical Center, which is a large group of buildings dedicated to both medical training and the practice of medicine, on the crest of a hill in San Francisco called Mount Parnassus. This Mount Parnassus, unlike its Greek counterpart, is wrapped in fog most of the year; I lived just two blocks from the medical center and seldom caught a glimpse of the City down below. In May and June, when the radio reported people sweltering in 90-degree-plus heat, across the Bay in Marin and Contra Costa counties, I thought with resentment that six months on Mount Parnassus would surely cure their complaints. (I couldn't afford a car on my salary, and it takes a car to search for apartments for rent in the Bay Area, so I was stuck where I was.)

I was a medical transcriber in the Department of Pathology and, at the end of my working day, I would often have supper in one of the two immense hospital dining rooms, usually finding a seat near the large double windows and reading whatever book I was enjoying at the time. I did a lot of reading in those days, since I was living alone and books were, as they had always been, among my best friends. They kept me company and fed me with richness at a time when the rest of my life was dry, anxious and slightly grey. I was in my mid-twenties.

Since beginning work at the center, I'd dated a few medical residents, then found myself deeply involved for several months with a gentle, thoughtful psychiatrist named Paul. I first became interested in him one evening in the cafeteria when a group of doctors sitting at the far end of my supper table got into an excited, argumentative discussion. Among them was an attractive, pale-haired man with a nice chuckle, who exhibited a character trait which is extremely rare in ordinary people and, among doctors, practically nonexistent: he didn't seem to mind discovering that he had some fact wrong, that he was in error; he appeared to actually welcome having a piece of misinformation corrected.

When he remained at the table after the others had returned to duty, I got up the courage to remark on his lack of defensiveness or resentment when contradicted — I said it carefully, as charmingly as I could — and added that this was a most remarkable thing, in my experience, and much to be admired. He laughed and asked if he might join me, and would I like some more coffee?

By the end of that evening, I had discovered that Paul was intelligent, funny, in the midst of a difficult divorce, and that I liked him. By the end of the following week, we both knew we had found in each other exactly what we needed — someone to have fun with, to make love with, to talk and share with.

A few months later, I discovered I was pregnant.

Paul was caught in a terrible ambivalence, having tried throughout his failed marriage to father a child, finally coming to believe that he could not, and never would. It was the wrong time for him to discover that he wasn't sterile, after all. The bitter divorce battle made it necessary that no one else know I was seeing Paul, much less expecting his child. Another sad fact was that Paul and I were not committed to each other for the future, so that what should have been a joyful surprise was, instead, a more than awkward embarrassment. We had begun to talk about abortion.

Nature doesn't give a damn about embarrassments, but she does have a way, sometimes, of executing judgement on certain defects or insufficiencies, and there must have been something not quite to her liking going on inside me, by the time I was about two months along.

One day, alone in my apartment after work, I began having contractions that felt familiar (I had given birth to my son Christopher during a brief, disastrous marriage at age 20) and made my way to the bathroom. Grunting and moaning with the pain, I squatted on the toilet, gazing blindly through trickles of sweat at the black and white floor tiles, until finally I had birthed the fetus. I looked down only once, to see the tiny shape floating in blood, and sent a sad apology to the soul which had intended to inhabit it, "Sorry; it wasn't the right time, my dear Whoever. Maybe someday — ."

After stripping off my stained clothes, I found a clear plastic tablecloth, folded it a couple of times and put it on my bed, then lowered myself carefully into the middle of it and leaned back on heaped bed pillows, exhausted. When I felt occasional soft clots of blood emerging from my body, I thought they were parts of the afterbirth, and continued to drowse, relieved at the absence of pain. Paul was on duty at the hospital that night, and I had every intention of cleaning up all the mess in time for his return the next morning, but for the moment I could only rest until the bleeding stopped and my strength came back.

It must have been at least a couple of hours before I became vaguely

aware of a coldness on my skin and opened my eyes, to find myself sitting in blood clots almost up to my hips. I was very light-headed, and it dawned on me that perhaps there was more blood than there should have been with just the losing of the afterbirth, and that maybe I should try phoning for advice. I couldn't think of whom to call — I certainly wasn't going to disturb Paul while he was on duty — then I remembered the pretty young nurse called Tess who lived in the apartment next door. It seemed a good idea to ask her to take a look at me, just in case I wasn't evaluating the situation as well as I thought I was.

When I tried to move off the bed, a warning voice told me to move very carefully. It said, YOU MUSTN'T FAINT. I wasn't in the least frightened, but thought it might be sensible to avoid standing up because of the light-headedness, so I crawled slowly on all fours toward the living room, pulling my dressing-gown off the end of the bed as I moved past, until I had reached the phone at the far end of the apartment. I lifted it from the coffee table and put it on the floor, surprised at how heavy it was.

Tess was home, and I crawled to the door to unlock it, then returned to my place — now marked by a small puddle of blood — on the floor. When she came in, Tess took one look at me and grabbed for the phone. I heard her saying something about emergency and hemorrhage, then she knelt down and carefully put my dressing gown on me, and when she had tied the belt, she said only, "Don't move, honey; save your strength," while I smiled happily at her, feeling altogether peaceful and good-humored.

When she went to get a towel for me, she stopped at the side of the bed and muttered something that sounded like, "Jesus!"

Having given me the towel to tuck between my legs, Tess picked up my purse, raised me slowly from the floor, and helped me down the outside stairs and into her car. While she was locking my front door, I sat like an obedient child, slipping in and out of consciousness, feeling safe and content. When we arrived at the Emergency entrance to the hospital, Tess went inside to arrange things, and I opened my purse and took out a compact. I giggled at the reflection in the mirror; I'd never seen anyone that color before. Pale grey, with a faint touch of green in the shadows.

Lying on a hospital bed, with several people around me — I had the impression of a couple of doctors and at least one nurse — who were trying to find a vein that wasn't too flat to stick a transfusion needle into, I knew I was going to be all right, and tried to tell all the earnest, bustling figures not to worry, that I wasn't going to die. What I got in response was a curt order to keep quiet; they seemed irritated by my good humor. I felt a bit hurt, then angry at the reprimand. After all, I hadn't done this to myself; nature and the gods had made the decision.

Almost immediately, the hurt and anger drifted away. I was left again in the state of gentle euphoria that the ancient Romans must have known

all about, when they chose bleeding to death from opened wrists (while sitting in a bathtub full of warm water) as the preferred form of suicide, at least for the upper classes.

A few days later, someone explained to me that most of the clots had not been pieces of afterbirth, after all. They were the result of bleeding from some little capillary inside the uterus which had failed to close off as it was supposed to, after the expulsion of the fetus. I had lost a bit more than six pints of blood; I forget the exact amount, but I do remember being impressed, having been reminded that women's bodies contain an average of only nine pints.

Paul, when he discovered what had happened, went to my apartment and cleaned up what he half-humorously described as, "The scene of a bloody ax-murder." But he was deeply shaken, and found himself contending with too many conflicting feelings — horror, relief and sorrow. He couldn't forget, he told me later, that I had come so close to dying. It was all too much.

It took me six weeks to recover my strength, and by that time I had become miserably aware of Paul's increasing distance and coldness. So we had the inevitable long talk with tears and pain, finally agreeing to be just good friends. I returned to work and did my best not to let myself feel freshly bruised at each occasional glimpse of him in the corridors of the hospital.

Now, it was an evening in March, and I was sitting over cold coffee in the dining room, reading by the fading light from the big window, when a friend of mine slid his food tray onto the table across from me and sat down. Dr. Samuel Golding was suffering through his internship year, headed for a residency in psychiatry. He was only a few inches taller than I, rather chunky, with a head of wiry black hair, and he was one of the most interesting — and delightfully strange — people I had ever met. While he was assigned to the Pathology Department, we had recognized each other as mavericks, and had begun to talk at lunchtime, and sometimes at supper, if he was on late duty and saw me in the cafeteria.

Sam was absent-minded to the point of near-unconsciousness, at times, possibly as a reaction to the schedule he was obliged to keep and the attention he was expected to pay to things which bored him, all of which he regarded as necessary evils to be endured on the way to the only thing that mattered — becoming a psychiatrist. I was familiar enough by now with the medical world to know that psychiatry was considered an orphan child and its practitioners generally peculiar; at least, that was the standard attitude of the average physician and most particularly of the average medical school professor, so that anyone studying medicine who made it known that his goal was psychiatry was in for more than the usual amount of sarcastic put-downs by the instructors, not to speak of his fellow students.

(It amused me greatly that, while — according to at least one study — 98% of medical doctors were Republicans, every psychiatrist I'd ever come across turned out to be a Democrat. Peculiar, indeed.)

The most hilarious example I'd seen of Sam's absent-mindedness, however, had nothing to do with boredom, but with its opposite — single-mindedness. One evening, sharing supper in the cafeteria, we were in the middle of an intense discussion about the ritual practices of a certain tribe of American Indians, when I told Sam I had to go to the bathroom, but I'd be right back. He rose with me, followed me — still explaining and gesturing with both hands — down the corridor to the door marked WOMEN, where I quite reasonably expected him to wait. As I walked into the stall, I heard Sam coming right through the rest room door behind me — still talking — apparently oblivious of the fact that there was no such thing as a unisex rest room in the medical center. I decided not to risk sending him into some kind of shock by reminding him where he was, but simply sat on the toilet behind the stall door and listened, grunting uh-huh's as seemed appropriate, stifling my laughter and hoping desperately that no other nearby woman would happen to have a full bladder at the moment.

When I was finished (a little more hurriedly than usual), we left. Sam followed me back to the cafeteria, his untied surgical smock trailing in the back as it often did; we resumed our places at the table and continued the conversation. I never told him.

We usually talked about the human mind, about the world in general, and occasionally the cosmos, but inevitably — no matter where our conversations started — we would sooner or later get around to one of two subjects. The first was Indian tribes of North and South America, about which Sam seemed to know everything — customs, traditions, rituals, beliefs — everything; or so it seemed to me. The other was psychedelic drugs, both natural and synthetic. Of course, the two subjects converged easily and often, since every American Indian culture appears to have made use of some kind of consciousness-altering plant, and Sam seemed to know about all of them, too.

I knew only what I had read in books, while Sam had actually lived in the Amazon area for a while among some of the Indians and had personally tasted a lot of different psychedelics, so my role had became primarily that of appreciative listener and learner, which was comfortable for both of us.

With one exception. I had discovered that Sam had a true gift for drawing. He had once handed me a written autopsy report to be typed up, and around the edges of the lined yellow paper there were beautiful little pencil sketches of strange creatures, plants, flowers, trees, and what looked like jewels. When I said, "Good Lord, Dr. Golding, these are incredible!"

he looked at me in honest bewilderment, then leaned over my shoulder to see what I was referring to.

"Those? Oh, I doodle that kind of stuff all the time. What's incredible about them?"

It turned out that, growing up in a family of physicians, he had never heard anyone remark on his ability to draw; no one talked about art of any kind. Apparently his parents were not interested in, nor did they expect their children to have any interest in, anything that did not have an obvious application to medicine. Having drawn and painted all my life, I was outraged at such neglect, and offered to teach him the simple rudiments of painting.

Sam was touched by this unexpected interest, and had agreed to come to my little apartment on Tuesday evenings, unless he was on duty at the hospital, to find out how to use different brushes and watercolors and pastels. I had never properly learned to paint in oils, and couldn't afford to buy a set of them, but I taught him what I could of the other media.

He worked on scenes which he told me were visual images he'd had while using psychedelic drugs, as a member of an ongoing private experimental research group, headed by a friend of his called Shura — a name I promptly forgot — and he talked about these sessions as he painted. He had also been involved with a series of Saturday drug experiments conducted a few months before by an innovative instructor at the psychiatric teaching clinic attached to the main hospital, who believed that anyone planning a career in psychiatry should experience the effects of some of the most widely used drugs, since they would undoubtedly have patients in their future practice who would be influenced by the use and abuse of such chemicals.

This group of experimenters — most of them third-year residents in psychiatry — had made movies of themselves under the influence of heroin, marijuana, LSD and mescaline, one day on each drug, and Sam talked to me for hours in the cafeteria about the sessions and what he had learned, and during our Tuesday evenings he painted some of the images which had appeared in his mind during both the clinic and Shura group experiments, telling me as he worked about the emotions and concepts he had experienced, interrupted only by my occasional demonstration of some useful trick or technique with brush or smearing thumb.

Late one Tuesday evening, while we were putting away the paints and brushes, I had dared ask him if I might possibly take one of these drugs someday, with him as my guide.

"I don't see why not," he said, "Which one do you think you'd like to try?"

Since I'd read Huxley's beautiful account of his mescaline experiment, as well as Andre Michaux's bitter story of his day with mescaline, I told

Sam it seemed to me that the peyote cactus, after all, had been used for centuries by thousands of people, which was a pretty impressive track record, and that I would really love to try it. I added that I wasn't sure what the difference was between mescaline contained in the peyote and mescaline synthesized in a laboratory, but I was ready to take whichever one he could get hold of.

Sam said he would do his best to arrange it, though he couldn't guarantee anything. I thanked him and promised myself not to hope too much, in case it never happened, for whatever reason. Knowing Sam's absent-mindedness, I knew I'd even have to be prepared for the possibility that he might just forget about the whole thing.

That had been two weeks ago.

Now, putting my book down with a paper napkin tucked in it to hold my place, I grinned at my rumpled friend, who was wearing his green surgical smock, untied at the back again.

"How ya doin', Sam?"

"I thought you'd like to know," he said in his usual abrupt way, tearing apart a piece of sourdough bread, "I have come into possession of some peyote buttons, enough for both of us."

I stared at him, my mouth open, "You got some? How wonderful! You really have it?"

Sam swallowed some soup, then asked, "Do you still want to try it?"

My stomach was doing a small up and down dance, but I leaned across the table on my elbows and peered at him, "I really want to do it, Sam. Very much. Just tell me when and where?"

"How about next Sunday?"

I nodded, "That's fine. Next Sunday." I thought frantically, is there anything happening next Sunday that I should remember?

*No, Paul isn't with me and it isn't my weekend to be with Christopher.*

Once a month, I spent a Sunday with my young son, who was living with his father and his father's new wife in Marin County because she didn't have to work. They didn't want me visiting my boy more frequently than every four weeks because, they said, it was disruptive to him.

*Nothing is happening next Sunday.*

"Where do we do it, Sam?"

Sam ate more soup, then said, "Where would you be most comfortable — how about your place? We could start there."

"Yes, of course. My apartment." I was in a state of confusion. I'd never taken a psychedelic drug before. I hadn't even smoked pot. Now, all of a sudden, Aldous Huxley's miraculous world was going to open up — or perhaps that of Michaux's demons — and I didn't know what to ask next.

Sam was sopping up the last of his soup with a piece of sourdough,

and I hoped he wouldn't sense my brain-fuzz.

*He mustn't change his mind, he mustn't!*

"What time?"

"What time?" asked Sam, looking up, "Oh, you mean what time on Sunday. Well, how about 9:00 in the morning? Don't want to start too late; it's going to be a long day, remember."

"Yes, of course." I mentally reviewed what he'd already said, and wondered what I should ask next. I felt like an idiot. How do you go about preparing for a day under the influence of something like peyote?

"We won't be spending much time inside," said Sam, "Maybe we can walk down to the park, once you've got your sea-legs. It's always best to be outside, in natural surroundings, during this kind of experience."

Suddenly, Sam was no longer the young man who failed to check whether his socks matched and managed to forget half the conferences he was supposed to attend; he was a knowledgeable person, a teacher.

I nodded.

*There must be something else I should be asking. What do I have to know before Sunday?*

"Is there anything I should do ahead of time, Sam? I mean, do I have to prepare in some way? Am I supposed to have an empty stomach?"

Sam was rising with his tray, "Ah — glad you reminded me. Yes. Empty stomach on Sunday morning. You can drink all the fluids you want, but no food. You'll probably vomit anyway. People usually do."

He turned to go, then looked back at me, "And don't put cream in your coffee. Nothing with oil or fat. Retards absorption. Oh, yes. Better have some orange juice in your fridge. See you Sunday morning."

I watched him moving between tables and around chairs on his way to the tray disposal, and I thought a jumble of things, a tangle of images, apprehensions and excitements. I wondered for a moment whether I might die during the experience, and was amused to note that the thought didn't scare me at all.

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I was up and dressed in blue jeans and a light blue sweater by 8:00 AM on Sunday, an hour when I would normally have been deeply asleep, making up for all the weekday risings at 6:30. I sipped coffee with sugar and no cream and waited at my living room window for Sam. I had an absolute certainty that what would happen this day was going to change my life in ways I couldn't begin to guess at. And I knew that I was ready. It's time, I thought. It's time.

At five minutes past 9:00 he arrived, carrying a large paper bag under one arm. My stomach was growling occasionally with emptiness and

anxiety, and I sat down on the couch, arms folded tightly across my chest, smiling weakly, "How do we do this, now?"

"Do you have some orange juice?"

"Sure. Wait a minute." I got the bottle of juice and two tall drinking glasses, carried them to the coffee table and sat down again. Sam was still standing, and while I watched, he opened the paper bag and pulled out a large jar half filled with a thick brownish-black liquid with lumps, and placed it carefully on the table. I muttered, "Good grief, that looks awful. Is it the peyote?"

"Yup, it's mashed peyote buttons. We'll mix it with the orange juice; that may help the taste a bit."

"Does it taste as horrendous as it looks?"

"Oh, much worse," said Sam, cheerfully, sitting down beside me, "It's probably the vilest taste in the whole world!"

I remembered what he'd said in the cafeteria, about vomiting. I felt a sudden shortness of breath, as I stared at the jar.

"Sam, what happens if I do vomit — I mean, will that ruin the whole thing?"

"No," replied Sam, "For some reason, vomiting doesn't seem to have any effect on the experience, as long as you've managed to keep it down for a little while before it comes up again."

*My God, this is going to be a lot harder than I realized.*

I squinted at the witch's ooze. "How many buttons do you have?"

"I mashed 14 large buttons, so we'll each have seven, if I can measure it out very exactly, which is what I'm going to do right now."

I watched, rocking slightly, while Sam sat beside me and dribbled a little of the thick, dark stuff into first one glass, then the other, and continued the careful, slow process until each was a third full. Then he opened the bottle I'd brought from the kitchen and poured out enough juice to fill the glasses to within an inch of their tops. That done, he leaned back on the couch and expelled a long breath.

I muttered, "Now, we drink, yes?"

"Now we drink."

He stood up. I stood, too, and touched the rim of my glass to his.

He smiled and looked directly into my eyes, which was unusual for Sam; he was, in some ways, quite shy.

"May the Gods bless us," he said. I was both surprised and touched. It was not a typical Sam thing to say.

I took a small amount of the mixture into my mouth and immediately spat it back into the glass. "My God, Sam! That's AWFUL!"

"Yeah, it is, isn't it," he agreed, proudly. I watched him. He kept taking swallows, his face scrunched up, eyes closed, while I looked at the dreadful mixture in my hand and thought, how will I ever get this down?

The taste was not just bitter; the moment it hit the tongue, the gorge rose in response. It was as if the body had decided instantly that this was something not intended for human consumption and was ready to resist its passage down the throat any and every way it could.

I carried my glass through the archway that divided the living room from the bedroom and sat down on the side of my bed, from where I had a direct view of the toilet in the bathroom. I'll be able to make a quick dash to there from here, I thought, then took one swallow, and began concentrating on not thinking about what I was doing.

Half an hour later, I was still sitting on the bed, my glass drained, and Sam was pacing the floor of the living room, drinking the last of his liquid, neither of us having spoken a word to each other since the ordeal began. I didn't want to move, and I didn't want to talk, either. I was going to just sit and be very quiet so that my tummy would continue to occupy its normal place and not go anywhere else.

Suddenly, Sam was coming through the archway, running across the wooden floor. He disappeared into the bathroom. I heard the sounds of vomiting, and stuck fingers into my ears immediately.

*Don't let the idea in. Think about the light coming through the windows in the other room; think about lying down on this bed and not moving ever again; think about how nice and peaceful it is in here, how quiet.*

When I finally unplugged my ears, the only thing to be heard from the bathroom was the sound of running water. I eased myself very gradually onto the bed, and lay down.

*No fast movements. Everything slow-motion.*

The bathroom door opened. Sam emerged and stood there, looking faintly embarrassed. I grinned at him, "You okay?"

"Yeah. Always happens to me. How 'bout you?"

"So far, so good. I'm just going to stay very still for a while."

He climbed onto the bed and stretched out beside me, "Good idea. Me, too."

It was very quiet in the room, and there was no tension, no feeling of awkwardness about lying on the bed with Sam next to me. I folded my arms under my head and gazed up at the ceiling for a while, waiting for something to happen, but all I could be sure of was that I was finally comfortable, my stomach was staying in place, and it was so wonderful not to be drinking that terrible stuff any more.

I wondered briefly whether I would ever be able to look at orange juice again without feeling sick, and decided I would, because I liked orange juice. Then I thought about women and vomiting and about whether men had a harder time with nausea because they didn't have to deal with it as often as women did; some women had upset stomachs with their periods, and most women had some morning sickness when they got

pregnant. They learned how to move slowly and how to keep the stomach quiet with water and dry crackers and patterns of thought that were smooth and even. Men probably fought nausea like an enemy, I thought, squeezing themselves tight against it, which is no way to calm a queasy stomach.

I turned my head to say something about this to Sam, but stopped with my mouth half open. His eyes were closed, and the soft light coming through the archway from the living room outlined his face. His mouth was that of a serious child, a bit vulnerable and wistful except in the corners, where a firmness was quite apparent.

*Firmness. What's the difference between firmness and stubbornness? Of course! When you like the person and agree with him, it's firmness; when you're in opposition to him, he's stubborn.*

There was a soft radiance about that grown-up child-face. I had never before spent time searching Sam's face; one didn't, after all, stare curiously at someone who was neither relative nor lover — not in our culture, anyway — and it was remarkable how very much of him was revealed in that mouth, once you took the time to look.

It seemed perfectly natural to be examining him closely.

I broke the silence with something else I was seeing, "I just realized, Sam; you really are the outsider, aren't you? And that's the way you want it; you like being the strange one." I was childishly pleased with myself, for perceiving so much, so well.

Sam's eyes opened; they were brown, and they looked straight at mine, without any shyness at all.

He asked, "What are you seeing?"

"I'm seeing a fascinating combination of things that show especially in your mouth, and it just came to me — I don't know why — that you've chosen to stay outside the usual, you know, medical fraternity. The doctor club. It isn't so much that they don't understand you, make friends with you; you don't *want* to be accepted, because you don't like them. And that means I don't have to worry for you, after all, which is something I tend to do."

I wondered if what I'd said made any sense to him.

He smiled slightly and looked away. After a while, he said, "Take a look around you. See anything interesting?"

I sat up and gazed around. The first thing that occurred to me was that I had moved without thinking about my tummy. I looked down at my body and felt it out; everything seemed all right. No nausea, no more feeling that I'd better stay still. I was free to pay attention to other things.

The surface of the bedroom walls moved with a faint shimmer of light. If I focused deliberately on any single point, the movement in that place stopped, but the rippling continued on the periphery.

There was another difference in the way everything looked, but for a

few moments I couldn't pin down exactly what the change was. The bed was still a bed, the lamp was the same old lamp, sitting on the small bedside table which was still a table.

Through the archway, I could see the windows of my living room illuminated by the soft spring light. The furniture looked familiar and friendly. Nothing had turned into anything else. No creatures danced on the floor. There was a feeling inside me that was new, though. I would have to look closer at that. And time was different. It didn't seem to be passing, at least for the moment.

I looked down at Sam, "Everything looks the way it's supposed to. I mean, the chairs haven't become mythical beasts or anything, but something's very different about all of it. The way it feels is very personal, sort of nice and intimate, as if my two little rooms *like* me — I know that's not the most scientific observation you've ever heard, but — well, there's a kind of — a friendly feeling to all of it."

"I didn't ask for a scientific observation," observed Sam mildly.

"And time —," I added, "Time isn't moving in the usual way."

I sat for a while just gazing, then said, "The light in the room out there is simply beautiful. There are little dust motes floating in the air and I think they're singing songs."

Sam said nothing, but the silence in the room was perfectly comfortable. I thought about how comfortable the silence was, and how I wouldn't mind if it went on forever, and that I wouldn't mind if it were broken, either. There simply was no tension anywhere, no anxiety. Just the radiance and utter peacefulness.

I said, "My insides are smiling. And I have the impression that all is well with the world. At least, all's well right here, in this corner of it."

"Good," said Sam briskly, swinging his feet to the floor, "We'll be taking a look at the rest of it pretty soon."

"Oh, Lord. You mean, outside? Do you think it's safe to do that?"

Sam turned around, "Safe? Why wouldn't it be safe?"

*He's wondering if maybe I'm not feeling all right.*

"I'm fine, Sam, but I just wondered if people outside will notice — I mean, I feel very different, and I don't know how different we're going to seem to other people."

"That reminds me, this is a good time to do something very important," said Sam, "Go take a look at yourself in your bathroom mirror, then come back and tell me what you saw."

"Okay." I stood up, observing that my body felt light and very strong. I was aware of some kind of energy moving through me, without any specific tingling or sensitivity anywhere.

I snapped on the bathroom light and looked in the mirror. The face I saw was myself at 18 or 19, when I had resembled the actress Ingrid

Bergman closely enough to be mistaken for her by strangers, a few times — to my great delight — and had not yet earned the lines in the forehead and around the mouth. The eyes were grey-blue, the pupils huge. There was something really likeable about that face, I decided, and there were no traces of anger or bitterness, where usually there were faint signs around mouth and eyes that said, Careful, don't barge in unless invited. Now there was only kindness and humor and it really was a nice face to look at.

I thought to myself, with a sense of having stumbled onto something important: this is a good human being; this person I'm looking at is to be treasured. All her faults and all her failures do not take away from the warmth and the ability to care and love that's there. I saw the reflected eyes blur with the start of tears, and felt a burst of amusement at such sympathy for myself.

I turned off the light and reported to Sam, "I look ten years younger. Is that usual?"

"That often happens. It must have something to do with the relaxation, dropping the usual defenses and tensions. Anything else?"

"Yes," I thought about how to say it, "I liked the face I saw. I mean, I really liked that person in the mirror. I'm not exactly used to that. I suppose most people aren't."

"My turn." Sam jumped off the bed and went into the bathroom, and I thought, his tummy is over its problems, obviously. When he emerged, I looked at him and waited, but he only smiled at me and walked on into the living room. I followed. He was wearing blue jeans and a toffee brown sweater, and I realized I hadn't registered details like that earlier; I'd been too anxious and distracted.

He went over to the bay window and squinted through the blinds.

"Sunlight's fading. Got a raincoat you can take with you? The radio said chance of rain, so we may as well be prepared."

"Raincoat?" I stood there, trying to make sense out of "raincoat". My mind was intensely occupied with the glowing immediacy of everything around me, the sense of light that still suffused the room, even though the shafts of sunlight had disappeared. The glow was as much *felt* as seen.

"You're okay, aren't you?" asked Sam, "I mean, your stomach's settled down, hasn't it?"

"Oh, yes, it feels fine."

"Then I think it's time to go exploring. Don't worry about anybody noticing you. People only see as much as they want to see."

"All right." I went to the closet and took out my blue plastic raincoat. It was pretty flimsy, but at least it had a hood. I asked Sam, "Do you have one?"

"In my car. I'll get it on our way."

I remembered to pick up my purse. I pulled the strap over my shoulder

and stood there, trying to look intelligent and normal.

"Got your door key?"

I searched inside the purse and found it, "Yeah, it's here."

"Okay, let's go."

*Thank heaven I'm with someone who can think of ordinary necessary things like keys. My mind wants to wander all over the place.*

Outside, Sam put on his coat and held out one arm, bent for me. I took it and we started down the sidewalk together. He said, "Whenever you want to stop and spend time with something, just tell me. We're not in a hurry."

"Okay, yes. Thanks." I was looking around at the sidewalk, the buildings, the lamp-posts; everything seemed to emit a subtle light. We passed a tiny garden in which the low bushes seemed to present themselves, calling out for attention, for acknowledgement. I smiled at them and said Hi, under my breath.

An elderly man in a worn coat was walking slowly ahead of us. As we moved past him, I glanced at his profile, trying to see inside. I could feel invisible walls and a dull, irritable tiredness, a readiness to be annoyed. I thought, if only it were possible to stop him and say something like, "Dear sir, just open your eyes and look around you; it's an incredible world! Don't close yourself off from all the life and beauty around you!"

I had been basking no longer than a few seconds in my own niceness and wisdom when a piece of information shoved itself at me and I suddenly knew that, first, the man needed his walls just exactly where they were, and didn't want to be rescued from them. Second, that it was not my right, not anyone's right, to tell him that there was another way to live, a better way to be, to urge him to see or hear what he didn't choose to see or hear. It was his choice to live the way he was living, and I must not make the mistake of passing judgment on the conduct of a life I knew nothing about.

*Oh, boy. Just got slapped.*

I remembered my mother telling me that there is a basic rule in spiritual matters: never offer what the other person hasn't asked for. Her phrase was, "Wait until you get the question before you volunteer the answer."

I thought about all the books — millions of books all over the world — in which human beings in many places and times had written about the human psyche, about life and death and the nature of God, and of how few people read them. I thought, how many people have taken peyote? I've heard lots of people talk about Huxley and his mescaline experience, wishing they could explore the way he did, have that kind of adventure, but how many of them actually go looking for mescaline or peyote to try it themselves? Most people hold onto the familiar. Who wants to actually risk having his universe changed?

*I do. Me.*

Sam was saying, "How about the park? It's only a few blocks more."  
"Yes, sure."

We were walking hand in hand, now. Every time I saw someone on the sidewalk or across the street, I would open myself to the feel of that other body's movements, trying to be inside the person, to sense whether there was unhappiness or daydreaming or anticipation and pleasure. I found it easy to pick up the emotional field, and had to remind myself that there was no way to know whether what I believed I was perceiving had any relation to reality — the other's reality.

*Doesn't matter; I'm enjoying it.*

After a few blocks, I realized I was walking with an easy, rhythmic stride which somehow matched everything around me. I was feeling completely in-tune, and everything I saw — a child running up a short stairway to the door of a house, a woman leaning out of a high window to shake a piece of cloth, a man in a leather jacket digging in the earth around a rose-bush — was music. In being who we were, in feeling what we felt, in moving as we moved, all of us were creating a silent music.

Sam was asking me, "Would you like to sit here for a bit, just to get your bearings?"

We were inside the park, and he was pointing to the base of a big oak tree. I spread my raincoat on the ground and sat with my back against the tree trunk, Sam next to me. We were surrounded by trees — eucalyptus, live-oak, cypress, others I couldn't identify — and by grass growing in at least five shades of green.

Across the path from us was another large oak, and as I looked up at it, I saw — with Van Gogh eyes — energy moving up the trunk, out each branch, bursting into tiny, leaf-shaped explosions; a tree massively still, yet alive with continuous, urgent motion. I knew that what I was looking at was real; I had just forgotten how to see it.

(Years later, at a museum exhibit of Morris Graves' paintings, I would hold my breath for a stunned moment at my first sight of his incredible pine trees. Another one who had remembered how to see!)

*It's some kind of life-force; is it what they call the etheric, the life-body? Is there some way I can see that continuous movement all the time, not just when I take a drug?*

The answer presented itself instantly, "All you have to do is take the time to pay full attention."

Tracing with my eyes the line of a thick lower branch as it rose, giving birth to increasingly slender extensions, I found that I could also hear it as a line of music, a single note branching into an elaboration of harmonizing notes.

I remembered standing outside the walls of the girl's boarding school

I had attended in Canada, when I was 16, looking up at the sky where a bird was riding a high air current, and discovering that I could mentally translate its line of flight into sound.

"Try something, Alice," said Sam. It was funny, hearing him use my name. In fact, now that I thought about it, I couldn't remember his ever having called me Alice before.

*My, my! Apparently it takes a courageous leap into the depths of the unknown, or whatever it is I'm doing today, before Doctor Golding is going to rack his brain for whatever the hell my name is!*

I giggled, but decided not to share the joke; it was too complicated. Besides, I didn't mind Sam not having used my name until now. It was part of his peculiar brand of shyness.

I smiled at him, "Yes?"

"Hold your hand up in front of you and look at it."

That seemed simple enough. I held up my right hand and froze in astonishment. It was the dear, strong, pianist-square hand I was used to, but the entire surface of it was a mass of infinitely tiny points in incredibly rapid motion. I knew what I was seeing; I didn't have to check it out with anyone else.

"My God! So that's what atoms look like!"

I turned my head and met the biggest Sam grin I had ever seen.

*He's so pleased — this must be wonderful for him, too — seeing someone opening up to all this for the first time.*

I went back to my hand, watching the extraordinary energies bursting through and around the skin. Then I looked at the big oak tree, at all the other trees and their leaves, at the grass around us; everything, everywhere, was surging with this continuous movement.

*Everything is energy, energy which assumes the shapes of grass blades and rabbits and human bodies and rocks, but we move around in a world which we've learned to see as stable, quiet, solid. Wonder at what age we begin to screen out this other reality level? Must be very early.*

"Care to share some thoughts?" I realized that Sam was being very considerate, wanting to know what was going on, yet determined not to intrude more than necessary. I felt a rush of warmth for this dear, stubborn, brilliant maverick, this so very odd man out, who had gone to a lot of trouble to open these doors for me.

I looked into his eyes and said, "Thank you, Sam. Thank you very much for giving me this day." He blinked, then rubbed his nose vigorously, mumbling that the day wasn't over yet; there was still a long way to go.

"Sam, there's a thing I've got to tell you before I forget it, because it seems important."

"Okay — say on."

"You know that everything I've been experiencing is new and — well

— every time I turn around, I see something I didn't expect to see — ?"

Sam was sitting beside me, head bent, listening.

"The funny thing is that, despite all the newness, there's something about all of it that feels — well, the only way I can put it is that it's like coming home. As if there's some part of me that already knows — knows this territory, — and it's saying Oh yes, of course! Almost a kind of remembering — !"

Sam was nodding, "That happened to me, too, the first time. A feeling of familiarity. I'm used to it, now. I mean, I'm used to the idea that somewhere in my soul I see this way all the time, but the conscious mind has learned to screen it out. Maybe it hasn't the survival value that the ordinary way of seeing does."

"Why wouldn't it have survival value?"

"Well," said Sam, getting to his feet and reaching down for my raincoat, "If you think about it, in this state a man-eating tiger could very well appear the epitome of beauty and enchantment, and a person might just stand there in awe and appreciation — right? — at the ruby-red tongue and the softly glowing ivory fangs — 'Tiger, tiger, burning bright' — and there goes one member of the human race, too busy being full of wonder to notice that he is about to become lunch."

I was hooting with laughter at Sam's tiger image, when something said, "Careful," and I checked myself as a group of four people walked by on the sidewalk; they were wearing tweeds and raincoats and looking over at us. I found myself doing for the first time something that would, many years later, become a habit — scanning my surroundings to pick up, as best I could, the reality level being experienced by others, then moving body and adjusting face to fit in with that level, in order to be not noticed, not demanding of attention. The people who had passed us were conveying a mixture of amusement, disapproval, boredom and curiosity. Nothing troublesome. Just a reminder to keep my laughter and talking at a polite and unobtrusive level.

"Oops," I muttered to Sam, taking my raincoat from him and putting it on. As we moved from under the tree, I felt raindrops on my face, and pulled up the hood. Sam took my hand.

We walked slowly. The tree trunks were black in the rain; there was fresh grass beneath my feet and nobody around. I went ahead, needing to be alone for a few moments. Moving over green-jeweled hillocks, I remembered how tired I always used to feel, as a child, when I was climbing any kind of rise. How tired I was most of the time, as a child.

Here, in this quiet dripping wood, I was stepping with a sure lightness, a lover making herself known to the body of the beloved. I didn't have to think about whether the ground was sloping up or down, or whether there might be stone or stick to avoid; my feet were taking care of all that. They

knew how to go and where to go and I was walking in pure pleasure.

A knowing spread from the soles of my feet, up my legs and into the rest of me, that the earth I walked on was indeed a body, a living body, that it was a sentient thing, with a consciousness of a kind I could not yet comprehend, and that it truly was The Mother.

I stopped and waited for Sam to catch up.

We were deep in Golden Gate Park, walking down the side of a road, not talking, just listening to the breathing of wet trees and other growing things, when just ahead of us there was a harsh screeching of car brakes, followed by the terrible, unmistakable sound of an animal injured unto death. We rounded a curve and stopped.

A man in an overcoat, obviously the driver of the braking car, was squatting in the road, one hand on his car bumper, the other hovering helplessly over the body of a panting, squeaking dog which was trying to die, to get past the pain and go, and on the sloping hill to our right, frozen under the dripping trees, were three young women in raincoats. A yellow raincoat uppermost, just below her a red raincoat, and to the side of that one, a white raincoat. They stood like figures in a Greek tragedy, a silent, stricken chorus, hands to their mouths.

While we stood there, waiting for the little dog to be released, I became aware that all living things around us — every tree, bird and insect — had gone quiet, clenching with the struggle of the dog. All of us were trying to push his soul free of the body, free of the pain, and I knew when he'd made it because suddenly I could feel everything relax and let go. One bird chirped, then the woods were filled again with bird sounds and the croaking of tree-frogs.

There arose in me then a certainty that all life on this planet is connected, all the time, at some unconscious level; that whatever is felt by a single living one of us is experienced, in some way I couldn't define, by everything else that lives.

I didn't try at that moment to formulate it, to put the right words to it. I was just aware of being taught something I was meant to learn and remember. I had read it a thousand times in as many places; it was an old, lovely cliche — "No man is an island" — and all that. Now I was being shown the truth behind the cliche, and it went farther than the poet had implied. It wasn't just human life we were connected with; it was everything alive.

There was the sound of a woman's voice, calling out in the woods, not very far away. Calling for her dog, whose still body lay on the road before six people who were standing around in the rain, crying quietly to themselves.

As we walked slowly past the car, past the crouched driver, past the now moving figures on the hill, I realized something else. I told Sam what

I had felt while the dog was dying, the sense of everything around us squeezing tight, holding its breath.

"When the dog died, it was all right again," I told him, "I mean, it isn't death that is the — the terrible thing, the enemy; it's pain. The trees and everything else around me, I could feel them all start breathing again when the pain stopped."

We walked in silence for a few moments, then Sam said, "I remember seeing a dead bird lying in the grass, once, in the middle of a peyote session. I stopped to look at it because I wanted to understand death, to know what it was, what it seemed like when I was seeing differently. I was looking down at the bird and it came to me that all the parts of the body were being dissolved back into the earth, some of them very fast, some of them slowly; it was all going to return, one way or another, to the earth, and that that's the way it's supposed to happen. The life that used to be in the bird belonged somewhere else, and it had gone there, and what was left, the physical part, was going back to where IT belonged. There was a rightness about it. Death was simply a moving from one state to another."

I nodded, remembering some of the phrases I'd read in books and articles about psychedelic experiences, phrases like "Everything's all right just exactly the way it is," and the equally infuriating, "I'm okay, you're okay," which had always sounded unbearably fatuous and self-satisfied. I'd often thought angrily that the writers had conveniently forgotten about the babies in Calcutta garbage cans, sorrow and hurt and loneliness, and the rest of a planetful of miseries. I'd said to myself, here's some whacked-out idiot rhapsodizing about life being all right just the way it is. It had never stopped me from reading about such experiences, but my liberal soul had always ground its teeth at that aspect of the reports.

Now — now I would have to take it all back, all that resentment, because I was beginning to understand. I stopped in the road and looked at Sam and looked past him, and around and up at the grey sky and knew that everything in the world was doing exactly what it was supposed to be doing; that the universe was on course, and that there was a Mind somewhere that knew everything that happened because it *was* everything that happened, and that, whether I understood it with my intellect or not, all was well. I simply knew it and I knew that I would try to figure it out later, but that I had to absorb the truth of it now, standing on a wet road in Golden Gate Park with a patient, quiet friend who was waiting to see if there was anything I wanted to tell him.

I said, "I just understood that it's all going the way it's supposed to be going. Hope that makes sense to you, because it's the only way I can say it, right now."

Sam nodded again.

We walked on until we found ourselves nearing the California Academy of Sciences, a huge stone building which stands on one side of a circle that includes, at its opposite side, the De Young Museum. In between the two, there is a small park, bare of grass, with a band shell and lots of trees with room under them for chairs, where people sit in the spring and summer and listen to music played from the little stage.

"Let's go in," said Sam, pulling me up the steps of the Academy. I trotted obediently after him, practicing normal facial expressions, trying to dull my eyes so that they wouldn't lift an innocent bystander off the floor if I should happen to glance his way.

*My God, how do you not broadcast this kind of energy?*

We walked through the immense rotunda without attracting any attention, and Sam led me to the aquarium, which was nice and dark, except for the lights in the fish tanks. I stood in front of a window full of tiny, darting fish and became all the little silver bodies at once.

*How is it I'm aware of being completely me — I can locate my Self, my center — yet, at the same time, I can scatter my consciousness into hundreds of fishes?*

I moved to the next tank, where an immense grouper swam in lonely dignity, and I became the big, ungainly fish, lower jaw protruding. It was a restful place to be, however briefly, because the grouper didn't seem to be particularly involved with anything complicated, like thinking. I looked around for Sam and smiled to see him at another window, as rapt as I had been. I walked over and joined him.

We stood, side by side, gazing into a tank full of tropical fish, trying to assimilate the extraordinary sight. One creature swam by, wearing a canary yellow bib outlined in velvety black, its mouth a prudish pout; behind it came a small gem in bright orange, marked by two broad tapering blue splashes, while above darted several tiny zebra-striped characters. The parade grew more fantastic as we watched: meticulously painted red stripes alternating with black-bordered blue stripes; a pursed blue mouth topped by a fashionable black eye mask, leading a body of blue and yellow stripes, the whole piece of enamelwork finishing in an orange chiffon tail.

Watching all of it — the designs, the brilliant geometric patterns, the funny, pompous little faces — it occurred to me that the creator of these little bits of sea life had a tremendous sense of humor.

(It would be a long time before the rest of that train of thought would present itself: how is it that human beings are equipped to see whimsy, beauty and comedy? What is it in us that makes us respond to the colors in nature with awe and delight, and to some natural designs with laughter? What strange quirk was wired into our genes which causes us to see something as funny? Were we made that way because the God-mind wanted company when it laughed?)

We moved out of the aquarium and spent time looking at the reptiles

in their glass cases. All I could feel was pity and the need to send an apology to them; they belonged out in the woods and the desert, not in here.

I leaned over the edge of a deep wet pit in the middle of the reptile room and let myself be captured by the crocodile that lay there, unmoving. The beast seemed to be almost entirely stomach; his soul lived in mouth and gullet and intestine, and I was sinking into a stolid heaviness. I broke the contact, shuddering a little.

Then I found the sea horse tank. I planted myself in front of the delicate grey-brown miniatures and went into a world that tasted of a certain sweetness, then I was feeling the strength, the firmness of the tiny bodies balancing themselves in the water, fins flickering. They seemed to carry small sparks of light inside. I laughed to myself.

*Hello, little darlings! Hello, there. My, aren't you just the answer to that ol' heavy in the pit!*

I found Sam again and we wandered through the immense rotunda of the building, past people standing in line for the Planetarium show, and into a portion of the museum which presented dioramas behind glass, showing early cave-dwellers, progressing to later cave-dwellers, all the figures life-sized, caught in the act of doing ordinary daily tasks.

There was no one else in the hall.

Around us were low walls of polished stone, topped by the glass exhibit cases; there were metal strips running up the edges of the glass. I was looking at the first exhibit — a stone age man wearing animal skins, apparently trying to light a fire — when I began feeling very odd.

It was as if the center of my body — just above the navel and below the ribcage — was suddenly becoming an empty space, a void. It felt like a rapidly widening hole in me where, seconds before, there had been only humming aliveness. I stepped back from the wall and stood in the middle of the hallway, focusing all my attention on this new sensation.

In front of me there was now a transparent curtain of pale grey, like silent rain falling, and I could feel the magnificent energy draining out of me. I realized I was beginning to come down, losing my place in the peyote-opened world, and I didn't want that to happen. I looked around me, and a suspicion formed in my mind. I said to Sam, "Excuse me for a moment; I have to try something out, but I'll come right back."

He looked at me, puzzled, but said nothing. I went down the corridor to the rotunda and kept going until I had drawn almost level with the Planetarium queue. The hollow in my middle was filling in again. I stopped just a few feet behind the last person in the line, feeling the hunger subside. Something was being replenished.

I looked around me and breathed deeply. The falling grey rain had disappeared. I was a being of energy again, back in the world of the gods.

*If I'm right about what made this happen, I can test it pretty easily.*

I went back to the hallway where Sam stood waiting for me. I walked slowly past him, continued for a few feet, then turned around again, my question answered. It had taken less than half a minute in this place for the draining sensation to return. I smiled broadly at Sam and said, "I'll explain everything, but I have to get away from here," and took his hand, pulling him out of the corridor and across the rotunda, to where we could lean against a wall while we talked.

As visitors strolled by us, I told Sam what had happened.

"The only explanation that makes sense," I concluded, "Is that there's a basic — that people *need* to be in contact with living things, and when they're surrounded only by stone and metal and glass, something drains out of them. It felt awful, Sam. I was actually coming down, out of the magic, losing everything."

"Why didn't you say something?"

"I wanted to test it out first. That's what I was doing. I thought I'd just see what would happen if I walked over to where there were a lot of living bodies, and I was right! It worked, Sam! As soon as I was within a few feet of the line — those people waiting for the astronomy show — the hole in my center began filling up. I could feel it, like an empty mouth being fed. And I was going up again."

"How are you now?"

"I'm feeling wonderful. Everything's repaired."

I looked around the rotunda, at the little children with their shiny yellow or red Christopher Robin raincoats, at the people leaning over the railing around a huge depression in the floor over which a great pendulum was slowly swinging a large metal ball, at a small child who watched the shining sphere with open mouth; I saw people waiting in a new line for the astronomy show in the Planetarium, some of them reading pocketbooks to pass the time, others talking.

I knew that I could tune in to anyone I could see; all I had to do was reach out in my mind to a particular person and open myself inside, so that what they were and what they felt could reach me. I only had to be open, making no evaluation or judgement, in order to experience anxious tightness, impatience, or contentment.

I examined myself and felt my body humming again and knew that in the middle of my chest there was a radiant center of energy, and another one just above my navel, and that they were probably what the spiritual teachers of India call chakras. I couldn't remember how many there were supposed to be, altogether; five or seven, maybe. I was certainly aware of two of them, anyway.

Sam said, "I don't know if you realize this, but there are some researchers — doctors — who are giving this kind of drug to volunteers, to

see what the effects are, and they're doing it the proper scientific way, in clean white hospital rooms, away from trees and flowers and the wind, and they're surprised at how many of the experiments turn sour. They've never taken any sort of psychedelic themselves, needless to say. Their volunteers — they're called 'subjects,' of course — are given mescaline or LSD and they're all opened up to their surroundings, very sensitive to color and light and other people's emotions, and what are they given to react to? Metal bed-frames and plaster walls, and an occasional white coat carrying a clipboard. Sterility. Most of them say afterwards that they'll never do it again."

"Jesus! Right now, after what I've just gone through, that sounds worse than awful."

"Not all of the research is being done that way, thank God, but too much of it is."

"What a shame," I said, saddened by the picture, "What a shame!"

"Ready to go exploring again?"

"Sure. Where shall we go?"

"I'd like to see the Japanese Tea Garden, for a start. How about you?"

"Oh, yes," I said, "That's a lovely place. Don't think I've been there for several years."

We stood outside the front door for a moment, looking around. The rain had stopped. Every tree shimmered faintly with the light that permeated all growing things, yet each tiny leaf and twig was outlined sharply in the clean air.

We walked across the road outside and down the steps to the park. On the other side of the great circle, we stopped at the big lotus pool in front of the entrance to the art museum. Leaning over the edge, we looked down into a world of dark green and black water; there were copper reflections here and there from the bottoms of lotus leaves. An occasional blur of orange-gold in the depths reminded us that this was a home to fish. We lost ourselves in the jade and copper world, watching insects and leaves and grasses and jeweled beetles as if they were the inhabitants of a separate planet.

Finally, Sam moved and took my hand, "Let's go," and I walked with him down the road to the Japanese Tea Garden, where we paid the small admission and I practiced ordinary-face until we were past the people at the gate.

It wasn't very crowded, probably because of the rain, but there were some patient, raincoated visitors who were obviously used to this kind of weather and we would have to expect them around every turn, so I kept my mind at least partially on maintaining normal body-language and making sure I did not glance directly at faces coming our way on the narrow paths.

Strolling the gardens, we stopped every few feet as one or the other of us was struck by an outline of rock or an exquisiteness of blossoming color. I had appreciated the garden before, but I understood it, now.

There was a deliberate juxtaposition of shapes and textures which captured not only eyes, but emotions. I could follow the unfolding of an inner experience created by the gardener, as he sculptured with moss-covered stone, fleshy plant leaves, delicate ferns, moving water and subtle gradations of color in the pebbles that drifted across the floors of the various water bodies. All this, I had in earlier visits glanced at; now, I was truly seeing it, giving grateful acknowledgement to the insight of the person who had so lovingly formed all this for others to see and feel. I said to Sam, "What an extraordinary work of art!"

"I had the same reaction, when I first saw it under the influence. Quite an experience, isn't it!"

I nodded, tears in my throat.

"By the way," said Sam, once, when we had been standing for a while, looking across water at a young willow rising from a bed of coral-pink flowers, "Have you noticed how time stops when you really focus your attention on something?"

I hadn't been noticing time. I said, "Give me a second, and I'll see."

He chuckled.

I concentrated on the willow tree poised at the tip of its peninsula of garden, watching its own reflection in the water, and felt the stillness. There was no here-going-to-there, only willow, water, me, in a Now that eternally folded itself into itself.

Time moved again with Sam's hand on my shoulder.

We walked on and came to a low stone wall, where Sam stopped to rest his elbows. "Come and see this," he said, and I looked over the wall, down a slope of grass to a mass of vivid spring flowers. I could feel his eyes on my face as I flinched and stepped back from the impact of red, orange and bright purple. The colors were physically painful to my eyes, unless I squinted.

"I almost can't look at them, Sam."

"They're really quite a shock, aren't they!"

I averted my eyes, then tried looking again, amused and annoyed at the same time. I asked him if he knew why the colors hurt the eyes, and he explained about frequencies and certain parts of the color spectrum, and about the sensitivity of the eye when the pupil was enlarged, and I nodded and said Oh, I see, knowing I wouldn't remember the explanations and that it was all right.

What was important was that I'd been reminded that no matter how strong the spirit or soul, how flexible and complex and magical the mind, there was still a physical body to be considered, and it operated according

to laws which were the laws of the physical universe, and I must never allow myself to forget that.

Climbing a small hill behind the tea house, we came across the seated Buddha, the great golden, gently smiling Buddha which watches the upper path, and we stood before it for a long time, in silence.

A little while after leaving the Japanese Tea Garden, we were going single file down a narrow path between trees and Sam was ahead of me, his head bent, hands in his pockets. I slowly became aware of an entirely new change in my body; something was happening, had happened. I walked behind Sam, trying to define it, to understand what it was.

My entire spine had become activated; it was a living channel of energy moving between the crown of my head and the tip of my spine. The intensity of it was just barely tolerable. As I continued down the dirt path, the energy charge in my back seemed to transform somehow, and I realized that I was feeling something throughout my entire body which, if I had been experiencing it in my genitals, would have been recognizable as orgasm. It was not confined to the genitals at all, but it certainly was orgasm and it was all up and down the spine, in the chest and stomach and legs, in head and throat and bladder. I was walking along like any ordinary person, experiencing total orgasm without having to close my eyes, without any loss of control or ability to think. Good grief, I thought. Ever-loving Pete! How do I ask Sam about this?

*Answer: I don't ask Sam about this.*

As I looked at his back, a few feet ahead, it occurred to me that I could reach out with my mind and actually touch him, and when I wondered how best to go about doing it, an image came of peeling layers of Sam away — like an onion — until I got to the core of him, and I would be able to touch that directly. I simply knew I could do it, and the idea seemed delightful and very funny.

I began mentally peeling Sam's layers, one by one, gently, as I followed him. After a while, I sensed a shining thing that had no shape, in the middle of his body, and I reached out with the will to touch, and poked it at the shining. Sam jumped in mid-step and turned, both hands spread against his back. He looked at me standing there, grinning, and said, "What the hell...?"

I apologized, not meaning it, and told him what I'd discovered I could do. I was very pleased with myself. It was like being a kid with a very powerful, brand new toy, I thought, and the message came that I should be careful and responsible, even though it was an awful lot of fun to play with.

Sam's face was rather thoughtful, and when he asked me politely to walk beside him from now on, I laughed and promised to behave.

The orgasmic energy continued to flood me, body and mind. I noted

that I was in complete control of what I said, what I did, and I couldn't remember any time in my life when my thought processes had been sharper or clearer. I had absolute trust in my own judgement.

We walked on together, talking now and then, most of the time absorbed in our own thoughts, until we found ourselves emerging from the woods into a field which sloped up gently on three sides, forming a shallow bowl of wet grass and red-brown earth.

We stopped and looked around us at the earth, the sky and each other, then I saw something forming in the air, slightly above the level of my head. I thought that it was perhaps a few feet from me, then realized I couldn't actually locate it in space at all. It was a moving spiral opening, up there in the cool air, and I knew it was a doorway to the other side of existence, that I could step through it if I wished to be finished with this particular life I was living, and that there was nothing threatening or menacing about it; in fact, it was completely friendly. I also knew that I had no intention of stepping through it because there was still a great deal I wanted to do in my life, and I intended to live long enough to get it all done. The lovely spiral door didn't beckon; it was just matter-of-factly there.

Any fear I might have had of death, of the actual crossing of the border, was left behind at that moment. I was seeing the way through, and there was nothing to be frightened of. As I gazed up at the energy-charged patch of sky, I was again aware of being unsurprised, because some part of me remembered this.

(I still have the fear of dying before I have done all I want to, but I have no fear of the journey itself, nor of what lies on the other side of that opening. I know that when I get there, I will recognize the territory very well indeed, and that it will be truly a returning home.)

Sam had been silent during the few minutes it took for me to undergo the experience. When I put my hand on his arm and told him about the gently revolving doorway, he listened, then said that he had seen the death place himself, once, during an experiment with Shura Borodin's group, but that, for him, it had taken the form of a short passageway which turned a blind corner, appearing just a bit ahead of where he was walking in a meadow.

"I had the same impression; it was friendly, and there wasn't anything dramatic or threatening about it at all. It was just letting me know it was there. I could go around that corner any time I really was finished with this act of the play. And I said Thank you for showing me, but I still have a lot of things I want to do, so it'll be some time yet."

I smiled at him, nodding.

We left the quiet hollow and moved on for a while in silence until suddenly we were on the edge of the highway. Standing on the sidewalk,

we watched cars moving at a speed which was not ours, in a space-time that was not the one we were in, knowing that if we wanted to cross the street, we would have to tune ourselves into that other space and time and act within it, remembering what red lights and green lights meant, and what the rules of crossing roads were.

Sam smiled, "I'm getting hungry; how about you?"

"Now that you mention it, I think I'm ravenous."

"There's a pizza place across the street. Want to give it a try?"

"Let me have a moment to tune into this — this aspect of the world again."

"I'm used to it. Just hold onto me."

I grasped his hand and kept an eye on the stoplights, and when the light ahead of us turned green, I checked and double-checked to make sure that the light that was to our right was red, and that meant the cars would stop and we could walk in front of them without danger. I muttered, hearing myself with some amusement, "Green ahead of us means okay to move across the street. Red means stop and green means go. That's right, isn't it?"

"Yeah," said Sam, hurrying me across the wet pavement, "That's exactly right, by George! Couldn't have said it better myself."

The orgasmic state was mellowing out, very gradually, to a level of energy flow less pressing, less intense than it had been before. I existed and moved in a field of light, and there was a steady flow, like a continuing note of music, underneath, that could only be called bliss — a connection with that aspect of the Great Mind, the Great Spirit, which was love and joy and laughing affirmation.

In the small restaurant, we were careful to squint so that our eyes would not startle anyone, and a waitress led us to a table with a red and white checked tablecloth and the obligatory candle stuck in a raffia-wrapped wine bottle. It was a nice place and we were not going to disturb anyone. The menu was immense, and I suppressed a strong desire to giggle at the endless listing of pizza names and hamburger titles and salad possibilities. I was concentrating deeply on a paragraph that described a particularly well-endowed pizza, when the laminated paper in front of me burst into searing golden light, so bright that I jumped and held the menu at arm's length. I looked up to tell Sam about this unexpected event, and saw him grinning wickedly at me over the top of his menu.

*What do you know! He's found out how to do it!*

We sat and laughed out loud, and I said Congratulations! and he said Thank You, then we became aware of the waitress standing over us and we both knew that she was very uneasy and didn't know why she was feeling that way. We sobered fast and gave our orders in voices that were as monotone and mechanical as we could make them, trying to remember

what it was like to talk in the ordinary world, trying to dim the light, the energy, so it wouldn't infringe on her, doing our best to wall ourselves off from everyone else in the room, to tone down our broadcasting. I thought to myself, Boy, there's an awful lot to learn awfully fast.

Later, back in my apartment, Sam and I made love very simply and silently, for the first and last time.

At the door, I said, "Thank you for this day," and he said, "It was a privilege, my friend," and kissed me softly on the cheek.

I locked the door behind him and sat on my bed and cried. I thought, everything I've gone through, all the pain and grieving, all the loneliness and the dark places — they were all balanced, paid for, answered, by this one extraordinary, blessed day.

I went to my bookcase, found Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* and, in the intimate silence of the very early morning hours, re-read it and cried again, sending love and gratitude to the author for having found the words. Then I turned off the bedside lamp and looked through the darkness to wherever that beautiful, funny, tremendously loving part of God was, thanked it with all of my being, and fell asleep.

## CHAPTER 18. THE BEGINNING

Shura and I met on a Thursday evening in the fall of 1978.

It was the first meeting of a new weekly discussion group; at least, that's what my friend Kelly expected it to become. I was sitting cross-legged on the living room floor of an old house on Adler Street, in Berkeley, wondering how many of the 30 or so invited people would turn up. I had promised Kelly I would come to this first gathering, adding that I couldn't commit myself beyond that, and he'd said okay, he understood.

Actually, at that point, I no longer thought of Kelly Toll as a friend at all; he was a recent, brief involvement which I was doing my best to end — as smoothly and quietly as possible.

He was an intense man with a striking, angular face, in his late thirties, who had met me at a Mensa gathering four months earlier. The next day, he came to my house and asked me to marry him. He explained, much later, that of course he knew I would refuse — had counted on it, in fact — but that he had often found proposing marriage to be an effective way of getting a woman's attention.

There was no denying it had done just that.

I was 48 and newly divorced, my ego as fragile as a piece of hundred year-old burlap. Being pursued by a youngster in his thirties gave me something I hadn't had in years: the feeling that I was still an attractive woman, not just a middle-aged parent.

Kelly's passions in life were computers, good-looking older women and the creation of new IQ tests. I also discovered that he had a generalized contempt for humanity, referring to most people as "turkeys," and a tendency to uncontrolled explosions of rage, which often resulted in his having to apologize later for damage done to someone else's furniture or a relationship — usually both.

He explained about his painful illnesses in childhood and his demanding, punitive father, and asked me to be understanding and patient.

It worked for a while (I've always had a soft spot for intelligent neurotics), but after one memorable day when he smashed some of my records in front of the children, screaming at me for coming home ten minutes late from work and keeping him waiting, I told him if he didn't go into therapy, I was through.

Kelly's answer was, "I've never met a psychiatrist I couldn't out-think and out-reason; I'm not about to waste my time or my money on one of those cretins!"

This Thursday gathering in Berkeley was an effort on Kelly's part to bring together people he considered intelligent enough to, as he put it, appreciate what he could teach them about using their minds effectively. I hoped it would all work out the way he wanted, but if it didn't, it wasn't going to be my problem.

I was sitting close to the fireplace so I could blow my cigarette smoke in the general direction of the chimney and avoid offending non-smokers. These were the early days of the anti-smoking campaign and Berkeley, as usual, was ahead of everywhere else in making it a cause. You could still expect to find ashtrays in most homes in San Francisco and Marin County, but in Berkeley, you apologized for needing to smoke and let yourself out into the back yard until you'd done your little addiction thing and were ready to rejoin the free souls inside.

By 8:00 PM, there were only four of us in the room: Kelly, myself and the person who lived in the house — a short, black-haired man in his early 40's with a seductive, lopsided grin, who translated ancient Chinese medical texts into English for the love of it, and was at the moment unemployed. The fourth was a very pretty woman, an attorney, who had been telling us wearily how it had recently come to her that she detested everything about the law, but that she couldn't decide what else to do with her life.

By 8:15, two more people had arrived; a short blonde woman with a pale face and hesitant smile, and a man with angry eyes who was introduced as a psychologist. Then the door opened and in came a slender, very tall man whose hair was a thick Old Testament mane of silver, matched by a trim beard which had streaks of blond hair mixed in with the white. He was wearing brown corduroy pants and a worn corduroy jacket, and Kelly yelled out his name, "Doctor Alexander Borodin, people, known to his friends as Shura!"

I must have been staring at the newcomer rather intently, because, as we were introduced, he met my gaze and lifted one large white eyebrow fractionally. Then he smiled as I patted the floor beside me. I'd heard just enough from Kelly about the man called Shura to be extremely curious. He'd said once, "Shura's the only person I've ever met — with the exception of Doctor Needleman — that I respect. He's a true, honest-to-God genius. He may even have a higher IQ than mine." He'd chuckled, and so

had I. We both knew that Kelly found it hard to really believe in any IQ higher than his own, which was in the 170's. I had been intrigued by the admittedly faint possibility that a person who inspired respect in my difficult friend might actually turn up at the meeting. And anyone who rated equal seating, in Kelly's eyes, with the philosopher Jacob Needleman must be pretty remarkable, I thought.

I watched the man with the gorgeous hair as he took off his jacket and sat down on the floor to my left. He hooked his arms around his knees and said, "Hello," his eyes clear blue and interested. I said in a low voice, "I'm honored to finally meet one of the two people in the world to whom Kelly does not apply the word, 'turkey'!"

"Oh, really?" Shura looked sharply at me, then glanced over to where his host was animatedly talking to the blonde woman. "I suppose I should be flattered, but I hardly know him. Only met him a couple of times, at the Berkeley Brain Center. Don't know where he developed such regard for me." I grinned at the mention of what was usually referred to as the BBC, a very large and successful lecture and discussion group Kelly had taken me to a few times. Berkeley, like most university towns, was full of discussion groups continually being born and dying, and the BBC had lasted longer than most.

I asked him, "What made you decide to come tonight, if you don't know Our Leader all that well?"

"Oh, I had a free evening after my class on the U.C. campus, and thought I might stop in here instead of going straight home. Just curiosity. And I suppose I wasn't looking forward to home that much. Since my wife died, the evenings have sometimes been a bit too quiet."

I said, "Oh, dear, how long ago did she die?" He said about a year ago, and I made a small sympathetic sound, thinking, I wonder if it was a happy marriage. I changed the subject and asked if the class he referred to was one he was teaching, or was he a student? He said it was a class in Forensic Toxicology, and that he taught it every fall at the university.

*He's forgotten to ask who the other non-turkey is. Should I tell him?*

"Since you didn't ask," I said, "Kelly's only other hero is Jacob Needleman. You're in pretty good company."

"Is that so?" He didn't have to say it; he wasn't familiar with the name.

I chuckled, "That's okay. I don't know anything about him either, except that he's a philosopher and he's written some excellent books which I haven't read yet."

During the break in the meeting, Shura and I took our cigarettes and coffee outside to the front porch and talked. I found out that he was a chemist and specialized in something called psychopharmacology, and that we knew a lot of the same people. He, too, had been to Esalen. He

told me a story about a certain rather stolid psychiatrist whom I had also met, doing a handstand, stark naked, in one of Esalen's famous hot tubs, with an audience of the great and near-great, also naked but less ambitious, doing their best to avoid being swamped by the tidal wave. He said it was his favorite memory of Esalen. When I stopped laughing, I promised him an equally hilarious anecdote of my own about the hot tubs, at some future time. I was already looking forward to a future time. I liked this man, despite Kelly's approval of him.

Somewhere along the way, I managed to make it clear to Shura that I had known Kelly for several months and that I was in the process of bringing closure, as gently as I could, to the relationship. It wasn't the right moment for details, and I didn't offer any.

Shura said he had been married for 30 years and that his wife, Helen, had died of a stroke last year. When I asked him if he had children, he said there was one son, Theo, who was grown and living on his own, not far from the family home in the East Bay.

*I wonder what age range is "grown?" I can't tell how old this man is. The white hair says one thing, but the face and the way the body moves say something entirely different.*

When he asked, "How about you? Do you have children?" I took a deep breath and began, talking fast because Kelly was calling everyone back to the hard work of learning to think properly. "I'm divorced from a psychiatrist and I have four children, but the oldest, from my first marriage (I thought of adding that I was very young at the time — around five or so — but resisted the temptation) is living up north. He's a very good teacher in a private school and he has his own family."

*The word, "family," implies children, which means I'm a grandmother. So, okay. I'm a grandmother.*

I stubbed out my cigarette, "I live with my three teenagers in Marin County and we have a house across the street from my ex, so the kids just climb up the hill to their father's house on weekends and spend the time with him, and come back at the end of Sunday. It's a very civilized arrangement and I'm glad I managed to do it that way, because it's paid off for everybody. I mean, my children haven't really had too bad a time with the divorce."

I finished up at supersonic speed, "I work in a hospital as a medical transcriber and I hate the job but it's a living." I expelled a long breath, and Shura grinned. We returned to the living room.

*I'm glad I'm still reasonably attractive and I have lovely long hair, and thank God I lost weight last year and I'm a size 9. I want this man to be interested. No — make that fascinated.*

I liked him. I liked his face and the long, lean body; I liked the husky tenor voice and the way his eyes observed and the impression he gave of

an open directness overlying something very inward, very private.

When the meeting was over, we walked out of the house together and stopped on the sidewalk beside my old Volkswagen bus. I asked him if he planned to be at the next meeting, and it was then that I learned the rest of what I had to know.

He said, "No, I'm afraid I'm going to have to leave it at this one time, because I'm starting lessons in French next Thursday."

"For any specific reason, or just to learn French?"

"Well, I've always intended to learn French anyway, but right now there's a reason for trying to learn as much as I can in a very short time."

He leaned back against my car, his arms folded, and the street light gave him a corona of orange-gold. His face was in shadow.

"For the past year or so," he said, "I've been in a — a strange sort of relationship with a woman named Ursula, who lives in Germany. She was over here with her husband to study psychology and I fell in love with her, which was a bit inconvenient, since her husband is a person I like very much and consider a good friend, but it happened. It happened to both of us. I don't know how it's going to work out, but I'm going to meet her in Paris for a few days around Christmas, and we're going to try to figure out what to do. The French is because she speaks it fluently and I have a smattering of it and it's easier for me to improve what I have than to try learning German."

I said the only thing I could, "Oh, I see." The Observer — my name for the part of me that keeps track of everything — noted with interest that there was suddenly a hollow feeling just below my rib cage. I smiled pleasantly at the shadowed face and said, "I hope it works out the way you want it to," not meaning a word of it.

Just before I got into my car, I turned to him and put out a tendril, just in case.

"When you get back," I said, "I'd love to know how it all turned out."

I dug in my purse for the pen and small notebook I always carried, wrote my name and phone number and handed it to him. He took a large, worn wallet from the front pocket of his pants and carefully tucked the piece of paper into it.

From the driver's window, I looked at the tall, brown-jacketed figure and said, "I'm very glad to have finally met you and I hope we meet again," speaking the ordinary, standard phrase slowly, with emphasis, as if it were the Open Sesame to treasure.

Shura Borodin braced his hands on the edge of the car window, brought his head down to where he could look directly into my eyes, and said one quiet word, "Yes."

A small shock went up my spine. I drove home, smiling for a long time.

I didn't see him again for over two months. During that time, Kelly reluctantly packed up the assortment of things he'd kept at my house and, to my considerable surprise, said goodbye with a shy kiss on my forehead and an almost apologetic shrug, as if he realized that, this time, his usual tantrums would gain him nothing at all. I was touched and relieved and had all the locks changed the next morning.

Then there was Christmas and everything that meant to me as a mother. Ann, Wendy and Brian were not only my children; they were also my only close friends. The divorce had made painfully clear that most of the people Walter and I had known during our marriage were going to remain attached to the partner with the medical degree and the social standing; apparently, it had not occurred to them to continue being friends with both of us.

I had to work for a living; Walter's support payments were all he could afford, and they were not quite enough to cover the needs of three teenagers and the monthly bills as well.

Ann, the older of my two girls, was — at age 17 — enjoying her new shapely figure, after years of misery with baby-fat. Wendy, one year younger, had also fought the bulge battle and won. The three of us had dieted together the year before until, finally, the day came for all of us to drive to the big shopping center up Highway 101, and walk together into a shop where they sold only blue jeans. While Brian sat waiting, the girls and I pulled on pants in sizes we had only dreamt of eight months earlier, and I bought a new pair for each of us, giggling at Brian's exaggerated look of boredom (he never had weight problems). Celebration day.

So for Christmas, with the seductive credit cards I knew I should be avoiding, I bought some pretty, sexy clothes for my daughters. For Brian, my gentle, observant young son, I found an expensive sweater with an understated brown and blue pattern. Brian might be the youngest at 14, but he was no longer the baby; there was actually a shadow on his upper lip, which his sisters occasionally commented on, and he had a very definite taste in clothes, tending toward the simple and conservative. Suffering from a mild dyslexia, he had learned, when very young, to avoid the taunts and jeers of school bullies by being as quiet and unobtrusive as possible, and I suspected that this was at least part of the reason for such understatement in his choice of what to wear.

Ann and Wendy were bright, lovely-looking girls; each had thick blonde hair that fell in a straight, shining river to her buttocks. They had always complained bitterly when they were younger about the fact that Brian's darker hair had all the curls, but in high school their own falls of gold had earned them so much attention, they gradually lost the habit of curl-envy. I felt vindicated in having threatened them with banishment, execution or worse, if they so much as thought of cutting anything more than a split-

end.

They were kind, thoughtful people, my children, sensitive to the feelings of others, and patient with me as I struggled, not very efficiently, to keep both job and home going. I had always been a poor housekeeper, and suffered bouts of guilt when I realized how often the kids picked up after me. The only trouble they gave me was in a tendency to silly arguments with each other, like most siblings. They were just starting to outgrow this particular form of fun and games, to my great relief.

I adored them, not just because they were my own, but because they were good human beings, people of integrity.

On New Year's Eve, when the children had gone up the hill to be with their father, I went to a Mensa party in San Francisco, but returned home relatively early, wanting to face the first hours of the new year away from the noise and lurching of people who had drunk too much. I stood outside on the deck, in darkness, looking up at the star-frosted sky, letting myself feel without censoring the ache and hope that belonged to that night, and I sent out a prayer for connection with someone who would be — finally — the person I'd needed to be with all my life, someone who would have gone through his own changes and wars of the spirit and emerged a true adult. A grown-up man. Who wouldn't mind my being a grandmother, for Pete's sake. A man somewhat like Shura Borodin — or what Shura seemed to be.

I cried a bit because the wanting was so very intense and the clear night sky so very indifferent, and everything I was in body and soul might yet grow old without a lover and friend who could be to me what I was capable of being to him. I toasted myself, hope, the new year and the magnificent cold stars with a bit of wine, then went to bed.

Toward the end of January, I received a phone call from a woman I'd met several times at the BBC discussion group meetings, a sweet, fluttering, childlike woman of 60-odd, who reminded me of a Hungarian countess my parents had known in Italy, when I was a child. Hilda even wore jewelry the same way the countess had, thin bird fingers glittering with rings, neck hung with numerous chains and pendants. She was the president of a psychology foundation whose name I could never quite remember, and she constantly fretted about the book for which she seemed to be forever gathering material.

She was phoning to invite me to an evening at her home with her new discovery, " — an extraordinary spiritual teacher from India; you *must* meet him, my dear!" She urged me not to miss the performance of Indian music she had arranged for, and the company of what she assured me were, "The most wonderfully interesting people, very special people, darling!" I said to myself, Oh, why not, and to her, "Thank you, Hilda, it sounds absolutely irresistible."

It was a Saturday night. When I entered Hilda's large living room, the first thing I saw was a magnificent dark red Persian rug and the second thing was Shura Borodin. He was standing at a large fireplace, resting one arm easily on the mantel, talking to three people whose backs were to me, two men and a woman. After the first shock of seeing him again, I found myself wondering where the German Ursula person was, not knowing what to look for — brown, black or blonde hair, although presumably it would be blonde — and I noted without amusement that my pulse rate had gone up considerably within the past few seconds.

I searched around for other familiar faces to focus on; I didn't want to be caught looking at him. I thought, he might even have gotten married, then remembered he had told me Ursula was already married to a good friend (or former good friend), so that idea could be ditched.

*Maybe he's engaged. To hell with it. He never did call me, so Paris must have worked out the way he wanted, and if she's here, I'll find out soon enough.*

Hilda called the room to order, and invited her 25 or so guests to please form a half-circle, sitting on the pillows scattered around the floor. I sat down on a dark brown velvet pillow close to an archway, arranging my long skirt gracefully on the carpet, and reminded myself that, when I looked around to identify Shura and his German lady, I should do so very casually.

Suddenly there was a body unfolding itself onto a large pillow next to me. It smelled warm and male and unaccountably familiar, and it was Shura. I smiled at him and said, "How good to see you again! Did you bring your German lady with you?"

"No, I'm afraid it wasn't possible, this time."

*Oh hell, I meant to the party, not from Europe. Does he mean the same thing? Does he mean she's here in California, but didn't come to the party? Or that he couldn't bring her home with him from Paris?*

I tried again, "When did you get back?"

"From France? Oh, about two weeks ago."

"And it went well for you?"

He didn't answer right away. I saw his profile, with its fine-bridged nose, as he squinted at the room. I waited, all my antennae on alert. After what seemed a very long time and was quite probably all of four seconds, he answered, "I really don't know."

I kept looking at him and said nothing.

"I've never had a relationship anything like this," he said, "And sometimes I wonder if I've convinced myself of something that isn't really there at all."

He sat, hunched over his knees, his voice subdued, "Yet, I'm sure of what's been said and I remember what was done, and I know that some part of it's quite real. And I suspect that some part of it isn't." He turned to

me and shrugged, "My problem is, how to find out which is which."

*Well, well, he doesn't waste time with small-talk answers, bless him.*

I met his eyes and openly read them. There was inwardness, and pain at the corners, and something else right in the center, and that something else had to do with me, not with anybody named Ursula. I thought, he really is seeing me; I'm not just a couple of sympathetic ears. That's good. Just as long as he doesn't suspect how very much I detest beautiful (I assumed she was beautiful) German women, specially those called Ursula. After all, we've only met once before. I couldn't possibly be as interesting to him as he is to me. No, I thought, that isn't true. I didn't believe that part, and my Observer was pleased to note that I didn't.

Hilda was asking for everyone's attention.

*But I couldn't very well be as fascinating to him as Ursula, because he's in love with her. On the other hand, people have been known to recover from being in love. Especially if things don't go well and there's another nice, warm, caring person around to pick up the pieces.*

I got a sudden image of my usually cool Observer holding its head in despair. Okay, okay, I thought, I'll go easy. We don't even know whether Ursula is in California, do we?

When the turbaned Indian person was well launched into his presentation, I put my mouth up to Shura's right ear and whispered, "Does that mean Ursula didn't come back with you?"

He inclined his head and nodded a confirmation. All right. Maybe she was arriving next week or something, but at least she wasn't with him right now. I kept my face impassive, thanking the gods that most of us humans were not competently telepathic, most of the time. It would have been hard to explain the fierce little thrust of exhilaration I felt. It was hard enough to explain it to myself, considering.

At the end of the talk, before the music was to start, there was an intermission. The guests helped themselves to wine or coffee at Hilda's table; Shura and I went outside onto the wide deck, to smoke our cigarettes. He held a plastic cup of wine in one hand and perched on the wide wooden railing. I suddenly remembered a question I had forgotten to ask the first time we'd met.

"By the way," I said, "I'm sure you must have answered this a thousand times, but — are you related in any way to the composer Borodin, the Prince Igor Borodin?"

"Only very distantly, I'm afraid. Not enough to boast about."

"Okay, now that's out of the way, tell me what you're going to do about your German lady. Did the two of you make any kind of decision about where to go from here? Or there?"

Shura tapped ash off the end of his cigarette, "Yes, I suppose you could say we made some kind of decision. She's going to begin proceed-

ings for a divorce, start packing her things, and before long — whatever that means — she'll join me here."

I thought about the curious flatness of his voice, and decided to take a chance.

"That all sounds very hopeful; why are you not sounding — well, your tone of voice doesn't match what you're saying, if you'll forgive my ...." I made an apologetic gesture.

He shifted his weight on the railing and glanced toward the glass doors and the lights of the living room, taking his time with the answer, "Yes, I suppose I don't sound that full of excitement, and it's probably because there've been an awful lot of false starts in this thing. It isn't the first time she's told me she would be moving out here, but somehow there never seems to be a definite date."

He looked around for an ashtray and I offered him a small cracked blue saucer I'd found on the deck floor — probably the cat's dish.

"When she does come for a visit," he continued, "She lets me know her plans a very short time in advance, and she never stays long. Yet while she's here, she talks as though she really does intend to move in; you know, things like wanting to change this or that in the house, sounding as if she can't wait to be settled in, to be staying with me forever. Yet, she always goes home, after a couple of weeks, and it's always, 'Just a few more months, please be patient just a few more months.'"

I asked, "What is the husband doing, in the meantime?"

Shura looked directly at me, the furrow between his eyebrows deepening in the reflected light, and he said, "You know, that's probably the strangest part of this whole very strange business; Ursula has told me, over and over, that Dolph is very upset and angry about all this, even on the verge of violence of some kind — which would not be totally unexpected, after all — and yet, he's answered the phone a few times, when I've called Germany to ask Ursula something that couldn't wait for a letter, and he always talks to me as if I am still his friend and nothing has changed, nothing is going on. I don't know what to think."

"Maybe he's just being stiff-upper-lip?"

"No, I don't think so. There's always some strain in the voice when a person's doing that — you can pick it up pretty easily — and there's absolutely no strain in Dolph's voice, no hint of anything underneath. He sounds as if he honestly enjoys hearing from me and still likes me, unbelievable as that sounds. He rattles on about articles in journals, stuff like that, and we talk just as we used to when he was visiting here. Then he says goodbye very affectionately and turns the phone over to his wife."

"Good Lord," I said, genuinely surprised, "That doesn't make sense at all, does it? You'd expect some explosion or accusations — or at least some sadness, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," said Shura, "I would think so."

Hilda appeared at the glass doors and motioned us in. As I headed toward my corner, I thought about what Shura had been telling me.

*He's wondering if his lady is playing games of some kind; he's sensing something out of kilter, but doesn't know what it is or where to look for it.*

We settled down on our pillows, and after the music — played by three men dressed, Indian fashion, in white tunics with broad red sashes around the waist — had been going on for about ten minutes, Shura rose very quietly. When I looked up, he grasped my hand, pulled me to my feet and led me through the open archway into Hilda's darkened hall. As he urged me along, I giggled at the suspicions tumbling through my mind, and Shura turned around, finger to lips, pantomiming Silence.

I followed him into a small room at the end of the hall, where I could make out a large desk and piles of books and magazines on the floor, and two chairs. Shura left the door open for what there was of available light, and settled himself in an old-fashioned captain's chair with wheels. I sat, knee to knee with him, in the other chair.

I smiled at him and said, "Oh?"

He grinned back, "I decided talking to you was more important than listening to the music, beautiful as it is, and fond of it as I am. Do you mind?"

"Terribly."

"Okay. What I want to talk to you about is the work I do."

*This is getting wilder and wonderfuler all the time. He drags me into a little darkened room to tell me about his work. I am intrigued. I think I adore this marvelous character and I hope Germany sinks into the sea.*

I said, "I would love to hear about your work."

He began, "Do you know what psychopharmacology is?"

"Not really."

"I think I told you, the last time we talked, that I am a chemist and a psychopharmacologist. Actually, what I do is somewhat different than what is done by most of the other people who call themselves psychopharmacologists. Everyone in this particular discipline studies the effects of drugs on the central nervous system, which is what I also do. But most of them study those effects in animals, and I study them in humans. I don't investigate all kinds of drugs, just a certain kind in particular."

"What certain kind in particular?"

"The drugs I work with are called psychedelics or psychotomimetics. I assume you've heard something about them?"

"You mean, things like mescaline and LSD?"

"Exactly"

"Well, I've never had LSD, but one of the most extraordinary and important days of my life was the day I took peyote."

Shura leaned forward, "Really! When was that?"

"Oh, good grief, I think it was — I have to count backwards for a moment — I think about 15 — no, more than that — maybe 20 years ago. A very interesting man who has since become a psychiatrist took me on the journey; his name is Sam Golding. Do you know him?"

Shura laughed, "Yes, I know Sam very well. We did a lot of work together in the 60's; in fact, he co-authored a couple of papers with me. That was a long time ago, though. I haven't seen him for at least a year."

"Sam's an unusual man, and he was a good guide for me. I haven't seen him in years, either. Anyway — go on."

"About 20 years ago, I left a very good job with a large company I'm sure you've heard of, Dole Chemical?"

I nodded.

"I went back to school, to learn everything I could about the central nervous system. It was a somewhat risky thing to do, since I had a wife and child to support, but Helen went to work as a librarian at the university, without even a hint of protest — she was totally supportive, bless her — then, after I'd done two years of medical school, I set to work creating a private laboratory in a large room about a hundred yards behind my house. It had been the basement of my family's first home on the property. The house burned down one summer and everything was lost except that perfectly good basement. Then I went through the long process of finding out how to deal with the red tape and the authorities, in order to get the kind of license I needed for what I wanted to do, which is an interesting story for another time. And I became a consultant."

I was still tasting the promising words, "... an interesting story for another time," and had to replay the mental voice tape quickly to catch up.

"What kind of consultant?"

"In the field of the effects of psychoactive drugs on the human sensuum, particularly those kinds called psychedelic. I began publishing everything I was doing and discovering. And I continued to find new ones — new drugs."

I shifted in my chair, my knee bumping his, not sure I understood.  
"You found new psychedelics?"

"I invented new ones. I still invent them. I try each new drug out on myself, starting at extremely low levels and gradually increasing the amount until I get activity. It saves a lot of mice and dogs, believe me. If I like what I'm seeing with the new compound, I run it through my research group. After that, I write up the results and publish them in a journal, usually a very respected one called the Journal of Medicinal Chemistry."

*Jesus Aitch! I can't believe this! He INVENTS psychedelics!*

I realized I was staring at him with my mouth open. I said, "It sounds like the most exciting work in the universe, or am I mistaken?"

"No, you're absolutely right. At least, in my eyes, it is. Most people who call themselves psychopharmacologists, however, would assume I'm out of my mind."

"Why?"

"Because trying new compounds out in your own body has gone out of fashion. It used to be the only responsible way for a person who called himself a scientist to evaluate a drug which was intended for human consumption, particularly if the drug was his own creation. Now, scientists shudder at the idea of anything but animal work, and when you argue that a mouse or a dog can't possibly tell you how a drug is changing their perceptions or their feelings, it falls on deaf ears. They're entirely comfortable with their way of doing things, and my old-fashioned approach strikes them as very strange and dangerous."

"What drugs have you invented? Would I know any of the names?"

"Well, the most notorious one was developed while I was still at Dole Chemical, and the fact that my name was connected to it has made certain people very distrustful of me, even though I was in no way responsible for the mess it caused. Have you ever heard of DOM?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"That's all right. Most people haven't heard of it under that name. It got onto the street as STP."

"Oh, yes, I've heard of that. I don't remember any details, though. I have a vague impression that there was something called STP around and people were having problems with it, but it was a long time ago, when the papers were full of all sorts of hysteria about drugs in the Haight-Ashbury."

Shura leaned back, his chair creaking. "Well, while I was still working for Dole, I was invited to give a lecture at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore and I talked about several compounds, including DOM and — this is entirely speculation, but it's the most logical explanation I can come up with — someone in that audience must have decided to run with it, go into business for himself with a brand new turn-on, because within a few months there were reports of a new menace on the streets of San Francisco, with people piling into the Haight-Ashbury Clinic, totally out of control, sure they were dying."

"Good grief!"

"What happened, apparently, was that our unknown entrepreneur had put the stuff out in capsules of 20 milligrams each, and it's fully effective — I mean, *fully* — at a third of that amount. I didn't know any of this at the time, of course, because I had no reason to associate anything I'd made with this STP thing I was hearing about. And, as if the overdose weren't enough — DOM is a very, very powerful psychedelic — the people getting it weren't told that it takes two to three hours before the full effects are realized. So some of them were swallowing their pill and when noth-

ing much happened after 40 or 50 minutes, they'd take another one."

"Oh, boy."

"When the effects caught up with them, they panicked and rushed into emergency clinics because they couldn't handle it. I don't think *anyone* could handle 20 milligrams — much less twice that — of DOM!"

"How did you find out that it was your DOM?"

"It took quite a while. I kept getting bits of information from various sources; I heard it was a long-lasting drug, over 24 hours' duration — at that dosage level, anyway — that it took a long time to come on, and that STP stood for Serenity, Tranquility and Peace."

I nodded, "Ah, that does sound familiar."

"I also heard that, according to the Berkeley police, STP stood for Too Stupid To Puke."

I laughed, repeated the words to myself and laughed all over again.

Shura continued, "Eventually, word filtered down to me from a friend that the FDA — the Food and Drug Administration — had tracked the stuff down to a patent held by Dole Chemical, and that Dole had identified it as one of the drugs I'd developed while I was working for them. I sent to the FDA for the information I assumed they had, but never got a reply. Finally, a chemist I knew got hold of a sample and analyzed it, and that was that; it was my old friend, DOM."

He crossed one leg over the other and I saw that he was wearing sandals. I remembered he'd had on sandals the first night I'd met him.

*Maybe he always wears sandals. Have to ask him sometime.*

"How many psychedelic drugs have you invented, so far?"

"Oh," he sighed, "Somewhere over a hundred — hundred and fifty or so. Some of them aren't worth pursuing, others are."

It caught up with me, all of a sudden. Here was a man I had liked from my first sight of him, was liking more and more — in fact, I was absolutely captivated, by now — and he had just told me that he'd invented about a hundred and fifty psychedelic drugs. I was assuming that they worked like mescaline — at least, some of them did — opening up the soul's eyes to other realities, and here I was, sitting in Hilda's little study, touching knees with a person who didn't just possess and try out these extraordinary treasures; he created them — doorways to a world in which plants emit light and God holds your hand.

I was aware of silence, and felt Shura's eyes on me. I looked at the bearded face and realized that, despite the appearance of casualness in his half-smile and the sprawl of his body in the chair, he was watching me intently.

I smiled fully at him, feeling excitement in my throat like the pressure of laughter. I sat straight and opened my hands to help me speak, "I don't know quite how to say this, but I have to try. For years and years, I've been

fascinated by this whole area of — of experience, exploration — and I've read Huxley and Michaux and anybody else I could find who seemed to know anything about it."

Shura nodded.

I continued, "I even had a secret dream about setting up, or at least being part of, some sort of research project for testing ESP before, during and after the taking of a psychedelic, and although nothing ever came of it, the idea still appeals to me."

The shadowed figure was still, listening.

"It's hard to believe that I've finally met somebody who's doing all these things, exploring this world, and isn't afraid of what he'll discover. It's incredible!" I laughed, holding out my hands in mock helplessness.

Shura smiled, then reached over and took my left hand. He held it as he talked. "There are a lot of people doing the kind of research I do, but at the moment, I'm the only one I know of anywhere who publishes on the effects of these materials in human beings."

"Why aren't the others publishing?"

"Mostly because chemists want to make enough money to support families and house payments, and buy the usual nice things, so they hire themselves out to large companies, or they work for universities, and one of the things you depend on in a university is government funds. When you're dependent on funding from the government, or in a business which has contracts from the government, you play the game according to government rules. And since the government decided that psychedelic drugs are too dangerous for anybody but the Pentagon and the CIA to play around with, they've refused to fund anything but animal research, and most of that animal research is directed toward reinforcing the idea that psychedelic drugs are dangerous in man."

"Well," I countered, "They are, aren't they, if they're not used the right way?"

Shura was quiet for a moment, then said, "Well, yes, of course they are. But just what is the right way? Use them with care, and use them with respect as to the transformations they can achieve, and you have an extraordinary research tool. Go banging about with a psychedelic drug for a Saturday night turn-on, and you can get into a really bad place, psychologically. Know what you're using, decide just why you're using it, and you can have a rich experience. They are not addictive, and they're certainly not escapist, either, but they're exceptionally valuable tools for understanding the human mind, and how it works."

"A lot more than just the mind," I muttered, remembering my day in Golden Gate Park with Sam.

"Well, one of the problems in talking about this kind of exploration," said Shura, "Is vocabulary. There simply aren't the right words available

— words everybody can agree on — to do a good job of defining a lot of this territory. The word, 'mind,' for instance, can mean only the thinking function, or it can stand for everything that isn't purely physical, the whole psyche. You get used to being very exact in the way you use words, after a while, when you're trying to communicate with someone about this area of experience."

I kept gazing at him, trying not to let my happiness show. It was a rare thing for me to be feeling so happy. Of course, there was still the wonderful, lovely, young, intelligent Ursula — it was best to assume she was all of those things — but he wasn't, at the moment, holding anyone's hand but mine.

From down the hall came the sounds of applause. I thought, we don't have much time before somebody's going to come looking for us, and I have to make it possible for us to continue this.

"Shura, before they hunt us down, could you write a date in your appointment book, if you have one?"

He let go of my hand and reached for his wallet. Out of it he produced a small notebook, and from a pocket of his jacket came a pen. He sat, poised to write.

"In February, I'm giving a Valentine's Day party at my home, and I want you to come." I gave him the date and time, my address and instructions on how to find it; I couldn't remember whether I had given him anything more than my phone number the first time we'd met.

"I would be happy to come," he said, writing in the little book, "I don't see any conflict that day."

"It'll be mostly Mensa people," (for once, I didn't feel it necessary to explain that Mensa was an international society for people whose IQ's tested out over 132, or play apologetic games about being a member) "And some other friends, including my kids — at least, the three I'm living with — and please try to get there; I want to continue this conversation," I concluded, "I have an awful lot of questions to ask you."

*My God! Do I have QUESTIONS!*

"I'll do my best to be there," he said, standing and taking my hand again to help me up. We started out of the study just as Hilda turned on the lights in the hallway and cried, "Oh, *here* you are!"

Back in the living room, we were separated immediately by other guests, and I decided to leave the party without saying goodbye to him. It wasn't necessary. If he was going to see me again, it would be within two weeks. He had the address, the phone number and the date, and he'd said yes. Now we'd see whether he meant it. There was no reason for me to hang around him, acting like a moonstruck idiot. I kissed Hilda, said, "Thank you, it was wonderful," speaking the absolute truth, then got my coat and quietly let myself out.

## CHAPTER 19. SEDUCTION

On the night of the party, I dressed in black ballet tights and black dancer's top with low-cut neck and long sleeves. Around my waist I tied a long wraparound skirt with a paisley design in dark red, and hung tiny red balls from my ears.

Checking my reflection, I felt a quick surge of pleasure; when you're only 5 feet, 4 inches tall, every excess pound shows, and the body in the long bathroom mirror had a clean outline, with no bulges to apologize for. Small breasts. Brown hair falling in thick waves to a few inches below the shoulders, glinting reddish blonde where the light caught it. My face no longer reminded me of the young Ingrid Bergman, but then, neither did Ingrid Bergman's. At least, the lines were mostly what people call laugh lines, in the usual places around mouth and eyes. During the past year or so, the children had made me smile just enough to keep my face from beginning to sour, as can happen all too easily when you're over forty and your marriage has taken a long, bitter time to end.

I bared my teeth in a final grin at the mirror and snapped off the bathroom light. Against the dark I saw again the image of the tall man with the observing eyes and reminded myself, not for the first time that day, to try — to do my very best — not to look for Shura. He might not come. I wanted to believe that he would have phoned if he couldn't make it, but I didn't know him well enough to be sure. Perhaps he said yes to too many people and ran into conflicts, or maybe he just hadn't remembered to look at his appointment book; perhaps he'd heard from Ursula and she was arriving to stay forever and he'd forgotten that I existed.

My first guest turned out to be the one member of Mensa who would inevitably feel uneasy at finding himself the early bird. Stanley was one of two people in the local Mensa society who could be described as idiot savants; he was awkward, socially inept, a 26 year old man with the general intelligence of a 12 year old child, except for one thing: the ability

to do mathematics, all kinds of mathematics, with the speed and accuracy of a computer. One of the two intelligence tests given by Mensa to prospective members was loaded in the math direction — or so it had seemed to me. I had done miserably on that one and made it into membership on the basis of my score on the second test, which contained almost no math. Stan had done the same thing, in reverse.

I took my shy guest's hand and led him with his wine bottle into the kitchen, where I gave him a plastic cup and said, "Pour yourself whatever you want, and since you're here first, you get the good seat by the fire." He smiled and filled his cup, then let me guide him to the long couch, which I had moved near the big fireplace.

From the outside, this was an impressive-looking A-frame house. It had three storeys — four if you counted the little room at the very top, under the peak of the roof, which was Brian's. I rented out the small apartment on the first floor to a young couple, and the children and I lived in the rest of the house.

The place was dominated by its three-storey living room and an impressive fireplace, built out of polished dark stone and volcanic rock. There were immense windows which allowed a view of trees and a small river which flowed past us, down below. For parties, it was wonderful; for daily living, less wonderful. There was no insulation anywhere; the windows and doors leaked cold air, and every winter there was a new drip of water from yet another hole in the aging roof. Sometimes, if we were lucky, the new hole would seal itself up as the wood expanded with the rain, but that still left a couple of old friends which kept us busy laying out pots and pans on the floor.

Thank heaven, I thought, no rain tonight. I put on a record, hoping it would reassure Stan that there actually was going to be a party here.

More guests arrived, and within an hour there were over forty of them, with drinks in their hands, talking and laughing; several were taking over the choosing of records, reading the jackets of my albums and arguing about what should go on next. I had made sure there would be music playing all evening, laying out a selection of jazz, Simon and Garfunkel, the Beatles and — for the later and mellower hours — some of my classical albums, Copeland and de Falla, and a few others that had rhythm and sensuality and lightness of heart.

Kelly arrived with his new girlfriend and I gave him a heartfelt hug, glad we were now, finally, friends. He hugged me back, taking a few seconds longer than his lady fully appreciated; I saw her mouth tighten and moved quickly to hug her, too, before she could step back from me.

*Don't worry, sweetheart; he's all yours!*

The front door kept opening, and the light from clusters of candles throughout the room flickered softly on brown silk, red wool and the

occasional blue denim. I paused, finally, listening to the noise level, and knew I could relax. The party was underway.

For a while, I was in the small kitchen, which was divided from the living room by a long tiled bench at table height, which the children and I used for our meals. The room was crowded, and I was perching on the edge of the bench, laughing with two women about the New Year's party we had attended, at which one of Mensa's less introverted bachelors had appeared in a costume consisting of one large red satin bow tied around his penis and absolutely nothing else, when suddenly, in the archway dividing kitchen from hall, I saw Shura. A wave of goose-bumps went up my back.

*He came! He really came!*

I stood on tiptoe and called out, "Hello, Shura! Bring your bottle over here!" He made his way toward me, his head easily visible above everyone else's, and when he arrived, I took his bottle of red wine out of its paper bag, placed it on the tiles and gave him a plastic glass and a cork-puller. When he had poured out his drink, I took his hand and led him through the sardine pack, out to the big room.

We found a piece of unoccupied space against one side wall, and I said, "Let me tell you a bit about the people — a few of them, at least," and proceeded to give him rapid-fire descriptions of some of Mensa's main attractions, as they stood talking or moved past us. In my best museum-guide manner, I told him, addressing his right ear closely because of the noise in the room, "You see that man there, the tall one with the red vest? He created the SIG — Special Interest Group — which is known as the Orgy SIG; I forget his official title for it, something like Sexual Freedom SIG, but everyone refers to it by the other name. I've never been to a meeting, but I hear they're a lot of fun for those who go in for that sort of ..." I waved my hand vaguely in the air to complete the picture.

*Okay, I'm obviously trying to be amusing and maybe even shock him a bit, but now he can assume I'm not a swinger.*

I continued, "That woman over there in the purple dress, the one standing in a straight line between us and the candles," I glanced at him and he nodded, "That's Candice. She's a very good-hearted, motherish person who gives the Mensa tests in this area, and for a while her little boy, Robin, was the youngest member of Mensa in the country. He's around ten now, and no longer the youngest."

I pointed across the room, "Now, the small-boned man with the bow tie, standing at the end of the couch; he's the best chess-player in the Northern Californian Mensa. I've only managed to beat him once, but that once fed my ego for a long, long time. He's a dear; a very funny, kind person who never seems to find it necessary to say anything nasty about anybody. His name is Jack, and I like him very much."

Shura said, raising his voice over the noise, "I like chess, but I haven't played it for years, now. It would be fun to try it again."

I looked up at him and smiled, showing all my teeth, "I learned long ago that the most dangerous opponent is the one who tells you he hasn't been near the game in years. He's the one who'll wipe the board with you, while apologizing for being so terribly rusty."

Shura laughed.

"And now," I continued, "That tall man with the black beard, standing near the door — he's got a big house in Black Mountain, which is a nice, wealthy little neighborhood a bit north of here, and he gives a lot of Mensa parties and his swimming pool is usually full of naked people — I almost said naked members — and one of my finest moments was during a party last summer, when I wore the black dancer's outfit I'm wearing tonight and toward the end of the evening I decided to be really daring, and I took off the skirt and plunged into the pool fully dressed in the top and tights. You never saw a woman get so much attention! Every naked male in that pool wanted to know my name and asked where I'd been hiding myself; I was the belle of the pool! I guess they were tired of so much bare pinkness and I was a vision of temptation in all those clothes."

I had him laughing again.

I told him about the mathematical computer which inhabited the sometimes bewildered soul of the young man on the couch, and he said he was very interested in that kind of mind, and would go over and talk with him later on. I said I had hoped he would want to do that, because few people paid any attention to the boy, and he was very sweet.

I asked Shura's ear, "Why haven't you joined Mensa, by the way? It's a good way to meet interesting people, especially when you've been divorced or — or widowed."

"Well," shouted Shura, "To tell you the truth, I never thought of applying, probably because you have to take an IQ test, and I will not take an IQ test."

"Why, in heaven's name?"

I could sense hesitation, and waited for him to decide whether to explain or not. Finally, he turned toward me and said, "I feel total, complete disgust for all tests of intelligence, and only limited patience with the people who give them. When I was in the third grade or thereabouts, I was given a so-called IQ test, a Binet-something-something —"

I said, "Stanford-Binet."

" — and I made an honest and diligent effort to complete it. There were angular objects, and number games, and if-this-then-what types of questions, and the strategies needed for getting to most of the answers were pretty obvious."

"You did well?"

"Of course I did, and that's where I really tangled with the school principal. He accused me of having cheated, since no one could get the results I had gotten without cheating, and so I was in essence thrown out of the testing group, and was pretty much humiliated. They obviously wanted scores that fit on a kind of distribution curve about some sort of a norm. Mine was a bit too far to the right of the curve. My mother was furious with the principal; she pulled me into his office and confronted him and lectured him about my integrity, which made me want to run and hide even worse than before. I swore then that I'd never take another IQ test, and I never will."

I nodded in sympathy, "Of course, of course."

Then the front door opened and I caught sight of my former husband, Walter Parr, respected psychiatrist and author, adoring father and compulsively unfaithful mate. The children were with him. I took Shura's hand and said, "I want you to meet these ones. Walter is my ex, and he's truly a very good man and a fascinating person to talk to, and I'm not saying that just to give you the impression that I'm a noble and forgiving woman, which of course I am."

*I forgot; I haven't told him anything about the marriage yet, so he won't know what exactly I'm being noble and forgiving about. Okay, okay.*

As we squeezed past warm bodies, I continued shouting over the voices and music, "The children are Ann, Wendy and Brian; they are absolutely the world's most wonderful people, and that is a completely objective, dispassionate, clinical observation."

When we reached Walter, I introduced him to Shura and added, "Dr. Walter Parr is a very good Jungian analyst and he's written two books about the myth-making aspects of the human psyche, and they are genuinely worth reading, and I did some superb line drawings for one of them," then I pointed at Shura's chest and told Walter, my mouth close to his ear because of the din, "Shura is the expert on psychoactive drugs and their effects in humans, and he invents new ones and publishes all the information in big, important chemistry journals!" Then I pantomimed loss of voice due to strain, while the men said hello and shook hands.

The children were already drifting away, so I pulled Shura by the sleeve and caught up with each one in turn and yelled the name to him, and he shouted hello and when that was done, I gestured that I had to go in the direction of the kitchen, patted his sleeve and left him standing there, holding his wine glass, with a bemused expression on his face, hemmed in by strangers.

I tried not to look for the big gleaming head, during the next 15 or 20 minutes, while I checked supplies in the kitchen and said hello to as many people as I could, making sure they had everything they needed and knew where the bathroom was. I caught sight of Shura often enough to reassure

myself that he hadn't left the party. When I had done everything I had to do as a good hostess, I began pushing through the people-clusters toward where I'd last seen him.

A few brave souls were trying to dance and the idea showed signs of spreading; I called out encouragement, since it was my belief that dancing could make the difference between a nice party and a great one. I eased past warm shoulders and backs, sweat trickling between my breasts.

*I know what it would take to make this a truly great party: if I could convince the Big Man to stay after everybody else has gone home. Wonder whether he would? How to invite him without making it hard for him to say no? Mustn't put him on the spot.*

I made my way to a little antique desk sitting against the far wall and searched through its drawers until I found some small pastel-colored note cards with envelopes, and a pen. I leaned down and carefully wrote my message on a small pink card: "Dear Dr. Borodin, I would be most appreciative and grateful if you found it possible to remain for a while after the other guests have left? Would like to have a chance to talk."

I wondered if it was a bit too forward; after all, it could be exactly what it seemed to be, an invitation to continue our conversation of the other evening. I actually had no plan. I just wanted to have a chance to really talk, to really get to know him, to hear about some of his adventures, some of what he had learned. If it led to something beyond holding hands, well, all right. I'd tackle that when and if the time came. I considered adding something about gracefully accepting a refusal, promising to ask for his exclusive company again, at a later time, if he should have to decline tonight. I decided against it. In for a penny, in for a pound. Let it stand as it was. I printed his name on the front of the envelope, then eased through the crowd toward the white head which I'd spotted near one of the wooden walls.

Most of the guests were dancing now, and when I reached Shura, he was engaged in what looked like an animated conversation with Walter. I handed him the note, saying only, "I believe this is for you," and brushed past, hearing the two men resume their discussion behind me, aware of feeling a mixture of triumph and terror.

*I could very well have just given that man a solid and final reason to get out of my life and stay out, considering the fact that he's in love with a lady named Ursula and apparently committed to making a future life with her. What the hell am I doing, anyway, involving myself in this situation?*

I'd never been part of a triangle in my life; I'd been too proud, perhaps too arrogant — or maybe too unbelieving in myself — to even momentarily consider the possibility of competing with another woman for a man I liked. It just wasn't my kind of scene. So why, *why*, was I doing this?

I poured myself a drink of vodka in cranberry juice, then went down

the hall to the bathroom and locked myself inside for a moment of quietness. In the mirror I saw flushed cheeks and very bright eyes. Finally, I said to the face, "All right. We'll see. Good luck, friend."

By midnight, the crowd had thinned a bit and those who were left were either dancing vigorously, sweat shining on their faces, or sitting in small clusters, talking with the open, expansive, whole-body gestures that emerge when people have had quite a lot to drink and have forgotten to be self-conscious. Shura was sitting with Stan, hands clasped over his knees, listening intently to the young math genius, who looked animated and happy. I left them alone. I checked the record stack and added some more dance music to the top of the pile. The fire was still burning and crackling, the way a good fire should.

*He's had plenty of time to tell me he can't stay. Enough time to get cold feet and leave. He's still here. Still here.*

It wasn't until quarter to two in the morning that the last of the guests, fortified with hot coffee, said goodnight and left me alone with Shura and the spitting fire and one of my favorite records playing — Concerto de Aranguez, by Rodrigo — which I had put on to gently discourage further dancing, while maintaining the mellow, pleasurable mood of the evening.

I turned from locking my front door and said to Shura, who was sitting on the couch, watching me, "I need your help in putting a couple of things back where they belong."

We pushed the couch into its usual mid-room place, then I went to the under-stair closet and hauled out a thick foam mat which, I explained to him, belonged in front of the fireplace except when there was a party. We placed the mat a few feet back from the hearth because the fire was still throwing off occasional sparks, and I covered it with a double-bed-sized Indian cotton spread with the classic Tree of Life pattern in blue, green and yellow.

Moving quickly around the big room, I rescued all my floor cushions, big and small, and scattered them around the edges of the mat, then said to Shura, "Help yourself to anything you want in the kitchen. I'm going to change and I'll be back in a moment."

He was moving toward the tiled bench as I went upstairs to the bedroom and grabbed my best form-fitting blue jeans and a crisp white blouse with a softly ruffled V-neck. I ripped off my black stockings and black top and changed out of my black panties, putting on plain white cotton briefs and a white bra. In the bathroom, I squirted a small spray of musk cologne on my shoulders, considered spraying elsewhere, then decided to powder instead with baby powder, for a warm, innocent, friendly smell. A few minutes later, I was ready. I walked down the stairs, into the living room.

Shura was seated cross-legged on the mat. In front of the fireplace, sitting on the polished hearthstones, was a bottle of red wine and another,

half-full, of white. He had found two of my wine-glasses and put them on the dark, gleaming surface, where they sparkled in the firelight.

As I eased myself onto the mat, Shura rose to his knees and poured red wine into one of the glasses, then asked, "Which would you like?" I said white, thank you, and took my drink from him.

We sat cross-legged, our profiles to the fire. I smiled at him apologetically and said what I needed to say, "I hope you'll forgive the presumption — that note — but I very much wanted to have a chance to continue our conversation, at least for a few moments, you know, without hordes of people around ..." I waggled my hand helplessly and shrugged, feeling apprehensive and a bit silly. He was looking at me, smiling slightly.

"I thank you for the invitation. It was an excellent idea, and if you hadn't come up with it, I'm sure I would have found a way to suggest it myself." It was a slightly formal, gallant gentleman thing to say.

*Well, maybe he would have and maybe he wouldn't, but he doesn't look as if he's here under protest; he looks comfortable and at ease, so no more apologies.*

The fire spat orange, then settled into a comfortable crackling.

*I wonder if he remembers our conversation at Hilda's place. Don't know how many conversations this man has with interesting people maybe every day; he may not remember that evening, although I can't believe he would completely forget holding my hand.*

I took a sip of wine and plunged, "I have so much to ask you, I don't know where to begin. I'll just have to dive in and bombard you with questions, if you can stand it?" I looked at him, suddenly anxious. Maybe he didn't want to answer questions right now?

"Go right ahead. Ask."

"Let me try to lay out what I think I understand of your life, so far. You teach some kind of chemistry at University of California, on the Berkeley campus, yes?" He nodded. I hurried on, "And you have a private laboratory behind your house, and you have official licenses to do the work you're doing, and you are an expert — a consultant — on the effects of psychedelic drugs in human beings, right?"

"Yes."

"Who asks you about those effects; I mean, what kind of people consult you?"

"Well, let's see," Shura said thoughtfully, "I've been consulted by NIDA — that's the National Institute on Drug Abuse — and NIMH, which stands for the National Institute of Mental Health —"

I nodded my familiarity with the names as he continued, "I was a consultant to NASA for a while, which is an interesting story I'll tell you some day, and I'm occasionally an expert witness in court cases involving so-called illegal drugs and what the police insist on calling illegal labs, although there's no such thing as an illegal lab, because it isn't against the

law to have a lab; it's only the activity inside it that can be termed illegal."

He was wearing dark blue corduroy slacks and a cream-colored, silky shirt. I could see his nipples through the fabric.

I nodded, smiling, "I see. All right."

"Also, there are people in the DEA — the Drug Enforcement Administration — who consult with me and sometimes refer people in other government agencies to me when they've got an unusual problem they think I might be of help with. And local county labs. And private individuals with questions. I think that's about all I can think of at the moment," he concluded and drank from his glass.

*He's a bit of a ham, too. Not one for false modesty and aw-shucks.*

I laughed and said, "NASA, huh? I want to hear about that! But first, another question, okay?"

Shura poured himself more wine, then held out his hand for my glass and replaced the little I had drunk.

"You told me that you invent new psychedelics and that you have a group of people who try them out after you've made sure they're safe and ..."

He interrupted, "Not safe. There is no such thing as safety. Not with drugs and not with anything else. You can only presume relative safety. Too much of anything is unsafe. Too much food, too much drink, too much aspirin, too much anything you can name, is likely to be unsafe."

He was looking very intent, almost scowling.

*Boy, I guess we hit a button, we did.*

"The most I can ever do in regard to a drug," he continued, a shade more gently, "is establish what appears to be a relatively safe level for myself, for my own body and mind, and invite my fellow researchers to sample the same material at what we decide is a relatively safe level for their particular bodies and nervous systems."

He paused, glancing at my eyes, "Sorry to pounce on you, but I feel it's an important point to make."

"Absolutely," I reassured him, "Pounce all you like. It's all new learning for me."

I had a flash of amusement, realizing that the invitation to pounce could be taken more than one way.

I sipped some wine and continued, "So you check the new inventions out with your group, then you publish articles telling all about them, how to make them in the lab and what their effects are on people?"

He nodded.

"And do all the government people who consult you for drug information — do all of them know that you're doing this, that you're creating new ones and publishing everything about them? I mean, don't they ever get uncomfortable or try to stop you doing it?"

"Well, as to the first part of the question, a lot of them have some idea, I suppose, if they've done their homework, but most people don't really read much, especially in the scientific literature. Second part: no. They've never tried to get in the way. They may be a bit uncomfortable about what they think I'm doing, some of them, but they have no reason to stop me. I'm not doing anything that's in any way against the law —"

I nodded quickly, hoping I hadn't sounded naive. Well, I *was* naive about this kind of thing.

Shura was saying, " — and I'm a quiet person; I don't make a lot of noise in public; I'm not leading any new social movements. I don't sell drugs. I have done work, under contract to the government, which involved making reference samples for them, and I bill them for my time, but it's a matter of principle for me, not to exchange drugs for money in any way. It keeps life a lot simpler. In the meantime, there are probably a lot of people in the government who are very interested indeed in what I publish. I have no doubt whatsoever that the CIA and probably the Defense Department take a close look at some or all of the compounds I write up; they probably feel I'm doing a lot of their work for them, as a matter of fact."

"You mean, testing them for use in war — biological warfare sort of stuff?"

Shura shrugged, "Or possibly for crowd control, or prisoner-of-war interrogation, or maybe helping drive an unfriendly head of state into some kind of befuddlement — who knows? Their objectives are not my objectives."

I leaned forward and asked softly, "What is your goal, then — discovering how the mind works, or the psyche, just the pure excitement of finding out everything you can?"

Shura drank from his glass and brushed moisture off his mustache before answering, "Isn't that sufficient reason?"

*There's a faint touch of tease here, but he also wants to know how I'm relating to all this.*

I said, "Sure, that's a perfectly respectable objective. But there's another one, isn't there?"

*If he's the kind that gets irritated easily, I'll probably find out now.*

"All right," he said, showing no signs of irritation, "But let me turn that question back to you and ask what other goal you feel there could be, or should be?"

*Each of us is determined to find out as fast as possible what the other one's philosophy and ways of thinking are. And, for that matter, whether or not the other is basically sane and rational. Okay. Here goes.*

I sat staring at my knees for a moment as I tried to put broad, wide images into small, tidy words, "Well, my day with peyote helped me clarify a lot of things I had thought and felt all my life, but not pinned

down, not really sorted out. It was — I think it really was the most extraordinary day of my life. It was such a treasure of an experience, I remember thinking just before I went to sleep that if I should wake up dead, it would have been worth it. I've done a lot of thinking about what I learned that day — years of thinking. And I understand more and more, all the time, about that one experience. The understanding keeps unfolding, bit by bit."

I looked up at Shura, who was leaning back on one elbow, his face attentive.

I went on, "It seems to me that the magic plants — and the psychedelic drugs — are there to be used because the human race needs some way of finding out what it is, some way of remembering things we've usually forgotten by the time we're grown up. I also think that the whole 1960's eruption — all that psychedelic experimenting and exploring — was due to some very strong instinct — maybe on the collective unconscious level, if you want to use Jung's term — an instinct that's telling us if we don't hurry up and find out why we are the way we are, and why we do the things we do, as a species, we could very soon wipe ourselves out completely."

"Which is," said Shura, "The very reason I publish."

"Aaah," I said, and paused for a moment, "So it doesn't matter if the CIA people or whoever are interested in your drugs for their own reasons —"

He completed it for me, "I'm still putting the information out, broadcasting as widely as I can, in as quiet a way as I can, and perhaps among the readers will be a few souls who have the same concerns I do, and will put them to the right use."

"Yes, I see."

"That's the hope. There's no avoiding the fact that a lot of idiots who don't know diddley-squat about chemistry are going to go to work to make some of those drugs — the easier ones — for sale on the street. And people are going to take them at parties and use them in stupid, irresponsible ways, the same way they use alcohol. All kinds of people read the journals I publish in. At least, psychedelics are not physically addictive and most people find them anything *but* psychologically addictive. My hope is that, here and there, someone with a good mind — and heart — uses one of these tools and perhaps begins to understand something he didn't understand before. And that there may be a few with the courage and ability to write about what they've learned, so that others can read and begin to think. And so on and so on."

"Like Huxley."

"Yes. Unfortunately, there aren't many Huxleys around, ever. But each voice counts. All I can hope for is that there'll be enough voices and

enough time."

I said, "Well, the world seems to be full of people trying all kinds of ways to change consciousness; I mean, there are lots of meditation teachings, and hypnotic trance, and breathing techniques —"

Shura replied, "Of course, there are many ways to alter your consciousness and your perceptions; there always have been, and new ways will keep being developed. Drugs are only one way, but I feel they're the way that brings about the changes most rapidly, and — in some ways — most dependably. Which makes them very valuable when the person using them knows what he's doing."

He paused to drink from his glass, then continued, "I thought for a while that I could use music to accomplish what I wanted to do, because music can be a very powerful consciousness changer, but when I discovered that I had a certain knack for chemistry, I made a decision to go that way, to concentrate on developing these tools. Mostly, I suppose, because these particular drugs, these materials, *are* a way to bring about new insights and perceptions quickly, and — well, I just don't know if we have much time. Sometimes I suspect it may be too late already."

I sat there, thinking Oh, dear. Shura's eyes were for a moment unfocused, and I knew he was in private territory, with images I had no way of sharing. I kept silent for a few moments, in deference to the possibly imminent end of the human race.

Finally, I shrugged. "I tend to be something of an incurable optimist; I figure we've got to have enough time, so we *will* have enough time."

Shura's eyes focused again, and he grinned at me, "You may be right, but I have no intention of getting lazy, and there's nothing better than a suspicion that time's running out, to keep you working hard."

I drank the last of my wine and decided to head into different and more dangerous territory. "Tell me about Ursula. Does she experiment with you — I mean, does she take your potions with you?"

"Yes, she enjoys them tremendously and she uses them well. I suppose that's been one of the strongest elements in our closeness. And it's one of the reasons I find it hard to understand some things about our relationship, because it's almost impossible to get away with lying about your feelings when you're sharing an altered state. She's a very intelligent woman; she's had difficult and complex insights and she's shared them with me, as I've shared mine. I know how she feels about me."

He hesitated, then said, "I should amend that. To be exact, I know how she feels about me when we're alone together. When she goes back to her home and her husband, though, she — it's as if she's disappeared into another world; I can't quite reach her there. I don't really know what to think, and I'm beginning to wonder how long we can keep things going this way, with nothing resolved and no way of being sure it ever will be."

"Has she begun divorce proceedings yet?"

"No. She says she'll have to make the final break with Dolph at just the right moment, when he's calmer, when there's less risk of his exploding into some kind of suicidal violence, or something of that sort. And it always seems that the right moment hasn't arrived yet."

"Yet, she leaves him to be with you for a couple of weeks or so — how often?"

"She's been here twice and gone back."

"And with all this, her husband is still friendly to you on the phone?"

Shura looked at me, frowning, "Sounds bizarre, doesn't it?"

I said carefully, "Well, it sounds like a rather unusual sort of marriage."

His face had saddened and there was anxiety in the air between us, and I thought, time to change subjects again. I got to my knees, leaning forward to touch the bottle of white wine, knowing that my body was outlined by the firelight, and that he could be expected to notice. He stirred and came to my rescue, lifting the bottle and pouring my glass full.

When I returned to the pad this time, I lay lengthwise, supporting my head on one hand, holding the wine glass steady with the other.

The atmosphere had begun to change in a subtle way. I knew that his focus had shifted and that he wasn't remembering Ursula, just at the moment. I spoke, almost apologetically, not wanting to say something that would drive him back to sadness, "Please tell me if you'd rather not talk about it right now, but I'd like very much to know what your marriage was like. What kind of person was your wife — Helen?"

I caught what looked like a flicker of amusement in his eyes as he replied, "Yes, Helen. No, I don't mind talking about her. I think I told you we were married for 30 years. She was a good person. Very bright, interested in a lot of different things. She was always completely supportive of me, even when I wanted to make a break with my perfectly good job at Dole — I mentioned that to you before — to start doing something I believed in. When I told her I needed to study two years of medicine, she went to work in the University library, to help pay the bills. She enjoyed getting back into the Berkeley activity, actually. She didn't really like the Farm that much — "

I interrupted, "The farm?"

"We live — I live — on a 20-acre farm. At least, it used to be a farm, with cows and goats and a horse. There still is a vegetable garden, when somebody attends to it. Helen wanted to like the Farm, but she missed the stimulation of Berkeley, her friends, all the things you find in a university town. So I think going back to work was very satisfying for her. Our son was growing up, so she didn't have to be a full-time mother, and — although I had a good scholarship to pay my way — it was a help to have

that extra money coming in while I studied."

"Did she take the psychedelics with you?"

"No. She couldn't — didn't have enough trust in herself; she was afraid of losing control, and self-control was a religion with her. I didn't try to persuade her, because that's one thing that must never be done — ever. It's not a decision that can be made by one person for another. But during her last year, for some reason, she got up the courage to try. One day, she came to me and said she'd like to take mescaline. She'd done quite a bit of reading about it, and finally she'd made up her mind that it would be all right to take it because it was one material that had a long, respected history.

"So, one Sunday we gathered together with some of our closest friends and all of us — except the person who was doing the driving — took mescaline, then we piled our picnic and blankets into the car and went up to a place that has a tremendous view of the whole Bay, and settled down on the hillside for the afternoon. Helen had a wonderful experience, a really beautiful experience. And now, looking back, I wonder if — whether she might have had some intuition, some feeling about the future — but, anyway, I'm very glad she made the decision."

"And that she didn't have to regret it."

"Yes. It was a wise choice, I think. But, then, I have great faith in mescaline, since it was my own introduction to the whole world of consciousness expansion. It's a true ally, for me. And I'm very grateful that it turned out to be an ally for Helen."

I remembered Castaneda's teacher, Don Juan, referring to his "little ally," but I couldn't recall exactly which plant it was. It was a pleasing word, for some reason, stronger than "friend," as if there were a suggestion of weapons at the ready, to help defend you against dangers. A friend with strength to back up his loyalty. Ally.

I glanced at Shura's face and saw him far away again, so I told him what I'd been thinking. He smiled, "Yes. It's a good word. I'm not sure about weapons at the ready, but yes, it has a strength to it and that's the way certain psychedelics strike me — as friends and allies." He thought for a moment, then added, "Or, at least, they put you in touch with some part of yourself which serves you as friend and ally."

By now, the wine had relaxed me completely. I felt comfortable, warm, at ease with either words or silence. I focused my eyes on the fire, letting images and thoughts drift. Shura put his glass down on the floor and got up to add more logs; when he sat down again, it was in a different place, closer to me. I found myself smiling again at the pleasure I felt, being with him. Then, on impulse, I rose up on my knees, opposite him. I asked, "Are you getting tired of all these questions?"

"Not at all," he said, and put out a hand to gently trace the outline of

my cheek, "I'm a teacher, you know, and teachers love questions. It means somebody's interested."

"Ah, yes," I said, placing my hands on his shoulders, "I am very interested indeed. As you perfectly well know."

He then did something completely unexpected. He placed his right hand behind my shoulder, then the left went between my thighs and up my back, so that he had me sitting on his upper arm, my breasts against his face. Inside the blue jeans, my body responded to the pressure of the arm with a flush of warmth. I was suddenly aware of the center seam of the jeans pressing into me. I pushed back a bit, riding now on his forearm. It was a strange, lovely sensation, having that long muscled arm pressing up into the seam, into the soft flesh inside it. I looked down at his face, my hands still on his shoulders. His eyes were open and he was looking directly into mine, not smiling now. I bent my head down until my forehead touched his. There was a slight sheen of perspiration on him, and I knew my own skin was damp.

His right hand moved to my waist and pulled part of my blouse out, then I felt his fingers on the back fastening of my bra. I thought, Oh, dear, he'll never manage it, and I laughed and said, "You'll have trouble with that. I'd better help a little."

Still riding on the hard, muscled arm, I undid the buttons of my blouse and slowly, feeling very thoughtful, took it off, then threw it up in the air; there was a glimpse of pink firelight on white cotton, then it was gone. I said, "I'm going to get a cover for us, just in case the fire doesn't last forever," and he pulled his forearm slowly from between my thighs and said, "All right. Don't take too long, though. I'd hate to have you forget I'm here, you know?" Fat chance, I thought, grinning down at him.

I was back almost immediately with my old patched eiderdown. It was immense and soft and well-worn and I bunched it up at the end of the pad farthest from the fireplace. Shura was very carefully placing another log on the fire, and by the time he turned around, I had taken off my bra and was rising to my knees to pull the jeans down over my hips. He sat on the pad, cross-legged, with the firelight behind him; it gave him a corona of yellow and orange. He asked, "Would you mind if I took my clothes off? I really would feel much more comfortable. It's rather hot in here, at the moment."

I whooped with laughter. Then I lay on my back and pulled the jeans off my upraised legs, like a child fooling around at bedtime. I hesitated for a moment, weighing modesty and ladylike behavior against the bother of having to think about clothes at all, then realized that both modesty and the lady had vanished in the recent arm-ride, and the panties may as well come off too.

I lay on my tummy, naked as a two-year old in a sunny back yard, and

supported my chin on my hands while I watched Shura's slow, dignified performance. Underneath the soft beige shirt he wore nothing. His rib cage was huge, and it presided over a stomach so flat, it looked almost undernourished. There was a scatter of dark hair on his chest, and his nipples shone softly pink. When he had carefully placed his folded shirt on the side hearthstones, away from the fire, he rose to take off his slacks. I peered up at him and thought, my God, he's so damned tall! I said, "I see that you grow dark hair on the other parts of your body. I mean, what I can see so far," and giggled as he stepped out of boxer shorts, "Which is pretty much everything, at this point, I guess."

He eased himself down and lay on his side, facing me, one hand supporting his head, and I observed, "You really don't have much fat on you, do you?"

"I feel much better without it."

I arranged my own body opposite his, about two feet away, and continued with the earlier thought, "Does that mean you were dark-haired before you went all gorgeous silver?"

"No, as a matter of fact, I wasn't. The hair on my head was quite blonde, strangely enough, even though—as you see—" he allowed himself a small twitch of the mouth, "The hair on the body is dark."

I kept my eyes averted from the curly nest below his stomach, and asked him when did his hair turn white, and was it all at once, and what was the drug he was researching at the time?

"It all began turning when I was 30."

"Thirty! Good heavens. Any particular reason — a shock of some kind?"

"No, no shock. And no drug, either. At that time in my life, I was still working for Dole and hadn't really begun doing my own research."

"It's beautiful, as I'm sure you know."

Shura smiled broadly, this time, and said, "I thank you. My hair thanks you. I have only one theory as to why it all went white so early. I suspect I was unconsciously preparing myself to look the part of the harmless old professor, which can be useful at times when you do the kind of work I do. And publish what I publish. Sound reasonable to you?"

"Well, it's a great theory, but I think you goofed. You don't look at all harmless. In fact, you look like the archetypal alchemist or mad scientist. My ever-loving Pete, do you look like the perfect mad scientist!" I was laughing again, and I was thinking, I can't believe how completely happy I am. Naked with this long drink of water with—oh, my—the loveliest slender man legs I've ever seen, and the world's most erotic forearm, and he's in love with a girl in Germany and it doesn't matter.

"Alice," he said.

"Yes, Sir?"

"You're a very beautiful woman."

"You're rather appealing, yourself."

"All I can offer you is truth. I will always tell you the truth — about my feelings, about what I'm thinking — and the rest I have to leave up to you."

I reached up and stroked the side of his cheek and said, "Thank you."

There was no doubt in me, no hesitation at all. There was a feeling of complete rightness about everything. A rightness that was almost a sense of inevitability, as if this part of the script had been written long ago, and there was no other way to play it. I had no desire to change anything, right now. Tomorrow did not exist and neither, for the moment, did Ursula.

There were so many reasons for being with him. His sharp, clear mind, the almost palpable lust for ideas, for knowing; the excitement about new experiences and new ways of thinking about things. Beneath the sadness of recent loss and occasional bewilderment about Ursula, there was something else, something inside him which was a laughing, shining thing, eager for life, greedy for living. The dark side of him — that, I hadn't met yet.

Now, I thought, another face of the man would begin to be known. He reached out to finger-trace the line of my hipbone. We were still about a foot apart and each of us was supporting head on hand. There was going to be no hurry. No hurry at all.

The light fingertips moved thoughtfully, up over the top of my shoulder, and paused behind my ear. Then, very gently, he clenched his fingers in my hair and moved his body close to me. His mouth came down on mine, open, his tongue meeting my tongue; I tasted wine and Shura. His mouth holding mine, he took his hand from my hair and I felt the palm, open, exploring the side of one breast, moving down, firmly, over my stomach, like a potter shaping the side of a clay vase.

The hand took charge. It explored and insisted. I suddenly felt vulnerable, because I knew he was aware of the response inside me, that he had tuned in to my longing, was letting himself be open to my pride, my aching for him, and all the questions I had yet to ask. I felt his breath on my nose and mouth.

I opened my eyes to meet his direct, clear gaze and hold it for a moment, then I closed my eyes again.

As my body clenched itself, I could hear his breathing quicken, and when the purple iris flower behind my eyelids opened its petals fully, I heard him cry out with me, then his hand came to rest like a benediction on my pubic bone.

After a moment, I opened my eyes and stroked his head where it lay, covering my tummy, and I said, "You know, that's the first time anyone has ever done that — I mean, that way. What an extraordinary hand you

have, Doctor Borodin!"

Shura raised his head and said, "Well, I don't think one should be limited to making love with just one or two parts of the body, do you? And — I have to tell you that, at least for now, the other way — the usual way — well, I feel that I must reserve that for Ursula. I know it seems a bit foolish, but the coming into a woman's body with mine involves a degree of intimacy, for me, that has to belong to her, at least for a while."

"Oh," I said, thinking, what a strange way of staying loyal — if not exactly faithful. "I understand," I said, "I understand."

I sat up, shook out my hair and smiled down at him, then murmured, "With your permission," and moved myself downward.

I spotted one long white hair, curled in his left groin, cried "Ah Ha!" and drew it out to its full length. Shura looked at my fingers, holding up the single hair, and asked what the noise was all about.

"Just look at this! I'll bet you never bother looking down *here* to see if anything is turning silver, do you!"

"Hadn't occurred to me to think about it, I must admit."

I laughed and let the hair spring back to its original place, then leaned down again. I heard a soft gasp, and his head fell back. Once, I opened sweat-blurred eyes to see his hand on the pillow beside him, fingers spread, as if in agony. As I closed my eyes, the hand was grasping the pillow, the knuckles ivory in the flickering light.

When it came, the sound from his throat was strangulated, as if he had come to the end of some strange, exhausting battle, and I slowly took my mouth from him. I reached across his body for a corner of the eiderdown, and pulled it over both of us. His voice, in a harsh whisper, said, "It's been so long. So long."

"Me, too," I answered, truthfully. I lay quietly for a while, my head on his shoulder, then knew I was going to have to give words to something which was pushing at me from the inside; it was just the way things had to be.

I said, "I must tell you something. Don't let it frighten you. You've promised to tell me the truth, and I'm going to do the same. Please don't give me an answer, because I know there can't be one, right now."

I looked at the fine line of one nostril, at the profile with its peacefully closed eye, and said, matter-of-factly, "I'm in love with you. It may not be sensible, but that's the way it is. Now, good night, and sleep well." I kissed a hollow in his neck and wiggled contentedly against him, then I became aware of a rich smell — something like carnations and fresh cut grass — coming from his armpit. It wasn't cologne or powder; it was Shura. I thought, he tastes lovely and he even smells wonderful. I've got to tell him what a delicious armpit he has. The words were arranging themselves in my mind as I fell asleep.

## CHAPTER 20. DOOR CLOSING

The next morning, while I cooked a breakfast of scrambled eggs and toasted English muffins, Shura played my piano, an old mellow-toned upright which occupied the corner to the right of the big windows. He played a Chopin prelude with a mixture of passion and gentle sweetness, then something fiercely joyful by Beethoven. When he had finished, he sat with head bowed, his hands braced on the edge of the piano. I waited for a moment, until the last ghosts of sound had melted into the slanting wooden walls, before calling out that breakfast was ready. When he sat down, I told him, "That was a pleasure. You're very good. How do you like your coffee and do you play any other instruments?"

"Black, please, and I play some piano, a lot of viola, used to play the clarinet many years ago, and I can switch to the violin pretty easily — most viola players can."

Across the table from him, I looked again at the bearded face and the eyes, which seemed a darker blue than they had the night before. He looked back at me with an expression I was beginning to recognize: direct, thoughtful, a suggestion of amusement at the corners of the eyes. Then he looked down at his eggs and picked up his paper napkin. I realized I was smiling only when he glanced up again and smiled in return.

When the eating was done, we took our coffee cups over to the mat and sat cross-legged, while he told me about growing up on the farm outside the town of Almond, in the East Bay, the cow named Bluebell, who was his favorite, and the three goats. I asked him if he liked farm life with all the animals, and he said that a little cow-milking went a very long way and that, despite his affection for the animals, he was quite happy to live without that kind of responsibility, these days.

I asked, "Do you have any animals around, now?"

He stubbed out his cigarette and lay back on a pillow with his arms folded behind his head. "I have two cats who live outside and hunt

gophers and mice. I used to have a wonderful dog named Bruno, and after he died, I didn't have the heart to replace him. Besides," he shrugged, "This way, I can pack up and take off anywhere without worrying about kennels and all that stuff. The cats take good care of themselves. They hunt all day and there's always a bit of running water somewhere on the Farm."

I said I'd never seen the town of Almond, and hardly ever heard it mentioned; it didn't seem to come up in the news much. Shura said, "It's very small and quiet and not too many of its inhabitants go in for murder or armed robbery, but things are growing and expanding pretty rapidly, so all that can be depended upon to change before long; real civilization can't be too far off."

I laughed and said I hoped Almond would stay a quiet, uncivilized backwater for a long, long time.

He said, "We used to own a lot more than the present 20 acres, but a couple of parcels were sold off. Sad to say, the crest of the hill right behind us —," he caught himself, "— behind me, has been built up now with a whole row of apartments. They're just a few feet from my property line. For some reason, I never thought anyone would build up there. It was my skyline, you know; it was supposed to look that way forever. It's a strange feeling to look up the hill, across the grass, and see those buildings staring down, where there used to be nothing but sky and trees." He shrugged, "But that's the way it goes. Nothing in the world stays the same and you learn to roll with the changes. If you don't," he paused to sip coffee, "You waste a lot of energy and a lot of time regretting. Or trying to hold back what isn't going to be held back. I still have a lot of privacy and I keep planting more trees every year to block the view into my place."

I asked about his childhood, and he told me he had been born in Berkeley, and grew up there. I repeated, "Berkeley! You were actually born in Berkeley?"

His eyebrows shot up, "Yes, I actually was. What is it about my being born in Berkeley that strikes you as unlikely?"

"Because you're far too exotic to have been born like an ordinary person in an ordinary place like Berkeley!"

"Oh, I see," he smiled. "Actually, Berkeley isn't that ordinary, you know. Once you get to know it, you find it's full of exotic people."

I chuckled. At least he hadn't denied being one of them.

I lit another cigarette and Shura talked about the changes in the East Bay since the time his parents first moved there, the wild animals and the birds, the snakes and spiders which had lived all around them, and he listed the ones that had gradually disappeared as the roads had come in and more houses were built on the hills. When he mentioned the black widows, I said, "Surely you don't miss *them*?"

"Yes, I do. I'm saddened when any form of life is pushed out by people. It's happening too often and too fast, and it means the natural balance of things is being upset in too many places."

"I understand; I share that concern. It's just that — well, it's hard for me to feel too much sympathy for the black widow."

"You learn to live with dangerous spiders, just as you do with other forms of life. Usually, if you leave them alone they'll do the same to you. By the way," he leaned forward, "Have you ever examined a black widow web?"

"No, I can't remember ever seeing one. Why?"

"They're quite extraordinary. Very, very strong silk. It's so strong, in fact, that it was used in World War II for the cross-hairs in gunsights. Did you know that?"

"No," I said, "I didn't."

I watched him as he talked about how you could tell when it was a black widow web by testing one of the strands with a finger and if it was, the strand would spring back like elastic. His body was relaxed, the long legs sprawled on the mat. I remembered the wonderful smell in the hollow under his arm, a smell of grass and something like carnations.

*Maybe marigolds. Not carnations. Marigolds. How many men in the world have armpits that smell like that? There just isn't anything about this beautiful creature that I don't like. Not so far, anyway.*

I must have smiled, because he stopped and looked at me, questioningly.

"Sorry," I said, "I was listening to you, but a nice memory rose up suddenly."

I waited for him to ask me what the memory was, but instead he pulled himself up and padded across the floor to the kitchen. I rose and followed him, holding out my cup. He silently poured coffee for us both, and I added sugar to mine. As we returned to our pillow fortress, I felt a change. Something was different.

He said nothing for a moment, apparently concentrating on his coffee. Then he raised his head and looked straight at me, not smiling. I stayed quiet and waited.

"Alice, I have to tell you something. I'd better say it now. Remember, I promised to tell you the truth, no matter how hard it might be. I'm not used to doing that; I haven't made a habit of it in my relationships, perhaps because it usually seemed kinder to other people if I kept my feelings to myself. The negative ones, anyway. I have a tendency to be sharp, I suppose, and people can be hurt. Even my closest friends have said I have a cruel tongue —" He paused.

*What in God's name are you going to tell me? I'd better be ready for something bad. Oh, please, don't let it be too bad, please. I love you.*

Shura was saying, "Not very long ago, I decided — I made a decision to be who I am and say what I think and feel and those who can't accept that and be equally open and honest with me —" he leaned forward, "I have things I want to do — must do — and I don't know how much time I have, and I don't want to waste any more time or energy than I have to, on people who play games or deal in half-truths. Not at this stage of my life."

There was a faint bitterness in his voice.

*Is he talking about Ursula?*

I said, softly, "Yes."

*Yes to you. Yes to telling truth. Yes to your beautiful big hands and intuitive fingers and all the rest of you. What are you trying to say?*

He took a deep breath, then said, "Ursula called me from Germany last night, before I came to the party, and it seems she can — she'll be coming to be with me for while. I'm meeting her plane tomorrow morning."

He looked up at the big windows, then back at me. "I don't know how long she'll stay this time. She never really says anything I can count on; it's usually 'I may be able to stay a week or two,' or she says she doesn't know — that it depends on how Dolph is coming to terms with the situation, or something else equally hard to pin down. She's a wonderfully gentle, kind person and can't bear to cause anyone pain. So I just have to continue being patient and let her work it through her own way."

I drank some coffee because suddenly my mouth was very dry.

"So all I can tell you is that she's coming and she'll be with me a week or a couple of weeks, or maybe she'll actually stay this time. I just don't know."

I'd had many years of practice in keeping both my voice and my face calm under fire. I made a deliberate effort to relax the muscles of my throat before I spoke.

"Thank you for telling me, Shura. I don't know what to say except that I can't wish both of you luck. I wish myself the luck, to be honest, because I would like very much to be with you, as I told you last night."

My actual words had been, "I'm in love with you," but there was no need to repeat them; he would remember if he wanted to.

"Alice, I want you to hear what I say now. I enjoy being with you. Very, very much. Last night — last night was — it was a beautiful gift. I had a great need for what you gave me. You're the last person I want to hurt in any way. I just don't know what's going to happen, and I realize it's all very unfair to you, and there's nothing I can do to make it easier. For myself or for you."

I couldn't let him go any further along that road, so I interrupted, "No, no. Please don't do that. I mean, don't try to avoid hurting me. If I were really that afraid of — of heartache — I wouldn't have asked you to stay last night. Don't push me out of your life until you know you have to,

until you know that she's really going to stay. I promise you, if things turn out that way, I'll go quietly. But until then, trust me to survive whatever happens. I'm really a very strong person, you know."

My hand had found its way onto his knee. He covered it with his own.

I continued, "I would appreciate it very much if you could let me know what's going on — as soon as you have some idea, yourself. Could you just give me a quick phone call, perhaps, so I don't have to spend a lot of time wondering? Would you mind doing that?"

Shura met my eyes and his gaze was dark and intense, "I promise you, I'll phone as soon as I have any idea of what the situation is. I certainly won't leave you in the dark."

At the door, he looked down at me, then wrapped his arms around me and lifted me off the floor. His mouth came down on mine, and I lost myself for a moment in the taste of him, the feel of lips that were achingly familiar, by now. Finally, he put me back on my feet and held me at arms' length for a moment, his eyes moving over my face and body, as if memorizing. He whispered, "Thank you, little one."

Then he was gone. I became aware of the faint prickling around my mouth from his mustache and beard. I went to the kitchen, poured myself a fresh cup of coffee and took it back to the mat, where I settled down to do the crying.

## CHAPTER 21. DOOR OPENING

I thought of it as The Closing of the Door, complete with capitals. It was the first time I'd cried because of Shura.

I went to work as usual and took care of the children, and the next weekend I attended a Mensa party, carrying my bottle of cranberry juice laced with vodka, and my little folding magnetic chess set. I played a couple of good games, drank enough to make me dangerously sleepy driving back home, and resolved never to risk disaster that way again.

Brian had his eyes checked and we discovered that he needed glasses for reading. We spent a long time fooling around in a store where they sell frames, laughing at how he looked in some of the fancy ones, settling finally for something that looked like him — quiet, a bit serious, not liable to attract attention.

Brian had always been a good-looking boy, with curly brown hair and large, blue-grey eyes. When he was in the second grade — his year of humiliation and terror — his handsomeness gave the young bullies who scapegoated him for his dyslexia that much more reason to tease, poke and kick. Now, at 14, he didn't have to fear the same kind of persecution, and the girls were beginning to notice him. I knew he wasn't the kind to attract the jock-chasers, but the more interesting, thoughtful girls would begin to seek him out. The second grade had taught him to be inconspicuous; I often urged him to ask questions in class, but understood his preference for getting help from teachers only after the rest of the students had filed out the door.

I hadn't hauled Brian out of the second grade because, at the time, I thought the teachers knew more than I did when they told me that my son had to undergo his trial by fire with no help from them, because that's the way things were among small boys, that every year there was one singled out to be the scapegoat, and there was nothing they could do about it. He'll survive it, they said; he'll be all right.

I had long talks with Brian about the psychology of bullying children, but it didn't help much. He would carry the scars from that year for a long time, and when, years later, I understood that the teachers had been wrong, I also understood that I would always carry in myself the bitter knowledge that I could have, and indeed should have, taken him out of his hell and put him in some other school, after confronting both administrators and teachers and demanding that they change their policy of resignation and indifference to the scapegoating. They wouldn't have changed anything, of course, but I should have said it anyway.

There was, however, one positive result of Brian's ordeal; he developed, very early, an ability to empathize with others — usually schoolmates — in trouble, to listen patiently to their tales of sadness and fear. I thought he was showing signs of being the kind of person who becomes a therapist, a healer of emotionally damaged people; he had the heart and clearness of mind for it.

My lovely Ann was discovering that she enjoyed math and science, and that she was good at both of them. Her directness, her habit of saying exactly what she thought, sometimes without sufficient efforts at diplomacy, earned her some enemies and a growing number of good friends. She was beginning to attract boys, of course, and I was trying to be as subtly persuasive as possible about the advantages of playing the field before relinquishing one's virginity. Not certain I could win this particular battle — not even sure I was going to know when the battle began or who the enemy would be, for that matter — I took her to the family doctor to be started on The Pill.

She tried marijuana for the first time, at a high school friend's party, and got very sick on the lawn; that was the end of her experimentation with psychoactive drugs.

Wendy and Brian were as uncomfortable with math as I had been, but both of them were showing unquestionable gifts in art. Brian had recently won a school award for a piece of work he'd done on leather, an engraving of a magnificent dragon, breathing fire in the best dragon tradition. We had it framed and hung on a living room wall.

Wendy had been so sensitive as a child to the slightest sign of parental displeasure, Walter and I had dreaded exposing her to the brutal realities of school, and were surprised — astounded, in fact — at the ease with which she made friends and charmed teachers. Our vulnerable Wendy, it seemed, was a lot tougher than we'd thought, and her social skills had flowered with every passing month. She was now a beautiful girl who — like her siblings — showed a certain gentleness in her face, and had a quick, whimsical sense of humor.

My oldest, my son Christopher, born of a very brief and bitter marriage to a fellow art student when I was 19, was living in a town a couple of

hours away by car, to the north. He was teaching in a private school, and had already made me a grandmother twice over with two little boys. I saw him and his wife, Jane, very seldom, because of the distance and my lack of free time, but whenever I visited them, I was aware of feeling great affection for Jane. She was thin, shy and as poor a housekeeper as I, but a very good, caring, attentive mother. Jane had shown an unexpected strength in her determination to keep her marriage intact, which wasn't particularly easy, with a husband who tended to be exacting, and impatient with household disorganization, a legacy of his years with his abusive step-mother, Irene. She had demanded of him a military-school neatness, and struck him for minor infractions of her many rules, telling him constantly how stupid and impossible he was.

I had failed to rescue Christopher, too, many years earlier. After divorcing his father, at age 21, I had lived with my small child in the only place — a housing project apartment — we could afford, on the little money Dick could give us; a young commercial artist couldn't earn very much, unless he somehow managed to get one of the rare jobs available in the advertising department of a large retail store like Macy's or The Emporium.

Christopher and I had lived the kind of life everyone in a housing project used to live, before the age of crack cocaine. There was not as much crime at that time as there was later, but I soon discovered that in places like Sunnydale, those who steal prey on others as deprived as themselves. I learned what it was to be really poor, what it does to the human spirit. I avoided pretty store windows at Christmas time, and told my parents that the baby and I were doing well, but that this wasn't the right moment to visit us, that we would much rather visit them, instead. My father, recovering from a heart attack, had no money to spare, and I knew they would be upset if they saw the place I was living in. So the baby and I went to see them, instead, now and then.

It was in the housing project that I began to experience a dreadful tiredness, an emotional dullness that would not lift. I stopped listening to classical music; it stirred feelings I couldn't trust myself to handle. Beauty hurt me. I didn't know I was suffering from an illness known as depression; I thought that I was, for the first time in my life, seeing the world as it really was, a place of struggle and pain and betrayal, all of it meaningless, a place in which only self-deluded, naive people hoped for things to get better and happier.

Much later, during my marriage to Walter, I read the newspaper accounts and watched the television coverage of the riots in a suburb of Los Angeles called Watts. In a grocery store, one day, I heard two housewives, behind me in the checkout line, expressing indignation at the way some of the poor people in Watts had looted the shops, not for food, but for television

sets and other luxuries. I tightened my jaw against a surge of anger and suddenly realized that I knew something these comfortable women had no way of knowing — that food is not enough; that sometimes a person who has been poor for many years is hungrier for some pretty, sparkling, impractical thing than for bread, and that a television set is what everybody else has, a symbol of everything he is denied. It wasn't right or good, but I understood it.

Some evenings, in Sunnydale, I played poker for pennies with the only friends I had there, a black couple with two small sons. Most evenings, I read books from the library. It was only while I was reading that the sad, dry ugliness disappeared and I forgot to be afraid. I took care of my baby, but he must have tuned in to my depression, as babies always share the psychic field of the parent, and the greyness in my soul surely invaded him at the deepest level.

I found work in the pathology department of a San Francisco hospital, typing tissue biopsy reports and autopsies, and I put my little boy in a place which called itself a nursery school and I worried when I picked him up every evening because he didn't laugh or even smile very much. But then, I didn't either, in those days.

So, when Dick told me he was going to marry a wonderful girl who was a graduate of a good college, and argued that Christopher would have a good home with them, I thought about it for a long time, feeling a kind of pain in my chest which I'd never felt before, and finally said yes, as long as I could see him as often as I wanted. When he was gone, I cried in the silence, but told myself I'd done what was best for him. I felt inadequate, and I didn't know how to be otherwise, and my baby deserved a real home with a good, cheerful mother.

After a while, Irene and Dick asked me to limit my visits to twice a month, so that my son could have a chance to fully accept his new life. He was upset, they explained, when I left at the end of my hours with him. I said all right, because I didn't know what else to say, and because the two of them together conveyed a sense of cool authority that made me feel alone and helpless.

I moved out of the Sunnydale housing project, to a small apartment a few blocks below the hospital where I worked, and I saw my little son two weekends a month, traveling by bus to Marin County, until Dick and Irene told me that more often than once a month was disruptive and disturbing to Christopher's security and routine. I felt, again, like an unwashed peasant bargaining with the people who dress in silk, and I acquiesced.

When my boy told me that his stepmother sometimes hit him, I persuaded myself it was childish exaggeration; I held him, kissed him and took him to places where we could have fun.

It wasn't until years later, after he had one step-brother and then a

step-sister, that I let myself hear the depression in his voice, but when I screwed up my courage to tell his parents what was disturbing me, I was met with appalling fury, outraged denials of mistreatment, and an increase in the freezing hostility which they had, for some time, made no attempt to hide. I was too unsure, too powerless, to continue asking difficult questions, so I assured myself that at least Christopher was a member of a real family, that he had a stepmother who could stay home and siblings to grow up with, whereas I could give him none of those things.

When Christopher was a grown man, beginning his own family, he finally told me what Irene had done to him, how she had treated him, especially after she had her own children; he recounted the physical blows, the humiliations, the attacks on his self-esteem. I cursed and wanted to kill her. And I hated myself for not finding out, for not having taken him away, not having somehow saved him. We talked and cried and I asked him to forgive me, for having been young and bewildered and blind.

Christopher said that he had managed to become friendly with Irene since she had divorced his father and remarried. He said she treated him well, now that he was an adult — too big to hit or humiliate — and that he had forgiven her, ever since she had made an effort, one day, to apologize for her mistakes, for having made things very hard for him when he was young.

I couldn't forgive her, any more than I could forgive myself.

Christopher was a good father, gradually healing himself by being to his boys what his parents had not been to him. Like most abused children, he could be a difficult and demanding grownup, and I blessed Jane for being patient and determined and loving him enough to stay with him, even though he often showed little tolerance for her inadequacies and mistakes. She, too, had scars from childhood, and sometimes the two of them bruised each other emotionally, but there seemed to be a deep commitment at some level that kept them together.

I once sat in on Christopher's class, and — watching him with the youngsters — felt a bursting pride in having a son who was so excellent a teacher — I consider teaching to be the most important of all the professions. After saying goodbye at the end of my visit, I sat in my car for a while, tears running down my cheeks, aching with the knowledge that Brian, if he'd had teachers like his older brother, would have been spared much of the sorrow and rage and, above all, helplessness, he'd experienced so very young. Christopher did not allow scapegoating in his class.

I was working, now, at a private hospital, transcribing medical reports, typing very fast and very accurately and spelling all the medical words properly. I was one of five women in a small room where a huge tape drum revolved all day long, as doctors inside and outside the hospital phoned in their descriptions of surgical procedures, reports on physical

examinations and letters to colleagues, all of it recorded on the tape. We had ten minutes each morning for a coffee break, half an hour for lunch, and ten minutes' break in the afternoon again. We worked all day, eight hours a day, with earphones on our heads; we were transcribing machines, paid the way most non-unionized hospital workers were paid — badly. I had a theory that, long ago, all hospital administrators had caught on to the fact that there are a certain number of people in the world who love medicine, would have become doctors if they'd been able to, and would put up with relatively poor pay and often stressful working conditions, just to be around those who practiced medicine, to feel themselves part of the medical world. I was one of them.

It was a hard job, but I'd never worked at an easy one, and to some extent it helped me to avoid thinking about Shura and Ursula. By the beginning of the second week of the lady's stay, I was getting accustomed to an unsettling sensation, a mixture of hope and dark despair that tended to make itself felt at unexpected moments, somewhere around the area of my diaphragm. I would clamp down on it quickly, telling myself to be patient; I'd know sooner or later and there was nothing to be done in the meantime but work and be mother.

At the end of the second week, Shura phoned. It was a Friday evening, and the children had crossed the street to their father's house. I was cleaning the tiled shelf, stacking papers and a few books to one side, half watching the evening news on television, when the phone rang. With the sound of his soft hello, my automatic pilot switched on and — while the rest of me stood there, frozen in shock — I heard myself saying cheerfully, "How nice to hear from you! I've been wondering how things were going."

"I thought you might want to know," said the tenor voice, "Ursula was here —"

*I know, I know.*

"— for two weeks, and she's just gone back to Germany. I put her on the plane a couple of hours ago."

"Oh."

"It was a wonderful visit, and she says she's going to take the bull by the horns, so to speak, and tell Dolph that she's going to get a divorce and come and live with me here."

"Ah," I said, feeling absolutely nothing.

"She says that this time she'll really do it and that she's still very worried that Dolph may do something violent, but she's not going to postpone it any longer."

It was like a replay of the night at Hilda's party. I was hearing a cheerful message spoken in a voice that didn't match. I took a deep breath and asked, "Shura, what's wrong? Are you just tired, or is it something

else?"

There was a moment of silence. When he spoke again, there was no mistaking the sound of discouragement. "I'm just not sure, that's all. It's so hard to understand exactly what's going on, and I've heard all these promises before. I don't know. I suppose I'm a bit tired, too."

I took a chance, "Would you like to come over and just relax? The kids have left for the weekend, and you can talk all you want or just be quiet and listen to music and have some wine."

*Oh Lord — there's no red wine in the house.*

There was another pause, then he said, "It wouldn't be fair to you, for me to come over and talk about — about somebody else."

*Please, don't back away. I'll take you under any conditions, Beautiful!*

"That's nonsense. Of course you need to talk about Ursula, and I'd love to see you. Don't complicate things that are perfectly simple. Just come over."

"I appreciate your offer and I'd like to accept it, if you think you can put up with me —"

"I'll put up. There's one thing you can do for me, though: bring your own red wine. I don't think I've got any here."

"I'll be glad to do that. It'll take me about an hour, all right?"

"Fine. See you when you get here."

When he finally stood in the doorway, I went completely quiet inside. The scurrying around of the previous hour — the choosing of dark green skirt and pale blue blouse and filigree earrings, the stacking of pillows around the mat before the fireplace — all vanished in the rightness of his being here, now, with me. In that instant, everything in the world was where it belonged, and there was all the time we needed.

Shura made a fire and talked as he stacked the wood. I handed him old newspapers to twist for fuses and listened. He told about Ursula going through the house, pulling him by the hand, pointing out what she would want to put here and take away there — little things, homey things, he said — and how he had begun to believe it, believe that she actually would make the break and come to him. And stay.

"It was wonderful, being with her. She's a beautiful woman, kind and intelligent and — and passionate. We share a love for so many things, classical music, art, taking journeys with the materials. And we dislike a good many of the same things," he smiled, "Which can be just as important."

I sat across from him on the mat with my wine glass half full, waiting, with no feeling of impatience, to discover the reason for the sadness, the discouragement.

"We discussed the possibility of her staying for several months, this time, phoning Dolph from here and telling him what she'd decided to do,

so he would have time to get used to it before she went back to see a lawyer and pack up all her things."

I kept my eyes on his face, that young, alive face with the lines and the white hair.

"But she didn't want to do it that way. She said it would be too cold, over the phone; she had to do it in person, looking into his eyes and holding his hands. She explained that she would worry about his doing something terrible to himself, if she didn't go about it the right way. A few days ago she said to me, 'I have to go home. I want to get it over with, and I must go home to do it.' So I put her on the plane for Germany, and now it's the waiting game again."

I still couldn't understand the depression. I asked, "What is it that worries you, then? It sounds as if you're going to have everything you want, doesn't it?"

Shura gazed into the fire for a while, then turned to me and said, "This is the third time it's gone this way. She tells me she's going to leave him, she's finally going to come and be with me, and I'm always left waiting for word from Germany, thinking 'This time, it's happening.' Then she writes and explains how disturbed and emotionally fragile Dolph is, and how she'll have to pick the right moment, asking me to just be patient."

"What do you think is going on?"

Shura reached over to his wine bottle and poured his glass full. When he touched the rim of my glass with a finger, I said No thanks, I still had some.

"I don't know," he said, "I don't understand. Sometimes I wonder if she's — if maybe she has a fantasy that she lives when we're together, and that it doesn't — that it loses its reality when she's back home."

"What about Dolph — is that short for Adolph?"

"Yes, yes it is."

"You're sure he knows his wife is with you, when she's away?"

"Oh, there's no question about that; he's made references to her coming here. He knows she's with me. But, as I told you before, whenever I've phoned there and caught him instead of Ursula, he's sounded friendly and spontaneous and warm; not a hint of distress."

"That's weird."

"Completely weird. There are moments when I actually wonder if I'm suffering from some kind of delusion — simply imagining the whole thing. But this time, she will either move on this, very soon, or I'll begin to think I've been made a fool of. But that wouldn't make sense, either. I know what she feels for me; I have no doubt at all that she loves me. You can't be under the influence of psychedelic drugs and play games with the truth — not without the other person sensing it. Not when you're that close, that intimate. If there's a lie, you can hear it in the voice, feel it in

your gut. I know she hasn't been lying about her feelings."

I tried to sum it up, "You're wondering, then, whether there's a possibility that she believes it completely when she's saying it? That maybe she's not consciously lying at all, just living a scenario that falls apart when she gets home?"

He didn't answer that directly, nor did he deny it, "Well, I should know before long. By the end of the week, one of us is going to call the other and by then, she should have said what she has to say to Dolph. Something must have happened by then, something clear and understandable to all parties."

*This is crazy. It's not like me to be in the middle of a mess like this. Listening to a man I've fallen in love with, a man I want to be with the rest of my life, while he talks about the woman he loves. Reassuring him, being a good friend. Crazy. But I don't have much choice.*

I asked, "And if nothing has happened by then?"

Shura shook his head, rubbing his eyes with one hand, "Again, I don't know. I suppose it depends on what she says. Cross that bridge when it looms in front of me."

"Yes, I suppose that's all you can do."

I felt a subtle shift in him. He was letting me come into view, focusing on me.

"You're very good, very generous — listening to all this. I must apologize. It's a ridiculous thing for me to be doing — dumping my problems onto you. Not at all considerate."

I laughed and leaned forward to pat his knee. "No apologies, please. We already went through that on the phone. I care very much about you and the only thing I can do for you right now is to listen and try to help you solve the puzzle."

"Would you like to see the Farm?"

The question took me by surprise. I stared at him, my mouth open, then nodded, "I'd love to see it, yes."

"How about coming out tomorrow? I'll give you a very good set of directions — it can be a bit hard to find without them. I'd like to show you around the house and my funny little lab."

"Yes, please."

I brought him a large pad of paper and a pen. He wrote rapidly for a few minutes, then tore the page off and handed it to me. I said, "What time should I be there?"

"What's best for you? I'm usually up around seven, even on weekends, so any time after that is fine for me."

"I gather it takes about an hour from here? I'll plan on eleven, if that's all right?"

"Eleven it is." He stood and stretched. "Time to get some sleep. It's

been a long day." He grasped my hand to pull me up and said, "Again, thank you."

At the door, he placed his hands on my shoulders and turned me around to face him. I looked up at the shadowed eyes and the full, sensual mouth, remembering a night two weeks ago. This time there was no kiss, but he put his arms around me and held me to his chest, rocking very slightly. I closed my eyes until I felt his arms leave me, then he was gone and I was locking the door behind him.

I sat down again on the mat, facing the fire while I finished my wine, reviewing what had been said by both of us. The phrase, "Girding for battle," sprang to mind, and I caught myself smiling.

## CHAPTER 22. WINDOW

I missed the road, the first time. It was tucked right behind a blind corner formed by an outcropping of rock and scrub. I swept by and kept going for a few blocks until there was an opportunity to turn around and retrace my way. At the entrance, a small sign nailed to a telephone pole announced "Borodin Road."

*I'll have to ask him how he managed that.*

I'd built an imaginary Farm in my mind, long ago, ever since Shura had first mentioned it to me. So far, it wasn't at all like my fantasy. To the left of the narrow road, grassy fields sloped gently to a line of trees below. Beyond that stretched a wide valley and on the horizon was what I assumed was Mount Diablo, an immense, mist-softened shape rising from rounded foothills. To the right of the road, which seemed to be mostly clay with occasional patches of ancient concrete, I could see only an uphill sweep of grass and several huge live oaks, magnificent trees with thick, twisting branches, bearing shadowy clusters of mistletoe.

The big wooden farm gate was open, as Shura had promised it would be. I followed the driveway up to a large circular parking area in front of an open garage, and looked down on a single-storey wooden house whose dove-grey paint showed heavy weathering.

As I parked my car, Shura appeared at the top of a stairway leading up from the house. Flanked by two overgrown juniper bushes, he stood on the red bricks, legs apart, hands tucked into the front pockets of his brown corduroy pants. He wore a woolen blue and green plaid sports shirt. His hair stirred in a light breeze and he was smiling broadly.

When we walked into the living room, my chest tightened. I hadn't known what to expect, but had hoped it would be something like this. Books lined one entire wall, and the room was divided into two sections by a center wall of stacked bookshelves that stretched to the ceiling. At the far end of the room, there were big windows through which I could see the

mountain, and in one corner sat a grand piano. On the floor were several worn Persian rugs and there was a long blue couch behind a coffee table. Above the small fireplace hung a large framed map, in blue and white. Moving closer, I recognized the outline of the Ile de la Cite from many photographs I'd seen of Paris. The map showed a section of streets and buildings on either side of the Seine. I looked up at Shura and said, "That's wonderful. Do you know Paris very well?"

"Not very well. It would take years to know it very well. But what I have seen of it, I love. You've never been there?"

"No. I grew up in Italy — a good part of my childhood was spent there. My father was American Consul in Trieste, and my brother and I saw Venice and some other places, but I never got to France. Or England. Or most other countries in Europe."

*God, would I love to go back! I long to see Europe again, as an adult, this time, knowing what I'm seeing. Wonder if it'll ever happen.*

The kitchen was comfortably large, with a linoleum floor so old its original pattern was lost in a general brown-ness. It had been swept clean, but no broom or mop could really rescue it, I decided. Past the far half-wall I could see a small dining room where an oval table, its polished wood shining in the morning light, was sitting on a beige, blue and grey Chinese rug. There was a basket of fresh fruit on the table; I reminded myself that it had probably been here for Ursula.

Shura showed me the bedroom with its oversized bed, long enough for a very tall man. Windows ran the entire length of the room's outer wall, and there was a floor of red-brown tiles.

*It's beautiful. He made love with Ursula on this bed. Don't look at it for too long; he'll know damned well what you're thinking.*

Across the hall from the bedroom was his study. Ceiling high bookcases thrust out into the room, three rows of them, crammed with books; there were more books piled on the floor between each row. Long shelves high above his desk were filled with magazines, journals and thick catalogues; steel filing cabinets lined the far wall. His big wooden desk had a clear space in the center, but papers were stacked at the sides. I saw what looked like letters and envelopes on one pile, and a magazine with the title, "Journal of Psychoactive Drugs," and I laughed at the wonderful, lived-in mess. A scholar's study.

I was reminded of another study I'd seen years ago, when Walter and I had visited the writer-philosopher Alan Watts on board his houseboat in Sausalito. Alan's living room was decorated and furnished in the style of a Japanese house, immaculate and serene, with wide stretches of polished wood floor and every piece of furniture apparently chosen, not only for comfort, but also for beauty of shape and color. It was a work of art, I created for quiet thought and meditation. When he showed us his study, I

had been delighted at the contrast. Every inch of wall was covered with notes, photographs and memos, each corner piled high with books and pamphlets. No Japanese clarity and serenity here; it was the study of a busy scholar, a man who read and wrote a great deal. As was this.

"What?" asked Shura, bending his head to look at my face. He meant the laugh.

"Oh, it's just — it's so much what I hoped it would be — "

"Well, wait 'til you see the lab," he said. He led me down the hall and out the back door. We walked along a narrow dirt path, past clumps of early narcissus, under buckeye and pine trees, until we came to a small stone building which had once been painted white. Ivy covered its walls. Pine branches were overhanging the roof and scraping the sides of a small chimney.

Inside, I saw a laboratory which could have been the original inspiration for every mad-scientist movie ever made, with an additional touch of color the movie sets had lacked: small brown piles of dead leaves, swept up against the sides of several oversized glass bottles and metal cans clustered under the work benches. I supposed that the wind blew them in. They gave a certain flavor to the place; so did the spiderwebs, which were definitely out of Dr. Frankenstein's castle.

At the far end of the room was a stone fireplace; firewood was piled to one side and, next to it, some neatly stacked cardboard boxes. On the other side was an old-fashioned, glass-fronted bookcase, filled with labeled bottles of all sizes; high over the fireplace were shelves carrying more bottles, most of them small. Metal pipes, glass beakers and rubber tubing were everywhere.

I laughed again, "Oh, dear ever-loving God!"

"Is this what you expected, too?"

"No," I shook my head, "No — I certainly didn't expect this!"

"It's a working lab," said Shura, "A true working lab should look like an artist's studio, not a sterile room with immaculate benches and wall-to-wall carpeting like they show in television commercials."

There was a hint of defensiveness in his voice.

"I never thought of a chemistry lab as being comparable to an artist's studio; it's an interesting way to look at it. But it does make sense, when you think about it."

"A lot of work gets done here," said Shura, "And a lot of magic has happened in this place, over the years."

*He loves it; he really loves this room and what he does in it. I can actually feel it in the air here.*

"I think it's wonderful," I said, "Strange and weird and it looks just like a mad scientist's lab in the movies, as I'm sure you realize."

"I never saw a mad scientist movie," said Shura.

"Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Frankenstein?"

He shook his head and shrugged, "Just culturally deprived, I guess."

"Oh, my, you certainly are. I'll have to drag you to some of them, if they ever play in a theater again. Maybe you can catch them on television. They usually have old movies on Friday nights, sometimes Saturdays."

"I'm afraid I hardly ever watch television. There's one in the house, but I don't know when I last turned it on."

"Never mind," I smiled, "Never mind. This is better than anything they show in the movies anyway."

There was a sharp knock on the roof, and I looked up, startled.

Shura said, "Probably a pine cone; they're always falling off the big trees."

I asked him, "What's in the big boxes near the fireplace?"

"Oh, those. Mostly evidence from court cases."

"Court cases?"

"I thought I told you that I'm what is known as an expert witness, in cases involving drugs — illegal drugs — and sometimes the police deliver the evidence in boxes like those, and when I'm through analyzing what I'm asked to analyze, I notify them that I'm finished, and they're supposed to pick the stuff up, but sometimes it just sits there and nobody comes for it. Possibly the case got thrown out of court, or something else happened that made everyone lose interest. I never know why, and I don't have the time or inclination to track down the reasons, so the boxes just sit there, year after year."

"I see. And I guess you don't really dare throw that sort of thing out — not for a long time anyway? Just in case?"

"Oh, I don't think anyone's going to pick them up now. To tell the truth, they've been there so long, I don't even notice them anymore. I suppose I really should go through them one of these days and toss out the prehistoric ones."

As we turned to leave I saw, pinned to the wall next to the door, some pieces of paper with official-looking borders. When I reached up to touch one, Shura said, "That's the license which allows me to work with scheduled drugs; that means drugs listed in the five DEA schedules. Schedule I drugs are the ones like LSD and marijuana and heroin; they're forbidden, illegal, and you can't touch them, even for research, without half a dozen government agencies looking over your shoulder."

To the right of the door was a large cabinet with leaded glass windows, a larger relative of the one near the fireplace. On its shelves I could see more rows of bottles, stacked three deep, some freshly labeled, others with labels so faded, I couldn't make out any writing at all. One of the legible ones said, "Parsley." I went closer to the glass and peered in, seeing "Dill," "Safrole," and a clear glass bottle with "Asarone" scrawled on its side in

thick black letters.

I shook my head, not quite believing it all, official licenses, leaves and spiderwebs, the big stone laundry-room sink, the shelves holding clean flasks (one of the shelves curved gently downward in the middle as if it had born years of weight and was finally giving out). It was intimate and personal, a place for alchemy.

Shura said, "Okay? Ready for lights out?" When I nodded, he reached up to the low ceiling and touched a switch, and we went through the door. Outside, pale winter sunlight shone on grass and tree leaves and a narrow brick stairway leading up to a level grassy shelf. We climbed the stair and Shura led me to the end of the green terrace. The hill dropped steeply away beneath us and I could see the valley spread below. Mount Diablo dominated the horizon, lavender blue in the haze from the valley floor. I let out a deep breath. It's so quiet, I thought. Shura named the towns below us and told me that the county seat, Martinez, lay out of sight to the far left. I said, "What an incredible view!"

We stood in silence for a while, gazing out over the nearby sloping fields and the houses far below, listening to the birds, then he put his hand on my arm and led me back down the stairs.

I was thinking, as I followed him back to the house, of how different all this seemed from Marin county, across the Bay. I'd never been to any of the towns in Contra Costa county. I couldn't remember even seeing Mount Diablo before, except on the local television news.

*I want to live here. With him.*

Shura poured glasses of wine, white for me and red for himself, and I sat down at the dining room table. He seemed to hesitate, then said, "Just a moment — I want to show you something," and went into his study. He returned with a framed photograph which he put in front of me without comment. I was looking at a black and white picture of a young woman in her thirties, leaning back casually on what looked like a wooden bench, outdoors, smiling softly. Next to her was Shura, in a similar pose, obviously relaxed, wearing one of his half-smiles. There was a bank of ivy in the background. I have never studied a photograph more closely in my life.

"Ursula?"

"Yes."

"She's very lovely. She looks sweet and intelligent."

*Finally, the enemy has a face.*

"She is."

"And you're in love with her, yes."

"I never knew what it meant to be in love, before Ursula. She changed everything about me."

"In what way?"

"I was — my closest friends will tell you, without hesitation — I was a

bitter, sarcastic person, very negative, impatient. Often hard to be around. They'll tell you, believe me, that I was not very nice and not particularly kind. In fact, my best friends will say they don't know how they put up with me for the past twenty years or so. And they'll also tell you that I've changed. I'm almost nice, now. At least, I'm a lot nicer than I was. And the reason is that Ursula opened me to feelings I'd never had before. I suppose you could say I learned what it meant to open the heart, being with her."

His face was slightly flushed.

*Okay. We all owe Ursula thanks. Thank you, pretty woman who is probably everything I can't be. So what the hell am I doing here? Why has he invited me into his home like this — into his life?*

I said, "Thank you for showing me what she looks like. It's hard to deal with just a name."

Shura rose and took the photograph back to the study. When he returned to the table, we clinked our wine glasses and drank from them. He leaned back in his chair and asked me, "Well, what would you like to do with the day? I'm at your disposal. My house, my cats and my weaving spiders are at your disposal."

*Thank heaven he hasn't suggested going to bed. Right now it would be unthinkable. Ursula would be in the room with us.*

I asked for what I wanted, since there seemed no reason not to, "I wonder, is there any possibility of my — of taking one of your materials? I just thought there might be something not too long-lasting that I could try?"

*The word "materials" is so much nicer. It's awful, how "drugs" sounds so — bad, dangerous, irresponsible. I guess I've been programmed pretty thoroughly, just like everyone else.*

Shura sat for a moment, looking at his glass. I held my breath. Then he leaned his elbows on the table and said, "Yes, there is something you might find interesting. I'll tell you a bit about it. First of all, it's not one of my materials. It was discovered a long time ago, in 1912, in Germany. Nobody paid any attention to it until a good friend of mine — a delightful, funny, slightly crazy girl who's also a very good chemist — called my attention to an old publication that mentioned several compounds, this one among them, and told me she thought it might be an interesting one to synthesize. It was simply intuition, on her part, some kind of extraordinary intuition —"

"What's the name of it?"

He grinned, his eyes teasing, "Methylenedioxymethamphetamine. MDMA for short."

I repeated the initials under my breath.

He continued, "I suppose I can take credit for step-fathering it, anyway,

if not for inventing it. I made it in my lab and nibbled. It gave me a pleasant lightness of spirit. That's all. No psychedelic effects whatsoever. No moving walls or glowing colors; nothing of that sort. Just a distinct lightening of mood. And an inclination to get busy and do things that needed doing. So I concluded that it might be an anti-depressant of some kind, and I took some over to an old friend, Adam Fisher, a psychologist in his late sixties or early seventies who had told me he was getting ready to retire — beginning to phase out his practice. I knew that he was very experienced with psychedelics, had been for years. So I asked him if he'd like to sample this MDMA stuff and tell me what he thought."

I sipped from my glass and realized, with a burst of warmth inside me, that I was very happy. Being here, listening to Shura telling the story, with sunlight glowing on the fruit in the bowl, I was content simply to exist in this moment and let everything else go.

He was saying, "Adam tried it, and the result of that experience was —," he paused, chuckling, "Well, to put it briefly, Dr. Fisher came out of retirement. He changed his practice, and in some ways I suppose you could say MDMA completely altered the course of his life."

"How did he change his practice?"

"Well, since then — that was about seven years ago — he's spent his time training people, mostly therapists, in the use of MDMA. He's introduced probably several thousands of them across the country to this drug, teaching them how to use it properly, for themselves and their patients. At least, for those patients who are considered good candidates for the experience."

"It was an anti-depressive, then, as you thought?"

"Yes and no. It had that effect on me, in a mild sort of way, but it had a very much more important effect on Adam, and I gather on most other people who take it. They say it makes it possible for them to have remarkable insights into the way they're living, what they're doing with their lives. They see how they're making problems for themselves, or wasting what they have, what they are. It's a drug that seems to allow insight, but it lets them see and understand without being afraid. It doesn't threaten them with any loss of control."

"Which is what most people are afraid of —," I nodded.

"Yes. The fear of losing control, being helpless, seems to be almost universal, and it certainly comes up in people who've never taken a psychoactive drug before. MDMA allows you to be totally in control, while getting a really good look at yourself. Adam told me that it does away with what he calls the fear barrier, the fear people have of seeing what's going on inside them, who they are. Most people describe a feeling of acceptance inside which makes it all right to take a good look at themselves. It makes the insight relatively non-threatening."

I asked, "Has anyone had a bad experience with it?"

"Oh, certainly. I've heard of a few really bad trips. In most of the ones I've been told about — by Adam, and by other therapists — the people were reluctant to undergo the whole MDMA thing in the first place; they'd been talked into it by a husband or wife, or the therapist, and they weren't really choosing to do it for their own sake. They went along with it because of pressure from someone else. The results were predictably negative. And the therapists involved learned a hard lesson."

"Do you mean that taking this drug has to be something you really want for yourself, or things go wrong?"

Shura leaned forward, "Not just this one; any psychoactive drug. That's why people almost always have what they call bad trips when some smart-ass has put a psychedelic drug in the punch, or it's been slipped to them in some way without their having been told. That's something I consider truly unforgivable — giving somebody a psychoactive drug of any kind without telling them and getting their consent. Personally, I don't think a doctor should do that even with a prescription drug; it should absolutely never be done with a psychedelic. Or with something like MDMA, which is not a psychedelic, but has a definite effect on a person's state of consciousness."

His eyes had narrowed in anger.

I nodded again and asked, "How long does the experience last?"

His face cleared, and he looked at me, "Are you sure you want to give it a try? Today? Now?"

"If you like the idea — if it's all right with you?"

"The duration," he said, "Is about three hours or so, unless you take a supplement, which is usually about a third of the initial dose. If you take a supplement, at about the hour and a half point, the level of full effect will continue for one more hour before it begins to taper off."

"Would it be possible for us to take it together? Does that appeal to you? Please tell me if you'd rather not — for any reason."

"I would be most honored, as a matter of fact," said Shura.

"Do you always call it MD — whatever it is. Sorry." I did the remorse bit, hitting the side of my head with an open palm.

"MA," finished Shura.

"MDMA. Thank you."

"Methylenedioxymethamphetamine," he reminded me, grinning. I stuck out my tongue.

"Easy for YOU to say!"

He got up from the table, "Wander around, if you'd like. I'll be back in a couple of minutes."

I stayed where I was, looking at the books in the bookcase against one wall, reading the spines. *The Art of India*, *The Lascaux Caves*, *The Voices*

of Silence by Malraux, The Law (in two volumes), Boswell in Holland, Chaplin, Bernard Shaw, Limericks and a collection of erotic art (Ah, yes!). I saw Sophie's Choice and a copy of The Wisdom of China and India, by Lin Yutang. I remembered having read a book by Lin Yutang that deeply impressed me, years and years ago, but couldn't recall the title. Two entire shelves were filled with the works of Aldous Huxley, a few of them in duplicate.

*Of course, he'd like Huxley.*

Shura returned, carrying four small glass vials with white tops. He went into the kitchen and I followed, watching as he opened a cupboard and brought out two wine glasses, which he placed on the tile surface near the sink. The tiles were a pale, faded blue, probably as old as the floor, I thought, but at least you can keep tiles clean. Shura opened two of the vials and emptied one container of white powder into each glass, then added a small amount of hot tap water and swirled the contents gently before handing one to me. He stood straight, almost formally, clinked his glass with mine, and said, "Blessings."

I downed the fluid and immediately clapped a hand to my mouth, almost gagging. The taste was bitter, nasty. I said so.

Shura said, "I believe in knowing what it tastes like, before you find out what it does. I should have warned you; most people don't enjoy the taste, I have to admit. Next time, you can add juice, if you'd like."

*Thank you for that "next time," darling man.*

I peered at him suspiciously, "Don't tell me you really like that taste!"

He said airily, "I think it's rather nice! A perfectly honest, straightforward taste. A taste with character, I'd say. A taste with personality!"

"You're out of your ever-loving mind!" I opened the refrigerator, found a bottle of grapefruit juice and poured out enough to wash this particular character and personality out of my mouth. Shura chuckled at my grimace, which was only slightly exaggerated.

*All right, Ursula, go. This is my day now, and he's mine, for just a little while.*

Shura led me out of the kitchen, back into the warm living room. I dropped my purse onto the coffee table and joined him at the large windows. He asked, "Do you know Diablo? Have you ever been on it?"

"I don't think I've ever seen it before, in person. As a matter of fact, I don't think I've been in this county before. I got as far as Berkeley a few times, but never came through the tunnel to this side."

"By the way," said Shura, still gazing at the mountain, "You should know that I gave us each a very low amount of MDMA, 100 milligrams, to be exact. Just enough to let you feel the full effects, but not enough to be overwhelming in any way, this first time. Unless you turn out to be extremely sensitive to the compound, of course. That's always a possibil-

ity which has to be taken into account when trying a drug that's new to you."

"How soon should I be feeling something?"

"Oh, probably between 30 and 35 minutes. Usually, people taking it for the first time are aware of a rather strange feeling — a sensation that's unfamiliar to them — in about half an hour. If you can just relax and let it be, the strangeness is over with in about 20 more minutes, then you'll find yourself on the plateau, which is where you'll remain for about an hour. Then, if you like where you are and want to remain there for another hour before you begin dropping, I'll give you a supplement, an additional 40 milligrams."

"And that keeps the plateau going for a while, but doesn't do anything else?"

"That's right. You won't feel any change in intensity; it just lets you stay where you are a bit longer than you would otherwise."

Looking out the window, I remembered the question I wanted to ask him, when I first drove in from the highway. "By the way," I asked, "How did you manage to get the name Borodin on the street where you live?"

"Ah, yes," he chuckled, "It's kind of a neat story. When my parents and I moved out here, there were walnut trees, orchards, everywhere that you now see houses and highways. There was no freeway, only country roads. We lived in the only house on the land, an old abandoned ramshackle place that had belonged to the original owners many years earlier. It actually leaned. I think it was held up by the acacia tree alongside it. There was one central room, surrounded by a verandah which actually sloped downwards, outwards, on all sides.

"My folks and I started to build this house, the one we're in now, about the time of World War Two. And someone from the post office dropped in, and told us that Almond was becoming too civilized to allow anyone to live in a rural route box. People had to live on a street.

"What's going to be the name of this street?" my father asked.

"'You give it a name,' said the postmaster, or whoever the man was.

"'Borodin Road?'

"Fine. Why not?" the man said.

"Then, a few years later, there was another administration, another postmaster. He came out and said, 'You can't just live on a road; you've got to live at a number on a road.'

"How about number one?" said my father, quite reasonably, since we were the only family on Borodin Road.

"Number one apparently wasn't one of the postal department's options. 'Let's make it 1692,' said the postmaster.

"That was okay by my father. 'Why not?' he said, and that was that. Nobody ever discovered the reason for that number being chosen; I sup-

pose nobody ever asked the postmaster, and now it's far too late. It was a mystery then, and it remains a mystery to this day!"

I laughed, "That's a great story. But I remember you saying something once about civilization not having arrived yet in the town of Almond?"

"I meant *real* civilization. The kind that means murders and bank holdups and people who don't know you in the grocery store."

I laughed, "Ah, now I understand!"

Turning from the window, I stopped in surprise. Against this side of the wall that divided the room hung a large portrait in a frame of antique gold. It showed a young boy, dressed in a blue silk tunic with a high neck and embroidery in the Russian style. I knew it was Shura and I went close to it and looked at the face. Blond hair, very blond. A firm chin and lower lip, a determined mouth. The eyes were clear blue and alert.

He spoke from behind me, "I'm not sure exactly what age I was then. Probably around twelve."

"That's a beautiful portrait. I like it."

The child was holding a musical instrument that looked familiar. I asked Shura what it was.

"That's a balalaika. I still have it; as a matter of fact, it's on top of the piano, but it hasn't been tuned in years, I'm sorry to say."

I glanced over at the piano and saw the shape of the instrument, but suddenly decided that closer inspection would have to wait. I was feeling something changing inside me.

I told Shura I was going to sit down. I curled up in a corner of the couch with pillows and concentrated on what was starting to happen. He sat down in a large armchair, facing me, his feet on a hassock which was covered with the same material as the chair. I found myself staring at the pattern, soft blue stripes against a silvery grey background, with a suggestion of tiny flowers. It was old-fashioned, I thought, and comfortable. Like the room.

I looked around, seeing things I hadn't noticed earlier. A large oriental vase on a bookcase shelf, a stack of photograph albums on a shelf below it, a miniature stone owl on the mantel of the fireplace, and next to it a small framed photograph of a woman.

*I'd like to see that photograph. Probably his wife. It looks old, sepia tint. Maybe it's his mother. I'm not going to move from here, though, not until I know what's happening inside me. Strange new feeling,* he said. Okay. Take a deep breath and relax the body.

"You're aware of something?" asked Shura.

"I'm not sure," I replied, picking up my purse to get my cigarettes. On the coffee table, which was set with small beige tiles, there was a copper ashtray. Next to it sat a round, sand-colored stoneware vase, holding white daisies. A few of them were wilting.

*Flowers for Ursula.*

Now, there was unmistakably something happening, and it was, indeed, an unfamiliar sensation. It wasn't like what I remembered of the start of the peyote effect; that had begun more as a change in the light, or rather, a change in the way I saw light. Light had seemed almost palpable, I recalled, a living presence in the room.

I sensed that Shura was watching me, but I wasn't about to pay attention to him, right now. The strangeness was quite physical, I decided, mostly in the chest, where it felt like a mixture of fear and excitement.

All right, I thought, it's a new feeling. I mentally surveyed myself, noting that the back of my neck was tingling, and my spine was alert. No surprise there. But the sensation I had at first assigned to my chest was now all throughout my body.

*It's like a voice speaking from inside, without words. Not unpleasant at all. Just new.*

"There's no need to talk," said Shura, quietly. "You must feel free to do anything you wish. Anything that feels comfortable to you."

"Yes," I said. My head was changing, now. It felt light. Not dizzy, just light. There was something else I was just beginning to be aware of: a feeling of peacefulness taking the place of the strangeness. Simple, overwhelming peacefulness.

"I'm feeling a bit more relaxed, now," I said to Shura.

*I forgot — he took it, too. Wonder what he's experiencing. I'm not going to ask him yet. Have to listen to my own innards for a while.*

"You're probably at the plateau, or you will be very shortly," Shura said, "And what you're feeling now is pretty much what you'll continue feeling. I mean, the intensity of it. It'll stay the same from now on — for the next hour or so, anyway — and there shouldn't be any further increase."

"I understand. Thank you."

"You're welcome," he replied, softly, not teasing.

*He's watching, listening, noting everything. He's relieved that I'm okay. He cares and he wants this to be good for me.*

"It's a very lovely feeling, very peaceful and gentle," I said.

"Good. I was hoping it would be like that."

"I think I'll get up and walk around, if that's all right?"

He stood and gave me his hand, pulling me up slowly. Then he put his hands on my arms and looked into my eyes for a moment. His eyes were very blue in the light from the windows, and I looked into them and saw seriousness and unmistakable affection. Caring and watchfulness. I reached up with both hands to hold his face and stood on tiptoe to put my lips on his, very lightly. Then I turned and walked toward the kitchen.

Behind me, Shura asked, "Would you like me to walk with you, or would you prefer to be alone right now?"

I stopped to think and knew immediately that I needed to be alone, to explore by myself for a while, and told him so.

He nodded, "I'll be in my study if you need me. Take your time. You can come for me, or just call out if you want company. I'll hear you calling if you're near the house."

*He means if I'm in trouble, but he's not going to say that. He doesn't want to program me to expect anything negative.*

"Thank you very much, my dear," I said, and left him. I walked, my body light, moving easily, to the back door. There had been no hesitation in saying, "My dear." I knew his dearness to me, and there had been no need to censor either the feelings or that one small expression of them.

Outside, the dirt path was dappled with sun and leaf shadow. It was cool and I was glad of my cardigan. I sat down on a grassy area to the right of the path, not far from the door, began to reach into the shirt pocket where I'd put my cigarettes, and stopped. The peacefulness had changed. Something I hadn't expected at all was pushing up inside me — a sudden surge of grief so powerful, I braced myself with hands on the ground.

*Oh, Lord, no! I don't need this!*

It was coming like a wall of water roaring down a dry desert wash. Tears were rising in my throat and I let them come, not even trying to fight what I knew would not be held back. Part of me scolded that this wasn't the way to encourage Shura to give me this stuff again — or any other psychoactive drug, for that matter. But there was a deeper, overriding certainty that this sorrow had been gathering inside me for a long time, for years, and that the pain had to be experienced, had to be released, if I was to become strong and whole.

There was another thing making itself heard, something which went beyond the traumas and sorrows of the past or present, a message with an energy of its own which would not allow it to be lost in the crying.

*I am driven by an urge, a need, to find out — to know — what is, how it is, why it is. The truth about myself, other living things, the world, and whatever drives the universe. It's the First Commandment for my life, and although I don't understand why, it must always be the First Commandment: keep wanting to know, trying to know.*

The sorrow was pushing through me in waves, as sorrow always does, but my mind continued to function clearly, separate from the tears and the convulsive sobs. I thought of the time I read someone's cynical observation that the desire to understand the What's, How's and Why's of life and the cosmos was an obsession of the young, usually outgrown by the end of the second year of college; thus, concluded the writer, it was appropriate to call them The Great Sophomoric Questions.

*So be it. I'm a bloody sophomore.*

All right. Today's truth was a simple one: I had found a man unlike

any other I had ever known; he was the man I had waited for all my life; the man I wanted to be with, live with, to experience life with, and he was in love with a woman named Ursula. I had made the decision to stay as close to him as he would allow, for as long as possible — win or lose — and I had to acknowledge that I was involved in all this by my own choice. It was my responsibility.

I cried for a long time, huddled with my arms around myself, rocking in place, sobbing on the grass until the torrent began to lessen and I could pay attention again to the Observer, who noted that the peaceful center was still there, and that I should take another look at it.

Underneath the terrible grief, there was a calmness, a serenity, and something that felt, incredibly, like joy.

*Don't try to understand. Just know it's there. You're held in God's hand, and that hand cradles you with complete love. All is well, even though that doesn't make any sense right now.*

There had been no sound, but suddenly I knew Shura was near. I could feel his presence in the hall, out of my direct sight. I was aware of his concern, and something underneath it which I knew was his own sadness and bewilderment about Ursula, and I found myself crying again, more gently, this time for him.

Finally, it was over.

I waited patiently while my breathing gradually returned to normal, with only an occasional shuddering breath to remind me of what had passed through. I got up from the grass and went into the house.

There was no one in the hall, but I heard papers rustling and knew Shura had returned to his study.

Standing in the doorway, I said, "Thank you for your patience. It seems I had to get something out of my system, and it's all over." I was smiling easily at him, knowing my eyes were red and probably beginning to swell, and that it didn't matter.

Shura came to where I stood and put his arms around me, holding me tightly to his chest. He whispered, "I'm sorry."

I looked up at his face and said, firmly, "No. Sorry is not what I want — in fact, it's the last thing I want from you. I enjoy being with you, and it's not your fault that I love you — it's not even my fault, it's just the way things are — and as long as we are both absolutely honest with each other, it'll be all right. Believe me, whatever happens, it'll be all right."

*Don't know where that certainty comes from, but it feels true, so it's okay to say it.*

He nodded, "I don't want to cause you pain. I just don't want to hurt you in any way."

I pressed my cheek to his chest, "I know that. But if I have to choose between being with you and having some pain, or — or not being with

you just to stay pain-free, you know perfectly well what my choice is. Please let it be that way. I don't believe I'll regret the decision, and I hope you won't either."

We went back to the living room. We talked about me, this time. I told him about growing up in Italy, in a village called Opicina, high on the cliffs behind the city of Trieste, where my father had been Consul for six years before World War II. I told him about my brother, Edward, who was always called by a very English nickname — Boy — until we returned to the United States, when I had to get used to calling him by his chosen grown up name — Ted.

I said, "My father was Jewish, but he had diplomatic immunity, of course. Boy and I knew very little about what was going on, but I remember being told very sternly that whenever our governess took us for our daily walk and we ended up in the village — which wasn't very often, because usually we went into the fields behind our house — but if we did go to the village, and we wanted to say something about the man called Il Duce or the other person we heard mentioned by the grown-ups — Hitler — we were to use the code names, 'Mr. Strong-arm' and 'Mr. Strong-heart.' It was impressed upon both of us that this was not a game and that it could mean serious trouble for our parents — for our entire family — if the wrong passerby heard us using the other names."

"Did you run into trouble in school?"

"No," I replied, "We didn't go to school. They were being run by the Fascists. We were taught at home by whoever happened to be our governess at the time, using the Calvert System. It's based — I imagine it's still in existence — in Baltimore, and Foreign Service families have it sent to them when they're assigned to a place where the available schools are poor, or there's some other reason to keep their kids out of them. It was a superb education, by the way. Greek and Roman mythology along with the usual elementary school stuff, believe it or not!"

I told of the morning when huge red letters were found, scrawled in red paint on the outside of our iron gate, letters Boy and I couldn't understand, but which the maid told us meant "Jew," and of watching the cleaning lady and my father scrubbing the paint off the black iron, while I wondered if I should ask what a Jew was. And of the nice neighbor across the street, an elderly, stooped man whose name I couldn't remember, who disappeared one night and never came back.

I said, "We were told it was because he was Jewish, and Mr. Strong-arm and Mr. Strong-heart were bad men who were very powerful in their countries, and they didn't like Jews or gypsies or anybody who disagreed with them, and sometimes they took them away. They didn't say to where, and we children weren't allowed to ask a lot of questions. I suppose this was around 1939, maybe 1940, and people were beginning to vanish in

the middle of the night, though Boy and I were told nothing about any of that."

Shura was listening intently, then — at a pause in my tale — he suddenly jumped from his chair, saying, "Hold it a minute; I've got to check the time," and rushed to the kitchen. When he came back he announced, "It's past the hour and a half point, so I need to ask you if you wish a supplement or not?"

"Oh," I replied, and silently consulted myself, "If I took the supplement, I would simply continue where I am for longer than I would otherwise?"

"Exactly. Approximately an hour longer."

"Then yes, please. I would like very much to have the supplement, if you don't mind.

"No, of course not. I'll join you. Wait just a moment."

When he brought out our wine glasses again, I shuddered at the memory of the taste, and Shura apologized, "I forgot. Let me bring you some juice." From the kitchen, he called out, "As a matter of fact, you should be drinking a lot of fluid, because this drug tends to cause a bit of dehydration."

I excused myself to go to the bathroom. Sitting on the toilet, I looked around at the pale green wall tiles and the old-fashioned sink, and saw that there was one very neat, well-spun spiderweb in a corner of the light blue ceiling. I assumed it had been left there deliberately, because the rest of the bathroom was clean and tidy and dusted.

In the living room, I clinked glasses with Shura and downed the juice without difficulty.

I settled back onto the blue tweed couch, and Shura brought in a pitcher of ice water and an empty plastic tumbler. As he put them on the table in front of me, I smiled. "Thank you. I'll try to remember to keep drinking."

"It's important that you do," he said, seated again in his armchair. I saw a glass of water on the small table by his side.

"Before you continue your story," Shura said, "I'd like you to tell me if you notice any physical effects of any kind, at this point?"

"Physical?" I paid attention and reported, "There's a bit of dryness in the mouth, now that I think of it, and a funny little feeling, a kind of tension, in the jaw hinges; it's not a problem though."

"Notice anything about the eyes?"

I rolled my eyes, looked to right and left and said, "There's a tendency for them to wiggle a bit, when I look to either side; I don't mind it. Actually, it's sort of fun."

"That's called nystagmus. Most people have a touch of it with MDMA, especially the first time they take it."

I practiced the eye-wiggle a few times and laughed at the sensation.

"Are you comfortable with where you are?"

I answered yes, thinking that "comfortable" was not exactly the word I would have chosen. I was seeing my world differently. There was still the peacefulness within me, and a clarity to whatever I looked at, inside myself and outside. I was not afraid; there was no anxiety. Then the realization struck me that I lived most of the time in a state of habitual anxiety. I was so used to it, I had long ago forgotten to notice or wonder at it. Anxiety was my way of life. It was very unusual — and it felt wonderful — to be without it.

*That can't change yet. Too many things to be responsible for. The children. My job. Paying bills. Wondering if I'll ever have a true soulmate, like this one, to share life with. So many things to do, to keep in balance. Can't relax and trust the universe yet.*

Shura spoke, "Please continue with your story. I don't want you to think I wasn't involved with what you were saying, when I remembered about the supplement."

"Oh, no," I replied, "It isn't that. I just got seduced by some other thoughts. I was realizing how much anxiety I normally live with. I hadn't seen before that a certain level of anxiety is an absolute habit with me. And that's probably been the case for years and years. I'm not sure I can even remember a time when it wasn't there. Except perhaps that day on peyote."

Shura nodded.

"It was an interesting bit of insight. Not that I can do anything about it, at this particular time in my life. But it's important for me to realize it consciously, I think."

I was looking across the space between us at Shura's face in the shadow of the divider wall. I lost myself for a moment in the study of that lion's mane, the deep furrows between nostrils and mustache, the full lips which seemed softer now than they usually did. The MDMA has brought out the warmest part of him, I thought. There was an openness, a vulnerability in his face which I had seen before only on the night we made love.

*He's a very controlled person, and he's allowing some of that control to go; he's not guarding as much as usual. His face is very beautiful. I wonder if he looks so to other people.*

Shura smiled at me, his eyes glinting in the shadows.

"I was appreciating your face," I said, "You're beautiful, you know."

"So are you, my little friend," he said, then swung his feet off the hassock and leaned forward.

"I'm going to ask you to do something, right now, if you would. Go into the bathroom and look at yourself in the mirror. Don't stay there long; it's easy to hypnotize yourself, when you're in this state. But I want you to look at your face for a moment, then come back and tell me what you've

seen."

I remembered Sam making the same request, on the peyote day.

I went to the bathroom and looked into the mirror. The face I saw was radiant, the eyes glowing, pupils large. It looked open and unguarded. There was sadness there, kindness, longing, and a faint touch of hope. I smiled at the reflection.

When I returned to the living room, I said only, "I saw a person I like very much."

Shura said, "I was hoping you would. I like you very much, too. For whatever that's worth to you."

"Thank you. It's worth a great deal."

*I would have it love as well as like, but that's something neither of us has control over.*

I settled back on the couch and thought about continuing my story, but a question had come to mind.

"Shura, you said that you never had the experience of being in love before Ursula. Weren't you in love with Helen when you married her?"

Shura rubbed his beard, thinking. He sighed, "No. We were comfortable with each other and we enjoyed doing things together, but I suspect we got married more to escape being lonely than because we really loved each other. And to aggravate our parents. Hers had made it clear that, in their opinion, I wasn't quite what they had in mind for their daughter, and mine most definitely felt I could do better. We both thought it was very funny, and we decided to elope, I guess to punish them."

The glow I'd seen in his face a while ago had dimmed. I wondered if it was the remembering.

"We weren't very happy, I regret to say. She was a good person, kind and intelligent, and she brought a much needed order into my life; you know, a clean house, fresh shirts and meals on time, even when she went back to work. It gave me a routine, a structure I could depend on, especially at times when I had doubts about the wisdom of the decisions I'd made — leaving Dole, going back to school. I wasn't always sure I could make a good enough living as a consultant to allow me to follow my peculiar and very different drummer."

"But you weren't happy together?"

"No, not happy. There were several major stones on the path, sorry to say, and neither of us was able to find a satisfactory way around them. For one, Helen was intensely phobic. She was afraid of a lot of things. Her greatest fear, as I said, was of losing control, being vulnerable, and as a result, certain aspects of our relationship suffered."

I poured ice water into the clean glass Shura had put out for me. I was aware of dryness in my mouth and remembered he'd mentioned dehydration.

He took my cue and drank from his glass before continuing. "When she gave birth to Theo, she had a lot of pain, and she told me she didn't want to go through that experience again. She said Theo would have to be an only child, because she couldn't face another childbirth. That saddened me because I'd been an only child and I sometimes thought that it might have been better — many things in my life might have been better — if I'd had siblings. But she felt so strongly about it, I had no choice but to accept her decision."

"You didn't consider adoption?"

"No, I can't remember ever discussing adoption, though I suppose it must have been mentioned, somewhere along the way. We were both probably too elitist to seriously consider it."

"Did she have her tubes tied?"

"No. Nothing like that. She was too afraid of surgery. She couldn't tolerate the pill and — not unreasonably — she didn't trust condoms. What happened was that we gradually — love-making just happened less and less often. We began to withdraw from each other." He frowned, "Are you sure you want to hear all this?"

"As long as you don't mind sharing it, I appreciate your telling me. After all, it was a whole thirty years of your life."

*And it means you trust me.*

"No, I don't mind talking about it. Matter of fact, it feels good to talk about it. I haven't told anyone about this aspect of the marriage, even Ursula. She and Dolph knew Helen; they genuinely liked each other, and they got on very well. All four of us got on well. We used to go on weekend trips together, in fact, even after I'd realized I was in love with Ursula and she'd said she loved me. Of course, Helen never knew. Thank God, she never knew."

"Did Dolph know?"

"I assumed at the time that he didn't, but at this point, I can't be sure. He gave no indication, then, of feeling differently towards me, but he doesn't now, either — on the phone. And he certainly knows about it now!"

He paused to drink, and I kept quiet.

"We did our best to be good parents, Helen and I. I think we were good parents, in every way but one. Neither of us really gave Theo the depth of acceptance and love that he needed. Helen did better than I, in that respect, but there was something missing for Theo. I wasn't as supportive as I should have been, and I've regretted it deeply without knowing how to remedy it. As I said, I wasn't a very loving human being at that time."

I nodded.

"I suppose I was too critical and judgemental, and I know I was often

impatient with poor Theo, and he suffered from it. He could never be sure, really sure, at the deepest level, that he was a worthwhile person and unconditionally loved, and I was more to blame than Helen for that. But, to be fair — to myself — I was gradually becoming emotionally dried up, withdrawing from people more and more."

He lit a cigarette, and so did I.

"I think that, for many years, I was unable to give much love to anyone. Until Ursula happened to me, and I began to thaw out a lot of what had been frozen for so long. I even felt more love for Helen, at that time, than I ever had before. And I actually felt kind, on occasion, and bit my tongue instead of delivering my usual devastatingly clever, cutting comments. I was careful not to overdo it, of course. There wasn't any point in alarming everybody!"

I laughed. I couldn't imagine him as an unkind man with a dry heart. The critical, impatient aspect, I had seen hints of; I could believe in that. But not in lack of kindness.

*Is he judging himself too harshly, remembering the past? Or is he warning me — unconsciously, maybe — of some aspects of himself I don't know yet?*

"We irritated each other too often, Helen and I. We argued a lot about little things, things not worth arguing about. It was a reflection of the deeper disappointment we both felt about the whole relationship, the way our marriage had turned out."

"But she never tried to stop you from doing your research, you said?"

"No, she wasn't in any way negative about that. She was interested in my descriptions of effects, but she declined to take part in any experiment. Until that one time with mescaline. It must have been very hard for her sometimes, knowing the kind of research I was engaged in; phobic as she was, I'm sure she was often scared of my doing myself some injury, but she kept it to herself, and I bless her for that."

"What kind of phobias did she have?"

"She was afraid of straining her body in any way — thus the withdrawal from sex — and of injury, of course. I always helped with anything in the kitchen that involved the use of a sharp knife, for instance. And of death, which is not unusual, I realize, but there were times when she seemed a bit obsessed with the threat of death. We got a little 20-foot sailboat, and for a while she enjoyed it when we went out as a family, but she was terrified for my safety when I went sailing alone. Eventually, she came to be afraid of sailing altogether."

"Poor soul!"

"When I learned to fly a small plane," said Shura, "She refused to drive down with me to the flying school. If we had to take a regular airline flight to anywhere, I had to give her Miltown before we got on board. None of this, you understand, prevented her from functioning quite nor-

mally and efficiently, in most respects. It's just that fear was always part of our life together, and it came between us in a lot of ways."

"She never went into any kind of therapy?"

"Oh, no. Psychotherapy was frightening to her, too. She dismissed any such suggestion out of hand."

"Unfortunately," I said, "that's not unusual. A lot of people think a therapist is going to lay open everything bad and unacceptable in them; they really expect some kind of professional Final Judgement."

Shura nodded, stubbing out his cigarette. "After she had her first minor stroke, several years before her death, we developed a quite different relationship. She allowed herself to trust me, and I was able to help her a great deal. I wanted her to gain independence from her medications as soon as possible, so I introduced her to biofeedback. She learned to regulate her blood pressure, to the point where she could get off both her medications — with the doctor's approval, of course — without any negative consequences."

"That's wonderful!"

"She showed tremendous courage. It touched me very deeply, her courage and her trust in me. And it paid off. She was able to stop thinking of herself as an invalid and go back to the job she loved, in Berkeley."

"You said she didn't enjoy living out here on the Farm?"

"Not really. She wanted to like it, but this kind of life just wasn't her cup of tea. She was a city girl at heart. That's just the way it was. She took care of everything, she was an excellent housekeeper, as I said. I am not a very neat or tidy person, and I left it to her to keep things picked up and running smoothly, and that's what she did, but she was never able to love this place the way I do."

*He needs to live with someone organized and tidy, and I'm neither.*

I asked him, "Did she have another stroke, or was her death due to something else?"

"She was working in the library — this was about three years after the first stroke — and apparently she complained to a friend that her right arm had suddenly gone dead, then she lost consciousness and — well, she never woke up. Pontine hemorrhage; a massive stroke."

"Oh, dear." I knew there were tears on the shadowed face, and I thought, how very good that he had wanted to tell me all of it. I wondered whether it might be one of the effects of MDMA, this kind of trust and openness.

"Thank you for telling me."

"I suppose I needed to talk about it. Thank you for being interested."

I smiled at him, then focused on taking a drink from my water glass, because I needed the water and because it would give him a chance to wipe his eyes. I heard the sound of a nose being unashamedly blown, and

saw a balled up Kleenex drop to the floor.

Shura asked, his voice thickened but cheerful, "How are you feeling right now?"

I told him I suspected the effects might be starting to fade, just a bit, "It's a barely perceptible change. Perhaps I'm just getting used to the state."

"Maybe, but I wouldn't be surprised if you were starting to experience the decline."

"Already?"

Shura was smiling, "Do I detect a bit of disappointment?"

"Oh, of course you detect disappointment. It would be nice to keep going this way for a lot longer."

"I'm glad it's been a good experience. Very glad."

*He means it, he really is pleased. I wonder how much of the pleasure is because he cares for me or because he believes this stuff is good and wants it to be good for everyone. Maybe a bit of both. Doesn't matter.*

We spent the next hour or so wandering over the Farm. I asked how the MDMA had been for him, and he told me that he'd had a pleasant experience, but that it didn't do the same things for him that it seemed to do for so many other people.

"Just my peculiar body chemistry, I guess," he said, "I don't mind."

"You don't mind?"

"No, I enjoy what it does give me, and since I take it these days only with other people, I also enjoy the experience of seeing them open up and discover themselves. I don't do it often, but every time I have shared it with somebody else, I've felt truly privileged. That's the only way I can put it."

We made our way down an overgrown path behind the garage, and Shura opened the door of a small greenhouse which was missing some sections of its glass. There was a hole in the back wall through which a few ground vines had entered. Patches of yellowing grass were growing on the floor and red pots clustered on an old redwood table. Some of the pots contained unidentifiable green plants and one held a small cactus.

Shura said, regretfully, "Have to get this fixed up and working again."

We walked past a slope of grass where a single grapevine, leafless still, wound itself around a crude wooden frame. Beyond it was a very old, dark barn, where Shura showed me the remnants of a huge wine barrel and a wall of bottles — homemade plum wine — resting on their sides in rows, barely visible in the dark. He said the lights hadn't worked for years and that he fully intended, one of these days, to repair them. In the meantime, he cautioned, I should watch my step, because there were all sorts of things lying around on the floor, waiting to turn ankles.

After the barn we saw more grapevines and a place on the hill where

he said there used to be a vegetable garden, and would be again, when he got around to doing some work on it. On our way back, we talked about the satisfaction of growing one's own vegetables, and the virtues of drip irrigation. I told him that it seemed to me the effects of the MDMA were gone, or almost gone.

"How do you feel, now?"

We were standing at the top of the brick stairway in front of the house. I put out a hand to explore the texture of juniper and thought carefully before answering.

"There's still a peacefulness inside. There's a kind of acceptance of things as they are, a feeling that everything is — everything makes some kind of sense. Not to the mind, because intellectually, there's a lot of confusion, but in the heart. And a — what I can only call excitement. Some part of me can't wait to see what life's going to come up with next! Anticipation without the usual anxiety. And underneath it all is the feeling that we both belong here, just as we are, right now."

*I think I said that pretty well. I've even impressed myself.*

"Do you feel hungry?" asked Shura.

"Hungry?"

*What kind of response is that, to my gorgeous speech?*

Shura was asking, a tease in his voice, "How does the idea of pork chops and mashed potatoes strike you?"

I thought of pork chops and mashed potatoes, and replied, "Not the most alluring thing in the world, exactly."

He grinned as if I had passed a difficult exam.

"That's the normal response. MDMA is highly anorexic. You probably won't feel like eating for quite a few hours yet."

We returned to the living room and I remarked that, although my appetite was gone, I certainly felt thirsty, and proceeded to drink all the remaining water in my glass.

"Good girl," said Shura, "Keep drinking."

I flashed him a good-girl smile, baring my teeth, then said what I had to say, "I'd better think about getting home, you know."

For just a fraction of a moment, there was a look of confusion on his face, as if my words had surprised him. Then he looked away and said, "Yes, of course. I hadn't thought about you going home, to tell the truth."

*Oh, thank you, love.*

"I feel perfectly fine, Shura. I wouldn't suggest going home if I had any doubts about driving."

"No, of course not," he said, "But let me give you a quick check, anyway. Go into the bathroom for a moment and I'll get my flashlight."

*What in heaven's name is he going to do with a flashlight?*

When he joined me in the bathroom, he turned off the light and told

me to stand with my back to the window. He said, "Tell me if you see any tracers — you know what I mean by tracers, don't you?"

"The after-impression you get from a moving point of light, if you're under the influence, yes?"

"Right."

He clicked on the flashlight and swept it across my field of vision, then turned it off. I assured him there were no tracers.

"Fine," he said, leading me back to the living room, "But you might still get light flashes at the periphery of your vision. Just be prepared for them, especially when you're facing headlights on the highway. Don't get confused."

I said I was sure I wouldn't get confused, and I hadn't seen any peripheral light flashes yet.

Shura urged, "Promise me, if you feel the slightest unease while you're driving, either turn right around and come back here, or at least get off the highway and wait for a while. All right?"

He was holding my shoulders, looking into my face.

"Of course I will," I promised him, "I have great respect for my own health and safety, believe me. I'll come right back here if there's any question at all."

Shura walked down the driveway while I was starting my engine, to lock up after me. When I reached the gate, I put on the brake and stepped out of the car. I hugged him, my head on his chest, "Thank you for a beautiful day, and for being who you are."

"Whatever that is," he laughed, hugging me back.

"Whatever that is," I agreed.

He bent his head and kissed the tip of my nose.

Driving home, I realized that neither of us had mentioned my coming back to the Farm, or even seeing each other again. And it didn't matter.

*We wait. It's in the hands of the gods. He waits for Ursula and I wait for him.*

## CHAPTER 23. THE GROUP

Late the next morning, Shura called to ask how I was feeling. I said very well, thank you, adding that I was still not hungry, to my great delight, and hoped the anorexia would continue for a long time.

He said he was glad it had been a positive experience.

"I'm very grateful," I said, "It was good of you to do that for me — and with me."

He replied, "It was my pleasure."

Nothing was said about a return engagement.

Wednesday evening, I put on my nightgown and sat down to watch the late news on television. The children were asleep. I was drained from the day's work, but reluctant to go to bed because all I could look forward to after the night's sleep was getting up and going back to the pressure of the Medical Records Department, which — having two transcribers out with flu — was even more frantic than usual.

When the phone rang, my first thought was that, at this late hour, it might be an emergency, and I wasn't in the mood for emergencies. I did not expect Shura's voice, and must have sounded surprised, because he asked me, "Am I calling too late? I didn't mean to wake you up — were you asleep?"

"No, no! Not at all. I was watching the late news, as a matter of fact. How nice to hear from you!"

"I called to tell you I'm having some friends — part of my research group — over next Saturday. Thought you might like to join us, if you don't have other plans?"

The aching tiredness in my shoulders and neck had disappeared.

"I'd love to. What time, and can I bring anything?"

"I'm asking everyone to be here by ten in the morning. Bring whatever kind of juice you like, and — let's see — we could use some fresh fruit. Everything else is taken care of. Oh, by the way, you might want to skip

breakfast."

*Why? They're probably having a brunch, that's why.*

Saturday was cool, the air fresh and clear from the previous day's rain. I had stopped at the market for oranges, apples and bananas and a bottle of my old standby, cranberry juice. Tucked away in the back of the Volkswagon bus was a decorated shopping bag, left over from Christmas, containing my toothbrush, an extra blouse, and my best pale blue silk nightgown.

*You never know, as the Boy Scouts say.*

As I turned into Borodin Road, I realized I was feeling more than ordinary, everyday anxiety; I was scared to death. In a few minutes, I would be meeting Shura's best friends; they would inevitably compare me with Ursula — the lovely, gentle, young, intelligent Ursula — and probably resent me as a poor substitute. Surely they would wonder at my presence here, today. I was wondering at it, myself.

*Okay. Nothing to do but be happy Shura invited me and hope his friends are inclined to mercy and compassion.*

The kitchen was noisy with talk, laughter and the sounds of bowls and cutlery being arranged on tile surfaces. Shura turned to see me hesitating in the doorway and called, "Alice! I didn't hear you drive up. Come on in!"

I put my sack of groceries on the counter, while Shura shouted happily that he wanted to introduce a good friend of his, Alice Parr. I flashed a quick grin at the blur of faces, then turned to busy myself with the job of putting the fruit in an empty basket, giving my mouth a chance to relax. I was afraid my old facial tic might return.

For most of my life, whenever I was being introduced to a roomful of people I didn't know, the tiny muscles on either side of my mouth would go into a twitching spasm if I tried to maintain a smile while I was being stared at, the newcomer on display. I had no way of knowing whether or not the tic was visible to anyone else, and had no intention of finding out. Only when one of the strangers made some gesture or spoke to me, would the tension ease, allowing me to smile back in a reasonable imitation of spontaneity. For years, now, I hadn't had trouble with the spasm, but I recognized the familiar feeling of suffocating tightness in my throat, and there was no sense in taking a chance.

When I turned around again, a moment later, I was sure I looked pleasantly expectant, without actually smiling.

I shook hands with five people, trying to register each name while knowing my nervousness would, as usual, make it impossible. I'd grown used to explaining that I found it hard to remember names with the first introduction, having discovered that it was a fault I shared with a large part of the human race.

First, there was Ruth Close, followed by her husband, George. Ruth was a small woman, a few inches shorter than I, with a comfortably rounded body and a face which showed kindness and warmth; a mother-face. Her black hair was cut short and feathery with streaks of grey showing at the temples. Dark eyes, friendly and questioning, looked into mine as she patted my hand.

George, who was only slightly taller than his wife and equally rounded, leaned forward with a wide grin, his eyes squinting behind glasses; he took both my hands in his and pumped them enthusiastically, "Hello, hello! So you're Alice! Welcome to the madhouse!"

My tension evaporated with George's greeting. Suddenly, my smile was back and I knew the tic wouldn't be.

Next came Leah Cantrell, a tall, thin girl-woman with long, dark blond hair fastened against the back of her neck with a blue ribbon. Hazel eyes searched mine, wanting to know everything. I felt an immediate liking for this quietly lovely person with the sensitive face.

Shura introduced her husband as "Doctor Morris Benjamin Cantrell, called Ben."

Ben said, "Welcome, Alice! It's a pleasure to meet you," sounding as if he meant it. His voice was resonant and warm, with an undertone of authority. He was a solidly built man with thinning white hair and an intelligent, powerful face, obviously more than a few years older than his wife. His eyes looked straight into mine, as he smiled.

Last to greet me was John Sellars, a slender man with smooth pink cheeks who, at first glance, seemed no older than forty. It was only upon looking more closely at him, later in the day, that I saw the many fine lines on the forehead and around the eyes, and realized that the straw-colored hair was mostly grey. His face was compelling; a Botticelli angel grown to middle-age, with thoughtful eyes.

While she washed lettuce for a salad, Ruth asked me questions. Where did I live, what kind of work did I do, how did I meet Shura? I answered willingly, aware of the mixture in her voice of empathy and strong curiosity. When, in response to a question, I told her I had four children, she said that she had wanted some of her own but found she couldn't have them. I said I was surprised to hear that, because she had impressed me as the kind of person who would have lots of children, all of them well loved. She chuckled, "Well, I suppose I make up for it by mothering just about everybody else."

Shura called out from the dining room, "All right, people, gather 'round," and the talk hushed. We crowded around the table.

"We're doing a new one, today," said Shura, "And not only is it a new material, it's also one of a new family of compounds. I've named it Aleph-2, and full activity has been established at between 4 and 8 milligrams. As

I think I indicated on the phone, it's relatively long, about eight or nine hours. At least, it was for me. For those of you who are very sensitive, there's always the possibility it might take longer than that to return to baseline, which is why I suggested you bring sleeping bags."

*He didn't mention sleeping bags to me. He didn't even tell me there would be an experiment. Maybe he doesn't say things like that over the phone. Oh, of course! That's what he meant when he said to skip breakfast!*

Leah's voice said, "Good! It's been a while since we've tried a new one."

George sighed loudly, rolling his eyes, "My oh my, the sacrifices we make for science!"

Ruth said, "Just as long as it isn't anorexic — I've got a gorgeous salad!"

"Then you'll be happy to hear that anorexia is not one of its properties," replied Shura.

"Hooray!" said George.

A discussion began about the level of drug which would be appropriate to each member of the group, and I noted that Ruth and George agreed immediately to Shura's suggestion of four and five milligrams, respectively. I wondered if they were both sensitive to these kinds of drugs, or were being conservative because it was new to them. I was curious to see whether anyone would elect to take the maximum amount Shura had mentioned.

Leah also chose a modest level, four milligrams, but her husband asked for six. John scratched the back of his head thoughtfully, then said he would take a chance with seven.

Shura scribbled on a large piece of paper, then announced, "As for me, I'll go with seven milligrams, this time. I tried eight, and it was a bit strong."

He looked across the table at me. I felt myself flushing, and he smiled reassuringly, "Alice, you're more than welcome to participate if you'd like, or just be with us without taking anything, if you'd prefer." He added, "I'm not sure I even made it clear to you there was going to be an experiment today, did I?"

I shook my head, "No, but that's okay. I'd like very much to join in, if it's all right."

There was a chorus of encouragement from the others.

Shura said, "If you want to give it a try, might I suggest something like four or five milligrams? It's a modest level, but you should get the full effects."

"Five, then, please."

Shura asked Ben to help him, and they left for the lab with seven glasses of assorted sizes and shapes. I sat down in a chair near the sliding

glass doors which formed one wall of the dining room.

*What the blazes am I doing, taking a new psychedelic drug with a lot of people I've never met before? I'll have to be careful, behave very well. They don't know me. I don't want them to know too much too fast.*

Ruth came up to me and asked, "Have you had any experience with psychedelics before, Alice?"

"Well, I took peyote many years ago, and last week I had my first MDMA experience. That's all." Then I remembered, "Oh, I did try marijuana once, but I'm afraid I didn't enjoy it very much."

Ruth put a hand on my shoulder, "Well, don't worry. We're nice people, you know, and you'll be just fine. It's certainly a new and different way to get to know a bunch of strangers, isn't it!" I was surprised to hear a faint note of disapproval in her voice.

I smiled at her and agreed it certainly was that!

*She doesn't think Shura should have put me in this position. He gave me a choice, though. He said I was welcome to be here without taking anything. He probably thinks I'm a grownup and can make grownup choices for myself.*

Shura and Ben returned and eased the glasses — now marked with initials and covered by neat caps of aluminum foil — onto the dining room table. Ruth brought out several bottles of juice.

There was an instant of silence, as everyone standing around the table looked at what had been placed there, and thought their private thoughts. Then someone sighed audibly and Shura said, "Well, are we ready?"

Leah said, "Ready," and picked up her glass, reading the initials out loud, "L.C., if I'm not mistaken." Shura handed me mine and I saw in it a small amount of white powder. I looked up and met George's eyes. He flashed a grin at me, peered into his own glass and shuddered dramatically, making a sound of strangled horror, then looked back at me and said, very seriously, "I strongly advise you to add juice; Shura's concoctions usually taste absolutely terrible, and I'll bet this one is no exception."

I was still laughing as I poured cranberry juice into my glass.

Shura was protesting, "There's nothing terrible about the taste; it's all part of the personality of the drug, part of its identity, its soul. Think of what you're missing; think of what you'll never know —"

George interrupted him with another shuddering groan. Ruth was chuckling, patting Shura on the back, and Leah said, "We know, Shura, we know all about your beautiful little drug souls, and we have found them wanting in the area of palatability."

We drifted into the kitchen and formed a small circle, holding up our glasses. I stood between Ben and John, looking up at Shura, as was everyone else. He said, "Prosit!" and everyone clinked glasses, saying, "Happy voyage," "Blessings," and to me, "Welcome Alice," then we drank.

It was more than an hour before the first announcement came, and it

was from George.

We were gathered outside, wearing sweaters and jackets. Ben and Leah were seated on a weathered redwood bench next to the front door, and Ruth was at the other end of the brick apron that stretched across the front of the house, talking with Shura and John. I was sitting on a large floor pillow somebody had brought out from the living room, and George was nearby on a bank of ivy, leaning against an immense oak tree whose roots were beginning to displace some of the bricks on the walkway around us.

Ben had been telling me about his childhood in Brooklyn, and the ways in which growing up poor — "my early survival training," he called it — had influenced the direction of his later life. I had learned that he was the founder and head of a graduate school of psychology, which he referred to as "the institute," in a town north of the Bay Area. He had a sharp, subtle mind and a sense of humor to match.

I had shared some of my own much briefer experience of poverty, in the housing project with Christopher, and what it had taught me. I didn't mention having discovered, at first hand, the meaning of the term, "chronic depressive state."

Suddenly, from his place underneath the oak, George spoke for the first time since coming outside, "By the way, is anyone else feeling this stuff yet? I must say I am!"

Leah answered, "Yes, so am I. A lot." She put her hand on her husband's thigh, "Are you cold, honey? Do you want a blanket?"

Ben looked thoughtful, as if examining himself for the first time, and said he was feeling fine, not cold at all. Leah rose and went into the house. I paid attention to my own state and concluded I was off baseline, as Shura would say, but only lightly, perhaps one shot of vodka's worth. I called out to George and asked him how he was.

"Oh," he replied, his voice strained, "Hard to say. There's an awful lot of visual stuff; the ivy is wiggling non-stop. I wouldn't mind a five-minute breather from it all, at the moment."

Leah reappeared with a stack of blankets of different sizes and colors, and George said, "Ah, thank you, thank you. I can use a couple or five of those," and grabbed at the one Leah offered him. He wrapped it around himself and lay down, huddled like a child at the base of the tree. I told Leah I was grateful for the offer, but didn't think I needed one yet. She rejoined Ben, her blanket clutched around her, visibly shivering. Her husband put an arm over her shoulders and kissed her cheek.

I asked Ben, "How is your experience?"

"Well, it impresses me as a mellow, pleasant material, so far. It certainly did creep up on me while we were doing all that talking." He chuckled comfortably. I glanced up at George, now invisible under his blanket.

*I took the same amount he did, and I'm not feeling much at all. I've been talking a lot, though. Guess that could be counted as an effect.*

I pressed Ben, "Are you getting visual things of any kind?"

"Yes, I'd have to say that there's quite a lot of movement, now that I'm paying attention."

I heard the scuffing of Shura's sandals on the bricks behind me. He went over to Ben and Leah and leaned down to peer into their faces, "How's it going? Where are you?"

"Very nice, indeed," said Ben, "It shows potential, Shura. Quite a bit of visual; comfortable body, reasonably strong effect. I'd say it's pushing a plus-three."

"Me, too," said Shura. He put a hand on Leah's blanket covered shoulder, "How about you, kid?"

"A bit intense, at the moment. Also, I'm feeling the cold a lot. I keep shivering, but I'm sure that'll smooth out in a while. I'd say a very strong plus-three, and I hope it softens a bit. In the meantime, I'm just going to go with it and not talk much."

Ruth was standing beside me, holding her sweater tightly around her body, "It's not too strong for me, for a change. Sort of pleasant, though I'm not sure I can tell you exactly what's happening. Just very definitely not baseline," she smiled, then went over to the ivy covered mound and climbed up beside George.

Shura squatted down in front of me. His eyes were dark and liquid, the pupils large, and I realized mine must be also. His face glowed with a look of frank pleasure. I smiled at him; you could only smile at that open face.

I reported, "I'm getting relatively little effect, really. It's a nice, relaxed sort of feeling, but it's only — well — it's like the effect of one cocktail, that's about it."

Shura looked puzzled, "How much did I give you? Five?"

"Yes, it was five."

"John's quite light, so is Ruth; Ben's kind of middling strong, Leah's very intense, and," he glanced up at George, "George is cocooning, I see. George?" He rose and climbed up on the ivy. George mumbled something to him from underneath the blanket. Shura patted him and climbed down, leaving him to Ruth's care.

"Well, this is why we have a research group," Shura said, hands in the pockets of his corduroy jacket, "But I must say, this one is hard to figure out. So far, there seems to be an awfully wide range of responses to the drug."

He stooped down to me again and asked, "Are you content with where you are, or would you like to try a supplement of a couple of milligrams, just to see if it boosts you into more of a real effect?"

I didn't hesitate, "I wouldn't mind a boost, if that's okay."

"I'll measure out two milligrams more. That'll put you at my level — seven — and that certainly should do it."

I followed him into the house. In the kitchen, he paused, my glass in his hand, and asked me, quietly, "How's it going?"

"Very well. Beautifully, in fact. I had a good talk with Ben, and I do like him."

"Yes, we go back a long way, Benjamin and I. It's a sort of brother relationship — the brother neither of us had, I suppose. I'm glad you had a chance to talk to him." He smiled, "I'm going to get your booster. Be back in a moment."

I wandered into the living room, saw two more big pillows on the carpet beside the piano, and dragged them outside. George was still curled up under the tree, and Ruth lay next to him, murmuring gently. I could hear only small sounds from George, and wondered what kind of difficulty he was having.

*I don't know him, though; I don't know any of them. Maybe George always curls up in a blanket during experiments. Maybe Leah always feels chilled.*

I couldn't understand my own lack of response to the drug, although there was always the possibility that my need to be in control was overriding everything else. No way to tell. The additional two milligrams might make a change.

Shura brought out my glass, with some juice in it. I said thank you and drank it down. He climbed up on the ivy to sit with George and Ruth.

I found myself in conversation with John Sellars. He asked me friendly, polite questions about myself and told me he was an anthropologist. Then we discovered our mutual love of art, he as — in his words — a lifelong student and critic, I as a person who had drawn and painted all my life. We talked eagerly about the Brundage collection in Golden Gate Park, where the museum had built an entire wing to house some of the greatest masterpieces of Oriental art in the world, and I told him how the sight of the great seated Buddha on the path above the Japanese Tea Garden had pierced my heart, on the peyote day, many years ago. He, in turn, offered his experience in the Oakland museum, under the influence of one of Shura's materials, enchanted by the blue and red horses of Franz Marc.

An introverted man, I thought, slow to trust somebody new. Yet he seemed to appreciate my responses, his brief smile startling in its sweetness.

I finally rose to go to the bathroom, and as I passed by Leah, she reached out a hand and I took it. She looked up at me and smiled with unmistakable warmth. I felt a surge of gratitude so strong, my throat caught on tears. When I squeezed her hand in response, she released me and withdrew again into her blanketed isolation.

A short time later, I was sitting inside by myself, on the couch, still not

more than slightly off baseline, despite the supplement, when Ben came in and sat down on the hassock. He leaned forward, hands clasped, his face serious.

"I was hoping to have a chance to talk to you alone," he said, "I thought perhaps you might be interested in hearing somebody else's view of our girl, Ursula?"

"Yes," I said, surprised, "I certainly am."

"I'm going to speak rather bluntly," said Ben. "She's a good-looking young woman, bright, charming, and highly manipulative. She has Shura totally blinded; he can't see what she is, and of course he won't hear anything from anybody who doesn't worship the ground she walks on. It so happens that I've come across her kind before. Shura's had relatively few women in his life, and certainly not this type, and of course he doesn't have the background of experience with different sorts of people that a practicing psychologist does, so there's no reason to expect him to understand what he's up against."

*My God, what is this? He doesn't like her! He doesn't like Ursula!*

I nodded, my eyes riveted on his face.

"Ursula is — how best to put it — she's a person who, when she's attracted to a man, intuitively senses what's lacking in his emotional life, and she has a compulsion to become whatever that man most needs in a woman. She probably convinces herself each time that she's truly in love, but I doubt she's capable of what most of us would call real loving. The Jungians have a term, 'anima woman.' The anima woman lacks a solid identity; like many great actors, she borrows — she takes on — a sense of wholeness from playing a part. In this case, it's the part of the muse, the inspiration, the adored dream-woman. She fulfills a fantasy, and you can imagine the tremendous emotional rewards there are for her in such a role, as long as the affair lasts. Each affair lasts, of course, only until the next needy attractive man comes along.

"It's all unconscious, by the way; I don't think Ursula has the slightest idea of what she's doing or why she feels compelled to do it. Or, for that matter, why the men she's drawn to always happen to be married. When it's time to move on, she explains — and probably believes — that she's ending the relationship because she couldn't live with the responsibility of having broken up a marriage."

I sat stunned, listening.

"When she first joined the group, we had long talks with each other, under the influence of Shura's materials, and she told me a lot about her involvements with married men; she told me more than she realized or intended to. It was a subtle form of preening, under the guise of telling problems to a wise, sympathetic psychologist, you understand?"

He grinned briefly at me.

"Gradually, I put enough of the pieces together to understand the pattern. By that time," Ben chuckled, "She had stopped telling me personal things about herself and her life, and I sensed that she was feeling uncomfortable around me. Nothing obvious, no overt avoidance, but nonetheless...." He paused, "As I said, she's highly intuitive."

I lit a cigarette, noting a very slight tremor in my body. It felt delicious.

Ben went on, "The dynamics of this kind of psychological compulsion are more than I want to go into right now, but what worries me is that I believe Ursula is simply not capable of true emotional commitment to anyone. She'll play the role for a time, as I said, until somebody else comes along — someone she finds appealing, with an emotional hole that's beginning to be filled — and she'll move on to the new challenge.

"That's what's going to happen to Shura. I'm sure of it. *I know it!* I love him very much — we all do, you know — and sooner or later, he's going to be badly hurt. That's why I'm more pleased than I can say, to see you here. I don't know what your relationship is with Shura, but it's clear that you care for him, and I hope that — umm — I hope you'll stay around. To help cushion the blow, when it comes; to give him something real to hold onto, when the unreal thing begins to unravel. Which I'm sure will happen before long, now that Ursula finds herself involved with a man who has — quite unexpectedly — become free to make an open commitment to her and ask her to do the same. Her bluff is being called."

*Oh, you wonderful man! The clouds are beginning to lift. The sun is breaking through. Twenty-thousand tweety-birds are singing their damn-fool heads off!*

I said, "As a matter of fact, Ben, Shura has said several times that he's beginning to wonder whether she'll ever ask her husband for a divorce, as she says she intends to do, and he's getting a bit cynical about all the promises she keeps making. He's aware that certain things just don't fit, don't make sense — like her husband's behavior, for instance. He says that whenever he's called Germany and Dolph has answered the phone, it's as if nothing is happening; Dolph still talks as if he and Shura are the best of friends. Not the kind of response you'd expect from a betrayed husband, is it?"

Ben was watching me, occasionally nodding.

I continued, "Maybe Shura's intuition is telling him what he doesn't want to acknowledge consciously. Otherwise, why would he have allowed me into his life, even just the little bit that he has? I keep asking myself why, if he's so much in love with Ursula, he's let himself get more than casually involved with me? He knows that —." I hesitated, not sure I should trust Ben with this one, then realized he'd already detected the signs, " — I'm in love with him. I told him that; I stated it very clearly. Maybe it hasn't scared him off because he already has some inkling —."

Ben said, "I'm relieved to hear that. Thank you for telling me." He shrugged, "I may be wrong, of course; Ursula may yet surprise us both. But I don't think so. I don't think I'm mistaken about her."

He stared at his clasped hands for a minute, then smiled at me, "I wish you luck. I also wish you a great deal of courage. Shura isn't the easiest person to understand and probably not the easiest to live with, either. But he's worth the effort. At least, I think he is. But, then, I'm not a woman who loves him; I'm not vulnerable to the kind of pain you could find yourself facing, in a situation like this."

Ruth came in. I could feel her intense desire to know what was going on, but she only waved to us and walked through, heading for the kitchen.

"Thank you," I said to Ben, who was getting up from his seat, "I'll keep what you've said to myself, of course, but it really helps to hear a different opinion; something besides how wonderful and sensitive and intelligent Ursula is, 'specially because I have no way of evaluating any of it."

"Glad you're here, Alice," said Ben. He pressed my shoulder firmly, and left to rejoin the people outside.

I sat on the couch for a long time, mentally replaying the conversation, word by extraordinary word, smoking absentmindedly.

*The whole universe just took a step to one side of where it used to be. Reality shift.*

In the early evening, we gathered together for supper. George sat at the table, his blanket still draped around him, making a brave effort to join in with the talking. He smiled shakily at me and said, "I must say, this day has been a surprise, not what I expected. Looks as if I'm a tad more sensitive to Aleph-2 than the rest of you. Happens that way, sometimes."

John seemed to be in a good state of mind and body; he ladled out a bowl of Leah's matzoh ball soup and reminisced with Shura and Ben about past experiments. Ruth and Leah laughed, occasionally adding details the men had forgotten. Now and then, Ruth would glance at George, who had settled down to eating bread and soup. The food was apparently helping him; I thought he was beginning to look more comfortable.

Finally, Shura sat back, burped loudly, and — after the boo's and catcalls had subsided — said, "Summing up time, yes? Ben, why don't you go first?"

"Good day, for me," said Ben, "Good talking. Body felt fine. No hints of trouble that I can recall, physical or mental. Plus-three and generally a positive experience."

Shura was making notes again. He turned to John and pointed.

"I had a good one, too, although it was light. There was a slight body tremor for a while, but it wasn't a problem, just felt like good energy. No

dark corners. No particular insights, but I was too busy talking to go inside much. It was a friendly material, for me. What else? Oh, yes. I'd put it down as a plus-two, definitely. And I wouldn't hesitate to take it again."

Leah was next, "I was really cold, most of the time. I'm just beginning to warm up now, in fact. The food probably helped. As for insights, well —" she paused, "I didn't feel like doing much talking, so I reviewed some things that've been happening recently — difficult interactions with a certain professor, a couple of good discussions I've had recently with other people, that kind of thing — and I was able to get a fresh view, see some things I hadn't seen before. So I'd have to say there was insight, yes." She smiled impishly, "Of course, it might not have been the drug. Maybe it was just giving myself a chance to be quiet and think for a while. These days, I'm so damned busy, I forget I should make time to just sit and think about what's going on."

Shura chuckled, "Don't we all, luv, don't we all!"

Leah concluded, "I'd say it was a plus-three, pretty strong, with the only negative being the cold; I was just as cold inside the house as outside. I couldn't seem to get warm anywhere. Otherwise, mainly okay, but I've had a lot more fun with other materials."

"I'll second that," said Ruth, "Okay for me, too, but not much fun, not the kind we've had on other things. Of course, I was a wee bit worried about George, and that probably influenced me. It wasn't more than a two-plus, I'd say, and I'm not sure I'd get too excited at the prospect of taking it again, to tell you the truth."

We laughed

Shura pointed his pen at me, so I took a deep breath and gave my report, "I was off baseline, but not very much. Even after the supplement, I couldn't feel anything more than a pleasant relaxation, about a single vodka-with-juice's worth."

Shura scribbled and said, "I'll put it down as plus-one."

"I think I talked a lot, though," I added, "And I forgot to be terrified about what Shura's best friends were going to think of me."

There were sympathetic smiles and murmurs of approval around the table. Even George grinned and croaked, "Good for you!"

*Not entirely true. I'm still wondering what they think of me. But I'm no longer scared to death, just plain ordinary everyday so-what-else-is-new anxious.*

Shura was saying, "I had a fine time. Plus-three, body good, mind brilliant, thoughts incisive, observations profound — as usual, I might add."

Loud hoots and snorts erupted. When the noise had died down, Shura went on, "Don't remember any great insights, but I was too busy exchanging wild tales and fond memories, most of the time, to bother

looking for any. I think seven milligrams is about the highest I want to go, though."

He wrote again, then looked over at George. "You got the overload this time, friend. Sorry about that. Plus-three and much too strong in the visuals department?"

"Yes, I'd say that's accurate," said George, his voice sounding stronger, "About as plus-three as you can get, and even with eyes closed, I couldn't escape the movement. You know how I love visuals, usually, but these were so powerful, I was almost seasick!"

"Can't figure it out," muttered Shura, "That wide a range is very unusual; Alice barely plus-one with a total of seven milligrams, and you blasted out of your skull with five. Looks as if I'll have to go carefully with the rest of the Aleph's, in case this turns out to be typical of the whole family."

An hour later, I was getting ready to go home, feeling entirely normal, sober and back to baseline.

Ruth and George had agreed to stay the night on a big mat which Shura had laid out on the floor of the living room.

John was preparing to leave. He said he was feeling quite okay and able to drive, but he kept getting into animated conversations with Shura and the Closes, obviously reluctant to see the day end.

Ben and Leah had already gone. Both of them had hugged me, Leah saying she was sorry she hadn't had a chance to really talk with me, but next time she'd make up for it.

I said my goodbye's. Outside, standing next to my car, I took Shura's face in my hands and kissed him on the forehead, suspecting we were being watched from the house. I said, "Thank you. It was a very good day, even if I didn't get much effect."

Shura hugged me and said he would be in touch soon, adding, "Thanks for being so courageous and going along with things so gracefully."

Driving home, I savored the word, "gracefully," rolling it around in my mind. I decided, finally, that it tasted like a superb caramel custard.

Crossing the San Rafael Bridge, I broadcast a message.

*Thank you, Ben, with all my heart. Blessings. Sleep well.*

It wasn't until I had reached home and was getting out of my car that I remembered the blue nightgown in the shopping bag, and laughed.

Next time. God and Mercy willing, next time.

## CHAPTER 24. 2C-B

The crucial communication which Shura was relying upon to tell him, once and for all, whether Ursula was going to follow through on her promises, turned out to be a letter, and it was less decisive than he had expected, but sufficiently persuasive to renew his hope. He phoned me on Thursday to read me parts of it.

She sounded both eager and sad, assuring him that Dolph knew the marriage was at an end and that she was leaving him soon. However, she cautioned, her husband's emotional and mental state was fragile, and she had moments of fear that he might lose control and "do something terrible," if she did not smooth out the hurts and reassure him of his essential worth. "Before I go," she wrote, "He must know in his heart that I will always care for him and that no part of what has happened is his fault." She pleaded for Shura to believe that it would not take long, concluding that she had to do it her way, the loving way, "Otherwise, our bright future will be clouded with guilt and blaming."

I was beginning to believe her, myself.

"She's a compassionate person," said Shura, "And I can certainly understand why she wants to end it as gently as possible, even if I don't think she's going about it the wisest way."

After the letter-reading was over, he asked me if I would like to come out to the Farm after work on Friday, to stay the weekend. I hesitated for one entire second before saying I would like to very much, thank you.

Friday evening, we took a drug called 2C-B, which Shura described as one of his favorite materials, among his best discoveries. He told me it was a relatively short-acting psychedelic, lasting only about five or six hours.

"Unlike MDMA," he explained, "This one heightens all the senses. You'll enjoy food, smells, colors, and textures. The texture of skin, for instance —" he stared at me, stone-faced, " — and other aspects of eroticism, are thoroughly enjoyable."

I nodded, equally grave.

"Most people can't begin to have an orgasm with MDMA, but 2C-B places no such restrictions on you, as I hope you'll discover." He flashed what was probably meant to be a leer, and I broke into laughter at the ridiculous sight.

"I suggest we try a modest dosage level, this first time," he continued, unabashed, "I think eighteen milligrams should give you a plus-three without bowling you over. I'll take the same."

After he had given me my wine glass with the tiny bit of powder in it, Shura poured a small amount of water onto the white crystals, telling me, "This stuff doesn't dissolve quickly; it takes warm water to get it into solution." He handed me one of the glasses. "Give it a moment." We carefully swirled the liquid until no white flecks were visible in either glass.

Then he said, "I want you to take a small sip of the 2C-B as it is now, before adding juice, just so you'll have the experience of tasting the pure material — even if you only do it once — because the taste is part of its character."

I smiled, remembering Leah teasing him about little drug souls.

I sipped. The taste was completely different from that of MDMA, but fully as horrible, and I said, "Eeeyuck! I'm sorry, but I've got to have juice."

"Sure," replied the Spartan, "There's apple juice in the 'fridge. At least, now you know what you're covering up, before you cover it up!"

"I certainly do," said I, "The memory will linger a long, long time, believe me!"

I put on my dressing gown and sat quietly on the couch through the transition phase — the time between first becoming aware of some change in myself and the plateau. Shura had told me that transition could take anywhere from 45 minutes to over an hour, and that the plateau should last about three hours.

Shura had gone to his study to work, since I had told him I wanted to experience the transition by myself. After half an hour, I got into the bath I'd prepared earlier, and lay down in the warm water, feeling out the nature of the 2C-B, the way it was expressing itself in my body and mind. The first thing I noticed was a slight movement of the hand-towels hanging beside the sink and a faint shimmer of the pale green shower curtain. Visual effects, I thought; wonderful terminology. A few minutes later, I realized that, although my body was all right, the rest of me was not; I seemed to be reviewing my worst faults — untidiness, disorganization, insecurity — as, one after another, they paraded through my mind. I was beginning to feel a rising anger and contempt at the whole miserable mess, when the Observer stepped in with a sharp comment.

*Then, of course, we have the baddest fault of all — being judgemental and unforgiving toward yourself. You wouldn't dream of treating a friend that way; what gives you the right to treat yourself with any less patience and compassion than you'd give a friend? Cut it out!*

Humor trickled back, slowly.

*All right, all right. I'll be good.*

Getting out of the bath, I realized I was feeling what I had come to call the energy tremor. It was rather nice.

I put on my beautiful, sexy French nightgown, the pale blue one, and my dressing gown.

In the bedroom, I looked around at the chests of drawers, the curtains, the floor tiles, and was pleased to note that the idea of Ursula having been here before me didn't seem important. That was another reality, and it had nothing to do with this one.

Shura was sprawled on the bed in his robe. He asked me, "How are you feeling?"

"Well, better than I did earlier. I went through a few moments of seeing all my worst faults and being both the prisoner in the dock and the execution squad, but it passed."

He remarked, "You shouldn't be overloaded on eighteen milligrams, unless you're very sensitive to this particular material."

I assured him I felt fine. Not overloaded.

"How's your experience?" I asked.

*"Delightful!"*

When I took off my robe, he looked at me and asked, "What are you doing in a nightgown?"

"What do you mean, what am I doing in a nightgown? It's my very best, sexiest nightgown, and you're supposed to be impressed!"

He took his own robe off and said, "I don't believe in wearing clothes in bed. How can you feel somebody's skin when you're all bundled up like that? Besides, they always wrap around you in the night."

I sighed and stripped off the pale blue silk and let it fall to the floor.

He turned off the bedside lamp, leaving only the radio dial for light, while I climbed onto the bed and lay on my back to examine the ceiling, which was pale cream. Suddenly, he was climbing over me, and I heard myself gasp as his tongue took me over. My eyes closed and my mouth enfolded him.

Inside my eyelids, I saw a blue sky behind an immense castle wall; there was the knowledge of turrets somewhere to the right, out of my line of vision. I was standing in grass and there were a few small daisies and lots of dandelions around me. The great wall appeared to be built of mossy yellow-brown stones, and I felt quite small, child-sized. There was a sense of familiarity, neither pleasant nor unpleasant; it was my world,

where I lived. The part of it that was especially mine, I knew, was the bottom of the castle wall, where it met the high grass. That was where I liked to play, and I moved toward it now, climbing a rise, past the scattered wild flowers.

Then I remembered where I was, in this life, what my tongue and throat were doing, and what a passionate mouth was doing to me. I was on the bed of a man I belonged with and who belonged with me, and we were making love to the humming sound of a little floor heater and the music of Beethoven.

Another image took over, in all possible shades of red — coral and pink, purple and rose — all of it textured like the interior of a body, smooth and slippery and strong. We were The Man and The Woman, Shiva and his bride, engaged in the Great Dance, the coming together and going apart in order to come together again. We were a single knot in a vast mesh which linked us to every other human being making love, everywhere.

We were The Node, that to which all lines of life go, that from which all lines of life come.

There was a sense of gold somewhere in the red. For an eternity, neither of us moved, neither tongue nor lips nor hands. We were. There was no separation between us.

Later, we put on our robes and wandered into the kitchen, where the pot of black bean soup I'd brought from home sat on the stove, waiting for a splash of sherry and a bit of seasoning. I turned the heat on under it and stood, leaning back against the tiled counter, waiting for Shura to return from the bathroom. Now the 2C-B was a gentle pulse of energy inside me, just enough to be noticeable if I paid attention. The legs of the red-painted kitchen table glowed, and the room was alive with soft light.

Suddenly, something was taking shape across the room, next to the table. It was man-sized and dark, black-brown. I couldn't make out features. I was not seeing it as a physical presence, but with the eyes of the mind, and I felt it smiling contemptuously at me, the embodiment of intentional, malicious evil, full of power.

It was Enemy. I stared at it, anger flooding me.

*What the hell are you doing here? Get out of this place! You can't touch me! I am filled with goodness and peace and my strength is as the strength of ten, because my heart is pure, as Launcelot said. Or Gwain, or somebody.*

The black man-figure lounged there, elaborately casual, enjoying my anger, radiating superiority.

What I did then was informed by a knowledge my conscious mind didn't possess. I became aware that fighting and opposing was a spiritual trap, because in order to destroy this enemy, I would have to use his tools, play his game, step into his battlefield, and that he was much better at that

kind of fighting than I, and that, moreover, I didn't want to become good at it.

I did the only thing I could. I closed my eyes and brought my arms up as if holding a baby to my chest. I visualized a child in the circle of my arms — anyone's child. I dismissed the figure in black from my world and focused all my attention on remembering what it was to love, to care, to nurture, to take away hurt and pain. I stood there and let loving take me over. The act of loving was all that existed, and I remained immersed in it.

When I finally opened my eyes, the dark shape had gone.

Shura came out of the bathroom and I poured soup into two bowls and asked him to get a couple of soup spoons. We went into the living room, where I sat him down in a chair and explained that I was going to introduce him to television. Gradually, I said. Nothing too extreme. Something delightful and British called, "Upstairs, Downstairs," which it was absolutely necessary for him to see at least once.

He muttered a skeptical, "Hmmm," but didn't protest. Within a few minutes, he was enraptured, as I had hoped he would be.

I sat in my favorite couch corner and decided to think about the encounter in the kitchen for a while before telling him about it. I had learned something, but it would take some time to figure out exactly what.

*Some parts of it are obvious. If you meet evil with hate, you lose. Hate belongs to the dark side. And yes, the temptation to oppose is a powerful force; it's immensely strong. You want to go at him, you want to hit, to strangle, to destroy. And all those emotions are his tools. So maybe the lesson is that if you really want to say No to what he represents, you refuse to enter the ring with him at all. You just become what he is not. Love. You become love. And when you do that, he's not there and he never was.*

When Shura and I were in bed later, curling up together for sleep, I said, "Thank you for the 2C-B experience. It was quite extraordinary, and I'll write the whole thing up first thing tomorrow, I promise, and give you a copy for your notebook."

"Good girl," he said. We drifted into sleep with Mozart playing softly on the radio and the chatter of mockingbirds outside the bedroom windows.

## CHAPTER 25. DRAGONS

There began a new order of things. Shura would phone during the week, almost every night, just to talk. He talked about trials he had participated in as an expert witness, describing the lawyers and the judges; he told me about university politics, about the heads of departments and the students he taught; he would tell me what he was doing in the lab, using chemical terms freely, knowing that I would get what he called "the music," if nothing else — he was well aware that I understood nothing at all about chemistry — and that I would ask for clarification when I needed it. He would, matter-of-factly, tell me what was going on with Ursula, according to her latest letter.

I would talk about the children, a book I was reading, a little about work — work was too hard, too pressured to talk about lightly, so I avoided saying much about it — and I would listen like an old friend to excerpts from Ursula's letters which detailed her problems and worries, locking myself into Shura's voice, reading the changes, the tension under the casualness. I was careful to say nothing sharp, nothing negative.

Then, close to the weekend, he would ask me if I would like to come out to the Farm when I was through work on Friday, and I would say I'd love to, as if it were a welcome surprise. Never take it for granted, I reminded myself, because it can stop in a moment, and it will, as soon as Miss Germany decides she wants another vacation in sunny California.

I began keeping a daily journal, writing to myself what I could not say to Shura.

On the bookshelf beside Shura's bed there was a stereo set which played radio and cassette tapes. We explored each other to music, usually classical. If we turned the dial and found ourselves in the middle of a piece of music we weren't able to identify immediately, we would compete to see who could correctly name the composer. Shura introduced me to Glenn Gould's recordings of Bach, and I brought him some Prokofiev

treasures which he had somehow managed to overlook, and Bartok's "Miraculous Mandarin," which surprised and delighted him.

The long, beautiful legs became familiar to me. The small, rounded buttocks stirred me to admiration, which I expressed freely. His back was my playground, as I showed him what could be done with the tips of fingernails running lightly from thigh to neck; he shivered with pleasure as I smoothed out the gooseflesh with the palm of my hand and began all over again, up and then back down, on the front of his body this time. He did the same to me, expert with the first try, and chuckled as I responded.

Sometimes on a Friday or Saturday evening, we would take one of his psychedelics, then go to bed. He teased me about something I'd said to him a long time ago, to the effect that I couldn't understand how anyone could take a psychedelic drug more often than once every few years, because there was so much to assimilate, to learn, from one good experience. I laughed and reminded him that he was always telling me things change, life is change.

"So," I said, "I'm learning new things!"

"We both are," he replied.

We both were. Perhaps it was the sense that everything could end at any time, be over with; whatever the reason, we shared our experiences, even our sexual fantasies, each of us withholding only a little, feeling out each other's acceptance as we talked.

One Saturday afternoon in late spring, we each took 5 milligrams of Shura's infamous DOM, the drug he had told me about, that night in Hilda's study, which had been nicknamed STP on the street.

He said, "This is a very long-lasting material, babe. You sure you don't mind being in an altered space that long?"

I said no, I didn't mind, and besides, "You told me it can be a wonderful experience, when you take it at the right level, and I assume you'll give us the right level, and how long is 'that long,' anyway?"

"At least 12 hours, and probably more, depending on your chemistry, and you do tend to milk a lot of extra mileage out of these drugs, you know!"

I made a nyah-nyah face at him, "You're just jealous, because you come down before I do. It's one of the few advantages of having a slow metabolism; in fact, I can't really think of any others at all!"

Shura showered while I watched television, then I took my bath, watching the unmistakable undulating of surfaces and rippling of edges develop, keeping an interior eye on the strong energy tremor, observing the first-time anxiety as it mellowed out into trusting acceptance of the state and where it was going.

I rubbed myself dry with a towel and sat down on the toilet, still naked.

Shura had said to me, some time ago, "Don't ever lock a door behind you, please, inside this house. Not even when you're in the bathroom. I have a strong fear of having something happen behind a door that I can't open quickly; it's a left-over from Helen being sick, and I beg you to please observe it."

I had observed it, faithfully.

Now, there were footsteps in the hall and suddenly, the door opened. I gasped, "Hey!"

Shura, wearing his dressing-gown, stood grinning at me. As I frantically grabbed for my towel, he teased, "I thought we were going to have complete honesty in this relationship!"

"There are limits, Shura!"

"Limits? No, no! No limits agreed on," he laughed, kissing me on the mouth and fondling my breast before leaving. He closed the door behind him and I sat there, caught between outrage and amusement. Then, an uncomfortable thought occurred to me.

*Is it possible he's one of those people who like to watch things like urination?*

When I reached the bedroom, the bedside lamp was lending a soft, butter-yellow glow to the undulating cabbage roses in the ancient wallpaper. I scrambled onto the bed and sat cross-legged in my robe, looking down at Shura, who was stretched naked on the blanket, pink and shining from his shower, smiling at me. I asked him, doing my best to sound casual and light, "Are you one of those bathroom voyeurs, by the way, or are you just a tease?"

His hair and beard were throwing off tiny multi-colored sparks, "No, I'm not. And yes, I'm a terrible tease. I have a whole lot of secret fascinations, but that's not one of them. How about you?" Innocent face, wide blue eyes, looking at me. I assured him that kind of thing wasn't my cup of tea at all.

He asked me, "How is the experience, so far? Comfortable?"

"Yes, considering that it's — as you said — a pretty strong psychedelic and obviously not for naive and innocent people, I'm doing pretty well. Especially considering that I had to go through the shock of being — being invaded, you know? While sitting on the potty, yet. By the same trustworthy gentleman who asked me to please not lock any doors, would you believe!"

"I never said I was a gentleman, did I? Did I ever make that claim?"

I admitted he never had.

He fiddled with the radio dial, settling on something by Sibelius. Then he folded his arms behind his head and remarked, off-handedly, "Speaking of strange, dark fascinations — "

*Uh-oh — this is going to be important.*

He looked at me, "Have you ever, in your numerous experiences, been tied up or tied someone up, just to see what it felt like?"

I replied that I'd never done that, but I'd often had the fantasy.

He raised himself on one elbow, "Then why did you never do it?"

"I suppose probably because it would have to be someone I could be really vulnerable with, and there haven't been too many men I've felt I could trust that much. Besides, nobody I've been really close to ever brought it up, and I wasn't about to shock anyone by suggesting it first, believe me."

"Is it a shocking thing, really?"

*He wants to be told it's all right to have that kind of fantasy.*

"It isn't shocking to me," I replied, "It's what they call 'bondage,' isn't it? From what I understand, lots of people enjoy that. I read a very interesting article — I think in a psychology journal — that said a large number of the men who enjoy being tied up in love-making tend to be very powerful people with a lot of responsibility in their lives; people like judges and senators and doctors. It explained that they enjoy the feeling of being powerless, you know, with somebody they trust, because their lives are too full of decisions they have to make and be held accountable for, and being tied up allows them to ditch all that, to be able to enjoy the sexual feelings without having to be responsible for them."

Shura was silent for a moment, then said, "I've always wanted to know how it felt."

I thought about it, then said, "I remember seeing a clothesline in back of the house. Do you have any more of it around?"

"Sure, plenty."

"I hope you've got the nylon kind, because cotton clothesline is pretty rough, and I don't want to hurt you." I paused, then I leaned forward and squinted at him, "Or — do you like being hurt?"

"No, I don't."

"Me neither," I said, immensely relieved.

"Wait here," he said, "I'll be right back." He put on his bathrobe and left me in the bedroom with the music playing and the wallpaper roses moving. So far, I thought, this DOM is very nice. I was aware, off and on, of the energy tremor. It was still strong, but I was getting used to it.

*Why aren't we always aware of this flow of energy in our bodies? Why does it take a drug like this to make it show itself? Maybe it would serve no purpose for us to be feeling it all the time.*

Shura returned, carrying a tangle of white nylon cord. I laughed, "A gen-yu-ine Gordian Knot!" and we set to work to undo the mess.

We cut the cord into various lengths, giggling when we weren't humming along with Beethoven's 3rd Piano Concerto, then Shura proposed that we try it out on me first. I said okay, thinking several things at once. First, that it was going to be hard not to feel silly; second, that it was obvious Shura hadn't done this before, which meant he hadn't done it

with Ursula; third, that this was something neither of us would consider doing with a companion we didn't trust absolutely.

*If there's some unknown dark thing in either of us, this might well bring it out in the open — at least, we'd get a glimpse of it. It would have to be acknowledged, talked about.*

The music had changed to our beloved Prokofiev by the time Shura had finished tying me. I looked up at him and tried to smile, feeling suddenly exposed and painfully shy. His eyes were shining, but his expression was more thoughtful than lustful, searching my face. Then he moved downward, and I closed my eyes.

Inside my head, Prokofiev flared blue-green and gold. I was distantly aware that my body was trembling and that I was being very loud. The world was a tunnel, spiraling down to soft darkness, then there was coming out of that far shadowed place — rising toward me with exquisite slowness — an immensity of petals unfolding, dark purple to blood-red, and as my throat opened in one long, final cry, a sear of light passed through my eyes and out the top of my head.

Shura quietly untied the bonds and lay down beside me, one leg over my thighs, his hand resting on my stomach, while my heartbeat slowed.

When I was breathing evenly again, I turned to him and whispered, "Thank you, love."

"I was with you, little one. I went with you."

After a while, I rose on one elbow and grinned down at him, "Now. Your turn."

Halfway through the business of tying him up, carefully, so that although he was secure, the nylon cord wouldn't bite into his wrists or ankles too much, I glanced at his face and found him watching me, and decided that I would feel a lot less self-conscious if he were blindfolded. I told him to relax, that I had to get something essential, and left the room. I found my shopping bag — the one in which I packed my clothes for the weekend — and took out the long silk scarf which I used to tie around my head after washing my hair. Back in the bedroom, I bound it around Shura's head, covering the eyes but leaving both ears free for the music.

He said, "Ahhh."

Looking down at him, I knew he was immersed in sensations he had only imagined until now. This was something he'd wanted to have, wanted to explore. On his face was the same seriousness, the same concentration you see in a small child when he unwraps the one Christmas present he most hoped for. I felt a surge of tenderness for him, and wondered what I would do when he was completely tied. I had no pattern to go by. I hadn't done much reading in these realms.

*So, I'll go with instinct. Just be sure it's graceful.*

We now had a Strauss waltz and, as I tied the last knot around the leg

of the bed, I muttered my impatience and said I was going to search the radio dial for something else.

"Not the most erotic music in the world, is it?" He was finally smiling. "Nope. Intolerable." I found another of our favorite stations, KDFC, and breathed, "Hooray!" It was Bach, and deliciously familiar.

"Well, well," I said, turning back to my victim, "The gods are smiling." "It's one of the Brandenburgs," Shura said, contentedly.

He had told me, the first time we had made love in his bed, that he had very sensitive nipples, and that he loved having them touched. I hadn't asked him if he'd shared that with Ursula; it was reasonable to assume he had. I feather-touched them now, seeing them shrivel in a sea of gooseflesh. I closed my eyes. The Bach was a moving thread of silver against a background of blue and emerald, then I sensed other colors — orange and sun-yellow — pulsing from behind the music, coming swiftly toward me.

Masses of deep orange, edged with red, flooded my mind. I opened my eyes for a second to see Shura's head rising from the pillow as his body strained against the ropes, then Bach was drowned in a roar that echoed off the walls.

*All right, this is what I want. It's all worth it — whatever it's going to be like, whatever is going to happen — just for this. Thank you, thank you, thank you.*

We lay side by side, the nylon cords abandoned on the floor, with only the light from the radio dial to see by, and we talked about what it felt like, what it meant, to trust somebody that way.

Shura said, "It's an extraordinary thing, knowing that you have complete power over the other person, that you can hurt — misuse that power in some way, any way you want — and that you won't do it, don't choose to do it; that you can trust yourself, even the darkest corners of yourself, not to do something the rest of you doesn't want to do."

"Uh-huh."

"And then it's your turn to experience being helpless, and it's the other person who has to be aware of hidden dark impulses, and make those choices."

I murmured, "And you can only lie there, hoping they know themselves well enough."

"Yes," he said, "Yes. And yet," he paused, "I have to say, I didn't have any fear. I just knew."

*That you could trust me. Yes. Of course you knew. Just as you know other things you won't allow yourself to be aware of.*

I asked him if he'd ever seen the paintings of the German artist called Sulamith Wollfing. He said the name wasn't familiar.

I explained, "Most people know her work from the yearly calendars she puts out, and her old calendars from years ago are sold at exactly the same price as the current ones, because her fans will do anything to get

their hands on her paintings — never mind the year. Her publishers finally put out postcards — in Marin County you can find them in all the bookstores. The picture that I love best, the one that moves me most, shows the head of a big, dark green dragon. Its mouth is open, and curled up on the big red tongue is a tiny baby, sound asleep."

Shura smiled.

"That's what our little experiment reminds me of," I said. "It's like bringing a beautiful fire-breathing dragon out of its cave and making friends with it."

"Walking the dragon," said Shura, "I like the image."

"Me, too."

He rose on his elbow, hair springing in all directions, and looked into my face, "Did you enjoy that as much as I did?"

"You know perfectly well I did."

Closing my eyes, I saw a multi-colored dragon with jeweled scales. Its wings were black, tipped with gold, and around its neck was a long brown dog leash, which — it assured me — it didn't mind at all.

## CHAPTER 26. FUNGUS

One Friday, after I had cleared the supper dishes and we were sitting at the table with our wine, Shura told me about the letter from Ursula that had arrived the day before.

"She said she's getting really frightened by the way Dolph is acting; seems there are increasing signs of depression, and a couple of times he's flared up with an intensity she's never seen before. She told me she's had nightmares about Dolph killing them both. He's barely speaking to her now, apparently, except when other people are around, to keep up appearances."

Shura traced around the rim of his glass with a finger, "She said surely I could understand why she has to wait just a little while longer before she sits down and holds his hands and says the final goodbye and all that."

"It sounds bad."

"Yes," said Shura, "Not exactly new, but pretty bad."

I waited, knowing there was more.

"So, I telephoned Germany this morning," he glanced at me, "To urge her to get out of there, to just pack a few things in a bag and get out, not to take the chance of something tragic happening, not now, when she's so close to resolving the whole thing!"

I realized my mouth was gaping, and closed it.

Shura sipped from his glass, then continued, "Dolph answered the phone."

*He certainly has an instinct for the dramatic pause, whether he's aware of it or not.*

"Oh."

"I don't have to tell you what happened!"

I kept quiet.

Shura leaned back in his chair, throwing his arms wide, "My dear old friend, Dolph, his voice full of sunshine, positively bubbling with delight

that I was calling; how was I and had I seen the latest article on enkephalins in Arzneimittel Forschung? When we'd talked about that for a couple of minutes, he asked me did I want to speak to Ursula, and I could hear him calling her to the phone, 'Darling, come quickly, it's Shura!'"

"Methinks I've heard something like this before."

"If he was acting, it was the kind that gets you all sorts of prizes in that Hollywood operation — what's it called — ?"

I nodded absentmindedly, "Academy Awards — the Oscars."

"Whatever."

*What's going on? What's happening in that house in Germany?*

Shura's elbows were back on the table, "Then Ursula came to the phone. She whispered to me that I shouldn't have phoned; things were very sensitive, very precarious. I just went ahead and said everything I'd planned to say. Pack your bag. Get out quickly. Get away. She said she couldn't talk any more on the telephone, but she would tell me everything in a letter. Then she said — still whispering — that she loved me and now she must go, and goodbye."

I waited, not moving.

"So, what do we think?" He looked at me, his face expressionless.

I remembered Ben, sitting across from me in the living room, telling me he thought it wouldn't be long now before Ursula moved to bring things to some kind of closure. This wasn't any kind of closure; this was crazy, and it was going on and on.

I replied, "We are reduced to a lot of guessing, as before."

Shura nodded.

*Something's got to be done. He can't keep living in this state of uncertainty and misery. What's going on, for God's sake?*

After supper, Shura worked in his study. He told me he was completing the first draft of an article he was going to submit to a new chemical journal. We went to bed early, both of us tired.

Curled against Shura's back in the dark, I tried to open myself to what was inside him, as he settled into sleep. Underneath the good humor that remained from the past couple of hours, I sensed a dark knot of bewilderment and fear.

*What kind of woman is the Lovely Ursula? Is this her way of letting him down gradually, weaning him from his hopes? Or is Ben wrong, and she's telling the truth, and really intends to come and live here? Nothing explains the husband sounding so warm and friendly, though. Unless Shura isn't as good at reading voices as he believes he is. That's possible. Whatever's happening, it can't go on this way much longer.*

The next morning, we began the day in Shura's preferred way, reading the San Francisco Chronicle, in silence, with our coffee. He always began the paper with the last section, working his way to the front; I read it from

front to back. He read quickly, barely glancing at some parts; I tended to read every word, except for the business and sports sections, which I usually ignored. When we were through, he sat back in his chair as I poured more coffee and said, "How would you like to try one of the great classic psychedelics today?"

"Which particular great classic psychedelic do you have reference to?"

"Ever heard of psilocybin? The magic mushroom?"

"Oh, yes, of course. I remember that wonderful article in Life magazine, years ago. Wasson? Was that his name?"

"Gordon Wasson, yes. You've never tried it, have you?"

"Never. I've been very curious about it."

"So — think you might venture?"

"Absolutely. I'd love to."

"I don't have the mushrooms themselves, but I do have some of the active ingredient, psilocybin," he said, "So you won't have to munch a whole lot of little dried things."

"Does the psilocybin by itself give you the full experience? I mean, the same as you'd get from the mushrooms?"

"Well, I've taken it both ways, in the form of mushrooms and as a white powder, and I find no difference at all in the effects. Although, of course, there are people who will swear that the natural plant gives the only true, genuine experience. I just don't find it so."

Shura remembered that he had to correct student exams, so we decided to postpone the mushroom world until evening, when all his paperwork would be completed. I spent the rest of the day in his living room, writing my own overdue letters on his typewriter.

At 7 o'clock, having bathed and put on our dressing gowns, we each took fifteen milligrams of a sparkling crystalline substance, dissolved in fruit juice, Shura noting the time on a slip of paper, as usual. Then we walked out to the lab, hugging ourselves against the evening chill, so that he could close down a chemical reaction he'd had going all afternoon, and put the lab to sleep for the night.

Inside the laboratory, I leaned against the door and spoke about something he had mentioned that morning.

"You know, I've been thinking over what you said earlier, about people who believe that if there's a psychedelic plant, you should only use the natural growing thing, not a synthetic form of the — what do you call it? — the active ingredient?"

"Yeah," said Shura, fiddling with stopcocks and flasks, "There's a very interesting and quite delightful person I know — you'll have to meet him someday — named Terence McKenna, who writes and lectures about sacred plants; it's his specialty, and he's an absolutely persuasive speaker on the subject."

"The name sounds familiar, though I can't remember where I've come across it."

"Well," continued Shura, "He believes, absolutely believes, that only in the plant itself can you find the particular balance of — well, I suppose you could say spiritual essences or influences — along with the actual chemicals, which go to make up the true experience that the plant — or, in this case, the mushroom — has to offer. He's absolutely adamant about the synthetic chemical not giving you the genuine thing. We've argued about it — in a friendly way, of course — for years."

"Well," I said, hesitatingly, "As a matter of fact, I have a lot of sympathy with that view, and I'd like to explore it a bit."

"Of course," said the alchemist in the brown dressing-gown, taking my arm and turning off the light, "Tell me. After all, how can I convince you of the error of your viewpoint unless I know what that viewpoint is?"

I stopped on the path to aim a symbolic kick at his rear. He ducked and took my arm again.

I said, "I know this sounds absolutely ridiculous to a scientist, but I was brought up believing something which I still believe, and that is that all growing things have some kind of — I don't know exactly what word to use — some form of consciousness attached to them. Not human-type consciousness, but a — a plant-awareness of some kind."

He opened the back door for me, as I continued, "Remember those experiments which proved — well, they seemed to prove — that plants react to human thought?"

"Carrots having nervous breakdowns when someone thought boiling water at them? Yes, I remember."

"Well?"

"Well, what?" Shura was going through the house, locking doors and closing windows, as I followed. "Do I think there's a possibility that plants have some non-physical level of awareness? Well, let me take the so-called scientific experiments first. I don't know the details of how the experiments were done, so I can't say much about them. I think I would have to be there myself, in the lab, before I could accept the findings without question. And even then — frankly, I tend to be skeptical. Scientists can fool themselves just like non-scientists, I'm afraid, especially when they have an emotional investment in a certain outcome."

I nodded. Shura came close to me, "Before we continue with this very interesting subject, I need to check on how you're feeling?"

"There's sort of a chill — kind of a variation on the energy tremor. It comes and goes."

"Any other effects?"

I went inside myself and explored for a moment, then reported, "Yes. I'm definitely off baseline. Gentle, but distinctly something."

Shura grinned.

"How's your level?" I asked him, and saw that his eyes were glowing as they always did when he was on.

"About the same, except that I don't have your little chill."

I smiled at him, "You're radiating, you know."

He laughed and squeezed my arm, "Let me take a moment to finish up the mess in the office — I've got things scattered all over the place. Would you mind if I left you on your own for just a couple of minutes?"

I told him I wouldn't mind at all, "As a matter of fact, I'd rather like to be by myself for a little while and pay attention to what's happening."

I sat comfortably on the couch with a glass of juice in front of me on the tiled table. There was soft light from a lamp on the bookcase to my left, and the sound system had been turned on from the back room so that I could hear the music; it was Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2, which I knew by heart. Through the windows at the far end of the room I was able to see the two tiny lights, red and white, that marked the top of Mount Diablo, and I felt both peaceful and excited, waiting for the world to change.

I picked up one of the art books I had put out on the table earlier in the day, and settled back to look through it. The book was large and satisfactorily heavy, a collection of Goya's paintings and sketches, and I was aware, holding it on my lap, that I had slipped suddenly into one of those states which are among the most treasured gifts of the psychedelics, a moment which is endless, a sense of being in what has been described most simply and accurately as the Now.

*There is no time, there is only the quiet aliveness of existing here, holding this book, sitting cross-legged on this couch, being the person who is myself, with the other person who is Shura — the complex and extraordinary human being to whom I have chosen to be tied, for however long or short a time — a few rooms away, but not separated from me.*

I looked up from the book and saw a room totally transformed. I was sitting to the side of two rooms divided by what I knew to be the bookcase, but which now appeared as an ordinary wall separating the two halves of a native hut of some kind. Familiar objects which would identify this place as Shura's living room had been swallowed by the shadows. To the left of the dividing wall there was a chair which I had left there earlier, and thrown across it was a Guatemalan woven scarf, gleaming vividly in the soft light. I stared open-mouthed at the stripes of yellow and pale green, the panels of red and black, and wondered if the scarf had triggered the associations to a native hut in a strange land. I looked around me, locating the Chinese vase on its shelf, almost lost in the dark at the back of the room. I saw the bulk of the piano on the other side of the dividing wall and recognized the bookcases under the windows; everything was there, yet I couldn't shake the impression that I was in a native hut with a dirt floor,

somewhere in Central or South America. I half expected to see an iron soup pot suspended over the logs in the little fireplace and strings of peppers drying in the corners of the room.

*The world has changed, indeed, oh yes. How extraordinary. Like seeing a completely new dimension of this place.*

As I looked around, allowing myself to accept the total strangeness, the shift from familiar to incomprehensibly different, I began to understand part of the change. I was seeing the room as if I had never been in it before, the way it would have appeared if I had just come through the front door for the first time and sat down on the couch in an unfamiliar, darkened place, seeing everything — rugs, fireplace, the beams of the ceiling, the gleam of windows, the chair — thrust into the stranger's perspective that regards every object in a new place as equally important, because there is no way of knowing the relative importance of anything.

*Only living with the room will cause the mind to assign unconscious priorities and a resulting new perspective.*

With familiarity, I thought, the mind tends to notice only certain pieces of furniture and ignore others. One moves past this or that table or chair without conscious thought — only the absence of a particular thing in the room will make one notice — and the attention is to those parts of the room which involve whatever action or concern one is busy with at the moment.

*The little table near the front door is always noted in passing, because Shura and I use its top to stack various things that must be taken out of the house the next time one of us leaves — letters or parcels or books to be returned to the library. The piano and the bookcases don't invite conscious attention. They're simply there, and we ignore them as we pass through.*

I decided that my original suspicion about the origin of the native hut association had probably been right; it had been triggered by the woven Guatemalan scarf. My unconscious mind had filled in the rest of the rich image, creating something recognizable out of a place which had unexpectedly presented itself as alien territory.

When Shura appeared in the doorway, I rose and went to him, and began explaining what I had been seeing. We went to the bedroom and Shura closed the door behind us to keep in the warmth.

When I told him I thought the scarf had triggered the native hut vision, he said, "That may be, but keep in mind that you know something about the history of the sacred mushroom, and it's just as likely that the look of the room was due to your associating psilocybin with that part of the world, Mexico or Central America; after all, you've read about Wasson's first experience, and it happened in a place that undoubtedly looked somewhat like what you saw, don't you think?"

I mulled that one over and admitted, "You're probably right."

We lay facing each other on the bed, still in our dressing gowns, and I glanced at the bedside electric clock and saw that not quite 40 minutes had passed since we'd taken the white powder. It seemed like several hours, and I remarked to Shura that there seemed to be a lot of time-slowing with this material.

"Yes, I've noticed that too," he said, then asked, "Are you at peace with it, so far?"

"Oh, my, yes. It's getting quite intense, though. Have we reached the plateau, or will it climb some more?"

"Oh, I don't think we've plateau'd yet. Still a little way to go, another 15 or 20 minutes."

I examined the friendly roses in the wallpaper and saw that they were moving gently. In the bookcase beside the bed, the books were dusty jewel-colored treasures, trying to say something, or perhaps just wanting to be noticed. Across from me, the face of the boy with white hair glowed from inside with life and humor and something close enough to love to fill the space inside me that sometimes ached.

I remembered what we had been talking about before.

"Okay," I said, "Back to natural and synthetic. Even though you might not accept without question any particular experiment with plants, or the conclusions those particular people came to — that plants have some kind of consciousness — is it absolutely inconceivable to you that a plant might have another dimension? Some kind of energy, if you want to call it that?"

"Of course it's not inconceivable," Shura said, "Everything that exists, not just plants, but rocks, animals — everything we see and everything we can't see, for that matter — is a form of energy, and there certainly are interactions of energy fields — but it's a considerable step from that to assigning some kind of personality to a plant, or the ability to pick up thoughts telepathically from humans. There's certainly no scientific basis for assuming anything like that."

I protested, "I didn't say anything about scientific proof; I just wondered if you can allow for the possibility of such a thing as every plant having a distinct, individual energy field of some kind associated with it? Something that might even be seen as a — well, you know how some people see what they call fairies or elves or gnomes — is it possible, in your view, that —" I floundered, not sure exactly what I was asking, then remembered what my original point had been. I waggled a hand in the air to indicate that I was still completing a thought.

Shura stayed quiet, watching me with only a suggestion of amusement in his face.

"All right, let me make this a statement, then," I said, sitting up cross-legged on the bed and trying to ignore the increasing excitement of the

wallpaper roses, "I don't know if this is what your friend Terence believes exactly, but I do know that there are a lot of people in the world who believe that every plant has some kind of — I guess you could call it an entity — attached to it. So that, when you eat the plant, you're taking in that thing, the spiritual dimension, if you want, along with the purely physical stuff, and they probably believe that a synthetic drug doesn't have those other energies, dimensions. It's sort of like taking in just the physical part, the purely chemical part, which didn't come from the earth and has no connection to the earth, so it has no spiritual entity attached to it as a plant does. Do you understand what I mean? Those people feel that a synthetic chemical has no soul, I suppose you could say."

Shura lay back on his pillow and gazed up at the ceiling for a while, then raised himself on one elbow again, "Let me tell you something that might interest you," he said.

I nodded, and a roomful of prisms nodded with me.

"I can't speak for other chemists, but I know that when I'm working in the lab, putting together a new compound, I not only see it upside down, inside out and in three dimensions, in my mind, but I also sense other aspects of what is developing. You might say that a personality or, to use your term, an entity, begins to take shape as I work. I try to feel it out, to get a sense of whether it's friendly or not, whether it's liable to open up this area of the mind or that; does it have a dark nature which may mean I'm going to have to watch out for over-stimulation of the nervous system, or some other difficulty I can't anticipate?

"By the time the new compound is completely developed, ready to nibble, it has a personality. Not yet known, because I have to interact with it, my chemistry has to interact with a substance it's never had a relationship with before, but even though I can't define that new personality yet, it's certainly there. By the time I've explored the new compound through its active levels, its nature has become quite clear, and the 'entity' has accepted some of my inputs to its creation and its personality. I can say, without any hesitation at all, that every compound I've discovered and tried has a real character all its own, quite as distinct as anything supposedly attached to a growing plant."

I sat looking at him, astonished, then leaned forward to tell him, "That's the first time I've heard anything like that. I had no idea that sort of thing could happen in a lab. It puts a completely different light on lots of things. Did you ever explain that to your friend Terence?"

"No. I've never told anyone before. It's not the sort of thing one would consider including in a lecture to the New York Academy of Sciences, you know."

I laughed. Then I asked him if he didn't think the wallpaper was getting awfully active, even more than usual.

"I guess it is, now that I look at it, yes. How about you? Still together, body and soul?"

I said I was all right. "It feels very strong, very intense. Maybe I just wasn't keeping track of it while we were talking, but it's certainly catching up with me now!"

"Me, too. It seems to have taken a leap upward, from the last time we noted the effects."

*Good Lord, this is really powerful! Everything is moving, waving, broadcasting meaningfulness of some kind.*

I let my teeth chatter audibly as a strong shudder traveled through my body, "How about getting under the covers right now, maybe?"

Shura swung his legs off the side of the bed and took off his dressing gown. The skin of his left thigh rippled faintly, as if an electric current were flowing across it. I looked at the long, muscled back and the lovely, small, rounded bottom, but I wasn't quite enough at ease yet to reach out and stroke it. The energy tremor had become impossible to ignore. I dropped my gown on the floor and scrambled under the sheets where I lay, grasping Shura's hand, watching the tiny fans of rainbow color which crowded the ceiling.

I closed my eyes and held my breath in astonishment at the multitude of colored images filling the mental screen. I was standing on the floor of a mosque, looking up at arches painted with gold-edged designs.

I was aware of Shura throwing off the covers.

The two of us were joining in the net of light that covered the earth, adding ourselves, our emotions and thoughts, our experiences of each other's smells and tastes, to flavor the whole. In the slowing of time, each touch of hand and mouth was an act of beauty, an offering of our own livingness and power to affirm. We were saying Yes to ourselves, to each other, to being alive, and Yes was pulsing back to us.

*How do we learn to make love? How do we know to trace brocade circles with our fingers on the beloved's skin, to say I Want with a stroke of ankle on thigh, to honor the beauty of curve and bone with hand and mouth. It's a language of body, and it opens with the opening of love in the heart and mind. It can't be explained. It teaches itself as you touch.*

When Shura cried out, De Falla's Nights in the Gardens of Spain was playing.

After a while he attended to me. I saw far ahead a clear gemstone — it looked like a pale aquamarine — and, spiraling up from it, blue-white gems which gradually shaded to mauve, then to violet, as they passed on either side of my head.

I felt the aura of the Grail, then a flood of exquisiteness roared toward me, and I was left floating in a sea of soft blue light.

I whispered, "Thank you," and lay beside him, my eyes still closed,

breathing evenly.

Suddenly, I was rising off the bed, Shura beside me. We drifted upwards to the ceiling and passed through it, our heads emerging on the other side. We could move no further. Surrounding us was brown earth, and a few feet away I saw a dirt clearing in front of a small hut; I couldn't be sure whether there was more than one room in the deep shadows beneath the thatched roof. Around us, in what looked like the light of early morning, was an abundance of flowers and leaves. The air was warm. There were large yellow lilies, spotted with brown, and tiny scarlet blossoms on a thick vine that wound through and around a fence climbing the bank behind us. Tall clusters of dark green, broad-leaved plants were visible under overhanging trees and I glimpsed wooden baskets hanging from beneath the roof of the hut, spilling pink and white flowers. There was a smell of rich, moist soil and plants growing.

Shura and I were children, being allowed — for a brief moment — to poke our heads into a place that belonged to the grownups. My eyes were drawn to the left of the thatched roof where I saw an immense dark shape, still as rock, out of which rose the outlines of three great heads, silhouetted against the slowly lightening sky. I knew that I was seeing three massive bodies, seated side by side, watching us. I was filled with awe at the power, the numinous majesty of what was sitting there: I felt again like a child discovered trespassing on forbidden ground.

The Great Ones were looking down on our two heads with what I sensed was a mixture of benign amusement and fond impatience. The message came: that's far enough, little ones, and long enough. Now you will return to where you belong.

I found myself lying in the bed, gripping Shura's hand.

"Did you see it?"

"See what?"

"The three — Buddhas or Gods or whatever they were. You were there with me, you were right beside me."

"Tell me what you saw."

I told him, aware and not caring that my voice was shaking with tears. When I had finished, he pulled me to him and we were silent together until the music changed to something by Wagner; both of us simultaneously cried "Oh, no," and broke into laughter as he reached to change the station.

## CHAPTER 27. SIBERIA

Shura and I were coming to know the dark sides of each other.

My problem was one which — I was beginning to realize — troubled a majority of humans on earth: I did not, at the very deepest level, believe in my own worth. There was a place in my soul where something fierce and strong lived, but I was in touch with it only in times of crisis and loss.

One of the few times the strong thing within me had spoken was when I finally discovered, after eight years of marriage, that Walter had a long-standing habit of falling in love with other women — often patients — approximately every six months, and that, moreover, he honestly could not understand or accept my anguished response when I found out. He told me, in all earnestness, "My relationship with (whoever it was at the moment) in no way affects my love for you and my bond with you." I tried a lot of vodka for a while to kill the pain. Then, one day, when we were driving to the market, the hidden lioness opened my mouth, and I heard my voice saying to Walter, firmly and matter-of-factly, that I wanted him to pack and leave the house immediately, and that I was going to file for divorce. He was quiet for a moment, then said — his voice rational and reasonable — that he thought I was being irrational and unreasonable.

But he left.

By that time, my already none too fabulous self-image was — not surprisingly — quite a bit further damaged. After I had spent some time nursing the certainty that I was ugly, in soul if not body, inadequate and generally unlovable (except of course to my children, who didn't know any better, bless them) the lioness thing — or whatever she was — finally roared inside me, one day, furious and passionate, declaring that if that's what I was, so then, that's what I was, and I would just have to get on with my life and make the best of it.

By the time the children and I moved to the A-frame house, across the street from Walter, the divorce was complete and I was able to look at

myself in the mirror and believe that on the outside, at least, I was not too bad at all. But the self-image of basic worthlessness and uglitude remained — my sad, nasty little secret.

One of my ways of unconsciously buying favor and approval was to try to do whatever was asked of me by somebody I worked for or liked, whether I really wanted to or not. The inevitable result was often a job done less than enthusiastically, and occasionally badly.

Another way was to feed people. I brought enough food to the Farm every weekend to keep a small army advancing sturdily through a month-long Russian blizzard. Shura began to gain a little weight, and finally said that he liked to be able to feel his backbone through his navel, and would I stop cooking so much for him. I argued that he always finished whatever I put on his plate, and he replied, in exasperation, "I'm as greedy as the next person, and that's why I'd rather have less on my plate to tempt me!"

"Okay," I said, and began explaining, "Half of me is Jewish, remember, and that half is inclined to be a Jewish mother — in the nurturing sense, of course, not the horrid sense —"

Shura interrupted to say, curtly, "I still want less on my plate, please?"

I said, "Okay, sorry," and shut up.

The triangle situation I'd signed on for was ready-made for insecurity and self-doubt, and I often had to remind myself that it was I who had chosen it, that there had been no coercion by Shura, no half-truths, and little if anything withheld. We both knew the situation, and I had urged him to let me take this role, promising I would not cause him to regret it. I was an adult, responsible for my own decisions.

But sometimes it got to me — the knowledge that I was the fill-in, the second-best — and my deeper self, less amenable to clarity of reason and purpose than the rest of me, showed its anger and fear in strange ways, at unexpected moments, despite my determination to avoid any obvious signs of stress.

One evening at the Berkeley Repertory Theater with Ruth and George, during intermission, while everyone was lining up to buy snacks at the counter in the lobby, Shura asked me if I would like coffee, and I found myself in a state of total brain-fuzz; the simple question had splattered in my mind like paint thrown by Jackson Pollock.

I looked up at him and said, "Coffee. I don't know. I'm feeling awfully confused for some reason, out of place here, as if I don't belong."

The look he gave me could only be described as freezing, and he walked away. A few minutes later, he brought me a cup of coffee, black — the way he drank it, not the way I did — and all he said was, "Here," then turned and left me again.

I moved behind a column, embarrassment added to the scatter of other dark and sorrowful things which had chosen that ill-timed moment

to surface. Hot liquid spilled on my hand and I felt awkward, clumsy and stupid. All I could think of was that Shura hadn't bothered to remember how I took my coffee; I didn't even mean that much to him. I took a shaky breath and gritted my teeth against the threat of tears, wondering if I was going to unravel completely in some unimaginable and appalling way, right there in front of all the nice theatergoers.

It didn't occur to me that I was undergoing a classic anxiety attack, and it's probable that the realization wouldn't have helped, anyway.

When we resumed our seats for the second act, Shura didn't reach for my hand as he usually did. I sat stiffly beside him, wondering how I was going to recapture my usual calm casualness and sense of humor.

We were both strained and careful for the rest of the evening, and at bedtime, we turned our backs to each other and went to sleep without the customary affectionate words and touches.

Much later, I understood that Shura hadn't been prepared to see me — without warning, in the middle of a pleasant evening at the theater — in such a state of pathetic confusion. I had sworn to him I would not be a victim, that I would not put him in the position of victimizer, if he let me become part of his life at this difficult, anxious time, and there I was, huddled like a lost waif against the lobby wall, looking at him beseechingly, piercing him with guilt. He had frozen and become distant, not knowing what else to do.

There were days when I found myself more than usually vulnerable, more sensitive to the wall inside Shura and the subtle emotional withholding that I understood and accepted intellectually, and feelings of inadequacy would flood me, thickening the air between us. At such times, he gradually withdrew, his face changing from open to defensive, then to hard and cold.

However, these incidents tended to happen at the beginning of the weekend, and after a night's sleep, I usually awoke with my courage and ease restored, and we could relax and laugh with each other for the rest of our hours together, before I had to leave for work early Monday morning.

Shura acknowledged and was critical of his own tendency to a particular kind of quiet arrogance, but I didn't find this aspect of him unappealing. It not only gave him a necessary strength, but was — in my view — the kind of elitism that many children born with very high intelligence learn to carry within them, if they are not to be crushed by the hostility of their peers when their gifts first become apparent in school.

Besides, as I told him, what he called arrogance might just as well be called self-validation, and as long as it never expressed itself in such a way as to make somebody else feel inadequate — and I had never seen that happen — it was a damned good thing to have.

I had come to know enough highly intelligent people in my life to

understand what most of them had gone through, when they were too young to realize that the bright one is the enemy to his classmates, unless they had been lucky enough to be placed in a special school with others equally gifted. Most of them hadn't been that lucky. Some of them had been permanently scarred by these early experiences. As adults, they either continued to censor themselves, to speak diffidently, avoiding words or phrases which might reveal intelligence beyond the average, or they became — like Kelly — neurotically aggressive, confrontational, even insulting to many of the people they had to deal with. Either way, they were always aware of a sense of un-belonging, and lived with a deep-seated, ever-present loneliness.

Shura had not fallen into either trap. He had somehow learned or decided, by the time I met him, to be simply what he was, making no effort to hide any aspect of himself. By teaching, year after year, he developed patience, finding ways to make clear to his undergraduate students the concepts he wanted them to master. He told me that he knew it was up to him to find the words and the right way to put them together, and when a student failed to understand, he accepted the responsibility for that failure; it meant he hadn't taught well enough.

But there was a part of him that sometimes got angry and frustrated, and it emerged in a form I had no way of recognizing or preparing for. The first time it happened, it rang no alarm bells at all.

One weekend evening, after seeing a movie, we went to a small cafe and ordered cheeseburgers. While we ate, Shura told me he was seriously considering giving up his Farm and moving to some place in Northern California where nobody knew him and he had no ties to anyone. He explained, between bites, that he was tired of people, tired of everything, and thought it was time to pull up stakes and start a new life, probably keeping to himself for the most part, he added, so that he could avoid getting involved in other people's problems or imposing on them with his own.

I sat there and stared at him, wondering what had triggered such bitterness, hoping I was not included among the people he was tired of, but not daring to ask. I was very disturbed at the thought that he might actually sell his beautiful place and go away, and said so. He shrugged and changed the subject.

When we talked on the phone later in the week, nothing further was said about such a plan or intention, and I eventually dismissed it as a brief mood of sadness and anger which had passed and didn't have to be taken seriously.

The next time it happened, many weeks later, the strangeness lasted three days, and came close to being a disaster.

I arrived at the Farm one Friday, and it was immediately apparent that

something was wrong. After an abrupt greeting, Shura turned away, informing me that he had a great deal of work to do at his desk and I would have to take care of myself for a while. I assured him I would be fine, wondering to myself what was wrong.

While I prepared dinner, Shura would occasionally stride through the house, silent, his face grim, as if everything he saw, including me, was somehow wrong, wrong. His few words to me were stilted, excessively polite, and there wasn't a trace of his marvelously wicked sense of humor.

We ate in silence. I sank into a state of profound misery, certain that he was through with me, that my faults had driven him to total exasperation, and that he was about to ask me to get out of his life.

After clearing the table, I said in a soft voice that I was going to wash the dishes and watch television and relax, while he got his work done. He nodded and took his wine into the study.

I didn't question the sudden change of personality; I took for granted that I was the cause of whatever negativity he was feeling. After cleaning up, I sat at the dining room table, hands folded tightly in my lap. When he came out of his office and passed through the room, ignoring me, I said, hesitatingly, to his retreating back, "Have I done something to make you angry, Shura?"

"No," he answered, curtly, and continued on his way.

Of course, I didn't believe him.

More than an hour later, I finally got up the courage to go to his study and face whatever had to be faced. I stood just inside the door, hands clasped before me, humbly waiting.

When he looked up from his desk, it was to speak in a voice tight with anger, "I'm so sick, sick, of being the one who has to solve everything for everybody. I'm sick of being the candy-man, the one who busts his ass in the lab to create new materials, new tools for exploring the human mind and how it works, while everyone around me only wants another trip. Nobody cares one whit about real research, real investigation, real work in this area. Nobody else wants to go to the trouble of writing and publishing what they've discovered through the use of these drugs. They just look to me to turn them on, give them goodies. Not a single one of them cares about me, just me, for my own sake. It's the candy-man they love, not Shura Borodin."

I stood there, stunned. It was the most appalling self-pity, and completely unlike him.

I stammered, "Of course, you have a lot of responsibilities, you do a lot for people, but you must know your friends love you deeply, Shura, candy or no candy! You can't really believe what you're saying, all this —"

"Yes, I do believe it," he shouted, banging his desk with a fist, "I know it!" He lowered his voice and continued, "I fool myself most of the time

into thinking there's real love and caring, but it's all a pathetic delusion, and it's time I faced it. It's time I gave all this up and moved to a different place. I'm going to sell this house and move to the north, where nobody knows what I do, and I'll start over, away from all of you. I'm not even going to tell anybody I'm going. I just won't be around, one day, and everyone will have to take responsibility for themselves. I won't be there to solve all their damned problems."

*Whose damned problems has he been solving; what's he talking about?*

I ventured a bit further into the room, not daring to sit down yet, because I suspected that all this was actually some kind of displacement of anger at me, or anger at himself for having kept me around, for being too weak to wait for Ursula without the distraction and comfort of being with another woman.

I asked again, "Have I made you angry in some way?"

"Well, you haven't been much help," he said, glaring at me, "You leave things all over the house; there's junk everywhere that you never seem to take care of. I know I'm not the neatest person in the world, but when I have to face your mess as well as my own, it's just too much, too much! I need some order in my home, otherwise I simply cannot function. And — while we're on the subject of what's making me angry — you insist on bringing too much food here, no matter how often I ask you not to. I don't usually say anything about any of this, because your insecurity makes me feel I have to treat you with kid gloves, or you'll come apart at the seams."

I stood, turned to stone, looking at the flushed, angry face.

He went on, grimly, "I should never have allowed you to do this to yourself — this ridiculous situation with me and Ursula — and I blame myself for letting it all go on, to the point where it's going to cause a lot of pain all round. Stupid, stupid! It's an impossible situation and I've been stupid to let it happen." He struck his forehead with an open hand, and I turned and left the room, closing the door behind me very quietly, my chest and throat clogged with tears.

We went to bed without speaking to each other. Shura had been drinking a lot of wine, and fell asleep immediately, while I stared into the darkness, crying silently until I was too exhausted to resist the pull of sleep.

The next day, I stayed in the living room, knowing that I should pack my things and leave, even though it was only Saturday. I kept hoping that Shura would come in and say everything was all right, that I could stay, that he wanted me there. He didn't. I could hear him, now and then, slamming out of the back door on his way to the lab, and I huddled on the couch and cried, hope dying, angry at him for his incredible unfairness, hating myself for being at fault, loving him, wondering what to do.

I knew he was right, that I had done so many things to cause him to lose patience. I was disorganized, self-indulgent, essentially lazy, careless, and yes, depressingly insecure. The insecurity was understandable, certainly, but it was a burden he shouldn't have to carry.

Once, when I heard him in the kitchen, opening the refrigerator, I thought of making him lunch, but after what had been said, and what I suspected he had not yet expressed of his resentment, I didn't dare. I tried to read, but couldn't. Everything we had been to each other, with each other, was over. The graceful ending I had planned when Ursula arrived to stay, the dignified, loving closing of the door, the final closing — if it turned out to be final — was never to happen. Instead, it was all ending with me as a swollen-eyed, hurt, bewildered victim who didn't even have the courage to gather her things and go, as he was obviously waiting for me to do.

It was dusk when Shura came in and sat down in the armchair, and tried to tell me what was going on, as best he could.

"I'm sorry, Alice. You've just had your first glimpse of an aspect of my world that I can't explain. It happens sometimes, this strange state of mind, and I don't know what triggers it. It's like a dark thing inside me that takes over. I feel completely alone, and I can't believe in anybody or anything; I lose all feelings of trust. There's only anger, at everybody — myself most of all. Everything I'm doing, everything I plan to do, seems suddenly pointless, meaningless. I hope you'll be able to sit it out and forgive whatever I said that might have hurt you. I do get annoyed at you, sometimes, as I'm sure you do with me, but my intention was not to undermine you, wound you, and I'm very grateful — or I would be if I could feel gratitude — well, some part of me is grateful that you stayed. That's all I can say."

I sat, looking at the blur of his face in the shadows, able to see only the shine of hair and beard. I was in a state of shock, thoughts and emotions tangled in a confusion of fear, grief and shame, still expecting a final dismissal.

Only the Observer was keeping track. It slowly got its message through, informing me that I didn't have to leave, that this morning's explosion had not been ultimate truth-telling, that it was time I stopped crying. Act with dignity, it said; get up and go over to him, but don't touch.

I rose and went to the hassock, where I sat a few inches from his knees and said, "Are you still in this — this darkness — now, or is it over with?"

"No, I'm afraid it isn't over with yet. Bear with me, please. I would appreciate your company, even though I probably won't have much to say, for a while."

His voice had an unfamiliar dullness to it.

*This is called depression. This is unquestionably acute depression. But right*

*now, I keep my mouth shut.*

"Would it be all right if I got you something to eat?"

Shura's head thudded against the back of the armchair and he cried, "Oh, for God's sake, I'm not going to bite! You don't have to be so damned tentative; it makes me feel like a monster!"

"Sorry. I'll get you a bit of supper."

I escaped into the kitchen and put a couple of frozen dinners into the oven, then went to the bathroom and combed my hair and put a little lipstick on — Shura didn't like makeup of any kind, so I used just enough to take the pallor out of my mouth. There was nothing I could do about my eyelids or the redness around the eyes. I looked drawn and ugly to myself, pathetic and not in the least appealing.

Dinner was silent again. When I stole a glance at Shura's face, he no longer seemed angry; he looked sad and far away.

He thanked me politely for supper and excused himself to go to his office and finish some letters. I said I would watch television for a bit, or read, and that I would be perfectly fine on my own. We both knew it was best that we continue being apart for a while.

When Shura was in his office, I washed the few dishes and cleaned every surface in sight, moving quietly so that he wouldn't hear sounds and come out to see what was going on; I didn't want him to feel more guilt at having said so much about tidiness.

When the cleaning was finished, I turned on the television and went around the living room picking up my things. I hung my coat properly in the closet behind the front door, gathered my art pad, paints and brushes together, packed them in the shopping bag I'd brought them in, and put the bag next to the couch.

Then I sat and focused my eyes on the television screen. I saw and heard almost nothing, my thoughts scrambling in an effort to organize information. After a while, I noticed that my breathing was uneven and my body tense, almost rigid. I deliberately relaxed my muscles and rotated my head to ease the tightness in neck and back.

When Shura came to call me to bed, I was already in my robe, teeth brushed, hormone pills swallowed, my hair combed again. In bed, there was no attempt at lovemaking. He put his arm around my shoulders and drew my head onto his chest. We fell asleep listening to Stravinsky's sad, wistful Petrouchka on the radio.

By the time I left for work on Monday morning, the worst of it seemed to be over. When he phoned me on Tuesday evening, his voice carried the usual enthusiasm and there was no doubt that his sense of humor had returned in full force.

I eventually gave these eruptions of Shura's dark side my own name: The Siberian Wastelands.

A long time later, I had a talk with Theo, who supplied some of the missing pieces. He told me that these episodes had been going on ever since he was a small boy. They always began the same way, he said. If there were any dishes in the sink which had not been washed, his father would suddenly start washing them. "Usually," said Theo, "Dad left dishes and cleaning to my mother, and when you're around, he leaves all that kind of stuff to you, right?"

"Sure," I said, "He takes care of basic tidying up when he's alone, but when I'm here on weekends, I do it. He certainly doesn't seem compulsive about any of it, normally."

"Exactly," said Theo, "A few dirty mugs and forks don't bother him, except when one of these attacks is starting. I learned very early that, whenever I saw Dad at the sink, washing dishes and scrubbing the counters with that intense look on his face, it was time for me to take to the hills. I just split, went out to the barn or up on the hill, keeping out of his sight until it was supper time and I had to come back in the house." He laughed.

I wondered to myself if Ursula had ever been around when the Wastelands struck.

The next time that Shura went into his attack of depression and anger, many months later, I had an inspiration. I asked him if he would take MDMA with me, and he agreed, while making clear that he thought it a pointless experiment.

Within forty minutes, his tense, angry face had cleared and he was sitting in his armchair, smiling at me. A few minutes later, he held out his arms and demanded that I come over and sit on his lap, right now, pronto, immediately.

Siberia had been defeated.

I knew it was not a resolution of the conflicts his psyche was dealing with, but there was no question that MDMA was effective against this particular form of shark attack from the depths.

Shura still occasionally let loose his dark side when he'd had a large amount of wine, indulging in elaborate sarcasm and sharp-edged teasing, but the Siberian Wastelands never overtook him in the old way again.

Eventually, I discovered — quite by accident — how to defuse the occasional wine-released nastiness. One evening, when he had been honing his verbal fencing skills even more aggressively than usual, at my expense, it struck me suddenly that the whole attack had slipped over the line from clever thrusts to ridiculous overkill — and I started laughing. I laughed until I was doubled over, and when I regained some control and straightened up, a glimpse of Shura's astonished face set me off again. It was a losing battle for him; he sputtered, chuckled a few times, then gave in, howling with laughter, until we were holding onto each other for dear life — weak, gasping and feeling absolutely wonderful.

## CHAPTER 28. A WORLD OF LIGHT

It was a Thursday evening in late spring when Shura called to tell me that a long letter from Ursula had come in the mail.

"Ah," said I, settling cross-legged into my armchair.

*She Who Listens. She Who Waits.*

He said, "There's the usual stuff about Dolph still being very unstable, and she says she's handling it by being loving and gentle, and she feels he's gradually getting used to the idea of her leaving, and that by the time the day comes, he'll have recovered his self-respect, and his perspective."

I murmured sympathetically, feeling terribly sorry for Dolph.

"In the meantime, she told me that I shouldn't worry, that she knows him very well, and there's no way she would let the situation turn into some sort of tragedy. I guess that's in response to my pleading with her to pack up and get out right away, and all that."

"Yes, of course."

"I'm just giving you the general mood of it, you understand."

"Sure," I replied. "But, you know, I can't help wondering if she isn't running a risk of — uh — isn't there a possibility that Dolph could keep her there indefinitely by continuing to be miserable? I mean, he might do it unconsciously, but if his suffering keeps her there, why would he have any incentive to feel better or get adjusted to anything?"

"I guess that could happen," Shura said, "But at some point, she's going to have to say, 'Okay, this is it; I'm going, I wish you well, I'm sorry, goodbye,' or something along those lines. No matter how lovingly she says it, eventually the words will have to be said."

"I suppose."

"Besides," said Shura, "What it comes down to is that she's the only one who can handle the situation; even if I were there, I couldn't do it for her. So I have to leave it to her instincts and assume she's going about it the right way, unless and until events prove otherwise."

"Yes. That's all you can do."

Shura went on, "I kept the good part for last. Ursula said something that makes me feel a lot more hopeful. She finally got all of her books packed in a big shipping trunk and it had just been sent off by surface, the day before she wrote the letter. There's no way of knowing how long it'll take to get here — it's coming by sea, of course — but at least it's on its way."

I said, "That's good to hear," and made it sound convincing.

*Jesu Maria san Roman!*

"She said she knew this was the kind of news I'd been waiting to hear," said Shura, "And I have to admit, I'm very relieved. I hadn't been aware, until I read that part, how many little doubts have been accumulating during the past few weeks —"

"Well, you've been getting an awful lot of vague promises up to now; this is a lot more tangible."

There was a cold knot in my gut.

*A trunk full of books sailing across the briny deep, bloody damn. She's serious. I've been fooling myself, believing Ben was right. Wanting to believe he was right. But books — books are real. You don't send your books unless you mean business.*

Shura was saying something about having the research group at his house again, next Saturday. This time, he said, I would have a chance to meet the two members who lived farthest away, in the Owens Valley area, about two hours' drive from Death Valley. He asked, "Have you ever been to Death Valley?"

*Put aside Ursula. Go with what's now.*

"No," I replied, "I've wanted to see it for years, but haven't had the chance yet."

"That's a place you absolutely must see! One of the wonders of the world, like the Grand Canyon and the Tower of Babylon."

I grunted, "Babel."

He tsk'd, "You're confusing the Hanging Gardens of Babel with the Leaning Tower of Babylon. It's a common mistake."

Despite the heaviness in my chest, I smiled, "You're right, of course. Silly of me. Always get them mixed up."

"That's all right," Shura said, soothingly, "I've been known to make mistakes, too. Made one in 1947, in fact. Remember it to this day."

I couldn't help it; I laughed.

*He's trying to make me feel better. Okay. I'm feeling better.*

"Anyway," he continued, briskly, "Dante and Gemina Sandeman live in a little town called Gold Tree. They moved out there several years ago and built a terrific house with the mountains as a backdrop and coyotes howling them to sleep at night — wonderful place. I've known them for a

long time and love them both dearly."

"I look forward to meeting them."

*This is ridiculous. I'm going to be getting to know new people and I'll probably like them, then Ursula sweeps in and I vanish from the scene. It makes no sense.*

"By the way," Shura was saying, "Nobody calls her Gemina. She's known as Ginger, and she has the hair and personality to match."

"You mean, a redhead temper?"

"No, no, I wasn't thinking of temper, although she has a perfectly good one. I meant a sort of energy and — ah — spunk, I guess you'd call it. She's quite a gal. Dante — well, when you get out here on Friday, I'll fill you in."

"Okay," I said, "Dante and Ginger. Those names, even I can't forget!"

I went to my job at the hospital and did what had to be done at home. I was in a state of mental suspension, freezing out as best I could all speculation, hope or fear. I hugged the children and remembered to smile, but occasionally caught them looking at me curiously, as if sensing something wrong.

Friday evening, having seen them off to their father's house, I packed my car with the makings of a big salad, as requested by Ruth, who was in charge of organizing the food for the day. There were hard-boiled eggs, tomatoes, avocados, small green onions, three kinds of lettuce and, just in case, two bottles of salad dressing: Thousand Island, which Shura liked, and a good Italian. This time, I didn't have to worry about bringing too much, since there were going to be lots of people.

Shura greeted me with a bear-hug and kissed me on the mouth. He was obviously feeling fine. I resolved to ignore the trunk of books sitting at the bottom of my stomach, and act as if only the present were real, and only this weekend mattered.

When I made a remark, during the evening, about nine people coming the next day, Shura said, "Actually, there'll be ten. You've heard me mention David Ladder, the young chemist who comes out here once a week to work with me in the lab? We've done a great deal of publishing together, and I consider him to be as good a chemist as anyone I know, a lot better than I am in many respects."

"The name's familiar, yes. Is he coming tomorrow?"

Shura nodded cheerfully, "He's been busy with grant-writing for the past few weeks, trying to keep his laboratory funded, and he's finally got it all done. That means we're actually going to have the full contingent, the whole research group. The only time that happens is when the Sandemans make the trip back here to see relatives or the latest grandchild or whatever."

"Tell me about David."

"Sure," replied Shura, "I've known him for years. He's in his late thirties, though he looks barely drinking age, except for the grey in his hair. Father's a psychiatrist — Freudian trained, to anticipate your next question — a good-humored, rumpled, friendly man. It's a large family. His sister, Joanna, plays cello professionally; wonderful cellist, truly a joy to hear. Two brothers, both mathematicians. David's the only chemist in the bunch. What else do you want to know?"

"How does he get on with his family?"

"As a matter of fact, they all seem to genuinely like each other, from what I've seen over the years. They're pretty close-knit, do a lot of things together. David seems to enjoy the family stuff; he thrives on visits from baby nephews and birthday celebrations — all that kind of mess."

I put supper on the table and sat down.

Shura continued, "David's a quiet person, somewhat introverted — I suspect he inherited some shyness genes from his mother. But there's nothing shy about him in the lab. He loves chemistry, even more than I do. I can get pretty enthusiastic about other things — I can see myself having become a writer or musician — but I really don't know what David would do without a lab somewhere. It's a major part of his world, his vehicle for self-expression. Of course, music's part of his world, too. But chemistry is his true and abiding love."

"Is he married?"

"No," Shura sighed, "He lived with a girl for a couple of years, but it went sour. She probably got tired of playing second fiddle to chemistry journals! We don't talk about it. He's a very private person, and when he comes over here after work — usually Wednesdays — we just dive into our world of weird nyrostyrenes and strange sulfur perfumes and we talk mostly about what we're doing and how we're going to write it up — and nasty gossip about other chemists, of course."

*Sounds like a father-son relationship. Whatever it is, it's important.*

"David's one of the world's few totally honest people," continued Shura, "He has complete integrity in the scientific area, and I can't say that about many of the scientists I know. It's not that there's intentional dishonesty or fudging of data or picking and choosing what's to be presented; there are very few who actually cheat in the lab. It's more a matter of judicious compromise, with far too many of them, especially those funded by the government. Sad to say, there's almost nobody working in the academic area these days who isn't funded by the government, directly or indirectly!"

I asked, "What kind of compromise, and why?"

He said, "The problems that you look at, the questions you try to answer, are the ones presented by your source of funds, and the answers you give back are often phrased in a way best calculated to keep that

source happy with you."

"You mean, there are lots of scientists who'll only present results that are pleasing to their — their money source?"

"Not lots, no," Shura waved his hand, "And there are many shades of grey. There are a few who will only report what is wanted by their bosses, and there are a few who report exactly what they see, even if it conflicts with currently accepted social philosophies. The remaining 99% are scattered in between. David is at the extreme that represents complete integrity."

*I hope David likes me.*

When we'd finished eating, I poured Shura a glass of red wine and myself some white. I asked, "By the way, what are you planning to give us tomorrow? We are taking something, aren't we?"

"Well, whenever Dante and Ginger are here, we like to celebrate by doing something special."

"Ah-ha!"

"And it occurred to me that we might try a real challenge, if everyone feels comfortable with the idea. They've all had mescaline in the past — that is, all except David — and I'm going to propose that we try it at a higher level than any of us has had before, with five hundred milligrams as the upper limit. That'll be for the hard-heads, of course."

In bed, after a couple of half-hearted attempts at love-making, we acknowledged it was a lost cause, curled up together and went to sleep.

The next morning, over our coffee, Shura told me more about Dante Sandeman. "He retired from a job in broadcasting, a few years ago. You'd think that sort of background would produce a certain amount of street-smarts, maybe even cynicism, but not in his case, it didn't. He's one of the world's most trusting souls; he tends to have faith in people, believe what they tell him. Most of us who've managed to live beyond 25 or 30 have got some cautionary little voice that says, 'Hold it, watch it. Is this person genuine; is he really what he seems to be?' Right?"

"Uh-huh."

"Not our Dante." Shura paused, sipped coffee, then amended, "I don't mean to exaggerate the innocence aspect. He's a very astute guy, intelligent, observant; it's just that he's inclined to take people at their word. Needless to say, he's been burned a few times."

I said, "He sounds like a basically good man, your Dante."

Shura settled back in his chair, "There was a notorious figure in the '60's, a wild character, complex, very shrewd, and totally without conscience, called Bill Proctor — William Shelley Proctor — who regarded himself as the Johnny Appleseed of LSD. He loved to turn people on, and he turned a lot of people on, in his time. Despite everything else you could say about him, I have to allow him one thing: he was the first person, as far

as I know, to recognize the value of LSD as a spiritual opener, and he was adamant and vocal about his belief that everybody — or almost everybody — should have the experience. And he certainly did his level best to contribute to that goal, believe me."

"How did he talk them into it?"

"Bill Proctor's approach was to challenge somebody he thought would be a good candidate, really bully him into going into the desert — he believed that the desert was the best place for a first time — and he'd hit the guy with about four hundred mikes.

"You haven't had LSD, I know, but you can take my word for it: four hundred micrograms is one hell of a way to be introduced to altered states of consciousness. Anyway, he managed to get away with it, because apparently everyone he turned on found it an immensely rewarding experience. Nobody ever sued him or arrested him or took a gun and plugged him. Of course," Shura chuckled, "Some of us did occasionally tease him — you know, 'Hey, Bill, what did you do with the bad trips, huh? How many bodies are out there in the sand dunes, Bill?' But the truth is, I think he actually managed to initiate a lot of people very successfully."

"But he wasn't a good person? You said he was —"

"Good? He was a con artist! He was always coming up with some scheme or other to get money out of people, and he persuaded Dante to invest a lot of money in some kind of scam, and then — well, suddenly the whatever-it-was had fallen through for all kinds of elaborate reasons, and Bill was riding off into the sunset, presumably with his loot intact, leaving Dante — like many before him — wondering what the hell had hit him. The full story is more involved than that, of course, but that's essentially what happened.

"He was one of a kind; he'd turn up at parties in a policeman's uniform — God knows what part of his past that belonged to, if any — and he'd strut around with a gun in his belt, playing the role to the hilt. He was an amazing character. It was fun just to watch him operate, if you knew what he was. Not much fun if you got conned. Dante still doesn't like to talk about it."

"How he could be a good user of LSD," I asked, "And know about the spiritual dimension — all that sort of thing — and still be a crook? I don't understand."

"Then it's time you did. Psychedelic drugs don't change you — they don't change your character — unless you want to be changed. They enable change; they can't impose it. Proctor liked being just what he was. He enjoyed himself immensely. He loved being the big honcho spiritual guide with his LSD initiations, and he certainly enjoyed the admiration and gratitude of the people he took through those trips. I have to assume

that some other side of him — a side the rest of us never saw — came into play during those desert sessions, because the people who went through them with Bill Proctor really worshipped the guy.

"LSD couldn't give him a conscience, because he had no use for a conscience, and it didn't make him humble or truthful, for that matter, because he didn't need humility in his life, and truth was a very flexible commodity, to be used only when it was in his own best interests to do so. No, Proctor was perfectly content being just the way he was. However, he did get a bit of a comeuppance, finally, in a very funny way."

"What happened?"

"He became very paranoid, sometime in the '70's, and got it into his head that somebody was going to bust down his door and confiscate his stash of LSD, which was a considerable stash, believe me. So he went out to Death Valley, which was his favorite place for LSD trips, and he buried the bulk of his supply at the base of a specific fence post, out there in the desert, in some godforsaken corner where the tourists don't wander. Then he went home.

"Anyway, he finally got over his paranoid fit and returned to the desert, about a year later, to dig it all up. And couldn't find the fence. Of course, it might have been buried by blowing sand; in Death Valley, a lot of things disappear that way. Anyway, he searched and dug and kept searching and digging, off and on for weeks. He never found his LSD cache again. So somewhere — somewhere out there in the shifting sands of Death Valley — is a king's ransom — or what used to be a king's ransom — in the form of LSD. Probably never be found!" Shura chuckled, adding, "By this time, it's probably worthless anyway. LSD is very sensitive to heat and light, and Death Valley is one of the hottest places on the planet!"

I laughed, "Wonderful, wonderful. Has anyone else tried to find it, do you know?"

"Never heard of anyone making the attempt. Not too many people knew the story. Have to give him credit, though — he told that one on himself. He died a few years ago, and the world has been marginally safer since. An interesting person. And part of Dante's past which he's not yet come to terms with. It still hurts him, to think that he was taken in so badly, that he mis-read another human being so completely. Even the fact that he was far from the only victim of our Bill doesn't help too much."

*So what do you have to do, to avoid being taken in or conned? You have to be very experienced. You have to trust your own intuition. And you can still get fooled.*

About Ginger, Shura said, "She's got marvelous energy; she's down to earth, warm, generous. She puts up with Dante's — I don't know what you'd call them — times when he gets depressed and uptight and finds fault with everything, with her and most of all with himself, and I think

they've weathered some bad times in the marriage because they've learned to use the psychedelics to help them talk things out honestly with each other and to get some insight into their own emotional baggage, or whatever has been making things bumpy between them. They're both good hearts, good souls. After all, it takes an essentially honest and good man to believe in others as much as Dante does — or used to."

"Yeah," I said, "I was just thinking that people who trust are usually trustworthy, and they tend to project that quality onto others. Better to be that way, I think, than the opposite, even if it means getting hurt at times. Too many cynical, suspicious people in the world, as it is."

"Well," said Shura, "Dante's less of an unquestioning believer now than he used to be, but he's still the kind of person you'd trust with your life. I would, anyway."

I smiled.

He went on, "Ginger is a superb painter, by the way. She began painting only a few years ago — watercolors. They live in the high desert — beautiful country — and she paints what she sees around her."

*Maybe I'll get back to my own painting someday. Not enough time or energy, right now. No. That's an excuse. If I cared enough, I'd find a way to do it.*

Shura said, "They're both seasoned travelers, Dante from way back. He was one of the founders of a place called The Institute for Consciousness Exploration, or something like that, way back in the '50's, in Berkeley, when LSD was still legal — or at least not illegal. Ever hear of it?"

"I remember hearing about a clinic where anyone could go and spend a day under LSD, for \$25, I think it was, and somebody who knew the territory would sit with them and take care of them through the experience. It was in Berkeley."

"That's the one," Shura said, "They did some groundbreaking work there, especially with alcoholics, and they were starting to get a good deal of attention in the medical community, when the law was passed making any research with LSD illegal unless controlled by the government. Of course, if anyone applied to the government, they found it next to impossible to actually get permission to do anything, any real research in humans, any kind of therapy. In the meantime, as we all know," Shura's voice had an edge to it, "LSD went underground and hit the street, and it was available to every hippie and college student who wanted to take it. Of course, everybody did want to take it, because — as they all said — if this stuff was banned by the government, it had to be worth trying; it *had* to be good!"

I nodded. "I wondered what happened to that place, the institute. I knew someone who worked there a few times, a woman psychiatrist who did volunteer work as one of the guides, and she told me a fascinating story about something that happened to her. Maybe I can share it when

Dante is here. He must have known her."

By 10 o'clock, Ruth and George had arrived. The sky, which had been clouded the night before, showed clear and blue. It was a good day for an experiment, I thought. It was going to be warm outside.

Next through the door was John Sellars, and a few minutes later, Ben and Leah Cantrell came in with two people I assumed were the Sandemans.

I smiled at the sight and sound of Shura being his extrovert-self. He always greeted his close friends with a shouted "Ho!" hugging hard and lifting the women off the floor. In a public place, he would sometimes omit the lifting part.

Dante was not a tall man, but he was muscular, built like a boxer, and I was to discover that he kept himself in shape by hiking with Ginger, several times a week, often up the slopes of Mount Whitney, which was near their home. The balding top of his head was tanned and freckled, but the sides showed plentiful grey hair. His triangular face was lined deeply between nose and mouth, the effect being one of great good humor mixed with traces of pain. His smile was wide and open, while his eyes, under bushy, sand-colored brows, held an expression more anxious than curious. He shook my hand firmly and said in a voice that cracked a little at the edges, "I've heard so much about you, Alice! What a pleasure to finally meet you!"

*Who told them about me? Shura, or someone else in the group? Wish I knew what they said. Wish I knew what all of them feel about me. Never mind. Never mind. Insecurity rears its bloody head. Just be who I am, let the rest go.*

Ginger gripped my hand in both of hers and said, "Hello! It's about time we got to see the real thing!" She was almost as tall as her husband, with red hair cut in a short, feathery style. One eye was blue and the other green. With a mouth fractionally too wide for prettiness, her face was attractive in its strength and aliveness. She looked ready to enjoy, to laugh. She had a superb figure, lean and athletic, with voluptuous breasts.

*No-nonsense type lady. Forties? Fifties? Hint of unsureness underneath. Fighter. Survivor. She's had pain in her life, too. I like them both, so far. Silly—don't know them yet. But they feel good. Nice warm energy.*

David Ladder was the last to arrive. I realized, now that I thought about it, that I'd heard his name mentioned often by Shura, particularly when he was talking about difficulties in the synthesis of a drug, or some article which they had co-authored. He was a remarkably young-looking man. As Shura had said, only the grey in his blond hair would lead one to suspect that he was over thirty. He was tall, with a boyishly slim body. He shook hands with me quickly, barely glancing at my face before ducking his head a little to the side, as if afraid of being somehow intrusive.

*Shy, indeed. Nice face, kind. Vulnerable. Intelligent, probably very intuitive. We all congregated in the kitchen, where the various food contribu-*

tions were laid out on every available surface. Ginger squinted at the top of one window and remarked cheerfully to me, "I see Shura is still keeping faith with his little spiders! I suppose he's warned you on pain of banishment not to deprive the poor things of their sense of security!"

I laughed, "Well, we've compromised on a few token webs in each room, and I get to remove the ordinary overnight types without applying for a special permit."

There was a light touch on my shoulder and when I turned around, Leah greeted me with a kiss on my cheek, "Hello, Alice. Glad to see you again."

I looked into the open, thoughtful eyes and hugged the thin body, "Me, too."

John Sellars gave me his slightly conspiratorial angel smile as he passed through the kitchen.

Finally, Shura shouted to gather 'round, and we went into the dining room. When there was quiet, he made his proposal for the day.

"I thought — in celebration of the Sandeman's all-too-infrequent presence — that we might try something a bit daring, this time, something that will appeal to the hard-head, macho types especially — and there is certainly no dearth of them in this little group —"

There was a scatter of applause and laughter around the table, George adding his loud groan.

Shura continued, "I propose — subject to your approval — a higher dosage than any of us have taken previously of mescaline, with the cut-off point at five hundred milligrams." He beamed at us, leaning forward, fingers splayed on the table.

Dante looked immensely pleased at Shura's suggestion, then frowned and began speculating out loud about exactly how high a dosage he dared take. George sputtered comfortably about five hundred milligrams being a bit rich for him, and Ruth nodded in vehement agreement. Ben, his face thoughtful, said he might consider four hundred, but didn't think he should try higher than that.

Shura called out, "Hold it! First of all, is the idea appealing to everyone? Anybody not happy with it?"

There was a general nodding of heads and assurances that it was, indeed, a great idea. Dante spread his arms wide and cried, "I can't imagine a more spectacular way of being welcomed to the beautiful Bay Area and the beloved Farm and all our friends!"

Shura sat down with a lined pad and began listing names and dosage levels. He turned to Ben first, "You're sure about four hundred?"

"Yes," replied Ben, arms folded, "That's higher than I've taken before, and I expect it'll keep me busy enough."

Shura turned to Leah, "How about it, love? A bit lower?"

Leah looked pensive, her slim fingers tapping silently on the table, then said, "I think I'll go for two hundred, and see what happens. I can supplement later, can't I, if it's too low?"

Shura said, "Yes, certainly, supplements should be effective for probably as long as a couple of hours into it."

He called out, "Everybody, attention for a moment! If any of you wish to be on the conservative side to start with, you can always take more later." He added, "I'm going to measure out an extra couple of hundreds and a couple of fifties, in case someone needs a booster. I'm going to do it ahead of time because I frankly don't know if five hundred milligrams will allow for precision in much of anything, later on, never having taken mescaline at this level before."

Ruth said, "I thought you'd taken everything at every level imaginable, Shura!"

"Almost, almost," said the wizard modestly.

John, his young-old, pink-cheeked face showing only a slight smile, said he would try five hundred milligrams. "Should be interesting," he added, eyes squinting in amusement at the exclamations and hoots from the others.

"John, five hundred," said Shura, busy writing.

Dante was next, frowning again, "Well, since we can take a supplement later, if we need to, I think I'll match Ben's four hundred to begin with and see how it goes."

Ginger said, "Three hundred is as fur as Ah'm a'gonna go, at least to start with, Shura."

I looked at Ginger, and took a moment to appreciate the beauty of the hand-made Mexican smock she was wearing, its white cotton shining against her tanned arms. There were large red and pink roses embroidered around the neckline.

*Looks Mexican. I want to go to Mexico someday and get some dresses like that. Delicious roses.*

George had decided that three hundred milligrams was high enough for him, and Ruth said she would take a bit lower, how about two hundred, to which Shura replied, "Sounds good to me," and scribbled on his paper.

David cleared his throat and said, "I'm going to be a bit cautious and take two hundred and fifty, because this is my first mescaline."

Shura nodded silently, writing, then looked at me. I said, "I'd like to join you in five hundred milligrams, if that's all right?"

Nobody hooted or teased, this time.

"Alice, five hundred milligrams," Shura wrote. Finally, he took a deep breath and reviewed the list out loud, then asked, "Have I got them right? Any revisions before I go to the lab?"

When nobody spoke up, Shura rose and asked David to come with

him to help carry the glasses.

Noise erupted around the table, as Dante and Ginger talked, laughed and answered questions. Names of people and places I didn't recognize were flying everywhere, while I listened, smiling at all the high energy.

When Shura and David returned with the glasses, various fruit juices were poured out according to individual tastes, then we trooped into the kitchen to form the circle.

Shura said, "I've discovered a way to avoid the nausea, you'll be glad to hear. If you sip your drink over half an hour, instead of taking it all down at once, the nausea doesn't present a problem. So take your time, sip it slowly, and the inevitable doesn't have to be inevitable, after all!"

*Does that mean synthetic mescaline causes nausea like the natural peyote? Thought that happened only with the plant. Must ask him.*

When the toasts to the Sandemans and ourselves and the clinking of glasses was over, the various group members drifted out of the kitchen, sipping cautiously at their drinks.

I asked Shura my question, and he nodded, "Yes, that's a very interesting fact about mescaline; it doesn't matter what form you take it in, the nausea seems to be part and parcel of the experience. If you take it fast, that is. I finally thought of trying it this other way, just to see if it made a difference. This method does, in fact, more nearly parallel the way the Southwest Indians eat Peyote, you know, and I'm happy to say it worked for me. Hope it works for everyone else. If it does, well — next stop, the Nobel Prize! For starters, that is!"

I chuckled and patted his fanny.

Thirty minutes later, Shura was being assured that he had, indeed, made an immensely important contribution to the welfare of the species. No one felt nauseated, although several in the group had decided to walk around outside for a while, finding themselves too attentive to their stomachs inside the confines of the house.

I decided I wanted to be alone for a few minutes and went into the dining room, from where I could see the outside world in two directions, through the big window to the mountain and through the sliding glass doors to the patio and the front stairs. I sat at the table, intending to stay still and quiet until I could be sure my insides could be trusted. I felt no nausea, not even pre-nausea, but wasn't about to tempt fate.

My hope, of course, was for an experience comparable to my first, years ago, the peyote journey with Sam Golding. Shura had warned me not to expect that, because, as he said, "Remember the famous quote, to the effect that you can never step twice in the same river."

The onset of the change, this time, was subtle. I was aware of a sense of something familiar, but couldn't be absolutely sure that what I was feeling was peculiar to mescaline, or simply typical of the transition to an

altered state. I noted a mild, rather pleasant tingling in the neck and down my back.

I looked across the table at the daisies I had bought the day before, on my way to the Farm. They were shining softly in their simple glass vase, on top of the bookcase. Each white and yellow blossom seemed to tremble faintly in the light from the big window, as if grateful for the warmth.

*Their roots are gone, but they're still alive. They exist fully, in this moment, and somewhere in the universe there's a place where this instant is forever, full of daisies and soft green stems and sunlight.*

I had heard and read of the Akashic Records, a name originating in India, as a level of reality where everything that has ever existed in the universe is recorded, and from which a spiritual initiate can retrieve information — the sights, sounds and sensations of any instant in time — if he knows how to do it.

*How does one learn to do such a thing? And how is an event recorded — from whose viewpoint, through whose eyes and ears? Whose feelings and sensations become part of that eternal record? The daisies' or the observer's? What if there is no observer; is there still a record of the daisies, and from what perspective?*

I smiled at the flowers, sent them my love and respect, and rose from my chair. My tummy was going to be okay.

I wandered into the kitchen, where a big soup pot sat waiting on the stove. On the tile counter were green lettuces and bright-red tomatoes heaped in a woven basket, alongside loaves of bread — one satin brown, another a braid of creamy beige, sprinkled with poppy seeds.

*Basic, basic. All us humans connect with each other by giving and sharing food, no matter where in the world. Other animals do that, too. And birds. Food shared is life shared. Eating with others is a way of connecting our livingness with theirs. All of us — humans and animals — take what the earth sends up out of her body, and give back what comes out of ours. Life-system. We are part and parcel of each other — us and our earth.*

I saw, as I had seen years before on the peyote day — but in different images this time — the planet itself as a living entity with a consciousness not comprehensible to the thinking mind of the human, since it is of a kind, of an order, entirely different from anything in ordinary human experience. I saw that there is a part of the human psyche which is aware of the planet as a living being, and seeks to interact with it, to stay in relationship to it, as the child of a nurturing mother reaches for her hand, feeling with pleasure the texture of the skin and the solid bones of the fingers.

*So humans touch the earth skin, planting and harvesting, and so they touch the planet's bones, hiking mountains and climbing rocks. We used to make our homes inside her, in the caves, like other animals. Then we ventured outside and learned to create our own peculiarly human dwellings. But we still anchor them, whenever we can, in the hard bones of the Mother.*

I glimpsed people in steel and concrete cities, shut away from the feel of the earth, unable to touch more than an occasional tree growing out of a hole in the pavement, losing connection with the mother-body, some part of themselves gradually paling, drying to deadness.

I returned to myself, standing in the middle of the kitchen. The images and feelings that accompanied them had taken probably no more than a minute, I realized, but I had experienced that minute as a long, flowing piece of time.

*Funny, I'd forgotten that what comes to you when you take a psychedelic is not always a revelation of something new and startling; you're more liable to find yourself reminded of simple things you know and forgot you knew — seeing them freshly — old, basic truths that long ago became cliches, so you stopped paying attention to them.*

I left the kitchen, a moving body of streaming energy. I felt as if I were emitting light. Smiling to myself at the thought, I ducked into the bathroom to see my reflection in the mirror, just in case it should actually be so. I saw a soft glow around my head, but it was due to light coming through the thick glass bricks of the window behind me. But what radiated from the wide blue-grey eyes with their enlarged black centers was not reflected light; it was what always showed in the eyes of anyone whose mind had changed its way of seeing and being aware.

I waved to the friend in the mirror and left.

In the living room, I was greeted by Ruth, who said, "Hello, hello! How are you doing, or need I ask? No, I needn't ask!" She smiled and patted my arm, "I think everyone's coming back into the house. They all decided it was just a mite too warm for comfort."

I asked her how she was feeling, and she replied, "I think I took just the right amount. I certainly wouldn't want to go higher than this, though. It's just about all I can handle, as a matter of fact, pretty intense. But it's okay; I think it's going to be all right." Her arms were folded, fingers making small, absent-minded stroking movements on the blue silk of her sleeves.

*She's on the edge of being overwhelmed, but she heard herself say it'll be all right, and she'll believe that, make it true.*

I asked how her husband was feeling, remembering the last time he had done an experiment at the Farm; I'd heard from Shura later that it had taken George almost three days to fully return to baseline, which had never happened before on any material. Shura said that George had sworn to be more conservative from then on — whatever that meant — particularly with new drugs.

Ruth said, "George took three hundred milligrams, fifty more than I did, and he seems to be doing fine, no problems this time. So far, that is," she added with a chuckle.

John came through the door, his fine-boned face shining from inside. His blue eyes were piercing, unreadable, and I knew he was focused on whatever was happening within, and content with where he was. He went over to the pile of thin blankets I had folded and placed next to the piano, and when he had wrapped one around himself, he sat down on the big foam pad Shura and I had laid out in the middle of the floor that morning. After rocking gently for a few minutes, he lay back on the pad and closed his eyes.

Dante was saying to Shura, "Just fifty more should do it," as they walked past me into the kitchen. I assumed he was asking for a supplement. I wondered what time it was and looked at my watch. The hands were pointing in interesting directions, but I couldn't make sense out of what they were doing. I tried to recall what Shura had said when we'd been in the circle, and remembered the words, "Eleven, almost on the dot." That was a start. Now, to figure out what it meant. The whole concept of clock time was un-graspable. It didn't seem to apply; it had no relationship to anything that was going on.

I giggled and sat down, trying to understand what my watch was showing me.

*I can't remember why I looked at my watch in the first place. What was the question? Why did I want to know the time?*

I laughed to myself, trying to keep from disturbing others in the room; the whole thing was ridiculous and hilariously funny.

Shura came into the room, trailed by Dante and Leah. He looked over at me and raised an eyebrow, "What's going on?"

I said, "I'm feeling like a complete idiot; I can't make sense out of my watch! I wanted to know what the time was, and now I can't even remember why!"

Shura smiled and ducked into the kitchen to look at the big electric clock. He reported back that it was twenty minutes to one o'clock in the afternoon and it was still the month of May.

I said thank you and suddenly remembered the question, "Oh, yes! I've got it back! I was wondering how long it's been since we took the mescaline — whether we've plateau'd or not yet — that's why I was looking at my watch in the first place."

Shura said, "It's about one and a half hours, and we've still got a bit of climbing to do before we level out. Are you comfortable so far? Is everything okay?"

I said I was fine, except for my problems with clocks and watches.

Leah said to me, "I was a bit light — Dante was, too — so Shura gave us a supplement. It's probably my imagination, but I could swear I'm already feeling it!"

I thought about Ruth and hoped she could tolerate a bit more of a

climb, if that's what we had ahead of us. She was seated on the couch, her face showing only a suggestion of anxiety.

*Wonder how much farther one can go? I feel engorged with energy-light already.*

I rose and walked toward the front door. There was only the slightest sense of physical weight, and every motion, every gesture of the body was graceful.

*I walk in grace. I move in grace. I live in Grace.*

Outside was the green world. The big pine across the brick path from the front door was an old friend, its branches always busy with birds and squirrels, and of course the insects which sapped a little more of its strength each year, as its natural life came to a close.

I looked down at the uneven bricks in the path, some of them jutting several inches out of the ground, where the pine's roots were pushing them. I smiled, thinking about the tree, whose needs had created a rather unusual entranceway; Shura always warned newcomers that they'd have to watch their step, and probably a lot of them wondered privately why the path to the front door was allowed to remain that way, every second or third brick displaced. Shura had explained to me that any effort to cut the pushing roots under the path would hasten the death of the great pine, and he wanted it to live out its full life-span, so visitors would just have to step carefully.

Hearing laughter from the living room, I postponed further exploration and went back inside.

For the first time since the circle in the kitchen, we were all gathered in one room. John was still stretched out on his back, blanket-wrapped, eyes closed, his face serene. Ruth was on the couch next to George, one hand resting on his thigh. George's face wore a slight, contented smile. Leah was in a chair, looking through one of Shura's big art books, turning the pages very slowly. Ben was seated in the armchair next to her, his head back, eyes closed. Dante was sitting on the edge of the mattress pad, near John, muscular arms folded around his raised knees. He was rocking himself gently.

Ginger was at the big window, arms raised to her sides. Her feet were still, but the rest of her body moved as if she were rehearsing a dance to music only she could hear, while she gazed out at Mount Diablo and the valley below it.

Shura was seated on the piano bench, talking with David, who stood at the back of the grand piano, leaning on its closed black top.

*There's nothing to drink out here. I'm hostess. Go to the kitchen, bring out water and juice and glasses. Don't get distracted until that's finished.*

Opening kitchen cupboards and gathering together what I needed, I noted my thoughts drifting, and realized I would have to focus deliberately

and continuously on each specific task, if anything was to get done. I talked myself through the counting of glasses, persuaded the ice-cubes out of their trays and into a pitcher of water, spoke encouragement to the different juices as I poured them into other various containers, and by using the sound of my own voice as an anchor, managed to keep track of what I was supposed to be doing. I heard myself chuckling, now and then, at being so stoned.

When I had put everything out on the coffee table, I gave myself permission to be not responsible for a while, and sat down cross-legged on the floor near the room-dividing bookcase. My Observer noted, simply as a matter of interest, that I was choosing a place symbolic of where I liked to be in any group, a location which allowed me to see all the others in the room, to keep track of what was going on. I was part of the group, but also subtly detached.

*The Watcher. The Outsider. Or is it The Writer? Same thing. This is the perch of a person who doesn't want to be truly part of any gathering, who wants to keep some aspect of herself separate, not absorbed by whatever is going on. Good or bad? Neither. Just the way it is. The way I am. That's why I can identify with Shura's lone-hermit side, the part of him that sometimes wants to be away, off to the mountain. Each of us has a large part that loves connection and sharing, the sense of community, but only for a while. Then we need to be alone again, to draw the energy back inside ourselves.*

Ruth was saying, "— colors are really vivid; they seem to jump out at me, you know — a little red Hello here and a blue Hello there — and everything I look at seems to be moving a bit."

George whooped, "Moving! Boy oh boy, is it moving!"

Shura leaned forward to ask, "George, is it all right for you, is it okay?"

"Yup," said George agreeably, "It's quite a bit to handle, but I don't think it's too much. I'm feeling pretty good, so far, to tell the truth."

"Well," said Shura, "Where you are is where you're probably going to stay, at this point. We've been on for about two hours, and I think it's safe to say we're at the plateau."

I remembered Shura telling me that the climb to the plateau could take sometimes as long as two and a half hours, so he must have said that, I thought, to reassure both George and Ruth that they didn't have to be on guard against further intensification.

Since they had told themselves they were able to manage whatever they were already feeling, they would dismiss a slight increase — if there were going to be any — as just more of the same safe, tolerable plateau.

*Pretty good thinking, for five hundred milligrams, if that's what he's doing. And I'm not doing too badly, either, considering the fact that I'm sitting here like a lady Buddha made of extremely active light-molecules, not sure I have a body at all.*

George said, "I'm relieved to hear it. There's no friend like a good plateau!"

Ruth patted him, smiling in agreement.

Glancing up, I saw Shura's eyes on me, warm and questioning; I responded with a full smile, letting him know I was all right.

He got up and left the room. In a minute, the sound of music came through the speakers from the back room. Gregorian chants. Everyone was silent, listening to the exquisite singing with their eyes closed. Ginger was still standing at the window, but she had turned to face the room. Now, eyes shut, arms lowered, she moved slowly to the music, her face intent.

I closed my own eyes, finally, and found myself inside the top of a cathedral, a golden cupola flooded with light, floating upwards past a stained glass window whose colors were a blur of star brilliance, drifting close to the point where the lines of the roof converged. I could feel something compelling beyond it, urging me to go out through that point to the other side.

The Observer cut in to say that I was quite probably going out of body, and that it might not be the most appropriate thing to do under these particular circumstances, especially since I didn't know how to manage it or what would happen to the part of me I would leave behind. Indulging in such an adventure, it warned, could result in anxiety and even alarm among the others in the group, especially if my body flopped down like a rag doll. I might be thought inconsiderate and attention-hogging or something like that.

I opened my eyes and blew air through pursed lips, looking for some way of staying firmly grounded, still feeling the pull of that place of convergence, the longing to go through that center to whatever was out there beyond it.

It occurred to me that all I had to do was keep my eyes open; there were bodies and faces to look at, to focus on, and in paying attention to them, I would be able to keep from drifting too far out.

Ben rose from his armchair, heading toward the bathroom. He moved somewhat slowly, but seemed steady on his feet. Leah had laid the art book on the floor and was sitting with hands clasped in her lap, head down. I knew she was in a meditative state — relaxed but aware — and that she was intensely involved in an experience of joy; I could feel it in her, from across the room.

George had opened his eyes and was looking around as if checking out the tendency of different things in the room to move and flow. His face was child-open and the only remaining sign of anxiety was in one hand which opened and closed against his sweater, the short fingers extending spasmodically to rub the wool, then folding again.

Ruth's face was set in concentration on whatever she was seeing behind closed eyelids. Both hands lay loosely at her sides.

When Ben returned, he said to the room at large, "That's quite an experience, trying to make sense of the different parts of the toilet and the different parts of myself, all at once! Not to speak of getting them to relate to each other in the appropriate way!"

Eyes snapped open and comments rose from all quarters, "All you have to remember is lid *up*, stream *down*," and, "I'm next. If I'm not back in half an hour, send out the big wooly dog with the thing around its neck," from David, while John groaned, "Oh, Lord, save me from a full bladder for a while yet."

Sometime during the next hour, Shura got up, flashed a smile at me, and quietly left the room. A moment later, the music was turned off. He returned and tiptoed back to his piano bench.

I was looking through a book of fairy stories with illustrations by the great enchanter, Arthur Rackham, and everyone around me had been silent for a long time, absorbed in their various interior worlds, when suddenly the room was jarred by a single, forceful note struck on the piano. On the pad, John's body jerked in shock. He yelled, "Owww!" and sat straight up, then turned around to glare at Shura, who was grinning broadly behind him, the guilty finger still on the key.

John sputtered, "What do you think you're *doing!*" in such outrage that the rest of us, who had also been jolted by the unexpected hammer-blown of sound, dissolved in laughter. Shura lifted his eyebrows and struck another note, equally loud, watching us intently. John jumped again, as if kicked in the spine. This time, he managed a weak smile as he protested, "Don't DO that, I *beg* you!"

A third ringing note pulsed through all of us, and we watched John, empathizing with him as he huddled in his blanket, now laughing helplessly at his own vulnerability, crying, "Stop, stop, stop, Shura! No more, please!"

"Really remarkable, isn't it," observed Shura, smiling with satisfaction, "How exquisitely sensitive the nervous system can become, under the influence."

*Small boy puts tack on chair, rewarded by yelp, now explaining it was scientific experiment.*

"That was pretty powerful," said Dante.

"Nobody went through the ceiling, though, except poor John," said Ginger.

"Poor John, indeed," muttered that person, "It was actually painful — I mean, like a physical blow to the body. And will you do me the kindness of warning me if you're going to do it again, so I can leave the room? I really don't want any more surprises of that kind, Shura."

*He means it. No more Mister Nice Guy.*

Shura had the grace to look faintly embarrassed, "Okay, you can trust me. I won't startle you again. I just had to try it, to see how much increased nervous system sensitivity there might be. I hadn't expected quite that much, John! You certainly are the star lab rat!"

John glowered at him, "Thanks a whole big lot!" then joined in the laughter. But he didn't lie down again, and from where he sat, he could keep an eye on the piano keyboard.

Ginger was sitting against a wall, ankles crossed. She hummed comfortably and said, "Well, I like where I am. I think I could get used to this level, with a little practice."

David picked up a floor cushion and put it down next to the coffee table, where he sat and carefully poured out a glassful of juice. He looked around and asked, "Does anybody else want some of this?"

Shura called out, "By the way, everybody, remember to drink your fluids. There's plenty on the table. Don't let yourselves get dehydrated."

We obediently got up to fill glasses and tumblers, then returned to our chosen places. Again there was stillness, the only sounds being an occasional deep breath expelled inside the room, and bird chatter outside. I looked around at the closed eyes, and gratefully closed my own.

I was aware, first of all, of the enormous energy in my body, and inside my head the entire field of vision was suffused with light. There was a sudden feeling of certainty that if I focused my mind in a particular way — I wasn't sure what that way was, but I knew it existed — I would be able to see through my closed eyelids. I just didn't know how exactly to make it happen.

The waves of microscopic bubbles or light particles, or whatever it was that kept sweeping through me, were intensifying, and I felt close again to going out into another place or dimension, and I wanted to go.

I opened my eyes and looked over at Shura, who was sitting on his bench with closed eyes. I said, as casually as I could, "Shura, could I ask you to come over here for a moment?"

He was by my side immediately, and I whispered, "This may sound melodramatic, but I keep feeling as if I'm going out of body, and I think I shouldn't, considering the circumstances. It would be sort of bad manners. What should I do? It's very strong — the pull to keep going up and out — and I'm not sure how to stay down in here," I pointed to my chest and smiled, because Shura's eyes were huge and glowing, and his hair stood out from his head like white flames.

He stood up and said loudly to the group, "I would like to invite you all to please get up and form a circle, holding hands, for a couple of minutes. It may help anchor anybody who thinks he's floating a bit too much, okay?"

Everyone rose, chairs were pushed back out of the way, and we gath-

ered in a circle, holding hands. I looked around and saw that the faces directly across from me — Dante, Ruth and George — shared a common look of inwardness, and their eyes were closed. I sighed deeply and closed my own. The feeling of wanting to rise through the top of my head was still there, but so was the sturdy presence of the palms and fingers of the people on either side of me, David to my right, Ginger on my left.

I felt myself a complete individual, separate and distinct from everyone else, and simultaneously, a participant with others, a member of a family, which was the entire species. I was aware, as I had been on the peyote day, so long ago, of a level of reality in which every human being was connected with every other, and that the connectedness was not of mind or personality, but of something far more basic; it was a spiritual or psychic touching which was blocked from consciousness most of the time, but which existed nonetheless, from birth to death. We were all woven into one tapestry, and at some deep, unconscious level of ourselves, we each shared everything known and felt by every other living person on the planet.

*Why must we be unaware of this, except for times when some of us might experience a revelation, a sudden state of grace, or when others of us might decide to open ourselves with meditation or a psychedelic drug? Why the shutting off of this awareness? Maybe because our assignment is to live our individual lives, our own singular stories, and we can't do that if we're open to everyone else's emotional and spiritual happenings.*

*We wouldn't be able to focus, to evolve as distinct and different entities, if we could feel everything that was going on in everyone else all the time. We would be a group consciousness, as the rest of the life forms on earth seem to be. And humans are meant to develop single identities, while still participating in their basic connectedness. Why? Because that's what the universal Mind intends as the next step in the adventure, the next chapter in the tale. Whose adventure is it? Whose tale?*

Into my mind came the memory of the spiral, my microcosm-macrocosm experience, and the un-nameable Friend-Companion who had greeted me each time, with laughter and love, at the end. It's the Friend's journey, I thought.

*And therefore it's also mine. My incomprehensible Friend is what I am also, and our purposes are the same, even though I can't be allowed to remember what they are while I'm living my physical life. And every human being on the planet is what I am — we are all different, one-of-a-kind forms of the Friend.*

I opened my eyes. The Observer scanned the passage of time since the circle formed, and said it had only been one or two minutes in the clock world. Shura was looking at me questioningly. I smiled and nodded at him to indicate that I was all right, and that I wasn't having any more trouble staying put in my body.

George muttered, "Phew!" and opened his eyes. David chuckled, "I

think being in the circle makes it even more intense, not less!"

Ginger squeezed my hand and gently bumped the side of her head against mine, then said, "This is the damndest level of anything I've ever taken. Did I say that right? What I *mean* is, I don't remember ever being quite so — ah — "

"The word is 'high,' love," laughed Shura, and the circle broke up in giggles and remarks about appropriate words for certain mental states, Ben suggesting "Zonkered," David throwing in, "Clobbered," and Ruth asking, "How about just plain ole 'stoned'?"

"Anybody having problems?" asked Shura, his voice suddenly serious, as he looked at each of our faces.

"Pretty intense, but okay," reported George, adding, "I don't think I'd want to try any higher though. At least, not until I'd had a chance to get used to this. And getting used to this could take a long, long time!"

Leah, her eyes soft, said, "This is beautiful, Shura. I know what you mean about being anchored, though. I keep feeling I could drift out into space — or somewhere — quite easily, if I didn't hold onto my bod."

"Well, let yourself go, if that's what you want to do," replied Shura, "We'll call you back for soup and bread, when it's time to eat."

John reported that he was feeling fine, had never felt better, "As long as you stay off the piano keys, that is."

"Promise," laughed Shura, "But you'll have to admit, those notes had an interesting effect, didn't they?"

"Very interesting effect, yes," said John, smiling despite his effort to sound sarcastic, "Memorably interesting effect, as a matter of fact, and one I would just as soon forego during the rest of the day, if you would be so kind!"

Some of the group decided to try the outside again. George expressed an interest in checking the soup, now that he had been reminded of it by Shura's remark to Leah, and Ruth went with him to the kitchen, holding his arm.

Shura put a hand against my back and gently pushed me through the kitchen, down the hallway, and out the back door.

I stood next to him in the open air, looking around. Every tree, every bush radiated light. I remembered my peyote experience, when I'd had to squint against the pulsing colors of the flowers. Now, the nasturtiums clustered on the bank to the right of the path were glowing rich yellow and an orange-red which I could feel in my stomach, while the grass sang life in the key of green.

Shura put a hand on my shoulder and said, "I wanted to bring you out here to tell you something I've always kept to myself before. You already know my other secrets, and I suppose this is the last one I have."

I looked at him and waited.

"The first time I took mescaline," he said, "I was astonished to discover that the world I found myself in — this world — was what I had been surrounded by, as a child. I spent my childhood in a reality that looked and felt like this. Of course I thought everyone else saw and felt things the same way I did, until it gradually dawned on me that maybe it wasn't the same for other people. Other boys my age didn't seem to want to spend time looking closely into flowers or merging with beetles, as I loved doing when I was alone. Eventually, I began getting the idea that I was different in some way, and I learned not to talk about that kind of thing, and to imitate the behavior of the other boys at the school, so I wouldn't draw attention —"

Shura leaned against the wall of the house, his eyes off in the distance.

"— because I knew instinctively that if others my age sensed any kind of difference, they would attack. So I behaved like everyone else until school was over and I could go home and have a couple of hours by myself doing what I liked to do.

"Just a few minutes ago, I was looking out of the front window in the living room and there were two dogs in the field, down below the house. They were in their world, in their reality, and knew nothing of me, in mine. I was simply an interested observer, so I observed them, and I saw that, although they were following one-another, they weren't moving."

"Not moving?"

"Of course they were moving — intellectually I know that — but the magic of a material like this, mescaline or any other effective psychedelic, is that it lets you put aside the intellectual overlay for a while and just have an immediate, direct experience of something. When I had my first mescaline experience the memory came back of seeing little bugs on the honeysuckle vines that grew over a fence behind my home — when I was very young — and I remembered that the bugs didn't really move; they simply changed their location in my reality, from time to time. Like the dogs in the field today. They weren't moving; there was just a change in where they were, now and then. At least, from the point of view of the reality I was in while I watched. I can't speak for what the dogs were experiencing, of course."

"You know, sweetie," I said, slowly, "I suspect that all children see the world this way at a certain time, very early in their lives. It sounds to me as if your only difference was in maintaining that state, that vision, longer than most others manage to."

Shura glanced at me thoughtfully, then looked away again, "You're probably right. When you're little, you live in what we would call a psychedelic world, surrounded by it."

I said, "I remember, with the peyote, I had the same feeling of familiarity about the world I was seeing. The territory wasn't strange at all; I had

just forgotten it."

"Exactly. I can only say, for myself, that with that first opening experience with mescaline, I was in a completely friendly environment and I'd recovered the ability to do things that had once been simple, which had been lost in all the years since then. I was home again." His voice was thick. After a while, he groped in a pocket and blew his nose on a rumpled handkerchief.

"Did your parents know any of this? I mean, that you were still seeing your world differently than most kids your age?"

"I think my mother knew some of it, at least had some suspicion. I knew that she worried sometimes; she probably worried about my ability to get along in the world that everyone else shared, but she never said anything directly to me about it. I suppose the fact that I did well in school helped allay some of her fears."

"What a difficult childhood that must have been!"

Shura turned and smiled, "Actually, I had a wonderful time, especially when I could be by myself. I remember when I was about six or seven, I think, I could travel all the way across the park near my house, without touching the ground — just traveling in the interlocking tree branches! It was great!"

I laughed with him. "Well, that certainly sounds like normal boy-stuff!"

He went on. "There was a certain amount of strain, I suppose, in trying not to be singled out, when I was in school, acting like other boys — but I got pretty good at it."

"When did you lose the — that kind of vision, do you remember?"

"I can't recall any particular time; it just gradually faded, like I guess it does with everybody else. I eventually forgot how it had been. Until the mescaline. Then it all came back; I remembered seeing the world this way before, and I began recapturing the memories."

I said, "I wonder why some people find a mescaline experience frightening?"

"Maybe their childhood world was frightening, or damaging in some way; maybe a lot of it has simply been pushed out of memory by the need to deny and repress the bad memories. And then, to have something reawaken that past, and in an authentic way such as this — it could be terrifying. It could be a dreadful experience, having all of it open up again."

"Yes, yes — I hadn't thought of that."

I looked again at the trees, at the grass, at the flowers, and felt the radiance moving in my own body as it was in theirs. We were creatures of light, Shura and I, standing in a little piece of the universe that was showing us, reminding us, how things really were.

*This interweaving, this shared energy; it exists between all living things. My Beloved Friend of the spiral is living the story of all things alive, everywhere.*

Shura had taken my arm and was leading me up the path to the lab. We walked slowly, in silence, stopping every few steps to look at an exquisite line or flare of color. Every turn of branch, every curve of flower stalk was a word of language, a communication from the particular shape taken by the energy that flowed around us.

I again remembered when I was sixteen, at boarding school, making the great discovery that line could be translated in my mind to sound. It had first happened when I went walking alone and looked up to see a bird moving silently, very high up against the clear sky, and the single pure moving line became a single pure curving note of sound. I began experimenting, after that, looking at the back of an antique chair, the outline of a vase sitting on a table, and confirmed that any line, moving or not, could make a sound in my mind. I shared the discovery, of course, with no one.

I talked to Shura about this kind of association, which I now knew had a name: synesthesia. I went on to tell him the story of how I came to love the music of Bach.

The first man in my life, the first love, was a young Russian of considerable brilliance. We had fallen in love during our senior year of high school. After years of separation, he came back into my life just after my divorce from Christopher's father, while I was living in the housing project with my baby. His name was Vadim Michel Ivanoff, and he loved Bach. When he found out that I couldn't understand the music of his favorite composer, he informed me that he was going to teach me to hear it as it should be heard.

One evening in my apartment, when my small son was asleep upstairs, he ordered me to sit on the old couch in the living room, and not talk. He then brought out a box of twenty household candles — the cheap, plain white kind — lit one, then turned out the lights. While I watched in obedient silence, he fastened the rest of the candles in place with the hot wax and lit them. They stood in a line that went from the concrete floor up the side of the white-painted concrete stairwell, until the small room was blazing with candlelight.

Then he took a record and put it on my record player, and the music of Bach (I didn't know which piece it was and he gave it no name) filled the air around me. I lay down on the couch and closed my eyes and caught my breath in surprise. Before me had appeared a crystal mountain which was being built by the music, and as I watched, the music showed me blue-shadowed crevasses, shelves and peaks and a beauty that belonged to another world. That night, I fell in love with J.S. Bach, as Vadim had intended.

"I'll always be grateful to him," I concluded, "For two things: teaching

me how to make Russian hamburgers and how to hear the music of Bach. The rest of my relationship with him was mostly pain and grief, but those two gifts deserve acknowledgement."

Shura was smiling, "I don't know what Russian hamburgers taste like, but certainly, being able to appreciate Bach is one of the things I consider essential to a fully lived life!"

I laughed, "So do I — now."

Shura took my hand and it was like being grasped by my own skin. I found myself thinking how marvelous it would be to make love right now. I didn't share the thought; it would be ungracious of us to leave the group for so long. We were the hosts. Perhaps later.

As we walked back toward the house, Shura said, "I want to remind you, before we rejoin the others, that I've never told anyone else what I just shared with you about my childhood. You may be right, that the only real difference between me and others of my age was in the fact that I continued moving around in that world a lot longer than most children do. But at the time, it was one hell of a difference, believe me!"

"It'll remain between us. But why did you never tell Ursula?"

*I'm assuming he didn't.*

"Because I've been used to keeping a lot of things to myself most of my life, especially things that I grew up thinking would make people regard me as an oddball. As it was, I was considered an oddball anyway, but it wasn't for lack of discretion about my interior workings. It's only been with you, for God knows what reason," he smiled down at me, "That I made the decision to be truthful and open about who I am and what goes on inside me."

I said, "Thank you."

*If I have to go on without you for the rest of my life, I'll have that as my treasure — being the first person you ever trusted so completely. No use telling you that this great secret of yours would be understood by more people than you think.*

In the kitchen, Ruth and Leah were laughing uproariously. Leah tried to explain to us, "It's the stove! You see, it's really much more complicated than you realize, understanding what 'front right' and 'rear left' mean — what they *really* mean — and what they have to do with heating up a pot of soup. You think it's simple, I know! I always thought it was simple, myself. Little did I realize the elaborate connections that have to be made by the mind, between those silly little words on the dials and —" she doubled over again, holding her stomach.

Ruth had tears running from her eyes as she joined Leah, crying, "You try counting soup bowls, Shura! Just see how far you get before you lose track! I've tried and tried, and it keeps slipping away after three or four bowls. How many people are we, anyway?"

We joined in the laughter and Shura took over the counting of soup bowls. He had no trouble at all, which for some reason sent the two women into further paroxysms until they were both gasping for air. Then Ruth reached out to the wall rack over the stove and held up a soup ladle as if it were an unrecognizable object lifted out of an archaeological dig, and we left the kitchen to the sounds of renewed gasps and croaks.

Ben grumbled from his armchair, "What in heaven's name is going on in the kitchen? I haven't the slightest desire to move, at the moment, so you'll have to tell us the whole thing."

Shura simply shook his head, "Ya hadda bin there."

David was on the floor pad, a few inches from John. Both of them were lying on their backs, eyes closed. David was smiling, I guessed in response to the sounds in the kitchen.

George spoke from the couch, "I must say, Shura, this is quite an experience!" From George, those words could mean one of several things, but his face showed no anxiety and his smile was full, so I assumed they meant that he was enjoying himself. Since Shura did not ask him any questions, I supposed he must have read George's face and reached the same conclusion.

I sat down on a floor cushion and watched Shura quietly move through the room, looking intently at faces, checking for any signs of distress. What he saw apparently contented him, because he slipped off his sandals and sat down in the chair next to Ben, leaning his head back and closing his eyes.

For a long time there was complete silence in the room.

I gave thought, finally, to the matter of Ursula. Ursula and her trunk full of books.

*There's no feeling of reality about Ursula coming and staying. It's as if that whole scenario is only one of several possible outcomes of this story, this particular script, and not the one that's going to be the final choice, in the end. But then, I'm not the playwright. Who does make those choices, in this play?*

By the time my watch and the kitchen clock agreed on 6:30, we were all seated at the table and the previously incomprehensible ladle had been put to its proper use. We were eating, tearing bread with enthusiasm and refilling our bowls, talking about the day's experience and comparing it with others. There was a telling of stories — remember when Dante got stuck in his guilt and self-negation and Shura and Ben played verbal torture games with him until he finally rebelled and decided that being victim wasn't all it was cracked up to be?

Dante bent over the table, flushed from laughing. I hadn't had a chance to talk with him yet, but I was already in love with his face, with its marvelous mixture of expressions — extroverted warmth and inward searching.

"Remember," someone said, "When Helen finally took the plunge with mescaline and couldn't bring herself to step out of the car, up in Tilden Park, because the gravel looked like the jeweled back of a huge snake and she didn't want to put a dirty shoe on such a beautiful thing?"

I asked if Helen had been afraid of the snake. Shura said, "No, she wasn't afraid of it — she knew what she was seeing was really just the side of a road — but she couldn't bring herself to disturb the pattern of jewels. The rest of us had to spend time persuading her that she wouldn't injure it, that it would still be there if she placed her feet on that scintillating back. She finally dared, but it took a while, believe me!"

No one mentioned Ursula.

George and Ruth stayed the night on the pad in the living room, because George could not trust himself to drive safely. He was still having visuals.

Shura and I made love slowly, holding on to the mescaline effects as long as we could, neither of us able to reach orgasm, laughing at our own futile efforts to focus minds and bodies in the way necessary for such a result. We settled for pleasure and the melting of boundaries, the my-skin-is-your-skin, the light glowing behind our eyelids, the sense of being children playing in the fields of the Lord.

Finally, we curled together spoon-style, my stomach to his back, and fell asleep in the middle of something sweetly familiar by Schubert which neither of us could name.

## CHAPTER 29. THE LETTER

Shura often gave me Ursula's letters to read. He knew that seeing her writing for myself gave me an independent, if limited, view of the person which I could get no other way. Sometimes he used me as a reality check. Feeling too close to her, too deeply involved to trust his own judgement, he might hand me a letter and ask what I thought of this or that. I would read carefully and reply with scrupulous objectivity, heart turned off and only head operating.

Ursula's letters were always passionate — not in the erotic sense, but spiritually and emotionally. She never referred to love-making, except by delicate implication, but she often referred to the soul. When she spoke about her future joining with Shura, it was always in terms of the spiritual, the cosmic. She wrote well, sometimes beautifully, considering the fact that her native tongue was German. The occasional temptation to elaborateness and honey-sweetness had to be understood as the efforts of a woman in love trying to convey the urgency of her feelings in a language not her own. My preferred self-image of a fair and honest witness demanded that I keep all that in mind.

I didn't dare question the authenticity of the emotions being expressed. I could question their durability all I wanted, but what I was reading in Ursula's letters often had an intensity and unmistakable yearning that seared the page — and me.

Then came the letter that changed everything.

It was a Saturday afternoon. Shura came into the living room where I was curled up on the couch with a book, and silently handed me a letter which had just arrived. Glancing up, I saw his face clouded. I turned my attention to Ursula's spiky German public school handwriting, which was still hard for me to decipher.

After addressing Shura as her love, her soul-mate and other variations on the theme, she described in detail a trip to the ancient city of Nuremberg,

with Dolph and two close friends. They had gone there for the four days of Richard Wagner's Ring Cycle, and there was no mistaking the excitement and delight she had felt during the experience.

I thought it was one of her most enjoyable letters. She told about the dress she wore on opening night, "As I stood before the mirror, I could feel you, my darling, watching me and smiling. I heard your voice telling me I was beautiful in the flowing white silk, the silver shoes and handbag, the embroidered scarf. You were so proud of me, my beloved!"

She went on to convey the magnificence of the theater, the deep blue of the velvet curtains, the superb stage lighting and scenery. She spoke of herself, in her red plush seat, creating in her imagination the figure of Shura sitting next to her, his hand enfolding hers as the magnificent music of Wagner carried their souls upward together.

*She either doesn't know or she's forgotten how much he loathes Wagner.*

There followed descriptions of some others in the audience, delightfully catty examinations of bad taste as expressed in various hair arrangements, jewelry and clothes.

The only mention of Dolph was in relation to one of the singers, "Dolph and our friend Rudi agreed that this man's voice did not meet the expectations raised by the rest of the divine company. Surely, they will not give to him such an important role next year!"

Then she spoke of the strain she felt, trying to maintain the necessary lightness of conversation with her companions, while thinking privately of what was to come: "Oh, soon now, very soon, my twin, my other Self, we will be together and none shall part us. Thank you for being so patient, for giving me the time I must have to calm the storms within the heart of poor Dolph, so that I can break free, soaring like the music, to join you forever."

Shura was sitting in the armchair, waiting for me to finish the letter. When I put it down, he asked, "Well, what do you think?"

*What, exactly, has made him so angry?*

"You have to remember," I said, cautiously, "I don't read these things with your eyes. What are you reacting to?"

"Doesn't it strike you," he said, voice tight, "That she has given a great description of a delightful trip, an interlude of several days with Dolph and friends, to see the Ring Cycle, and that not a word of this sounds like a woman agonizing over her husband's suicidal or other-cidal depressions? I don't see anything in that letter to indicate that Dolph wasn't having a fine time, along with the rest of them, do you?"

"Well, she wasn't going into details about Dolph, honey. It was a letter about the trip and the theater —"

He interrupted, hitting the arm of the chair with his fist, "Am I going mad, or is this what you would do if you were trying to wean your husband

away from you, trying to get him to accept the end of the marriage? She sends her books across the ocean, then she takes off with the husband she's about to leave at any moment, and a couple of friends, and they all go to see the bloody Ring Cycle in old Nuremberg!"

*I'm missing something. It didn't seem that strange to me.*

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know!" Shura pounded his forehead, "It just seemed so — so crazy, all of a sudden. All that fun and games at the opera, while Dolph is supposedly suffering the pangs of betrayal and Ursula is nursing him, easing him into accepting her imminent departure — all that tension and misery — then this! It just struck such an incredibly wrong note!"

I thought for a moment, remembering the combination of obvious delight with the sad, wistful longing to have Shura beside her.

*Be as objective as you can.*

I spoke slowly, carefully, "Well, it seems quite possible to me that she might simply be keeping peace this way, and perhaps things were getting too — well, you know — too closed in, too tense at home. Maybe she thought it would lighten everyone's mood if they just took off and went to the Ring Cycle. She talks of missing you, wishing you were there."

"Yes," Shura nodded, "Almost as if she were remembering every now and then to say the sweet words, to make sure I don't think she's really enjoying herself. But she *was* enjoying herself. I can read it in every line. It's just not — I can't fit it into the picture. Nothing fits the picture properly. None of it makes sense."

*Ursula goofed. What now?*

An idea came to mind as I looked at Shura's lion head, bent onto his hands. I tuned into his hollow fear that this state of affairs would go on forever, that there would never be a true resolution, and the deeper suspicion that he was being played like a puppet, for unknown and unknowable reasons.

I said, "I just thought of something I might do, my love. I think it's time you jolted the lovely lady a little, and I have an idea of how to do it. I'm going to write a letter to her."

"What?" Shura looked up at me, his face totally uncomprehending.

"Let me work on it, okay? I'll give it to you, of course, and it'll be entirely up to you whether it gets mailed or not. But if it is sent, it must seem as if I'm doing it entirely on my own. You don't want her to suspect that you have any knowledge of it at all, otherwise it'll look like exactly what it is: a ploy. A prod. Just wait and see what I come up with."

Shura shrugged, "I don't know. If you want to try it, I can't stop you, but — what the hell would you say?"

"I'll put it in your hot liddle hands when it's done. No use rehearsing it now. It'll take me a couple of days, then let's see what you think."

It was the strangest letter I'd ever written. The words were from my heart and gut, and by the time I'd reworked it four times, I was able to call it a masterpiece (at least to myself), even though I knew that Shura — if he decided it could be sent — would be using it only to make the woman he loved jealous and insecure and perhaps inclined to move a bit faster in tying up her loose ends

My reason for writing it was not complicated. In case Ben was right, after all, this might well give her the excuse she needed to break things off with Shura. It would, in other words, take her off the hook. If, on the other hand, she really wanted him, wanted to come and stay happily forever after on the Farm but was dragging her feet for innumerable reasons, this would almost certainly give her a kick where she needed it. Even if she were to find out, later, that it wasn't going to be forever after, things would have been moved along a bit toward whatever the conclusion was going to be. At this point, I thought, anything that speeds this whole business up is all to the good; Shura is getting too depressed. It has to be resolved.

Ursula,

I am taking the liberty of writing to you directly, without the knowledge of Shura, because I think you should know what the situation is and because he is suffering greatly from what he reads in your letters — or, rather, what he does not read.

I have been in love with Shura since the Fall of last year, when I first met him. We allowed ourselves to become involved during the past many months, because of our mutual loneliness and need for companionship of a kind that is hard to find for intelligent people with unusual interests such as ours.

He has told me from the first time we met of his love for you. He has never failed to mention you, to talk of you, as the woman he loves and wishes to live with for the rest of his life, and it was in full knowledge of all this that I decided to continue my relationship with him, a relationship which must end, of course, when you finally come to be with him, to live with him and make this place your home.

What I am attempting to do, in writing this, is to tell you that I believe this man is worth the pain I feel in knowing that I cannot have his heart, and the pain it will be for me to relinquish the closeness and the extraordinary communication of ideas and concepts. I could have saved myself all this pain, both past and future, if I had decided not to become involved in his life. But I decided otherwise. For the first time in my life (and most certainly the last), I let myself be part of a triangle — I allowed myself to

love a man who loves someone else. I am older than you, Ursula, but I am still a woman of some attractiveness and certainly of great pride, so this was not an easy decision.

I wish you to know that I can see him go to you without jealousy or hostility, when you come to join him, because I love him enough to want to see him fulfilled. He believes — and since he does, I must — that you are the one person in the world who can make him truly and deeply happy. Since this is so, I can only hope and pray that your love for him is, and will continue to be, the equal of his for you. If it is, I will be — in time — content and even satisfied.

Please know that he is suffering right now from many doubts and a lot of emotional distress. You might perhaps realize that he needs to have some definite encouragement from you as to the fact that things really are moving and evolving in your effort to leave your marriage and your country. He is becoming deeply discouraged, and I write to you asking you to please do or say something which will be reassuring to him at this time.

I believe it was inevitable that you would learn of my relationship with Shura, since he will want to tell you the truth. We have established our strange, difficult and caring relationship on the basis of absolute truth-telling, playing no games of half-truths with each other, and I know that he will insist on total honesty and openness in his future life with you. I feel that, once you have recovered from the surprise and shock of discovering that someone else shares many of the same feelings about Shura and has had some closeness to him, you will welcome what I have to say: he is in love only with you.

It is one thing to hear from Shura that he made at all times clear to me that you are his one and true and only love; it is even better to hear it from the "other woman." And from me you have heard it. He is yours, lady, his heart and soul belong to you. All I ask is that you treasure them as I would if they had been given to me.

There is no need for a reply. I hope to someday be your friend, but that will be entirely up to you.

Blessings,  
Alice Parr

I wrote my return address clearly on the envelope, addressed it by hand, and brought it with me the next Friday evening when I drove to the Farm.

I sat in Shura's office on a stool while he read the letter, and in my mind I reworded the message it contained.

*All right, you who are loved by the man I want to be with for the rest of my life; if you truly are what he sees and believes you to be, you deserve to be the uncontested owner of the territory, and I'll have to resign myself to being Graceful Loser. But if by any chance you're playing some kind of game, Pretty-pie, I'll be around to pick up the pieces. Not only that; if you do stay here and I have reason to believe you don't really love him, I'll do everything I can to fight you for him!*

When Shura had finished reading, I said, "I'm just going to leave the whole thing in your hands. You mail it or not, as you wish. It's got to be your decision, because there's no way to know how she'll react to something like this, and if it backfires, I have no intention of being held responsible."

He nodded and folded the letter into its envelope.

*He's been forced to look at what I feel for him on paper, look it full in the face. No hiding from those words. Doesn't hurt to remind him, yes.*

The next morning, Shura said, "There's a new family of compounds David and I have developed, called the 2C-T's. So far, we've completed the synthesis of 2C-T-2, 2C-T-4 and 2C-T-7, and I've taken the "T-2" up to active level."

I murmured, "Uh-huh — ?"

"Quite interesting. Thought you might like to try it with me today?"

"I'd love to," I grinned.

"Just to make sure you're fully informed and will identify the drug properly in your notes," he glared meaningfully at me, as I nodded very hard to indicate that I would, absolutely, write a report, "Its full name is two five dimethoxy, four ethylthiophenethylamine hydrochloride."

"Thanks. I needed that. What level?"

"Well, I took it up to fifteen milligrams and got a plus-two, so I thought we might venture another step, to 18, and see if we can get a plus-three out of it."

The telephone rang. It was an attorney who wanted him to testify in court as an expert witness for the defense in a case involving *Psilocybe* mushrooms. Then there was another call, a reporter in San Jose, who needed information about MDA. Shura went through his usual, "I'll be glad to give you any and all information I have available, but not for attribution. I don't want my name mentioned in the paper," and I sat there, chuckling at his silent pantomime of the usual protests and arguments from the other end of the phone.

Shura had explained to me that he preferred to keep what he called a low profile, that there was no benefit to him in having his name casually publicized, and that if the reporters or journalists were sincere about wanting information, they would accept his condition. They always argued, he

said, but in the end they usually agreed to do it his way.

I filled the bathtub and took my bath. When I emerged, Shura was on the phone again, winding up another conversation as I entered his office. He said, "That was an old friend, Terry Major. He used to be part of my experimental group way back in the days when Sam Golding was involved. Terry and Paula — that's his wife — were with Helen and me and the Closes the day Helen took the plunge into mescaline."

"Oh, yes," I said, "The jeweled snakeskin."

"They're among my oldest friends, and we used to do a lot of exploring together. Not as much, the last few years. Terry's a psychologist at the university, and the rest of the time, he and Paula raise mushrooms — the eat-with-your-steak kind, non-psychadelic — and write books about their care and feeding. Good people. You'll meet them someday. Dolph and Ursula became good friends with them, when they were over here from Germany."

*Got to get his mind off Ursula and Dolph and Germany.*

I sat down and informed him, "I'm ready for the whatsis."

"2C-T-2. That's the 2-carbon analogue, the phenethylamine analogue, of Aleph-2. The T stands for thio, which is a chemist's way of saying you've replaced an oxygen atom with a sulfur atom."

"Oh," I said, "And what's the two for?"

"Which two?"

*How many blasted two's are there? Oh, yes.*

"The second two."

"It's there because Aleph-2 is the second Aleph compound I made."

"Oh. That explains it," I said brightly, "Thank you very much."

Shura gave me his smart-ass grin and got up. "I'll weigh it out, then."

"I've had my bath, so you can use the water for your shower."

"Let's take our Experimental Substance first. It takes between one and two hours to plateau, so there'll be plenty of time for a shower."

"How long does the whole thing last?"

"Between six to eight hours, if you're me. Going by past experience, you'll probably make it last ten or twelve!"

I laughed. "Okay," I said, "Ingestion of Experimental Substance first, then."

As we clinked our glasses in the kitchen, Shura looked at the clock above the sink and noted, "Two o'clock, give or take," and we drank, toasting ourselves and the lovely warm Saturday.

I curled up on the blue couch and looked through some art books I had stacked on the coffee table earlier. The paintings involved me sufficiently so that I forgot about having taken the 2C-T-2 until reminded by my own alert — a flush of goose bumps up my spine. My watch said 2:35 PM.

I got up and turned on the television. The Discovery channel, one of

my favorites, was showing a documentary on Nepal. I watched it with deepening interest until its conclusion. It was 3:00 o'clock and I was definitely plus-one and climbing. I sat down at Shura's typewriter, which I had borrowed again, near the big windows, and began my report with dosage level, date, time of ingestion, and the remark that so far, at over a plus-one, it seemed okay.

Shura came in and asked how I was doing. I said fine, that I was climbing slowly, and asked him, "Where are you?"

He said, "A pretty firm plus-two. You?"

"Not quite a two."

"You want to be alone for a while yet?"

I said yes, thank you, and told him I was writing my report like a good girl. He said, "Will wonders never cease!" and left.

During the next half hour, I became aware of a slight body-load, a sense of strong energy beginning to be felt; at first it was only around the shoulder-blades, but soon spread throughout the rest of me. My tummy asked questions, but there was no nausea, only alertness. Feeling slightly restless, I went outside and turned on the hose to water Shura's new rose bushes, which had been planted by Theo in the early spring. The two cats — Male and Ms — ran up to me and nuzzled my legs passionately. They were usually friendly, but a human in an altered state affected them like catnip. I bent down and stroked them.

A little while later, Shura and I closed the bedroom door to keep out the sound of the telephone, and sat on the bed, cross-legged, facing each other.

"How is it for you, so far?"

"So far, it's fine," I said, "During the transition part, I had a few moments of wondering if my stomach was going to be all right, but that smoothed out. The energy tremor is very strong, but I'm getting used to it, and I think I'm going to like your Two-something."

"What level would you say, at this point?"

"Oh, plus-three, absolutely."

"Me, too." Shura glowed at me, eyes and mouth smiling, as he took off his robe.

There was elegant and stately music playing on KKHI which, we told each other, could only be by Handel.

Shura turned out the bedside light.

*At the bottom of my tongue there is a deep black sky with stars in it. There's a different kind of magic down there. Wonder how it feels to him.*

I saw a small river flowing between low banks and, on either side of it, carefully tended green lawns sweeping up to mansions separated by flower gardens; there were glimpses of rose trees, marigolds, clusters of blue and violet lobelia, an impression of Greek columns at the front of one great

house.

*The land of the aristocracy. Absolutely Handel. Serene, measured, then the delicate, playful notes of the flowers. Lovely, lovely.*

Sweat trickled across my face. A great ball of scarlet, like a miniature sun, was coming up the river toward me, and I knew what it was. I heard the choking sound in his throat and its explosion into the long, long roar of completion.

I stayed there for a moment, my head on his thigh, sharing the remnants of the beauty.

After a while, I got under the covers to lie beside him, and he rose on one elbow, to look down on me. I closed my eyes.

*How easy orgasm used to be, when I was younger. Now, it's a search for the center of my Self; it's hard work, it's a battle to get to an inexplicable thing I can't even name. The threads have to be pulled together by the soul, before the body can release it.*

Rachmaninoff's music was forming huge petals of sensuous violet and pink, with a stamen of glowing yellow. Georgia O'Keefe, without question. Suddenly, a tiny fire caught somewhere, far away. The flame spread slowly, and with it rose an almost unbearable sweetness that flooded everywhere as it drove the line of fire toward me, through me.

Shura turned out to be right; I milked the 2C-T-2 for over ten hours. Around 8:00 PM, I finished typing my report on the experiment and went to the Master's study to hand it over. He clapped one hand to his cheek and sputtered disbelief at actually getting my notes without the usual wait of several weeks. I gave him a full Brooklyn raspberry and flounced out, very pleased with myself.

We had some of the soup I had cooked at home, a thick Dutch split pea soup with bits of ham in it, and we sat down to eat in the living room. I turned on the television and found Peter Falk in a rerun of one of his old Colombo murder stories, and for the next hour and a half we both sat hypnotized, moving from our places only during commercials, to go to the bathroom or to pour out more soup.

The carpets and walls were quieter, now, and the energy charge in my body had long since gentled to a comfortable humming.

Just before drifting into sleep, my body fitted to Shura's back, I remembered the letter to Ursula, and knew with complete certainty that he would send it.

## CHAPTER 30. ENDING

It took two weeks for Ursula's reply to arrive. She wrote two pages and enclosed my letter, demanding an explanation. Anger, hurt, betrayal, outrage, shock, sorrow; they were all there.

Shura was visibly relieved, smiling broadly as he handed the letter over to me. I read it through and realized that, as far as he was concerned, jealousy and upset were at least consistent with her really loving him.

I reserved comment.

It was interesting, I thought, that she had managed to overlook completely — at least, she made no mention of it — the main and certainly positive message. I tried to put myself in her place, as well as I could, and concluded that — eventually at least — I would have felt some kind of empathy, some degree of compassion for the person who had written that letter, for any woman who had been driven to say to her rival: you've won, and I've lost; be happy and make him happy and bless you. In her place, in fact, I would have written at least a thank you note back to the loser. Eventually.

Everything she'd written added up to a case of hurt pride, which was certainly understandable, but there was no response to my mention of Shura's anxiety and pain. She hadn't even gotten angry at him for doubting her, which I certainly would have.

But, then, I wasn't Ursula and I didn't have enough information to enable me to understand her life, her surroundings or her way of thinking. I had only Shura's view of her, Ben's analysis, and what I could piece together from her letters, and I was still left peering through a very shadowy glass.

*Wonder why she didn't phone him, as soon as she got my letter? You'd think that would be the first thing she'd do, with all that surprise and outrage and betrayal and so on. Funny.*

One week later, on a Thursday evening, Shura phoned me and said,

"Well, I guess this is it!"

"What is it?" Sinking stomach.

"She's coming. She's leaving there next Wednesday and arriving here a week from today, this time to stay. She phoned me and said that getting your letter made her realize she couldn't keep postponing having it out with Dolph, so it's done — she's said goodbye, and asked her closest friends to keep an eye on him when she's gone — and —," his voice trailed into huskiness for a moment, then he regained his courage, "Thank you, Alice. Thank you for the letter. That was above and beyond, you know."

"I know," I said, not letting myself feel anything yet. Not until the phone call was over.

"Could you possibly come out here for just one last weekend, so we can talk? Is it all right to ask that?" He sounded anxious.

*I have to get my things out of there, whatever I've left around. It's going to be hard — everything will be happening for the last time. Maybe.*

"Yes, of course it's all right for you to ask it, and I have to pick up my things, so I'll be out — when? Friday evening as usual, or should I come Saturday?"

There was a moment's hesitation, then he said, "Oh, come out like any other weekend, Alice. I know it isn't, and I realize you'll be going through a hard time, but so will I, you know. It's not going to be easy for me, either, this part of it. But if you — if you can see your way clear — Friday would be great. I need to be with you, talk with you."

"Okay. Friday it is."

After I put the phone down, I sat quietly with my cigarette, my Observer frantically active. It was telling me to lay out in my mind everything I knew about the situation, to look at it calmly, review all of it, and to try to postpone grieving because there was still a weekend ahead with Shura.

*All right. How do I put off the pain, huh? Part of me is beginning to mourn as I sit here. No way to stop it. And it doesn't matter whether I think she's going to stay forever or not. I still have to go through the closing of the door, as if it were permanent. Because no matter what happens in the future, everything will be changed. Must be changed.*

*What do I think is going to happen — what does my intuition tell me she'll do? I think she's going to leave him again. Maybe she'll last six weeks. Maybe even six months. But I don't think she'll stay.*

*Why do I think she won't stay? Because Ben believes it and I want to believe it. No, no — it's more than that. There are too many strange things about this girl's behavior that don't make rock-bottom sense. Anima woman, Ben said, and Ben's pretty shrewd. I hope to God Ben's pretty shrewd!*

I got ready for bed with my interior world split into two levels: one was preparing for the grief-anger-pain, and the other was quietly anticipating the weekend, planning a fast, unemotional gathering up of my

various things around the Farm — combs and hairpins and the odd sweater — speculating on whether or not Shura and I would feel like making love. Seeing in my mind the final goodbye, dignified and graceful. Afterwards — afterwards would take care of itself.

*Whatever happens in the long run, I'm going to have to shut off this relationship once more and go through the grieving. For the last time. Never again. No matter what, I'll never go through anything like this again, for Shura or anybody else. Never!*

That Friday, I was greeted by a long, tight hug. Looking into Shura's eyes, I saw that what he'd said on the phone was true: this part wasn't easy for him. He was going to miss me, and he was already realizing it.

I went around the house, carefully looking for signs of my own presence and removing whatever I found. I was going to play this one clean, with complete integrity. No little mementos lying around. I didn't want her resenting me any more than she already did; there would be no purpose served by hurting her.

*Boy, what a good girl am I! Well, that's okay. I have some extraordinary memories and my self-respect, and that's not too shabby.*

Friday night, we held each other tightly, without trying to say anything, before turning over to go to sleep.

The next morning, over our coffee, Shura looked at me with a mixture of feelings in his face — happiness, misery, wistfulness — and asked, "How would you feel about having one last experiment with me?"

I replied that, as a matter of fact, it might be very good for both of us.

*It's either that, or saying goodbye before the weekend is over, because the ache is getting strong. Tummy and chest. A good psychedelic might help me assimilate some of the pain. Even if it doesn't, it'll still keep us occupied for a while and postpone the goodbye.*

"I'd like to share with you one of the old great ones," said Shura, "It's called DOB."

"Uh-huh."

"You should know, it's very long-lasting — between 20 and 24 hours — and it's pretty powerful. I'd like you to know it. That is, if you feel okay about giving it a try?"

"Thank you, yes."

"I was considering a pretty hefty dose, three milligrams. It's fully active as low as two milligrams, but I think you're enough of a hard-head to tolerate three, if you're game?"

I was smiling genuinely for the first time since hearing that Ursula was coming.

"It takes between one and a half to maybe two and a half hours to come on fully, so there's plenty of time to adjust to it," Shura said, and got up to do the weighing out.

We toasted each other silently, this time. The clock over the sink said 10:53. Saturday morning of the last weekend. Maybe.

*He's hoping all will go well with Ursula and that I won't hurt too much; I'm hoping all will go badly with Ursula and that I won't hurt too much.*

After my bath, I went to the friendly blue couch, and sat curled up in one corner to track the effects. It was a summer day and warm. I was wearing a loose cotton shift, blue with wide stripes of soft yellow, brown and rose. It was years old, worn and comfortable.

Images and phrases drifted through me as I waited.

I remembered Shura telling me, one night, that Ursula had never been able to have an orgasm, and my shock at hearing it. I had wondered if he had enough psychological smarts to know what that might imply, and being unashamedly pleased to have that bit of information. It was, I had thought at the time, another flaw in the beautiful, bright, wonderful Ursula.

Now, gazing out at the great mountain shimmering in the haze, I reviewed what I knew, or thought I knew, about women who could not achieve orgasm — healthy, normal women — and realized I wasn't that sure. Supposedly, they were emotionally immature, or couldn't relinquish control, or were in some way psychologically less well integrated — whatever that meant — than women who didn't have that problem.

*And those diagnoses are usually made by men, aren't they? Which should make them slightly suspect. After all, Walter told me early in our relationship that the only mature kind of orgasm was the vaginal; that needing to stroke the clitoris was childish and regressive, or something like that. Which is why I faked orgasm all the years of our marriage, and waited until I was alone to give myself the real thing; I didn't want him to think me immature. I took for granted that, since he was a psychiatrist, he knew whereof he spoke. Until Women's Lib came along, and articles were written about a lot of things people hadn't written about before, and I finally realized that Walter didn't know a damned thing about women's sexuality.*

I checked on myself. It was the one-hour point, and I was about a plus-one.

*Ursula may well confound all of us. She may turn out to be faithful, constant, deeply loving, all those good things. She may even learn to let go enough to have a full sexual response. With a man like Shura, spending hours and hours making love, it's possible.*

I smiled, thinking back. Early in our relationship, Shura had remarked on the strange habit American women had of shaving their underarms and legs, and told me he liked the way European women let body hair grow naturally. Hair, he'd said, was one of the most erotic things about a woman, and he couldn't understand the desire to remove it from any part of the body. I had joked that it was probably some deep-seated streak of pedophilia in the American psyche, adding that I rather liked body hair,

myself, that Sophia Loren certainly looked gorgeous enough without shaving, in her early movies, and that if I ever ended up living with him forever after, I would happily forego the use of a razor for the rest of my days.

Suddenly, I was aware of a shift inside, and noted that I'd jumped up to a plus-two within the past 15 minutes. There was a distinct awareness of a change of state, but there weren't any strong visuals yet. Nothing rippled or wiggled. There was an increased feeling of intensity, as if the world was collecting itself to convey a message, but that was usually part of the transition experience with any psychedelic.

*Time to ask some serious questions and see what comes up in answer to them. After all, it may be my last psychedelic experience in a long time. Let's start with a simple one: what is the meaning and purpose of life?*

The answer slipped in almost casually: "The meaning and purpose of life is life."

*Okay. Glad we've cleared that one up.*

There was more, apparently.

"All existence is an expression of the One Mind. Allah, The Ground of Being, The I Am, God, are some of the names for that which forms itself, loves itself, hates itself, teaches and learns from itself, gives birth and nourishes itself, kills and devours itself, forever and ever without end."

I sat rock still, then took a deep breath and let it out.

*Sweet Jesus! Try cuddling up with THAT in front of the home fire!*

I was feeling cold. Transition chill, I thought, and went and got a light cotton blanket to wrap around myself.

When I was settled back on the couch corner, I tried again.

*What is love?*

*"Love is yea-saying with the heart."*

Now for the nasty one, I thought, the one that always lurks around the corner.

*What about the part of the — God, the It, whatever — that kills and destroys?*

"It's there in the service of life, to keep the cycle going. On the God-level, destruction and death are part of the yea-saying to life."

I couldn't stop the process, now. The questions were asking themselves, and the answers were pushing into me instantly, implacably.

*That doesn't explain loneliness, pain, sadism, torture, all the cruelty and suffering! Why does the dark side have to be so dark, so evil, so terrible?*

"For there to be life, there must be duality — yes-no, positive-negative, male-female. For there to be life, the One must become two halves, Yin and Yang, each half defining itself in opposition — light does not know it is light until it meets darkness — and without this duality, there would be only The Seed, and no flowering. Darkness is. Light is. Each grows, changes and elaborates, shaping itself in new ways, expressing itself in

new forms, destroying itself and renewing itself eternally."

"There was a grey, iron weight on my soul.

"I'm stoned out of my gourd. No fun, no fun. Wonder if there's going to be a glimmer of hope anywhere in this.

"Within the Yin is an island of Yang and within the Yang is an island of Yin."

"Where does THAT leave me, for Pete's sake?

"Right back where you started."

A surge of despair threatened to take over; I shoved against it.

"Great. Thanks a lot. Where do you look for compassion, for caring, then, when you need it? Where do you look for love in this Godawful overwhelming universe?

"You look to where compassion and caring are, in the part of the One that loves, the Christ and Buddha, the Great Mother, the Kwan Yin, the countless forms of love and loving everywhere around you, all of them alive within your Self, as are their opposites. You look to your own heart."

"The image I'm getting is of an awful cosmic indifference.

"Since we are all forms of the One, there can be no indifference as long as there is a single entity which feels pleasure, sorrow, pain or hope. Whatever a living thing feels, the One feels. Whatever a living thing experiences, the One experiences. The One is each of us; the One is all of us."

"I can't accept the idea that half of the One includes so much of evil — what I consider to be evil.

"Yin and Yang are the law of life and do not need your acceptance. Only you need it, and your need is of your own choosing."

I wanted to say, Fuck You! but there wasn't any point in being angry and, besides, I knew it would be ignored.

"Is there any other way for me to see all this? Any way to make it easier?

"Life is the One telling stories about itself to itself. It is all story-telling."

I couldn't see how that was supposed to make me feel a whole lot better.

"What part do I play in this bloody universe? I mean, of what importance am I in the scheme of things, if any at all?

"With your birth, the universe changed. With the opening of your eyes, the God-mind saw itself as never before. In your ears, all sound was re-created. With you, the One unfolds a new story."

"And this happens with the birth of everything alive, am I right?

"Yes."

I remembered the book, *Voyage to Arcturus*, by David Lindsay, who was one of Tolkien's group of fellow-writers in Oxford. A strange, dark and wrenching story. It wasn't the best writing, but it had a great power.

I'd read it long ago, and was aware at the time that my conscious mind didn't understand what I was reading, but some other part of me did; it took the images, fought them, couldn't let them go, even when I'd finished the book and gone on to other reading.

One scene in particular stayed with me. The hero had wandered into a valley where he saw, all around him, plants thrusting up by the tens of thousands, each individual plant totally unlike any other, some exquisitely beautiful, others grotesque and misshapen; he saw each plant blossoming, withering, then falling lifeless, within moments of its birth. The hero looked on in growing horror until, unable to stand the sight any longer, he ran out of the valley.

I remembering shuddering at what was obviously a portrayal of human existence, each new person emerging with a completely distinctive, never-to-be-repeated set of genes, fingerprints and psychic structure, billions of such one-of-a-kind entities continually being born and dying, all over the earth. The picture was one of terrible waste, of vast indifference on the part of the producing force, and one could only feel a profound horror and, like the book's hero, try to run away.

I had thought at the time, and I thought again now: what was the use of all the suffering, all the joy, all the searches for meaning, if this obscene birthing and dying, this implacable thrusting into blooming life and disintegration back into the dirt was all that was really happening? And why, for God's sake — if God was anything other, anything more than just the unthinking, unstoppable Begetter-Destroyer force — *why* was it happening?

*Against that mindless natural machine, that frantic, never-ending life-making and life-taking, there stands what? Only an instinctive knowledge that it is indeed part of the truth of what is, but only part; it is not the whole. I know it's not the whole.*

I knew it, because I had met the answer in my spiral experience, week after week, year after year, throughout half of my life. Hello, my dear friend, it said, I greet you with respect, love and laughter. It is joy to meet with you again, it said.

That was the Whole.

Shura came in. He was in his dressing gown and his feet were bare. His hair stood out from his head as it always did when he was in an altered state. He looked at me, wondering how I was, and I smiled at him in reply.

"How's it going?" he asked, leaning down to look into my face.

"I haven't been paying attention to the effects, actually, because I've been too busy with concepts and thoughts and all that there kind of stuff."

"Well, that there kind of stuff *is* part of the effects. What level would you say?"

"Now that I take a look at it, a very much plus-three. How about

you?"

"Pounding along nicely. Plus-three, no question. I'll leave you in peace with your thoughts, then. You know where to find me. We haven't plateau'd yet, but it won't be long."

"Yes," I replied, reaching up to take his hand, "I think I'll be with you pretty soon. Just a couple of loose ends to clear up."

He kissed the top of my head and left.

I returned to stalking the wild universe.

*Final question, if you please. How do I stop being afraid?*

"Know that there is no safety anywhere. There never was and there never will be. Stop looking for it. Live with a fierce intent to waste nothing of yourself or life."

There was one final message.

"Turn fear around. Its other face is excitement."

*Shura said that to Dante, during the mescaline day. Can't remember in what context, but I do remember those words.*

I took another deep, slow breath and came back to my comfortable old couch. Everything around me was dancing a little at the edges and flowing in the center, and I was reminded of the beloved wallpaper roses in the bedroom. It was time to join Shura.

*To the potty, first.*

While my body did its usual self-cleansing, the rest of me floated in the soft pulsing of no-time, at peace after battle.

On the bed, we became totally absorbed in the world created by our mouths, our skin, our tangled legs and salty sweat. At one point, lying beneath Shura, I realized I was feeling no sorrow at all, no sense of imminent loss. The coming of Ursula had no reality. What we were doing and feeling now was the only thing that mattered, and there was a moment of knowing that our alliance, the bond between us, would not be broken. The knowledge stood by itself, not susceptible to analysis or cautionary reshaping by the mind.

There was only the two of us, breathing each other's smells, tasting each other's familiar flavors, confusing each other's skin and hair with our own.

*The Gods are pleased. We express them well. They like the way we do it.*

Shostakovich, Bartok and the delicious Hummel kept us company.

Afterwards, I sat up and said to Shura, "You remember I told you there was a fascinating episode I heard about, from someone who used to volunteer at Dante's institute in Berkeley — you know, the clinic where they allowed people to take LSD trips — and that I was going to tell the group about it, that day on the mescaline?"

Shura nodded.

"Well, I forgot to tell it, obviously. Now that I've thought of it again,

I'll tell you and you can pass it on to Dante."

"Good," said Shura, "But before you begin, I need to empty a bladder."

"Okay, me too," I replied, standing up to put on my shift. "Why don't I heat the soup on the stove, and I can talk while we put some yummies in our tummies."

"Sounds good to me!"

At the table, I began. "I'll tell you what I can remember. One evening, at a party somewhere, Walter and I got into a discussion with a small group of people about psychedelics, particularly LSD, and the conversation got pretty intense. There were several therapists there, and one of them was this sweet, pretty lady with a round face and blonde hair, called Eve, and she told us she'd been a volunteer for a while at the Berkeley place — Dante's clinic — and that it was one of the most fascinating chapters of her life, sitting with people while they went on the LSD journey."

Shura ate slowly, listening.

"I remember telling her that I'd never taken LSD, but that I'd had an extraordinary day on peyote, and I'd had an encounter with what I called the death door, and that it was beautiful and friendly, but I wasn't tempted to go through it because I knew it wasn't time and there was still a lot I wanted to do. I said I'd wondered ever since what might happen to someone who saw that way out of life and *was* tempted; what would happen if he actually went through, or tried to go through?"

I ate some soup, then continued.

"She stared at me and said that, as a matter of fact, she had an answer — at least, she could tell me what happened to one of her clients at the clinic who did just that. She was sitting beside his cot when, apparently, he saw the exit and decided to go through it. What *she* saw was a young guy lying there, who had stopped breathing. She called out to him, and when he didn't respond, she tried to find his pulse and there wasn't any. He was in clinical death, she said. She dashed out to get help. By the time the staff people got back to him with the injection and whatever to kick his heart back to life, he'd been dead for just under three minutes.

"Eve said that, as they rushed through the door, he opened his eyes. He was back. After all the panic had died down, he told her that he'd seen that opening and wanted to go through it, and did, and he got to a place where an entity of some sort told him very firmly, but kindly, that he wasn't allowed to stay because it wasn't his time to die, and he was going to have to go back and stick around until it was the proper time. Then — Zap! — he was waking up on the cot with people running into the room, brandishing hypodermics and stuff.

"He also told her he would never again consider cutting his life short, and that he certainly wouldn't have any fear of death, when it was time to go. One of the things Eve concluded was that there must be some kind of

— ah — Overseer part of us that keeps an eye on things, so to speak. She said she'd never talked about the incident outside of the clinic before, especially not to other psychiatrists, needless to say!"

Shura's eyes squinted at me thoughtfully, and he nodded. After a moment, he said, "Thank you. I'll tell Dante, if he doesn't already know about it. That's quite a story."

When we'd finished eating, we went into the living room, where I curled up in my usual place and Shura pulled the ottoman closer and sat on the edge, leaning forward. He smiled at me, "Did I ever explain my twosies-threesies theory to you?"

I shook my head.

"Didn't think so. Now is as good a time as any to tell it, while we're still blasted out of our skulls. Ready?"

I grinned, "Sure! What's a two-Zee, three-Zee?"

"Well, you know those great old — what's your name for them? Sophomoric Questions? — in particular, the one that goes, 'How did life start on earth?'"

I protested, "Hey, it was someone else who called them that name. Don't lay that one on me!"

"All right, but anyway, this has to do with the question of where we — meaning mankind — originated; on this planet or elsewhere. Okay?"

"Sure. One of my favorite questions, as a matter of fact."

"Let me lay the groundwork for a minute. A living animal, plant, bug or virus can be defined absolutely by a connected series of molecules. These molecules are called nucleotides."

I nodded, hoping I would be able to keep track of details, but sure I'd at least get the music, as Shura would say.

"At the far left of this series is the first nucleotide, and at the far right of the series is the billionth nucleotide. This series, taken as a unit which is called the chromosome, completely defines that animal or plant or bug or virus. Not only does it define the structure and how it will look, it also defines every instinct and how it will behave. All of the shapes and all of the behavior patterns are incorporated in that one series of nucleotides, and in no two individuals is that nucleotide series the same."

*So far, so good; I haven't got lost yet. He's so full of energy, talking like this. Beautiful man. He makes ideas as sexy as love-making.*

"A small percent of this long series, when the individual molecules are taken three at a time, represent a code for amino acids, and thus represent a code for protein structure. The vast remainder of this series of nucleotides makes no known sense at the moment. But then, again," he gestured at me, "We don't know yet how instincts and memories are encoded, right?"

"Yeah."

"The code is one of triplets, and since one has a choice from among four nucleotides for each position of the triplet, there is clearly the potential for 64 amino acids. Well, 62, anyway, because one code has to say START and one has to say STOP. But there are only about 20 amino acids, so there is a great deal of redundancy in the system. With several of the amino acids, the first two nucleotides define the amino acid, regardless of which nucleotide occupies the third position. You with me so far?"

"So far."

*I sort of lost something around the 64 amino acids, but it's basically clear.*

"Well," said Shura, rocking a little, "It has always seemed to me a very appealing thought that this triplet system — I call it 'Threesies' — evolved from a simpler, two-nucleotide system, a 'Twosie.'"

I grinned and corrected my mental spelling.

"I enjoy giving my class a theoretical problem, to wit: if you were given physical and chemical hands of infinite skill, could you design a duplication of a living organism, based upon a 'Foursies?' In other words, it would be a task of stretching out an entire chromosome, that which represents a living individual, and introducing a fourth nucleotide after every triplet. It would be a task of designing a ribosome that would require a Foursie to define an amino acid, but the fourth position should be indifferent — meaning that it can be any nucleotide. It would require going at every single aspect of the entire genetic structure, expanding the three's to four's, and then not using the fourth. Then, if this chromosome could be inserted into a living cell, it would produce the same individual, with the same appearance and instincts as when he was a Threesie."

*I wonder if this would be easier to pin down and remember if I weren't stoned.  
Probably not.*

"Now, look at the fantastic room that's been made available for evolution! With time, that fourth position may no longer be indifferent, but can be used for survival, adaptation, development, in ways which would be totally unforeseeable. An interesting experiment," he cocked his head at me, "And I think potentially do-able."

I nodded, trying to look keenly intelligent.

"And I believe that that's exactly the way the Threesies evolved from the Twosies!" Shura smiled at me, obviously hoping for a look of startled fascination or, even better, astonished disbelief. Instead, I leaned forward and gave him earnest anticipation. It was the least I could do.

He continued, "Long, long ago, in a place far away, there lived an intelligent species that had its RNA and DNA put together in the form of a binary genetic code. This may have originally limited their proteins to 16 amino acids, or I should really say 14, because one code says START and one says STOP —"

I laughed.

"— but they evolved beyond this limitation and generated complex genetic machinery to create new amino acids. Just as we — we Threesies — require amino acids that don't lie within our chromosomes.

"And so, a professor in this faraway place, long, long ago, proposed to his students: do you think you can design a system in which all the two-unit pairs in our chromosomes incorporate a third unit and become a triplet system? Of course, he said, you're going to have to redesign ribosomes to accept a triplet system and ignore the identity of the third component — as was the case earlier, where the fourth position was to be indifferent, remember? — held in reserve, if you will, for later use.

"And I believe this is what actually occurred. I think spores of this triplet system were scattered to the universe. Some fell into blazing suns and most are, without doubt, still adrift. But at least one fell onto our planet Earth, where it produced a living organism that was, by appearance, related to our Twosies in a faraway place, in a time long ago, but carried within it that third nucleotide potential which allowed, over the intervening billion years, the development of the human!"

I stared at him, mouth open. He was perfectly serious. It was a wonderful theory — what I understood of it — and I believed it.

"Do you think," I asked tentatively, "That it will ever be possible to discover where, exactly, we started from? I mean, where — what planet or what system the professor was in?"

Shura replied, "I'm certain that the star map of our parents lies within the structure of the ribosome they created, but — as they say — that's another story."

*Meaning he hasn't figured that one out yet.*

"Now, for a flight of fancy," said Shura, and I knew him well enough to assume that he was proposing something he considered a real possibility, but wanted to leave open an escape hatch in case he needed to revise something. "If this Threesies from Twosies is reasonable, then one cannot avoid the question of how did the Twosies evolve from Onesies? It seems inescapable that, on a place even far, farther away, long, longer ago, some professor type was carrying about him chromosomes of our famous four nucleotides, but where each nucleotide represented an amino acid — well, not really four amino acids, because one has to say START and the other, STOP — anyway, this teacher, who was a Onesie and who was composed of protein made largely of two amino acids, was instructing his students to construct a Twosie.

"Now, you get to the real heart of it. This reduces the question of the origin of life to something that could very well be rationalized in light of some recent research on the development of complex molecules by chance. They would have needed only to bring together a few nucleotides which would determine a protein of a few amino acids which, somehow, rein-

forced the ordering of the nucleotides; namely, the system represented a transform between nucleotides and amino acids that, after many failed trials, stumbled upon one which was self-reinforcing. The time requirement for this having occurred would be unbelievably long, but clearly it did happen. There was not anywhere near the time needed, on this earth of only four billion years' age — a major portion of which was taken up with surface conditions which were intolerant of life — for that to have taken place on this planet."

He spread his arms wide and let them drop again, smiling to indicate that he was finished. I said, "I believe it absolutely. Every fantastic word of it. Have you considered publishing it?"

Shura shook his head, "Not really. No, it's just for my own enjoyment, right now. Every time I propose it to my class, I think of something else to work into it. I guess you could say it's still evolving."

When we went to bed, both of us were still feeling the effects of the DOB. Shura was down to a plus-one; I had descended to a soft plus-two. We weren't sure sleep was going to be possible, but somewhere in the middle of Beethoven's Ninth it must have caught up with us, because we weren't around for the ending.

The next day was Sunday, the day I had decided I should leave, to give each of us one day alone before the work-week began. I knew I would need crying time, and that Shura would have a thousand things to change, to fix, to make ready for his love's arrival on Thursday.

In the intimate warmth of the bed, holding me for what he believed was the last time, and what I hoped would not be, but had to allow might be after all, he said something which was intended as a wistful half-joke, "You know, you and Dolph should get together; if only you were friends, you could keep each other company, help each other through this, you know? Perfect solution!"

I held my breath for a moment, not trusting myself to speak, wondering if I had misunderstood, knowing I hadn't. How could he be so wise, so extraordinarily understanding about so many things, yet say a profoundly stupid thing like that!

I rolled out of his arms, and sat on the edge of the bed to put on my gown. My back to him, I said, "You mean, us poor sad little cast-offs; wouldn't it be nice if we could cheer each other up, so our misery wouldn't cast a pall on the happiness of the Prince and Princess? I must say it isn't one of your more brilliant scenarios, my dear."

There was silence behind me. I could hear him getting out of the bed, and as I walked from the room, I heard a quiet, "I'm very sorry. That was pretty dumb."

Yes, I thought, it damned well was.

*How could either of us have expected to get through this weekend without*

*something hurtful being said, something awkward? It just wasn't possible. Okay. Drop it now. Don't want my last sight of him to be through a cloud of anger.*

At the gate, Shura dropped his head down and into the car window to kiss me, very gently, on each eyelid. I said, noting with pride that my voice sounded even, pleasant, affectionate, "Try to let me know what's going on, when you can. I'll always be a friend to you, my love, and I hope to be a friend to Ursula too."

He said nothing, but there were tear tracks on his cheeks, and it was time to leave.

On the way home, I was surprised to note that I felt no grief yet, only a kind of high-energy state, and thought I was probably maintaining myself in some sort of suspension of emotion —

*State of suspended an-emotion. Not bad, for a shattered psyche. Not bad at all.*

— some kind of semi-shock state, so that I could drive home with maximum safety. I reminded myself to be extremely attentive to driving details, and not to fall into the trap of getting distracted by thoughts. I kept my adrenalin up by telling myself to be careful, careful, until I had been on the freeways for a good half hour, and decided I was going to be all right. Until I got home, of course. Just keep your attention where it belongs until you get home, I crooned to myself. At home, you can let loose.

Inside my house, I began the grieving. Again. All of it again. And for the last time, I said over and over to myself. No more Mistress Yo-Yo. It had all been my decision, to do what I'd done, but Jesus Aitch Christ, enough is enough is enough. Even the most extraordinary man in the world isn't worth more than — what was it? — two closings of the door and willingness to return. Three? Basta, as the Italians say.

Finally, the angry inner voice subsided and the tears came. My Observer sighed with relief, knowing that the sobs and aching ribs meant that the beginning of healing wasn't too far off.

## CHAPTER 31. VOLCANO

When the children came home from their weekend with Walter, I told them, "I've got some grieving to do. The German lady Ursula is coming to stay, and I personally don't believe it's going to last, but I have to act as if it will, because I don't know. No matter what happens in the future, I have to close the door again on my relationship with Shura. You know how I feel about him —," which they did; I'd been open about it all along, " — so it's hard. I have to go through the ending of this, because everything will be changed in the future, no matter how it comes out. So please be patient with me for the next few days. And don't worry. I'll be okay after a while, I promise."

They nodded, their faces shy, and hugged me hard before going off to bed.

On Monday, I phoned the hospital and said that a family emergency made it necessary for me to take the day off. I spent hours writing in my notebook, which helped me ignore the almost constant stream of wetness flowing down either side of my nose. When I went to the bathroom I avoided the mirror. I opened a can of soup and forgot to put it in a pot until two hours later, and remained generally unaware of the details of what I was doing. Everything was on automatic while I wrote out my feelings and let the waves of pain wash through, my Observer keeping watch like the family doctor. I wrote:

"Surges of grief, stomach tightened and churning. Head tension gradually forcing headache. Like childbirth in reverse -- the more you cry, the longer the intervals between waves of pain, and the shorter the wave.

"As soon as Ursula is near, he's ready to give me away. He said Dolph and I should get together; it was a joke, but the truth is, he'd

be happy to see me with someone else, with another lover. It would give him only relief, because it would lift his feelings of responsibility. The ultimate rejection is having the person you love hope (and say) that you'll meet someone else and be loved by someone else.

"What did he say in his letter to Ursula? Loss of faith. I'm feeling loss of belief in the validity of what he felt for me. I'm seeing the total absence of love and deep caring, now.

"This is a death I'm grieving for. The death of what has been; of both the good and the not good in our relationship. No matter what Ursula does, he and I will never be the same. I will not have it the same. Because he was so much hers, he was never able to give himself fully to me, and I'll never accept anything like that again. No more triangle, no more half-love, no more withholding. So, either way, the past is past, and dead."

It helped, writing it out.

"Why did I allow this to happen? Because I love him. And it was worth it — worth all the pain and anger. Even three times in one year, which must be a record. And I had love back. Not the words, but very much else. Enough to be unbelievably happy for a while. I have that, and my dignity and pride."

Later in the day, I wrote:

"No appetite. Underneath the pain, I found a knowledge of the rightness of what's happening, and — unexpectedly — a sense of joy! Don't know why, but it's quietly there. Something very far inside me knows all is well, although the rest of me continues to tear itself into bloody strips."

The kids came home from school, glanced at my pink, swollen face and made understanding grimaces. They did their homework quietly and pitched in as usual to set the table for dinner on the long tiled bench. I asked them questions about their school and managed to keep my voice level and my mind reasonably well focused on their answers. They were tuned in to me, I knew, and any effort to pretend what I didn't feel would be detected immediately, so I remained honest in what I said and what I showed in my face, and left it up to them to deal with it as best they could.

Wendy was, as usual, Earth-mother, stroking my head as she passed

by, hugging me tightly when it was time for bed. Ann, who usually talked her way through difficult situations, relying on humor and lightness of spirit — or the appearance of lightness — to carry her over the bumps, fell into an irresistible sadness, her empathy with my pain overwhelming her. At one point, I put my hands on her shoulders and said, in as down-to-earth a voice as possible, "Don't let yourself tune into my feelings, honey. It'll really be all right in a day or two, believe me. Sorrow doesn't kill, and the wound does heal. It's going to be okay."

Brian, aware at some level that too much closeness to me could disable him, glanced at me now and then with helpless compassion when he had to be near, and for the most part kept himself separate in his room, concentrating on homework.

I went to the hospital Tuesday and told the people in Medical Records a short story about a favorite relative dying unexpectedly of a heart attack. They were sympathetic and left me alone. I made it through the day, escaping from memories and grief for minutes at a time in the need to concentrate on the flood of medical reports pounding into my ears, hour after hour. I typed at full speed and left at 5 o'clock, relieved at having managed to stifle the tears all day, at not having forced my fellow transcribers to pay more than the slightest attention. They were nice women, all of them, but they weren't close friends, and disturbing them would have been unfair and of no help to me at all.

It wasn't until I was on my way out of the hospital, at a few minutes after 5:00 PM, that the full force of the anger hit.

I stopped in mid-stride on the grey pavement, my car in sight across the parking lot, immobilized by the deep red fury which had suddenly taken over. It was appalling in its intensity. My Observer said, half-humorously, "Uh-oh," and shrugged, knowing that this moment had been inevitable. Then it spoke loudly, reminding me that this kind of anger could get me — or somebody else — killed on the highway, and that I'd better put it under wraps, any way I could manage it, until I got home.

I drove very carefully, paying attention to every move of my own and every other driver around me, as if I were quite drunk and unable to trust my reflexes or my concentration.

At home, I said hello to the children through gritted teeth, aware that I was going to start shaking, and asked them if they would please take care of their own supper, explaining, "I've just gotten hit by lot of anger, all of a sudden — which is a perfectly healthy thing to have happen, by the way — and I need to be by myself for a couple of hours, if that's all right."

They said yes and sure and okay, we'll take care of ourselves, don't worry.

I went to the kitchen and got a glass and a bottle of cranberry juice and took them up to my bedroom. I opened the drawer where I kept the

MDMA that Shura had given me for my own use, many months ago, and took out a little envelope marked 120 milligrams and another one marked 50 milligrams, in case a supplement should seem like a good idea. I swallowed the first dose in some juice and lay down on my bed.

The fury was hot and terrible, deep inside my stomach, where I'd held it during the drive home. I gave it permission to come to the surface. The top of the volcano opened, just above my navel, and a flow of searing, murderous hatred spurted upward like lava. I lay on my back, hands clenched, body trembling, and reminded myself not to scream out loud, because of the children. I was a bit frightened by the rage, by the horrible force of it. It was one thing to know intellectually that it would mellow out to anger, and that the anger, in turn, would soften to acceptance, and that it was all part of the healing process; it was quite another to feel it shaking my body, to realize that it was this kind of sharp, thrusting fury that caused some people to kill other people, just to rid themselves of the ugly pain by putting it into someone else.

I remembered, all over again, the remark about Dolph and me getting together — the insulting pity, the arrogant selfishness of those words — as lava flowed down the sides of the fire mountain, burning trees and fields and Shura and Ursula and everything else in sight, devouring the land to the horizon.

My Observer volunteered a small, tentative thought that the poor guy could be excused, considering the circumstances, for failing to fully appreciate anybody's grief. Come on, for Pete's sake, it said, don't distort your perceptions or your ways of thinking, even though you're feeling murderous. You don't have to justify the rage; it has a right to be there. Just experience it. Let it go through you. You'll stay sane. You'll come out in one piece.

An impulse struck me. I thought of the notebook I'd been writing in since I left him for the last time. I thought of the raw pain, the fresh blood that lay on the most recent pages.

I decided to rip those pages out of the notebook. I imagined putting them into a manila envelope, licking the envelope closed, and addressing it to Dr. Alexander Borodin, and I saw Shura opening it and reading what I had written, and I knew that it was the perfect answer to that last careless, stupid insult. He would never forget what he would read. I knew it wasn't something that could be forgotten. He would carry the gut knowledge of my agony with him for the rest of his life, as I would.

*Yes, of course it was my decision to risk all this; of course it was up to me and I said yes and I knew it would mean hurt when it ended. That still doesn't forgive that unconscious message to please take my pain away so his happiness wouldn't be tainted. It doesn't forgive ruining what should have been a loving, graceful goodbye.*

I was beginning to feel the first effects of the MDMA. There was a corner of quietness inside, just a hint of a pale, cool, dove-grey feeling at the edge of the searing fire.

I was crying again, hard. My body was still trembling.

*The tremor's probably the way the body is handling the too much energy of the anger. It's all right. In fact, it feels good.*

I closed my eyes and felt the looming, blistering shapes of the emotions churning inside me; there was the rage, the wracking sorrow and loss, there was an element of self-destruction, and something howling for help, for an end to the pain, all mixed together. I relaxed into what I expected would be a good long, thoroughly wrenching experience which should leave me — I hoped — very much cleansed and maybe hurting a bit less.

The voice came abruptly, without warning. It snapped open my eyes and jolted me upright on the bed. It spoke without sound and its words were absolutely clear in my head. It was a voice of absolute authority, and it most certainly was not my Observer.

It said, "Stop this *now!* Know your anger, get it out, and be rid of it. Forget about sending notebook pages in envelopes. Put aside being sorry for yourself. Shura is about to undergo a heartbreak. He will need you and everything loving you can possibly be to him, not six months from now, but within a very short time. You must remain his refuge. Be ready. He'll be in touch with you soon and he'll need you."

It was gone. I was left with a serene, gentle, rather strange feeling of something easing out of me. The strangeness, I thought, was perhaps a different dimension of the grief and struggle. There was still the heaviness in the center of my chest, but it had softened.

I had never before had such an experience.

The message didn't make sense, either, I thought. Ursula was coming in on a plane on Thursday, just a couple of days from now. She was coming. What did the voice mean when it said, Shura would have heart-break — pain — immediately? Ursula's plane lost in a crash? I didn't want that, I didn't want harm to her. That would be no answer for us. He would be in love with her memory, then. Better an outgrowing, a long-term outgrowing of each other, than something like that.

It mustn't be a tragedy, whatever was going to happen. Could it be that she would not be coming, after all? That simply wasn't believable. She had never, as far as I knew the history of their affair, told Shura she was flying in and failed to arrive when expected.

Sitting on the bed, wondering what the hell that message meant, slightly awed by having had such a thing happen at all, I realized suddenly that there was no anger anywhere. It had vanished. All it left behind was a sob-jump in the throat now and then as I forgot to breathe evenly. There was a sense of utter calm, like a meadow after a violent storm has passed,

everything crystal clear and quiet in my chest and stomach, where the fury had boiled a few minutes before.

I was even able to laugh at myself.

*Well, whatever that visitation was, it sure cured you for the moment, hey?*  
*What're you going to do now?*

Go downstairs, I decided.

The children were seated in different parts of the living room. Wendy and Brian were scrunched over homework. Ann was watching television with the sound turned way down, so I assumed she'd finished hers. I sat down on the couch and grinned at all three of them in turn and said, "Well, a funny thing happened on the way to my screaming anger fit. I'll interrupt you only long enough to tell you about it, and then I'll shut up. By the way, I'm feeling very all right."

I told them about taking MDMA (they had already heard me talk about my experiences with that particular drug) and the voice like a river of cold water on the hot coals I was clutching to my insides, and what the voice had said. Ann's eyes were round and she laughed with relief. She was obviously picking up my matter-of-fact pleasantness and the absence of the pain which had filled the house for days now. Wendy said, very softly, "Wow!" Brian smiled widely and said, "Boy, I can't wait to see if it turns out to be true!"

"Well," I said, "Even if it all ends up being imagination and nothing to do with reality, I must admit that the MDMA has given me a great feeling of having gone through the worst of all this and coming out the other side. Maybe it won't last, but I really do feel some healing, some sort of — well, as if the bleeding has stopped, so to speak. And, by the way, thanks to all of you for having been so helpful while I was in this state. I'm very grateful to you and love you very much. End of speech. Continue with homework."

When I had seen them into bed, having hugged each of them with a very good hug, so that they could feel with their body antennae the absence of hurting in me, it was around 10:00 PM.

I looked at the phone and it was clear that I was supposed to pick it up and call Shura and tell him what had happened.

The Observer said, Hey, hold it! Why don't you just keep this one to yourself, for the moment?

I knew it would be sensible and reasonable to do just that; in fact, it made no sense at all to tell him. I would sound like a fool and, moreover, I would probably appear to be trying to ruin his anticipation and joy. But the impulse to share it with him was strong enough to be considered another order from Whomever.

Shura's voice, when he answered, had a hopeful, anxious eagerness that told me he was waiting to hear from Ursula. I let him down as gently

as I could.

"Hello, my friend, I felt I had to call you tonight. Do you mind?"

"Of course I don't mind, Sweet Alice. In fact, I can't tell you how good it is to hear your voice."

*He sounds as if he really means it, bless his heart. I know he was hoping for Ursula, but he did make that sound like genuine pleasure.*

I suddenly knew with absolute sureness that Ursula hadn't phoned since I'd left. It was ridiculous to think such a thing, but I knew it was so. Just to be polite, I asked if he had heard from his lady recently, and did he know what plane to meet?

"No, not yet, but I expect to at any moment."

"Okay," I said, "I feel rather weird about telling you what just happened to me, but for some reason I'm sure I'm supposed to."

I told him the little story about taking the MDMA, leaving out the worst of the rage and saying nothing about manila envelopes and notebooks and revenge. I told him about the voice, remarking that this kind of thing had simply never happened to me before, and I didn't expect it to happen again in the future, and I hadn't the slightest idea what it meant, but it was a powerful experience, and I was deeply impressed.

Shura didn't comment on what I gave him of the voice's message, but after a moment's silence he said, very quietly, "Thank you for telling me about it. I can't offer any explanations, of course, any more than you can. We'll just have to wait and see."

I said, "I'm of course taking into account all the usual causes of such an experience, like stress and escape from this and that, et cetera, but there it is. As you say, the rest is waiting to see whether it turns out to be what it seemed or not."

"What it seemed?" Shura sounded confused.

"Oh, you know — like an ESP thing; something like that. Voice from the future or from the cosmos — *whatever*" I ended up with a raspy impatience, and told him to go to sleep and forget all about it. I'd had a compulsion to tell him, I had given in to it, and that was that, so "Goodnight and sleep tight and make sure all those various whatchamacallits don't bite."

He chuckled and wished me good dreams, then he thanked me again.

When I'd put the phone down, my Observer shook its head disapprovingly, but I knew I'd done what I was supposed to do and there was no point in questioning it.

During the night, I dreamed I was housekeeping a mountain highway, cliffs on one side of me and a sheer drop on the other. It was my job to fit a wide red carpet exactly and properly to the road so that trucks coming around the blind corner wouldn't skid or be off balance. I felt very cheerful.

## CHAPTER 32. TRANSITION

It was Thursday evening when Shura phoned me. His voice was strained. He told me that the night before, not having heard from Ursula about what plane she was going to be on, or what time she would arrive, he had phoned Germany.

"What happened?"

"Dolph answered the phone," said Shura, "Nice and friendly, as usual. He told me that Ursula left a message for me. The message was that she had gone to a retreat of some kind to think out some conflicts, and that she would be in touch with me when she returned."

"Oh, Lord," I breathed. No plane. No suitcases. Not this Thursday, anyway.

"I asked Dolph if he had any idea when she would be returning, and he said — very sympathetically — that he didn't think she'd be away for more than a few days, although he couldn't be absolutely sure, of course."

"Oh, boy."

"Yeah. Oh boy."

"But she sent her books, Shura!"

He said, deadly quiet, "Did she?"

"Oh — I see what you mean. We only have her word for that. No trunk has actually arrived yet."

"Precisely."

I thought back to the Voice of Authority that had broken up my rage-fest, two nights earlier.

*Thank you for that message, that warning, thank you, Whoever you are. Thanks for making me wait. If I'd gone with my anger and sent those notes, I'd be strangling myself right now. Probably would have lost him.*

I asked, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

Shura sighed, then after a little silence he said, "It's just good knowing you're there. Thank you for being there for me to talk to, my friend. I

simply don't know what's going on, what's going to happen next; I don't know what she intends, what she wants, and why did she just leave me dangling all these days, waiting? Why couldn't she have phoned me herself? Leaving me in silence, waiting for word, waiting to find out which plane — I don't understand somebody doing that to the person they love."

"Neither do I," I said, but softly. I didn't want to put him in the position of having to defend Ursula.

"You see," he said, "With that silence just at the time I should have been hearing from her about travel details, you can imagine what I thought must have happened!"

"Oh, of course," I said, suddenly remembering, "You thought maybe murder and suicide."

"I was beginning to be really terrified; I was talking myself into all sorts of ghastly scenarios. I was so convinced that something was horribly wrong, I couldn't believe I was hearing Dolph's voice on the phone for the first second. I mean, he was not only alive and answering the phone, he was sounding perfectly normal. I just couldn't take it in for a moment, then I felt this tremendous relief, because I knew he couldn't sound that way if there had been some kind of — you know — and then I had one of those milliseconds of wondering if — if I was completely crazy and I'd imagined this entire love affair, the whole thing. Utter disorientation."

"Yes. I know what you mean. Reality gone up-side-down."

"And now," he said, his voice sounding less strained, "I think I'm going to have the rest of my bottle of Burgundy and go to bed as bombed as I can manage, and get some sleep."

"This all happened last night?"

"Yes, last night. I've been trying to come to grips with it all day. Didn't sleep much after the call. Have to catch up tonight."

"My dear Shura," I said softly, "I'm with you, I'm here for you in whatever way you need me; you know that. Sleep as well as you can and let me know what's happening when you find out."

"Thank you, Alice," he said, his voice coming a bit more to life, "I'll let you know everything I know as soon as I know it. You deserve that."

"Yes," I agreed, "I bloody well do."

"Oh, by the way," he said, "Just a closing thought I'll share with you. I can't help feeling that Ursula was there all the time, listening to Dolph telling me she'd gone to think things over in a monastery. Just standing quietly there, you know?"

"That's a rather grim thought," I said, thinking that he'd probably hit the nail on the head.

"Yes, it is, rather."

I murmured, "Get some sleep, honey."

I put the phone down and sat there, trying to think, but all that came to mind was a profoundly silly question that skittered through my head and out the other side.

*He said a monastery. Do monasteries take ladies? Or does it have to be a nunnery? Never mind. Never mind.*

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Shura called me every evening while he waited for further word from Ursula, reporting in, his voice flat, depressed. I gave out as much warmth as I could over the phone, knowing that he was going into a grieving state and that he wouldn't register much of what I said, only the tone of voice.

I said nothing about coming out to the Farm. I realized that the last thing I should do now was push myself on him. I was not a substitute for Ursula, didn't intend to be a fill-in for Ursula, and whatever place I was to have in his life — if at all — it would have to be a completely different one than it had been. And it might not turn out that way at all. Ursula could phone at any moment and say that she was coming, she was over her cold feet, she was ready and she would be on plane this and flight that. It could still happen.

*But the Tuesday Night Voice didn't say, "temporary discomfort." It said Shura would be in pain and in need of me. So far, it's been right.*

I sat down at my typewriter on Sunday night after the children had gone to bed, and wrote my second and final letter to the German Lady.

*This one, she won't send back to Shura.*

Ursula:

This will be the last time I write to you, and I do so more as an exercise in futile anger than in the hope that it will accomplish anything worthwhile, because you seem to live in a world that is not understandable to me, and I cannot identify with what you feel and do, although I have tried to do just that for more than six months.

You have been portrayed to me by Shura as a highly intelligent, sensitive, deeply feeling and responsible woman; a woman who opened the long-closed doors inside him and showed him how to experience emotions he had buried for most of his adult life. You were the magic, beautiful and loving person who was his refuge, his other self, his future.

For a long time I believed this to be the true picture, even allowing for his obvious tendency to see everything about you through the well known rose-colored glasses. I did have a hint of

something else, from someone close to Shura who loves him dearly and wants to see him happy — a perceptive and wise person who said, with what now appears to be extraordinary insight, "Ursula needs to be wanted and adored, but she needs this from more than one man. She is compelled to fulfill a man's fantasy, to become his ideal, his inspiration. She is a classic anima woman, using Jung's term, and completely unconscious of her own drives and motivations. I believe she is not capable of really giving herself — neither to her husband, nor to anyone else. She cannot commit herself emotionally. And I'm very much afraid of what she will do to Shura — perhaps in a week, perhaps in a year. She will not stay with him, after the first excitement wears off. And he will be desperately hurt."

The friend had not said this to Shura, since he knew it would not be believed, and it could put a strain on a friendship that means a great deal to him. But he did say it to me.

Yet, through Shura I learned a little of your search for yourself, your deep need not to hurt, your apparent determination to bring the relationship with your husband to a graceful close, with kindness and caring, so that you would leave no emotional loose ends. I learned of your great love for Shura, your longing to be with him. I believed it for a long time.

I understood your apparent struggle to find a good way to resolve your question of what to do about these two men in your life. That struggle, that search, obviously had to have an end, a final answer.

The only answer you seemed to come up with was the temporary (and obviously exciting) one of visits across the ocean to the adoring White Knight in California — for a week or so — until the pull of the adoring husband took you back to Germany. Not long enough for the honeymoon to be over, for the reality of septic tanks and dry yellow hills and ironic, angry moods and impatience and head colds and being too tired to make love — not long enough for any of that to assert itself and have to be lived with and dealt with. Just long enough to confirm the adoration and the yearning, to warm yourself in the sexual fire and the open loving made even more open and spiritual by the chemicals. A good vacation for your body and soul.

He was yours, all yours, and he would wait. You knew he loved deeply and would not easily be turned from you. You knew your own beauty and intelligence and ability to make contact with that soul-love — you knew it well enough to assume that he would stay yours until you chose to come for longer, if you wanted to.

And there, in your home, was the other man who yearned and wanted and needed. An embarrassment of riches for any woman.

It becomes even more tempting as one approaches 40, to exercise that kind of power, to know that one can attract, hold, and keep an interesting and desirable man. It's a temptation that one learns — or should learn — to relinquish. That power to seduce carries with it a great deal of excitement. A woman with intelligence and insight feels out the power and recognizes it as a potential danger to herself and to the men who fall in love with her. She learns to be careful of opening up what she will not assuredly nurture. The Buddhists say that, if you save a human being from death, you are forever responsible for the rest of that person's life. That doesn't mean you shouldn't save someone from death; it does mean that you should be aware of your actions and their consequences. In opening up a person's soul, you have the same obligation to be aware of what you're doing, to be careful, and to accept responsibility.

Seeing Shura's love and need and anxiety, I sent you, some time ago, a letter which was very hard to write. There have been many aspects of my love for Shura about which I had no choice — I could not choose to have him love differently; I could not decide how his relationship with you would go. I did, however, have a choice about that letter. And, to ease your mind and heart, I gave you the kind of assurance that every woman truly in love wants and certainly never — almost never — gets from her rival. I told you that the man I love loves you. Who could have asked for more, Ursula?

What you have done since, and most especially what you have done during the past two weeks, has made it impossible for me to see you through Shura's eyes any longer. I believe in your intelligence; I do not believe in your insight. I believe in your need for love; I do not believe in your capacity for real and deep, lifelong loving. I can believe in your agony and conflict in making these choices about your husband and your lover, but I'm no longer sure that it is much more than a need for drama — emotional drama — in your life. It keeps things exciting, and when you can live the fantasy through letters and phone calls, the drama and sparkle of your life is maintained. It continues to feed you. And, most important of all, Ursula is kept assured of her own desirability.

As I write this, you may indeed be on your way to Shura. Your motives may or may not be what I think they are — most probably you are quite unconscious of them yourself — but I have

no faith that you come to him with the kind of changes inside you that he has hoped for, and is still hoping for. I do not think you are capable of those changes or that kind of maturing. And I can do nothing about it — I can only wish that you might be able to understand and acknowledge your deepest needs as they really are and — understanding them — free Shura.

I wish you well, Ursula. But I love the man who loves you. And I wish to see him loved as he is capable of loving, for the rest of his life.

Goodbye.  
Alice Parr

I wouldn't tell Shura about the letter, I thought. Perhaps some day, but not yet. It would serve no purpose. I mailed it the next morning, on my way to work.

I didn't ask to see him the next weekend, either, and he didn't invite me to come out to the Farm. It was his dark night of the soul, and he was going to go through it by himself, as I would have, in his place.

Sunday, on the phone, he let the bitterness come through. He said, "I don't think I'm going to allow that kind of thing to happen to me again. I'm never going to let myself be that vulnerable again. Nothing is worth this degree of pain. Nothing and no one."

I scanned my innards for the right words and the right tone. What rose up inside me came out of my mouth immediately, "Don't be silly, Shura. That's just the pain talking, and you know damned well you're not going to wall yourself off from life because of this one betrayal. It hurts and it doesn't help to be mad at yourself for having trusted, but it's not as if you've committed a crime; you fell in love, and trust is one of the things that goes along with falling in love, if you're a healthy human being."

"I don't know. I keep wondering how a person of my supposed intelligence could have failed to see — "

"Shura," I said urgently, softly, "You're human. You were in love. It's a strange sickness, and it alters perceptions a lot more effectively than psychedelics. It just hadn't happened to you before, from what you've told me. It's happened to most people at least once — being in love and a bit blinded — and they all tend to make the same mistakes. It's got nothing to do with logic or intelligence."

"You're probably right, but at the moment I seem to be catching up with everything I failed to look at before. I'm seeing all the messages she kept sending and I kept overlooking. I was like a young boy, fixated, able to see and hear only what I wanted to. What idiocy!"

For the first time it occurred to me that he'd probably had quite a bit of

wine already this evening; I had just noticed a hint of slurring in his voice.

*Oh, hell. I should be there.*

I said softly, "Wish I were with you, dear. It's up to you, of course, when I come out there. But please feel my warmth around you. You're not alone in this, remember."

"Thank you, my little friend. I've got to get through this mourning period by myself, first. Before I ask you to come out here again."

"After all, Shura," I said, reluctantly, "There's a real possibility that she actually is working through some very hard problems and that she still could be coming out to be with you, isn't there?"

"No," he said, his voice suddenly harsh, "No, there is no such possibility. It's been quite clear to me for several days now that it's over. She simply didn't know how to bring it to the right sort of happy-ever-after conclusion. I think she got herself stuck and had to ask Dolph to help her get out of the trap she'd woven for herself. She plays fantasy games, Alice. I think she truly believes them herself, for a while, at least. I believe she and I could have gone on forever with what she essentially saw as a spiritual love-affair, if only Helen hadn't died. That made it a different ball-game, and she just didn't know how to enjoy all the goodies she could have with me without getting deeper and deeper into a commitment she had no desire for. She never intended to leave Dolph. It's a strange marriage; about that, I was right. About all the rest, I was one more blind, love-sick fool."

*Oh, Jesus Aitch. That's maybe being a bit too hard on the girl. I wonder, though. Didn't Ben say something about her having let slip to him, when she was on the psychedelics, that she'd had problems in other affairs with married men?*

"Shura," I asked, "This is just an off-the-wall question, but do you have any way of knowing whether she's ever done this with anyone else — I mean, has she ever had an affair before you — during her marriage — that you know of?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "She made no secret of it. There were other involvements; there was another professor, in Germany, just before she met me. She described it as a very brief episode, which she brought to an end because he was married and she didn't want to be responsible for damaging a marriage. But all I know is her version of events, of course. I don't know details; I didn't ask for any. She swore to me she had never been in love before the way she was — ." I heard a sharp intake of breath, and said nothing. After a moment, he continued, his voice under control, "So the answer to your question is yes. I was not the first. I suspect I will not be the last."

When he'd said goodnight, I sat by the phone, thinking intently. It was, in a way, like discovering I'd been holding my breath for days without knowing it. I had been supposing that Ursula could well change her

mind and decide to come to California — for whatever period of time — and that Shura would not be able to resist one more meeting. I hadn't expected the brutally realistic view he'd presented. It meant that he really was through, that she could not manipulate him any further. It meant a lot of things.

The following evening, Shura phoned me and his voice was cool. He said, "I hope you'll understand, I have a lot of thinking to do. I might not be in touch as much as I have been, for a while. Please be patient. I'll get back to you and tell you what decisions I've come to, if I come to any at all. But for a while, I'm probably going to have to isolate myself until I work things through."

It was like a ball of ice hitting the inside of my stomach, and my guard clanged up, loudly and hard. I said, "I understand very well, my dear. If you and I have any future together, it's going to have to be on a completely different basis, needless to say, and that means thinking a lot of things through, for both of us."

*So, nyah to you too, kid! I'm not going to beg, you know. Not any more. No more Mrs. Goody-goody for this baby. You either need me and really love me, or at least see the possibility of having those feelings for me, or I'm lost to you. No more second-best, ever, ever. That would be worse than never seeing you again. My gut doesn't believe that, but it's true.*

It was the beginning of a different kind of agony, and it lasted every inch of three weeks.

Shura didn't phone at all, the first week. I went to work and told my children what was going on — once — then didn't refer to it again, because there was nothing to say until the man I loved made up his mind what he was going to do with his life and with me.

In the early part of the second week, he phoned to share the letter he'd just received from Ursula. He sounded fond and warm, with only the slightest hint of withholding, all of which I read as meaning he hadn't decided whatever he had to decide yet.

He read the letter perfectly straight, from beginning to end, without comment..

Dearest, dearest Shura,

A window has widely opened to you, a soul-window, a love-window, of graceful being — being together. A common space of breathing, of light touch, of inner smile. I could let these hours pass without telling you, and then you would never know what I am feeling — you would have only your own experience.

Or I could share this with you.  
That is what I am doing.

A space we are in, you and I, a space beyond geographical location, beyond events, developments, desires, longings, doubts, griefs, it is a space of love. Love and the melting frontiers of self-protection. A touch of each others hands, eyes — a common aura that surrounds us.

Yes, I feel it again, this aura. A total yes to whatever is and will be.

I feel light in this benign space. I have let go of what we were, you and I, and I have experienced, over and over again, what we truly *are*, forever and ever.

I do not always succeed in letting go, and my heavy dreams of the last weeks and nights are revealing to me how much I am still attached — to your personality, to our plans, to the farm. That specific place on this globe must have penetrated into deep levels in me; I am bound to each hill, tree, grass, to each corner in the rooms, each view, to everything existing there. It is all strongly integrated into my awareness and memory. I have lived there and, at least in extensive dreams, I am still there. I have visions of the changes made around you, in materialistic things as well as in spirits. I see it for hours and hours. If only I could paint well enough, I could show you what I see!

Your lab especially appears very often, but now so sterile! Everything stored away, well ordered, no flair anymore. This certainly cannot be true. Ah, the strange realms of the mind!

Let me tell you openly what I had only wanted to tell you in a very private moment. This moment is private enough and it flows out of me:

In a past life, about 2,000 years ago, you took a long knife and cut my throat, took my life, murdered me, in the desert! You were the chief of our tribe, and I was a young girl, and you killed me! The why's are irrelevant. I have seen this over and over, and others who lived with us in that time have come to me in this life and warned me to be aware of this old karmic connection.

We were, I think, of a nomad people, in North Afrika, when this happened so long ago.

Search into our individual past is only meaningful because it brings light into our present problems, constellations, traumas, etc. I do not see any merit to dig deeper. Either it reveals by itself, or it does not. Therefore, my only reason for mentioning these "shadows of the past" to you is to help us understand the present situation.

In this moment of open love, you might be able to believe what I say to you, that I do not have *any* misgiving or second

thoughts about emotional involvements with you because of this vision of what happened so long ago.

No, my only concern is, and this is very real to me, to free myself and to give you the possibility of freeing yourself, from these old, old bonds of emotional slavery which must not be repeated in this life. In this life, through our deep love, we have the real chance of changing this by bringing it out into the open. We have broken a karmic consequence and do no longer have to blindly bear the burdens of the past life and tragedy.

I am leaving Dolph and I will go to a place to begin a new life with myself. I do not think I will marry again. I must seek alone my true path of the soul.

I love you very deeply and I go to live my own life, of which you are a wonderful spiritual part. Maybe it will come that you will be a material part as well. But now you must live the present as completely as you can.

Shura, my dearest one, I want you to be free as a bird. Unfold your wings and leave all pain behind you, all possible accumulated guilt, all disquietness, all sorrows. Be free, and newly born, and walk into sunrise!!!!

Fly and be!  
Ursula

Shura added, "By the way, in the margin was a little note in red ink which said 'Please read only when you are alone!'"

I laughed and laughed and kept on laughing. It was so good, that tumbling release of pent-up feelings; I hadn't laughed like that in a long time. For the moment, I didn't care whether Shura liked it or not, I just let it take me. When I had control again, I said weakly into the phone, "I'm sorry. That may not have been the most appropriate response, but it was genuine. I hope I didn't hurt your feelings."

"Noooo," came his voice, elaborately sarcastic, "Do go ahead, don't mind me. Feel free to express yourself!"

I burst into laughter again, and my ear, squeezed to the phone, picked up what might have been an aborted chuckle.

"Okay, okay. I'll behave," I said, finally.

"I just thought you'd want to know," said Shura, "As soon as I heard from the lady."

"Yes, thank you very much, very much."

"How are you?" The tone was not as warm as I might have wished; he was still withdrawn.

"I'm fine, thank you. As fine as can be expected, considering all the

strange things that are going on in my life, like waiting to hear what Dr. Alexander Borodin has decided he's going to do with his future, if that's what you're busy deciding, and trying to take care of my wonderful children — who most of the time are probably taking better care of me than I am of them — and keeping my mind on medical reports eight hours a day; you know — all that sort of thing."

"How are the children?"

"They're fine, except for Brian, who's still getting over a nasty head-cold."

"Please say hello to them from me?" A shade more warmth, this time.

I replied that I certainly would, and we said goodnight.

*All right. He had already closed off Ursula; he's been going through separation and grieving, and now this letter from her completes it. She loves him in spirit and will always love him in spirit — that's her message. The old murder in the desert may be a genuine memory of a past life — who knows? — I don't think she could have written all that, the way she did, unless she were convinced it was true. And now, when she's faced with having to make a final decision, that so-called memory becomes the basis of the resolve to stay apart from him, in body, while still, of course, being tied to him on the soul level. If it weren't so ironic, so hilariously funny, it would be — what? — almost sweet, like a child creating her own fairy tale to help explain to herself what's going on and what she should do.*

*Shura guessed, and he's probably right, that she completely believes what she says when she says it; she probably believed, when she was with him on the Farm, that she was his true love and he was hers, and that she was really going to leave Dolph and come to live here happily ever after. Then, when she got home, she was back to the other reality of being Dolph's wife, and the Farm and Shura faded, became unreal. What incredible unconsciousness! And what damage a person like that can do without ever intending it.*

I remembered the remark about Shura's laboratory — her vision of it being orderly, neat, all sterile. What had she said? "No flair anymore?" Of course. She meant, "Without my presence, there will be no magic in your life. Whoever this other woman is, she will undoubtedly bring organization and neatness, and she will suppress your genius, your sparkle, your imagination, your sense of excitement and wonder. Only in your thoughts of me, only in your soul-tie to me, will you keep your sense of the fantastic."

I laughed again, thinking of the lab under the trees, old leaves and spiderwebs rampant within its walls, the very air full of energy. Magic in every dusty corner.

*No, lady. If he asks me to come back into his life, it certainly won't be because I bring order and neatness. It'll be because I bring love — the kind that stays and puts down roots — and because I share the adventuring and the excitement.*

I remembered the words about her soul being connected to everything,

every little place, on the Farm. What she was saying, of course, was, "I will always be there, I will always be with you. No other woman can take my place."

I told the kids about Ursula's letter. Ann said, "Well, I guess your Voice from Outer Space knew what it was talking about!"

I said, "Yeah, certainly looks that way! But it doesn't change the fact that Shura's still got a decision to make about the rest of his life, right now, and there's no guarantee that he'll want to be with me."

Their faces showed confusion and something like embarrassment. I realized they didn't know how to deal with the possibility that their mother might be unwanted or rejected by a person she loved, now that the rival had withdrawn from the field.

I tried to put it in perspective, "Sometimes when you go through a miserable thing like this, you can sort of get allergic to everyone connected with it; you don't want to be around people who remind you of what you went through — at least for a while. Besides, as I told you, Shura and I can't go back to the way things were before, and I don't know how it's going to come out. It's up to him. I can't do anything but wait 'til he works it through. But," I concluded with a grin for all of them, "At least The Lady from Germany is out of the picture, thank heaven!"

They cheered and Wendy danced around the couch to celebrate.

Ursula — as we all discovered much later — had not gone into either a monastery or a nunnery, and she didn't leave Dolph. Shura received a happy announcement, about a year later, of the birth of their first child, a girl, who weighed exactly seven pounds and looked just like her mother.

## CHAPTER 33. RESOLUTION

By the end of the second week, Shura hadn't called and I was feeling grim. I kept my emotions repressed, on hold, but underneath I was sometimes aware of terror, a certainty that I was not worthy, not good enough, not sufficient in this or adequate in that. It was my old program, and the silence from Shura triggered the worst of the familiar recording, and it played quietly underneath everything I consciously felt and thought. And, to make matters worse, in response to the negativity, some part of me that was concerned only with my own survival was getting seriously angry. When I took a chance and looked deep inside, I saw a dark canvas like a Clyfford Still painting, split halfway down from the top by a thin sliver of red hate. I recognized the feelings and the images as defensive and self-protective and maintained my silence and my dignity.

I took the children to a movie once, and talked to them in the evenings about what was happening at school, spending more time on details than I usually did, immersing myself in what they could tell me of their worlds. They were kind to me and cooperated, telling me stories and describing incidents.

When they went across the street for the weekend, I dressed up and packed my portable magnetic chessboard and went to a Mensa party, intending to get reasonably potted on my own vodka in cranberry juice, but couldn't bring myself to drink very much. After listening for an hour to a long story of misery from a recently divorced man, I managed to get a chess game going, but my opponent was too drunk to keep his mind on the game. Finally, I gave up and drove home, too tired to think or care about anything but sleep.

At work, I typed automatically and began to seriously consider looking for another job, because I knew that if I had to face life and work without Shura — if that's the way things were going to turn out — I had better find a job which threatened me with a somewhat less early death

than this one did.

By the time the phone call came, on Thursday of the third week, I had stopped letting myself feel very much at all. I could be affectionate with the children, and only my interactions with them convinced me that I hadn't completely turned to granite. I had become very silent at work, keeping to myself at coffee-breaks and lunch because I couldn't find the energy necessary to maintain the appearance of ease and normalcy.

Underneath, the anger was no longer in hiding. It was an old friend, by now, a quiet bed of hot coals waiting beneath the dark crust of numbness and non-responsiveness that had formed during the past weeks.

Now, on the phone, Shura's voice was carefully casual as he asked me how I would feel about coming out the following weekend.

I cleared my throat against a choking mass of conflicting feelings and thoughts, and said, "That's a nice idea. When would be a good time for me to be there?"

"Oh, how about Friday after work? Would that be all right for you?"

"Fine," I said, aware that my voice was a bit dull and not knowing how to bring life into it without letting the furies break through; dull it would have to stay, for the moment.

"I need to ask you," I said, carefully, "How long are you inviting me for? Since this is a new chapter, I gather, one doesn't want to — ah — take anything for granted." It was meant to be funny, but somehow it didn't sound funny at all. What I heard in my own voice, with a tinge of helpless fear, was sarcasm. I desperately hoped Shura wouldn't catch it.

"How about staying through Sunday? Does that appeal to you?"

This time I forced lightness, "It does, indeed, thank you. I'll see you Friday evening."

When I had hung up the phone, I sat and cried, grateful that the children were already in bed. I cried rage and love and relief and fear and murder and love again. Then I went to bed.

It was during the drive out to the Farm, Friday evening, that I began to understand the possible reason for the silence, the coolness, all the signs of distancing, which had resulted in the flaring hurt and humiliation I'd been suppressing during the past endless days.

*He's being a bastard, putting me through a mini-version of what Ursula put him through, all the lack of contact, dangling me on a string, and it's all because he believes — whether he's aware of it or not — that being with me is inevitable. He's feeling trapped in the inevitability of it, at this point, instead of taking pleasure in what it could mean. That's why the silence, letting me wonder if he considers me worth any more of his bloody time. He's feeling he really has no choice, and he's angry. Maybe it's a kind of "Either I replace Ursula with Alice, or I go the hermit route and shut out everyone." Is that what he's fighting? And if it is, what the hell can I do about it? I'm through being the blasted saint and martyr. I'm not*

*going to make it easy for him.*

I was still numb, and my Observer said that was okay. Numbness is quite understandable at the moment, it said, and probably safer than the alternatives.

Shura met me at my car, as he usually did. He stood there, as I got out with my shopping bag full of clothes and other things I needed for a weekend. Neither of us made much of an attempt to smile, and when he greeted me it was without the usual enveloping hug and kiss on the mouth. His hands went to my face and he touched his forehead to mine, and I thought briefly that the gesture was more one of commiseration than anything else, and that it seemed quite appropriate.

When I was inside and had dumped my bag on the floor next to the couch, I looked around at the familiar books and fireplace and the hazy bulk of Diablo through the windows. It was all so much a part of me, by now — this room, this whole house — so permeated with memories of the two of us; yet, in that moment, it looked alien, strange. It took me a few minutes to realize that the strangeness was my own fear reflected back to me from everything I looked at. As I was maintaining distance from my own emotions, so I perceived myself as distant from the piano, the rugs, the couch, all the old friends — or what had been old friends. I was keeping locked up the pain, the bewilderment, the profound anger, and while all of it was wrapped safely and stored deep inside, I could not touch anything with my feelings.

Everything I saw around me spoke of memories, of the past, and I was stuck now in a place which was not the past, and not anywhere else either. I could not believe in a future with Shura, I dared not believe in it because such a belief would make me vulnerable to a degree I just couldn't risk. So I must not believe in a future with his house, his furniture, his cactus plants, or anything else I saw here. All of it might have to belong only to my past, and I dared not expect it to be otherwise.

He had invited me here, this weekend, and that could mean he wanted us to continue, but it could perfectly well be that his idea of the conditions under which we could continue — well, they might be conditions I could not agree to, conditions which would break what was left of my spirit and heart and belief in myself.

*If you won't put up with second-best, you may have to put up with nuthin' at all, kid, because he may not have anything but second-best to give you.*

We sat at the dining room table, looking at each other without letting ourselves see deeper than the surface. I could sense his wall as I knew my own.

*This is going to be one fun weekend, yeah.*

"I would like to make a suggestion which might help both of us," he said, leaning back in his chair, focusing his gaze on the edge of the carpet,

"If you're willing to go along with it, I'd like to do something with you that we haven't done before; I'd like to share with you about 100 micrograms of LSD. Most people have a lot of anxiety about LSD because of all the wild stuff in the papers they read in the '60's, and all the negative propaganda since then. I thought you might want to explore it yourself and make up your own mind. Unless you'd rather postpone it, which I would certainly understand?"

I looked at him and wondered for a moment if he had the slightest idea what kind of state I was in, and what a cauldron was simmering close to the surface. I looked at his body, leaning casually in the chair, and saw that the casualness was not real. When I let myself pick up his feelings, I knew that he too was tightened up and afraid, and that he didn't know how to let anything out without risking saying something wrong, or in the wrong way.

"Okay," I said, "How long does it last? I mean, will we be up most of the night?"

"Yes, probably," he said, and I caught a glimpse of blue eyes actually daring to look at me, "Is that all right? I don't have any plans for tomorrow morning, myself, and we can sleep in."

"Well, I'm willing to experience LSD, in fact I'm very pleased with the idea of finally meeting the dangerous enemy face to face, if you think it's a good idea — I mean, considering the fact that we're both in a strange sort of — well, state of mind, to say the least?"

*That's not the clearest sentence ever spoken.*

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I thought it might help us break through our various — whatever you'd call 'em — walls, barriers. I'm feeling very stuck right now, and I don't really know how to get unstuck, and it just could be a help. I thought perhaps you might be having the same kind of trouble, and if so, this might be an interesting way to loosen ourselves, help us say what we need to say."

*He's almost as anxious as I am. Why? It's all up to him; it's not up to me. He's the one who can decide everything. Maybe he just isn't certain of what he feels.*

"Sure," I said, "At least, it's not liable to be a dull evening."

"That," — he said directly to me with his first grin — "Is for sure."

As I took a bath, my thoughts were a confused mess. One thing returned to my mind several times, and that was the fact that Shura was proposing a new experience tonight, which meant that he was still teaching me, introducing me to something new, and that wasn't the kind of thing one did to a person one was intending to part company with.

*All right. That's not the worry. Of course he wants me around, if for nothing more than great love-making. But what if he decides to be a hermit, after all, except for an occasional weekend with me — or with some other woman, for that*

*matter — what do I say? I want to be part of his life forever, and I want to live with him the rest of his life and mine, and I don't want to be short-changed any more. And he may not feel he can give me anything close to what I want from him, and if he makes that clear — if that's what he tells me this weekend — what do I do? That's the Goddamned problem.*

In the kitchen, we stood facing each other, wearing our dressing gowns, as Shura explained, "The duration of this material is about six hours, give or take, depending on your sensitivity. The one thing really different from other psychedelics is the rapidity of the onset. Instead of waiting for 30 minutes or an hour, you'll find yourself feeling the effects very fast — usually within about 15 minutes. LSD is known as a 'pushy' material — you've probably heard me refer to that particular quality — and it's one of the complaints people have about it, even the people who love it; they say it tends to take over, to push you. In the higher dosage ranges, people who aren't used to it sometimes feel they have less control than they would like. It simply has to be learned, like all psychedelics. Once you're familiar with the quickness of it and realize you can control it whenever you decide you want to, there's no reason for anxiety. The scare stories have been mostly from naive people who took too high a dose the first time — "

"I've heard some pretty wild stories about first times, yes."

"— and the rest were cases of people who were fragile emotionally or mentally. If you're fragile, or ready to tip over, then anything can send you off center; LSD or falling in love or losing someone or having a big fight with your father."

"I suppose there's a hidden compliment in there somewhere," I said, smiling faintly, "At least I'll take it as such. You're assuming I'm not mentally fragile, right?"

"Oh," said Shura, his eyebrows shooting up, "Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, absolutely not! Certainly not! Rock solid, you are. Emotionally, of course, you're a quivering mess — "

I gasped, caught between shocked anger and a sudden desire to explode with laughter. Two months ago, I would have aimed a kick at his balls, but this was not two months ago. I returned my face to impassive as he continued, " — but your sanity is, without question, unshakeable."

I realized that he knew I was controlling myself, and I knew what he might not be that sure of, which was that I had excellent control and would not lose it easily, with or without LSD. Not unless I wanted to, and right now, I didn't want to.

After we drank the colorless liquid, which consisted mainly of distilled water with the tiny amount of LSD in it (Shura had explained that tap water contained chlorine which would kill LSD immediately, as would strong light), we sat in the living room, I on the couch as usual and he in his big armchair, and I listened to him talk about the past week.

"I told Ruth and George about Ursula's letter, and they asked me over there to dinner so we could discuss it. I read it to them, and they were completely bewildered. They didn't see the humor of it as you did, and they didn't try to dissect her motives. On the other hand, I think their real concern was to help me feel better, and I think they knew that attacking Ursula — blaming her for what she'd done — wasn't what I needed at that point."

"No, of course not."

"They just became family. Let me talk myself out and tucked me into bed when I'd drunk too much wine, and gave me a wonderful breakfast in the morning. I left there feeling a lot more solid. It was a great help."

I nodded, then raised my hand in the air, "Could I be feeling something already?"

Shura got up from his chair and went into the kitchen to look at the clock. He returned and said, "You certainly could."

"Well, I think I'm beginning to."

"How does it feel to you?"

I paid attention and chose my words carefully, "As if the cells of my body are trying to re-align themselves in a different way than usual."

"Comfortable or not comfortable?"

"Comfortable's the wrong word. Intriguing is the right word."

Shura laughed softly, "Sounds all right. Just let it happen; you'll get the hang of it in a while."

I looked around at the room and said, "There's a lot of color. It's more noticeable than usual — I mean, there are little prisms, rainbows, everywhere."

Shura nodded silently.

I looked out the windows at the twilight and continued, "I see what you mean by saying it's pushy. It does sort of press on you a bit. Maybe it's because the transition begins so soon. But it also gets very intense quickly, doesn't it? I mean, there's a certain sense of being on a roller-coaster ride."

Shura nodded again.

"Aside from that, it's pretty much familiar territory. So far."

"Would you like to repair to the warm bedroom with the music, or is it better for you to stay here?"

*Oh, my, how very carefully he said that!*

In answer, I rose and led the way through kitchen and dining room and down the hallway to the bedroom, the place of love and music. When I moved, I felt solidly connected with the physical world, yet there was still that feeling of being more a body of energy particles than of flesh and bone. It was quite pleasant, when I allowed myself to feel pleasantness, and the thought occurred to me as I pushed open the bedroom door that it

was time to stop worrying about keeping control or appearing in this light or that; it was time to just be who I was and let myself feel the emotions, including laughter, because to do otherwise was to be untrue to myself, manipulative of Shura, and wasteful of a possibly great experience.

We lay beside each other on the bed, Shura naked and I still in my dressing gown. When I closed my eyes, the inner world erupted into detailed imagery. Shura went up the radio dial and found Chopin, and when he turned back to me, I sat up and took off my gown. I saw behind closed eyelids a lovely scene. We — Shura and I — were looking down from an open balcony into a central courtyard. We were in a place that appeared to consist of balconies hung with baskets of flowers, storey upon storey, surrounding the courtyard below. Ivy plants rose from the edges of the garden and crept up the walls and columns. Looking down into the center of the round garden space, I saw a tiled platform and on it, a grand piano which was being played — Chopin's music, of course — by a young man in a tuxedo. I could see only the top of his brown hair and his moving hands.

When I heard Shura's gasp and the start of the shaking cry, I had a moment of startled anxiety, realizing that what we were doing, he and I, must be completely visible to anyone who might be standing on a balcony above ours, and that we could very well be in serious trouble if we made too much noise. The pianist might stop, and look to see what was happening up there above him. I thought of warning Shura not to yell, as he usually did, but before I could say the words, I realized that we were perfectly safe on the big bed, and that I had been letting the line between reality and fantasy blur. Shura howled, sitting up in bed, one hand clenched in my hair.

The pianist played on, undeterred, and in my place on the floor of the balcony, I giggled into Shura's belly and stroked his hip.

"For a moment there," I murmured, "I really did think we were going to frighten the horses."

"Horses?"

I reminded him of the famous saying of Mrs. Patrick Campbell, friend of George Bernard Shaw, who said that she didn't care what people did in making love just as long as they didn't do it in the street and frighten the horses.

"Oh."

I told him about my vision and he laughed, still a bit out of breath.

"Did you go with me on that one?" he asked, as he usually did.

I sat up and folded my legs, "To tell you the truth, I lost track because of my fascination with the fuzzing of lines between realities. I was thinking about how easy it is to get caught in that inner picture, and what fun it is, but how frightening it could be to somebody who'd never had a psy-

chedelic drug before and didn't know how to get back in touch with his normal, ordinary reality because he couldn't tell which one it was."

He said, "But you didn't stay fooled, did you? I mean, even a very naive person, if he finds himself seeing places and things with his eyes closed, knows at some level that he can open his eyes. Unless he's taken a real overdose, of course. To make sense of things with a heavy overdose, you have to have a good deal of experience, and even then it can be pretty hairy for a while."

I moved up and lay beside him. The long fingers began lightly stroking, and as I looked past the big head to the ceiling, I saw against the shadowed surface a multitude of tiny kaleidoscopes, moving, bumping into each other the way blood cells do under a microscope. I smiled, and when Shura's hand paused for a moment and his eyes opened wider in question, I explained what was happening all over the ceiling. He looked up, "Yes, it's pretty active, isn't it!"

The hand was exploring again. I thought of how well he knew my body, and then I heard him say, sounding slightly amused, "You know, I made a little experiment that might interest you. I asked Ruth and George this last week the same thing I'd asked the others in the group, over the past week or so, everyone except David. I asked them what they thought of my settling down to live with you. Every one of them, believe it or not, said something along the same lines: no, don't do it, beware of rebounds, I don't think she's the right woman for you, Shura. I can't remember one person saying anything positive about the idea; isn't that interesting, considering?"

I had gone rigid. My Observer commented that most people would respond negatively just because the question had been asked in the first place; if you have to ask, the answer is no.

I opened my mouth to say just that to him, reasonably, to explain quietly and rationally why all his friends had come up with negative responses, but suddenly — without any warning at all — something shattered and the red coals were on their way up the funnel. I was trying to focus through hot tears which were welling up and over and down and dripping off my chin. With no awareness of having moved, I found myself sitting upright on the bed, my hands clutching the blanket in front of me. My entire world had shrunk, within the space of a few seconds, to a dark purple-red tunnel which contained only pain. I was sobbing, shuddering with the force of the grief that was pulsing up from the bottom of the tunnel and scalding my eyes, then I felt bright orange knifing into the scene — anger — and the flow of energy changed. The sobs felt now as if they were grunting their way out, and I was dimly aware that my jaw hinge was tight. I lost sight and I could hear nothing but the sound of my own explosion. I seemed to be screaming through clenched teeth, and it

was all making a lot of noise.

The Observer, almost lost in the chaos, wondered with a touch of amusement whether the dear man had by any chance let loose a somewhat larger tiger than he'd expected to have to deal with.

Shura waited quietly until the storm had begun to subside. I was on my stomach, at that point, vaguely aware of having spit out words like "cruel," "sadistic," and "insufferable;" there was an echo of "appalling," and even "stupid." I lay face down on a wet pillow and felt the tide slowing. The color of it was no longer purple-red or orange or yellow or black; the only colors I could feel were gentle blue and violet, with a edging of rose. I was washed clean of emotions, peaceful.

I lifted myself up and turned around, slowly, until I was lying on my back again. I stared up at the ceiling, knowing that a glass wall was between me and Shura, and that the wall was my friend and would stay there unless he came up with an awfully good reason for it to come down. The best thing was, I realized with a feeling that was almost pleasure, that I wasn't hurting any more. For the moment, at least, I didn't care. In the center of my chest there was a pond of blue water, and I could float contentedly in it for a long, long time, until everything healed.

Shura's voice came in quietly from my right, from the other side of the glass wall, "I guess I didn't say what I meant to say, or I said it in the wrong sequence, or something like that. You see, as I told you, it was a sort of experiment, asking them. I'll admit it wasn't the nicest thing to try with old friends, but I made a bet with myself, a while ago, that everyone in that group — again, I didn't ask David the idiotic question, but he was the only exception — I made a bet that they would all warn me against deciding to throw my lot, as the saying goes, in with you. I made the bet because I was pretty sure I knew why they'd give me negative responses, and I thought, when I told you, that you'd understand immediately, too. It was a stupid, bitter sort of joke and it was made by the less admirable side of myself — you know, the part of me that rather enjoys seeing the worst expectations come true?"

I heard him, but nothing inside me was touched. I had no reason to speak.

Shura continued, "I was certain that every one I asked would have some degree of worry about a woman — even one they knew and liked — becoming so close to me that she might influence my relationships with them. I knew that they'd always been afraid Ursula would do that, you know, but I never asked them what they thought about her; I never gave them a chance to say no, and they knew better than to try to influence me against her. They were always uneasy about her. I knew that. So this time, just for the fun of proving myself right, I thought I'd give them a chance to have some sort of input. I asked them, individually, what they

thought of my settling down with you.

"I guessed that they'd all say don't do it, because every one of them is afraid you'd change things in some way they couldn't foresee. They don't want me to need them less, to spend less time with them. It was a stupid experiment, and all it did was confirm what I already suspected."

I looked at him and spoke in what sounded to my Observer like a steady, reasonable voice, "Didn't it occur to you that the very fact that you asked them meant that the answer had to be no? I would have said no, myself. The rule with loving somebody is: if you have to ask your friends, you're not sure, and if you're not sure, it isn't real love. Or something like that."

"Yes," he said, "I suppose that's true. I think it's also true that they're jealous of anyone who gets closer to me than they are."

"Okay. Maybe so. It was a cruel experiment, as you admit yourself. And what did you expect me to do when you told me — laugh?"

"I thought you might see the humor of it, yes."

"Uh-uh, no humor. Not funny."

"So I have learned. I'm sorry, Alice."

He held my head to his chest, and then he said, "Look, there's no use apologizing, is there? I don't want to waste time doing that. So why don't I just ask you: what do you think of the idea of quitting your job and moving out here with me?"

"Jesus!" I muttered.

"You called?" he replied.

I laughed despite myself, and muttered into his ribs, "You idiot!"

"Well, how about it?"

In reply, I put my arms around his neck and watched the glass wall quietly crumble into diamond dust.

"Are you sure?" I whispered.

"Waddya mean, am I sure! I'm not sure of anything! I'm probably a complete and utter fool and this is probably the path to total disaster! Of course, I'm not sure! But I want you to live with me, because this weekend off and on stuff is ridiculous, and besides, you're not a bad kid, everything considered, and I probably could do a lot worse!"

I hit his chest with my fists and he grabbed my wrists and, when I started crying again, he hissed, "Stop that or I'll throw ya across the room!"

I laughed and sobbed, and he repeated the threat in what was probably meant to be a Chicago gangster accent, until I finally lay back on my pillow, face wet, gasping with laughter, and yelled, "All right, all right, all right!"

Suddenly I thought of something — something too important to leave for later. I had to have the answer immediately, if I was to believe all this. I sat up, looked intently at Shura, and asked him, "Does this mean we can

do it in the missionary position, now?"

He stared at me, "Now? I'm afraid I might not be up to it, right now. Could you possibly consider waiting until tomorrow morning? I'm not 18 any more, you know; it takes me a few hours to recover!"

I shoved him back onto the bed, sputtering, "I meant from now *on*, you louse! Not now immediately!"

He grinned, and I realized he'd understood all along.

"Sure," he said, "If you insist."

"Just occasionally," I said, "Just to make sure we don't forget how to do it the classic, old-fashioned way."

"I'm trying to remember," grunted Shura, "But I think it goes something like this, right?" He made a circle with his left hand and poked in and out of it with the right index finger, in the gesture understood around the world.

I nodded vehemently, giggling, "Uh-huh, that's it!"

*Nothing reserved any more for Ursula. Thank you, thank you.*

I hiccuped and laughed, and hiccuped again. The hiccups were silver-colored spikes against the rainbowed ceiling.

## CHAPTER 34. THE FOURTH

On the 4th of July, 1981, in response to approximately 80 invitations to a picnic at the Farm, 67 people arrived. They brought their own meat for the barbecue and several of them brought portable barbecues and some extra bags of charcoal. They came in short pants and slacks and halter tops, carrying hot dogs, hamburger meat, chicken, potato salad, green salad, raw vegetables, cake and jello and ice cream.

It was a hot day and there were people everywhere I looked. I knew there had never before been a gathering this large on the Farm. Most of them knew each other, but there was an occasional one who had to be introduced, someone who was from outside what we called the network; these included a few old friends of mine and two women from the hospital where I had worked the year before.

Walter had been invited, along with the children, who now lived with him. During the past year, Shura and Walter had become comfortable with each other, and all of us got together for a pot-luck dinner with friends every couple of weeks, at Walter's house in Marin, as a way of keeping family ties strong.

Ruth remarked to me, in some surprise, when we found ourselves occupying the same corner of the living room for a moment, "I can't believe Shura actually invited such a crowd! I've never known him to have more than twelve people at a time out here!"

I told her that it was my idea, and he'd gone along with it just this once. "I thought it would be really fun to ask all our friends to a barbecue picnic, you know? He said okay, as long as it was a one-time-only experiment."

Ruth laughed, "Amazing! Never thought I'd see the day," she beamed at me, "And wasn't it wonderful that Dante and Ginger happened to be out here just for these few days?"

Dante and Ginger had called Ruth and George a couple of weeks ago

and asked if they could stay with them, explaining that they were visiting relatives in the area and had heard that we were giving a picnic, so why didn't they all go to the Farm together? Ruth and George were delighted and offered their spare bedroom.

Of all the research group, only these two — Dante and Ginger — knew our plans. Because they lived so far from us, they could not have been persuaded to make the journey just for a 4th of July barbecue, and we realized we'd have to tell them, swearing them to secrecy.

The only others who knew what was going on were Shura's son Theo, my four children, and a very good friend of Shura's, Paul Freye, of the Federal Narcotics Lab, who was going to act today in his capacity as a minister of the Eternal Life Church.

I had come to feel strong affection for Paul. He was highly intelligent, thoughtful, and had an appallingly unsubtle sense of humor which Shura happily shared, usually over a bottle of red wine on occasional Sundays.

In the back of the house there was a grassy area below the level of the path. It measured about 20 feet at its widest, and it gradually narrowed to five feet across. It was shaded by trees and relatively cool in the summer. We had laid out old Persian rugs and some big floor pillows, and when people asked what all that was for, we explained that later in the afternoon there would be chamber music. Everyone was very polite, said How nice! and turned back to their conversations.

At 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon, I gathered my children and gave them their orders, and while they scattered over the Farm, rounding up the guests for a special program to be presented in back of the house — in some cases meeting with blank stares and in others, frank resistance, which had been anticipated — Shura and I locked ourselves into our bedroom and changed our clothes.

I put on a filmy Indian print dress of rose, gold and brown, made of sheer cotton over a pink slip, floor length; there were dusty pink dance slippers on my feet. Shura wore sandy brown slacks and a new tweed jacket and a tie. We laughed at ourselves in the mirror, at the sweat trickling down our faces, then kissed quickly and left the bedroom.

We waited at the back door until Brian ran up the stone steps from the place where the murmuring crowd of curious, half-annoyed guests had been politely bullied into sitting down. At his wave, we emerged and walked down the steps, hand in hand. To our right, under the trees, stood Paul, who now rang a big brass bell — a relic of Shura's days in the Navy — which had been hung from a sturdy tree branch.

There was a shocked silence as we walked in front of the guests, and turned to the rug-covered area in front of Paul Freye. He had in his hand the paper on which we had written the words of our wedding ceremony, and in the stunned quiet, his voice, shaking very slightly, said the opening

words, familiar and beautiful. I looked to my right and exchanged smiles with my son, Christopher, who was my ring-bearer, and to Shura's left, where Theo stood as best man, his camera on the rug near his feet.

"Dearly Beloved: we are gathered together to join this man and this woman in holy matrimony."

Inserted into the ceremony were words of a benediction borrowed from the Apache Indians.

"That, clasping one another's hands,  
Holding one another fast,  
You may fulfill your roads together."

After Shura had put the ring on my finger, Paul continued, gradually losing his fight against the tears in his throat:

"Now you will feel no rain,  
For each of you will be shelter to the other.  
Now you will feel no cold,  
For each of you will be warmth to the other.  
Now there is no more loneliness for you.  
Now you are two bodies,  
But there is only one life before you.

"Go now to your dwelling place,  
To enter into the days of your togetherness.  
And may your days be good  
And long upon the earth!"

His cheeks wet, our dear Paul concluded:

"I join you to one another and to all of us who love you. I now pronounce you man and wife."

Later, in the kitchen, when Ruth had stopped crying and Leah's nose was losing its pinkness, I explained why we'd done it this way, "Shura said he didn't mind getting married as long as we could do it in such a way that there wouldn't be any big present-giving mess, because he hates that kind of thing, and as far as he was concerned, we didn't need wedding presents and he wanted to keep things simple.

"So I said why not invite everybody to a picnic and surprise them, and that was the beginning of the plan. We decided nobody except our children would know what was going on — we needed their help, and it would be fun having them in charge of a secret like that. Of course," I grinned at Ruth, "Ginger and Dante had to know why they were being asked to come all that way, and Paul had to be ready to be our minister!"

"I don't know when I've been so completely taken by surprise," said Ruth, beginning to sob again. I put my arms around her and hugged, then I leaned back against the sink, folded my arms, and said to them, "I want you both to know — and everyone else in the group, of course — that this marriage won't cause anything to change in your friendship, your relationship with Shura. That's the last thing I would want to see happen. I know that you all love him, and I have no desire to squirrel him away from his friends. That's just not the way I am. I think you had fears of that happening with Ursula, but I'm not Ursula — "

Leah made an exaggerated gesture of relief, wiping her forehead with the back of a limp hand, as Ruth laughed.

" — and I don't have to have him all to myself and not share. The more extended family, the better, as far as I'm concerned. He needs all of you, and I want to thank you for being his friends. And mine."

*Horribly sentimental. But they need to hear it. Now get a Kleenex and blow your blasted nose and get out of here so they can talk to each other.*

Ann, Wendy and Brian cornered me and reported with obvious relish that they had watched their father to see his reaction, when Shura and I stopped in front of Paul and it became clear what was about to happen.

"His mouth opened," said Brian, "And it just stayed that way."

Wendy illustrated, crossing her eyes over her hanging jaw.

"You never saw anyone so absolutely dumbfounded in your life," laughed Ann, holding her stomach, "It was wonderful, Mom. I wouldn't have missed that sight for anything in the world!"

"Boy," I said, "You guys have a *weird* sense of humor, you know?"

I hugged each of them and said many thanks for having done their part so beautifully.

"Well," Ann remarked, as they turned to go back to the party, "At least you'll never be able to forget the date of your anniversary, right?"

"Not easily, sweetheart."

*July Fourth. Celebration of freedom. The freedom of being tied forever to the man I want to be tied to forever. Thank you, God and all the Little Gods. I send you my joy and gratitude. Bless us and keep us, amen.*

## Part Three: Both Voices

## CHAPTER 35. AACHE

(Alice's voice)

A few weeks after the wedding, Shura was given the opportunity to attend a nuclear medicine conference in the city of Aachen, Germany, and we decided to make the trip together, as part of a honeymoon which would include my first visits to London and Paris.

I hadn't seen Europe since leaving it as a child, in 1940, on the last refugee ship out of Trieste, Italy, where my father had been American consul. The idea that I was actually going to see any part of Europe again seemed almost too wonderful to be true; I had dreamt of such a return for years with increasing disbelief in the possibility of it ever really happening.

I was going to cross the Atlantic once more, this time by plane instead of ocean liner, and I was about to see England and France and Germany, all for the first time. I felt a mixture of reluctance and excitement about the Germany part of it; reluctance because throughout most of my life, the name, "Germany" had usually been tied to the word "Nazi," but there was also the excitement of seeing a country I hadn't seen before, a country out of which had come some of the greatest musicians, artists and thinkers of all time. The Germany of castles and rivers and Black Forest elves. The land of Bach and Mozart.

Shura had told me that we were going to travel his preferred way, with backpacks and no other luggage. That way, he said, we wouldn't be held up in airports, waiting for suitcases, and we wouldn't be frustrated by constantly having to watch baggage. Everything we needed would be on our backs.

I was known in my family for packing enough stuff to last about a month, every time I planned for a weekend trip, but I was willing to try the backpack method, and there was something really challenging about the idea. It made sense, after all. Nobody wants to baby-sit a suitcase. And

learning experiences are learning experiences.

The backpacks we bought were large and dark-colored with no metal frames, just lots of compartments. Shura had packed an extra pair of his dark blue corduroy slacks and I put in jeans, a denim skirt and several blouses. I was going to live in denim — skirt and pants — since it was the one material that wouldn't show dirt easily and, of course, it would wear like iron.

As Shura reminded me, while we folded things into our backpacks, "We aren't planning to attend any formal concerts or go to expensive night-clubs, so our wardrobes can be practical and relatively dull." He added, "No matter what clothes we take, we'll be sick of the sight of them in a couple of weeks, anyway," to which I had to agree.

My camera, an old Yashica, was going to be used for documentary purposes, mainly, and to keep track for me when my eyes and mind might be too tired to register important details, as tends to happen on long adventures in strange places. Shura's camera was coming too, in its soft leather carrying case. He would take the more deliberate and careful shots.

A very long plane ride later, leaning out the window of a hotel on Piccadilly Square, I breathed in the smell of London — sharp, sooty and wet from recent rain. This was the city of my childhood nursery rhymes, and I was on my way to seeing the places I'd heard about from the time I could talk ("They're changing the guard at Buckingham Palace, Christopher Robin went down with Alice,") and to fall completely in love with the British Museum, just as Shura had predicted I would.

After a few days, we were on our way to Aachen, by plane and then train, and I was finally in Germany.

Aachen is a very, very ancient city known by different names in several different languages because it is situated at the point where Germany, Belgium and Holland meet. Its other most familiar name is Aix-la-Chapelle. Apparently its history as a city began when the Romans discovered hot springs in the area and built watering-places and bath-houses around and over what they believed were healing waters. Some of the graceful columns left over from that time are still standing throughout the city, surrounded now by shops, cafes, tiled piazzas and, of course, boxes full of geraniums. (During the long time since I had left Europe as a young girl, whenever I heard or read the word, "Europe," I always saw in my mind red and pink geraniums clustering in a window box, and heard the echoing of church bells.)

We first saw Aachen early on a Sunday morning. Having just gotten off the train, very tired and grimy and wanting baths, we were interested only in finding a hotel as fast as possible. We looked for anyone who might point us in the right direction, but there were few people to be seen

at that hour, as we walked into the town. We both assumed that we would be able to find somebody who spoke English, because everyone back home who knew anything about Europe had said, "Practically all Germans speak English."

After several encounters with smiling, pleasant-faced citizens, out early, walking their dogs or picking up newspapers, it became painfully apparent that we had landed in the one single exception to the rule. Nobody in this particular place in Germany appeared to speak any English — or French, for that matter — and absolutely no one understood what I had always believed was a universal word, "hotel." The people we came across all gave the impression of being friendly and eager to help, but there was no sign of even the slightest comprehension of anything we said in either of our two available languages.

Finally, walking down yet one more cobbled street, we saw the sign of a hotel, three stars, which we would ordinarily have considered a bit rich for our blood, but we were too weary to search further, and told each other it probably wouldn't be *that* much extra. Inside, we found that the young, pretty lady behind the counter spoke heavily accented English and the price was manageable. We sighed thankfully and smiled all over her and took the keys to a room on the second floor with gratitude and relief.

After showers and a few hours' nap, we unpacked and put on fresh clothes. It was time to explore. We walked some of the city streets, had beer and coffee in an outdoor cafe, and marveled at the huge, old cathedral called the Dom (we also discovered that "Dom" means "cathedral" in German). We went inside for a few minutes, long enough to see the famous chandelier and the little statue of the Madonna in her hand-embroidered gown. It seems that there are certain women in the city of Aachen who commit themselves to sewing magnificent brocaded dresses for the statue, and the Madonna wears a new one every week. The custom is centuries old, and the honor is, when possible, passed down from mother to daughter. This day, the Madonna was wearing a gold-embroidered pink dress with a white and gold cloak.

The Dom was built in the 8th Century AD, and inside its great walls, there was a many-layered quietness. Soft candlelight reflected deep orange on the polished tops of the pews facing the Madonna. Above the huge pillars loomed comfortable darkness, and we could make out against the shadows the immense circle which formed the chandelier presented to the Dom by Frederick Barbarossa — Red-Beard the Great. Not for the first time and far from the last, I found myself wishing I had read more and could remember more of what I had read, about people like Barbarossa. I had heard the name from when I was a child, and there was a vague mental picture of a big man with red hair who was an important, powerful German chieftain of some kind. Or was he an Emperor? In the Middle

Ages — or was it the Dark Ages — ?

The discomfort of realizing how little I knew, and how much I might miss because of my failure to read more, before the trip, gradually gave way to a delicious feeling of awe. Here we stood, Shura and I, looking up at something which a man of power in a time long, long past, had given to this very building. My back prickled at the thought of that much human time, represented by the simple circle of bronze.

(A couple of days later, along with the nuclear medicine group, we were given a private tour of the cathedral's less accessible corners, and found ourselves standing before a marble seat, cut plain, without embellishment of any kind, which had been the coronation throne of the emperor Charlemagne, and we stood with the rest of those who had chosen to go exploring, in silence. It was like facing a closed doorway into another world; a seat shaped simply, its lack of adornment stating, as nothing else could have, the emperor's sureness of his own absolute power.)

But now, having been in Aachen for only a few hours, we decided to put off a really detailed exploration of the Dom until later; these first hours would be a tasting of the different flavors of the city, a tentative smelling and feeling out of its nature. As we strolled, there seemed to be friendliness and ease in all the faces on the street, and courtesy and smiles whenever we went into a cafe for Shura's lager and my coffee. There still didn't seem to be any English spoken anywhere, though, outside the hotels.

It would not be until the following day, when I went exploring by myself while Shura was busy delivering his lecture at the nuclear medicine complex (security rules forbade my admission) — not until I was a single foreign woman asking for a pack of cigarettes in a kiosk or for a cup of coffee in a cafe — that I would discover that the friendliness and courtesy were totally absent as soon as I had no man at my side. By myself, I was ignored, pointedly overlooked and, in one case, openly sneered at. Interesting.

But this aspect of Aachen — in fact, of many parts of Germany — we did not know on that Sunday. We were discovering a series of wonderful cobblestoned and tiled streets, some of them old and narrow, others broad and obviously modern. Aachen had been bombed during World War II and the ruined parts of the city had been rebuilt with imagination and, in some respects, a whimsical sense of humor.

There were fountains everywhere in this new Aachen, fountains more complex, playful and beautiful than any others we had seen, anywhere. Walking down one street, we stopped at the entrance to a park, seeing in the middle of it a 15-foot fountain shaped like a lotus-flower, covered with reflecting metal squares which shone like silver. As we watched, the petals of the lotus closed slowly until they formed a bud-shape, then slowly and silently opened again to full flower, spouting a delicate spray

of water from the center.

A few blocks away, in a busy little square, we found a small, child-sized fountain, a metal well sprouting bronze doll-figures with movable heads, arms and legs. On the top of a pole emerging from the center of the well was a small bronze soldier on a horse. An excited little girl called to her parents to watch as she bent and straightened the arms of a bronze peasant woman. I looked up at Shura; he grinned and gestured at my camera. He had left his at the hotel.

We found another fountain, near the train station, honoring the needle boys of Aachen, adolescent boys who had worked in the needle factories of the city before World War II. Three lean bronze figures held their right arms raised, each hand showing a long little finger distinctly crooked because (we were told later) they had been trained to use their little fingers to sort good needles from bad.

At one point in our explorations, Shura said to me, "Have you noticed, no matter where we walk, all we have to do is look up, and there's the top of the Dom. Anytime you think you're lost, just look for it and head back in that direction." I hadn't consciously noted it, but he was right. The great grey cathedral dominated the center of the city visible above the rooftops, sitting there, quiet and solid like a venerable grandmother keeping an eye on the young ones.

We bought some bread, fruit and cheese, a big bottle of orange soda for me and a beer for Shura, and took it all back to our hotel. We discovered the strangely made-up beds (the pillows were rolled like bolsters and the sheets were folded like apple-pie beds or what Shura called short-sheeting; you were supposed to undo all of it before you got in). I sat at the little desk in front of the windows and looked out at what I could see of the city, and thought about the faintly hollow sensation in the general region of my tummy.

I said, "You know, I'm just beginning to feel a little bit of weirdness for the first time since we left home. Don't know why I didn't feel it before this — I mean, realizing that I'm actually in a foreign country, and it isn't home, and I don't really belong here — maybe it's not knowing the language. I certainly didn't feel this way in England. I guess it must be the language. Not being able to understand anything people say and knowing they don't understand what I'm saying. It really makes a difference."

Shura agreed, "It does, yes. At least we'll never tell anybody not to worry about traveling in Germany because practically everybody speaks English!"

I laughed and groaned at the memory of the early morning search for a hotel.

Looking at the little pile of food we'd put on the desk, I made a decision.

"Shura?"

"Alicia?"

"A thought occurs to me. Maybe this would be a good time for the 2C-I; what do you think? Maybe it would let me get a bit of a handle on this displaced feeling? It's just an idea. Say no if you're too tired, or think we shouldn't for any reason."

We had brought with us four doses of MDMA and two of 2C-I, just in case. I thought to myself that perhaps it would turn out to be a waste of a good, lusty psychedelic, if we were too tired to make love, but the prospect of integrating with the 2C-I, and whatever fooling around we might manage, was pretty tempting.

"Fine with me," said Shura, "But if we're going to do it, we should start pretty soon. I've got a really full day tomorrow at the nuclear thing."

I stretched and yawned, "Right now's okay with me. We shouldn't be up too late if we take it now."

Shura unpacked his set of vials and held up two of them, each marked 2C-I, 16 mgs. We dribbled a bit of tap water into each vial and shook them carefully. Then we clicked vials. Shura said, "To us," and I said, "To adventure," and we swallowed it. The taste wasn't any better than usual. I said "Bleah," and Shura showed off, smacking his lips and murmuring an appreciative "Yummm," which I ignored. I opened the bottle of orange soda and poured some of it into a bathroom drinking glass, remarking to him that — since he enjoyed the taste of 2C-I so much — I wouldn't offer him soda to help wash it down. He said he'd have some anyway, just to keep me company.

While Shura was taking his turn in the bathroom, I figured out the sheets and the quilts and checked the window-blinds, after pausing a moment to look out again on the quiet street below. When he came back into the room, we pushed the two beds together, speculating — between grunts — about the sex lives of Germans. We had asked for a double bed, and they'd given us two narrow singles.

Then, naked under the big downy quilts, we explored each other's skin with gentle fingers and shared our impressions of what we had seen that day. We were feeling the first effects of the 2C-I, when I took a moment to look around at the room, softly lit by the one bedside lamp. The wallpaper was a Victorian floral pattern in blue-grey and white, and the desk across the room was made of polished, dark wood. The carpet was red and there were cocoa colored drapes over the windows. I decided I liked the room, specially the wallpaper. Everything was moving a bit, shimmering slightly, which meant the 2C-I effect was by now at least plus-two.

I turned back to Shura. Our heads were a few inches apart as we talked. Suddenly, I was aware of something right outside our window. It

was immense and powerful and I wondered for a frightened moment if it was trying to get in. I sat up quickly and Shura said, "What's wrong?"

I told him, "I just got hit by an extraordinary feeling that there's some kind of thing — a presence — outside the window. I don't know what it is, but boy, is it strong!"

"Do you want me to take a look?"

"I don't think there's anything to actually see, honey. It's just a — something tremendously big like a mountain, and very powerful. Feels sort of dark grey. Frankly, it's a bit scary. What the hell could it be? I've never felt anything like it before."

"Well, I'll look anyway," Shura said. He climbed out of his bed and lifted the blinds. "Nope, all clear." He got back on the bed and sat cross-legged, watching me.

"This is very strange," I said, hugging my knees and trying to figure out what could possibly be out there, pushing to be acknowledged. I bent my head down and closed my eyes, keeping myself as open as possible to the presence.

"It feels like — well, if I were to give it a shape — it's hard to get any kind of shape in my mind, but maybe like a pyramid, sort of. I don't even know whether it's good or evil; it's just huge and strong. That's the closest I can get to it. Like a pyramid, awfully old and absolutely immense. It doesn't feel like anything human, really."

Shura asked, "If it doesn't feel human, what does it remind you of?"

"I can't think of anything it reminds me of. It's a completely new experience." I kept trying to touch the thing with my mind, like a blind person feeling out a piece of sculpture with insistent hands.

After a few minutes, I told him, "I'm not sure about the non-human part, now. Maybe it has something to do with humans, but it's not like a person. It's part of the human world, in some way, I think, but it's too immense to be any single human being." I took Shura's hand, "I know I'm not making any sense, but I'm working as hard as I can to understand what it is. My main reaction is wanting to push it away, but maybe that's just because it's so strange, and I can't figure it out."

Shura asked, "Does it frighten you?"

I thought about that for a moment, then told him, "No, not really. It's just surprising to get hit by something so intense, all of a sudden like that."

"Why don't you lie back and close your eyes," suggested Shura, "Just let the impressions come to you. Don't try to push at it. Let it tell you what it is in its own way."

I said I'd give it a try.

As we lay next to each other, I speculated out loud about what the thing might be. Maybe the cathedral, just a few blocks away? That didn't make sense; the cathedral had been full of warmth and peace. Could it be

some kind of memory of the Nazi time here? That didn't fit, either. There wasn't a feeling of evil about the thing.

"I think it's somehow beyond good and evil," I said, still probing with my mind, with every antenna I had, "Or maybe it includes them."

The answer came as such answers always do — like a confirmation of what some part of me already knew. It was clear and certain and Of Course.

I turned to Shura and said, "I know what it is! It's the city. Aachen! It's the whole city, the whole of everything that Aachen has ever been, thousands of years of this place. I'm feeling the city, the total of all the lives and deaths and everything that's happened here!"

Shura nodded.

I sat upright again, "That's it, honey, that's it! My God, what an experience! I've never felt a city before, not that way. It's like a — it's not like a person, but it's got an identity, almost a personality; it really does have a kind of pyramid shape to it, like a mountain, and it's so incredibly strong!"

"Now that you've figured it out, does it feel friendly or unfriendly?" asked Shura.

"Neither. It's just there. It exists. It's good and evil and everything in between that human life is. Wow! How fantastic!"

"Well," said Shura, pulling me down beside him, "Now that we've got that figured out, how about some very personal contributions of our own, to the City of Aachen, huh?"

We made love, then. The pressure was still there at the window, but it no longer demanded attention, and I knew it would slowly fade, now that I'd identified and acknowledged it.

Later, as we lay quietly on Shura's bed, my leg folded around his, our sweat pooling in the center of his chest, a new image began forming behind my closed eyes. I said to him, "I'm seeing something very interesting inside my head, and I'll try to tell you as it develops, okay?" He grunted, and I described the pictures as they unfolded.

There was a large grassy clearing in a forest, perhaps a hundred feet across. The trees around it were thick and tall, and there was sunlight on the grass. Around the edge of the sunlit oval, between the trees, were people, some standing, some sitting. Small children ran, shrieking and laughing, around the perimeter of the circle, darting in and out of the trees and bushes, but they didn't venture into the clearing. The adults were quiet, all of them looking toward the center of the grass, where the sunlight seemed to be gathered most intensely.

I knew that the people were worshipping and that the way they did it was to gather around a place like this, where the life energy was strongly present, even if only for a short while, and simply allow themselves to

become part of it, greeting it and letting it greet them, feeding their bodies and their souls.

I said to Shura, "They know that the energy, the life-force, whatever you call it, is everywhere, that they can choose to contact it, immerse themselves in it, anywhere at all. This just happens to be one of their favorite places, when the sun is shining on the grass."

Then, the scene changed and I was watching a man, driven and single-minded, obsessed with what he believed to be his life's purpose, gathering stones to make a wall around another clearing much like the one I'd seen earlier. He was directing other people to lift and place the stones, and they were obeying his instructions, some good-naturedly, some with resentment. They all thought of him as not quite sane — out-of-balance, out-of-harmony in some way — but they were doing as he wished because of the force of his desire, his urgency. These people had not developed psychic or emotional boundaries, I realized.

The man was building a worship-place by putting stones around the grass circle, closing it in. I saw that he didn't know and couldn't understand, as the others did, that the singing life-energy was everywhere and could not be contained within walls.

The man believed that he had been singled out by some kind of Great Being to build a place for it to live in, a wall of stones which he, himself, would control, because he had built it. He would make the rules about it, because it was of his making, and because he was the appointed instrument of the God-thing which had ordered that this be done.

I felt the pity that some of his tribe had for him, and the irritation and impatience that others were beginning to feel; I saw that, before long, they would leave him alone in his circle and go to some other place together, because there was no point in being around a soul so dark and sad and unable to hear anything they said.

"He was pretty sick, I suppose," I murmured to Shura, "But I wonder if it's a picture of the beginning of a new development in humans; I mean, maybe he was a mutation, you know?"

"A mutation?"

"Well, maybe it was the beginning of individuality. A mutation who was one of the first individuals. What humans eventually had to become — closed-off individual egos. They couldn't do that if they stayed telepathic, without psychic boundaries. It meant giving up some of that interconnectedness, in order to develop the single, separate Self — for whatever *that's* worth! It certainly isn't a particularly happy picture, I must admit; in fact, it's very sad — that disconnected, power-hungry little mutant."

"Well," said Shura, putting his arm around my shoulders, "The whole history of the human race is somewhat sad, wouldn't you say, if you look

at it in a certain way? But then, if you squint a bit differently, it isn't sad at all. Just extraordinary."

When the pictures faded, I respectfully saluted the City of Aachen, which still leaned against the window, and silently thanked it for the experience. I murmured a thank you to Shura and he kissed my nose and turned over with his back to me, and I fitted myself against him and we went to sleep.

## CHAPTER 36. 5-TOM

(Alice's voice)

Sometime in the early '80's, David and Shura developed a new drug, to which they gave the charmingly odd nickname, 5-TOM. Shura began running it up (as he calls the early nibbling of a new material) in the fall of 1983, with my infrequent help. Between the two of us, threshold activity was eventually established at around twelve milligrams, and the nature of the effect at higher levels — between 35 and 50 milligrams — was reported in our notebooks as benign, de-stressing, and enabling fantasy and visual interpretation, though without much in the way of conceptualization.

In April of 1984, we decided to get together for Shura's 59th birthday, (we always celebrated group members' birthdays with an experiment, followed by soup, bread and cheese, a cake with candles and small token presents), and — although Dante and Ginger wouldn't be able to attend this time, Theo and his girlfriend, Emma, said they would be coming.

Theo had become part of the research group several years earlier. He had met the tiny, exquisite Emma at a poetry reading and, six weeks later, moved into her house. Within a few months — after the usual consultation with all the permanent members — she was invited to join the group. The young couple didn't participate in our experiments very often, because they worked during the week and, like most people in their thirties, they had a lot to do on weekends.

Emma was less than five feet tall, with a lovely figure and a fine-boned, delicately sensual face. I never tired of looking at her. As befitted a poet, she tended to introversion and occasional dark moods, but when she was having a good time, her brown eyes crinkled with humor and she laughed a low, velvety laugh. When Theo visited the Farm on Sunday afternoons for a few hours, Emma usually accompanied him, settling gracefully into the role of appreciative audience for Shura's ebullient ham-

and-nonsense.

I hadn't kept up as much as I should have with modern poetry, but it seemed to me that the poems both of them wrote, although quite different in style and content, were extraordinarily good, and I was always surprised at how demanding they were of themselves as poets, and how critical of their own beautiful pieces. They both used psychedelics or MDMA a couple of times a month, as writing tools, and brought Shura and me copies of the poems which had first taken shape under the influence. Emma also brought delicate watercolor paintings of flower-forms and mandalas, which she had created while using certain of the 2C-T compounds, her favorites being 2C-T-2 and 2C-T-8.

I was delighted to hear that they would be coming to the birthday celebration, and told them we would be trying out a new material with the funny name of 5-TOM.

So, at 10:00 AM on a Saturday in April, we gathered at the Close's house in Berkeley. Ben and Leah, Ruth and George, John Sellars and David, Shura, myself, and Theo with his lovely Emma, greeted each other in the high-ceilinged living room, with its view (when the fog was absent) of the Golden Gate Bridge and some of downtown San Francisco.

The house was the Close's treasure, and although I had never seen it otherwise than immaculately clean, it managed to be completely comfortable; couches and low tables were expected to support feet, and spills on the Persian rugs were taken care of with paper towel or sponge, and without fuss. The house was like its owners: neat, organized, and warmly welcoming.

While Shura weighed out the various dosages of the material of the day in the kitchen, Leah was in the dining room with David, Theo and me, telling us that she had finally completed her Ph.D. thesis, after grueling years of work. She said, "I can't believe it's over! It's going to be hard, you know, learning how to relax again — maybe even waste a few minutes, now and then — after all that pressure. Of course, I've still got a lot of stuff ahead of me, before I'm a proper psychologist-with-shingle, but the worst of it's done, *done!*"

We cheered and David reminisced, "I'll never forget the day I finished my thesis! There's no feeling like it, when you look at that stack of paper and realize you don't have to re-read or re-write or even re-think anything, any more! Far as I was concerned, getting the official document was an anticlimax."

Ben called us into the kitchen, where Shura was leaning against the sink, arms folded, ready to tell all of us about the drug we would be taking. Behind him, lined up in a neat row on the counter, were ten kitchen glasses of varying sizes and shapes.

"This," he said, "Is one of the sulfur analogues of DOM and DOET that

David and I have been sweating over for months now. Its full name is 2-methoxy-4-methyl-5-methylthioamphetamine, but you can call it 5-TOM. We refer to the family as the TOMS and TWATS." He waited until the groans had quieted down, and explained, "That last one is spelled T-O-E-T, of course, being the sulfur analogue of DOET, and there's obviously only one way to pronounce it, which is TWAT. At least, that's how David and I see it."

David laughed, "Last week, we were having lunch with a bunch of very dignified chemists, visiting from the East Coast, and one of them asked the usual polite question, 'What are you two working on these days?' and when Shura told him — you know, very casually and completely straight-faced — about the TOMs and TWATs, there was this dead silence, then one guy broke up, and the others choked on their sandwiches, and — well, it was sort of downhill all the way from there, you might say!"

"Anyway," said Shura, when quiet was restored, "Alice and I have taken this up to fifty milligrams, and I'm willing to try that again —," he glanced at me, and I nodded, " — but some of you may want to go a bit lower, since it's a new one."

George nodded vigorously, as did Ruth. I was sure John would match Shura's and my fifty; he usually took the maximum level offered. Ben wasn't predictable; sometimes he matched Shura, but at others he seemed cautious, probably because of a recent rise in his blood pressure which — he'd told us — was slight but nonetheless worrisome, at his age.

Shura continued, "There seems to be some time distortion, a lot of eyes-closed fantasy, and Alice found it very interesting to look at paintings in art books. It takes anywhere from forty-five minutes to something over an hour to plateau, and the drop-off begins around the fourth or fifth hour.

"It's a long one; between eight and twelve hours before you can sleep, depending on the dosage. I was energetic the next day, but Alice said she was pretty flaked out, so you may or may not need Sunday to recoup."

Ruth spoke up, "We've got mats and covers for everyone, in case anybody wants to spend the night. And lots of eggs and bacon for breakfast!"

"How is this stuff on the body?" asked Theo.

"For me, fine. Alice had some heaviness, one time, but it was okay the next, so no predictions on that. Neither of us found any neurological threat anywhere."

After the usual discussion, Ruth decided to be modest, at 35 milligrams, while George said he'd try 40; Emma, who was usually pretty venturesome — she described herself proudly as a China Doll with an iron head — said she'd take 45. Ben, Theo and David said 45 sounded reasonable. John, as I'd expected, voted for the same dosage as the Borodins: 50 milligrams.

After clinking glasses in the traditional circle and swallowing our 5-

TOM, we dispersed in various directions. I went out the back door of the kitchen to the patio, where I could sit at the round white-painted outdoor table and smoke, under a magnificent kiwi vine the Closes had lovingly tended for years. It was carried around one entire side of the patio area by a wooden trellis, and every fall gave them baskets full of kiwis, which they shared with everyone they knew who liked the delicate, translucent green fruit.

I returned to the kitchen for a glass of ice-water, and met Ruth, who smiled at me, "How are you doing?"

"Okay, so far. I felt an alert a while ago, and I guess it's developing. What about you?"

She pulled her sweater around her in a familiar gesture, "I don't know. A teeny bit sluggish, I think. Not bad, but not much fun, yet. Guess I'll just stay with the others in the living room and listen to Shura and Ben competing with each other; that'll keep me distracted until I plateau."

I returned to the patio, with its soft sunlight, and stayed for a while, smoking, enjoying the isolation, while keeping track of the effects. I become increasingly aware of a certain discomfort of my own, and recalled Ruth's word, "sluggish." There was also a vague ache across the back of my shoulders, and my mood was anything but light-hearted. In fact, I was feeling slightly depressed.

*May as well join the rest of the guinea pigs. Transition is often a drag for me. Nothing new in that.*

In the living room, I found Theo lying on his back on one of the rugs, near the big fireplace. At the other end of the long room, David lay curled up on another rug, with John a few feet away. Ben and Shura were seated on the couch, exchanging atrocious puns, while Emma sat curled up in an armchair, laughing. She seemed to be feeling fine.

Ruth was sitting in another chair and she seemed a bit restless; her bare feet twisted and rubbed against each other and her hands were either stroking her skirt or fingering the agate stones of her necklace.

George was very still in his chair, only the tips of his fingers moving on the armrests. As I watched, he suddenly shuddered and got up, announcing in an unusually flat voice that he was going upstairs. "I've got to get under the electric blanket, because I'm very cold. If you will please excuse me?"

Ruth went upstairs with him, while Ben and Shura watched from the couch, their banter forgotten. I saw them exchange speculative looks, then Shura asked the rest of us, "Anyone else feeling chilled?"

Nobody replied.

"How's the body, for the rest of you? Any problems?"

Theo spoke up, his arms folded behind his head, "I'd say it's not the kindest material I've ever tried. I've got a bit of stomach cramping, and I

can't seem to get really comfortable, no matter how I shift my different parts around."

I glanced over at him from my own place on the floor, a few feet away, and agreed, "Yeah, I'm with you. Not the stomach problem, but it makes me feel sort of heavy; it reminds me a little of the MDA cloak, in fact. Not one of my favorite sensations."

John spoke up from his corner near the big window, "What's the MDA cloak?"

"It's the reason I don't take MDA. I get a sensation around the upper back and shoulders that feels as if I'm wearing a leaden cloak. I can't shake it off, and it's all I can think about. MDA is a total waste of time for me, because I don't experience anything else. No insights, no nice visual stuff, no images or fantasies; just the ache in my back and wishing I were out of it."

"Oh dear," said John, "And is that what you're feeling now, with the 5-TOM?"

"Not quite that badly, but almost, and nothing's happening inside that's interesting enough to make up for the body discomfort, up to now."

Emma stretched and yawned, then reported, "Well, it's been great for me, so far. It's a wonderful de-stressor. I've been talking a blue streak and having a great time, but I see what Alice means, about there not being much going on. Colors are bright and friendly, and the leaves of that plant on the mantelpiece are moving nicely, but otherwise — well, I have the impression that I wouldn't get much done if I tried writing on this."

"All right," said Shura. He turned to Ben, "You, Benjamino?"

"I second that — about the de-stressing quality — and for the rest, I'll have to admit I've been too busy having fun with puns to pay attention. I haven't been aware of any physical problems at all. Quite comfortable, in fact. I'll focus on the psychological aspects for a while and see what turns up."

In response to Shura's questioning look, Leah, seated on the floor with her elbows on the coffee table, smiled and said, "I'm seeing some lovely visuals and I feel fine, very relaxed. I suppose it isn't specially insightful, but that's okay with me, right now. It's the relaxation I need. It's nice, Shura."

Shura's voice rose slightly, "David, how about you?"

His long, thin body unfolding with obvious reluctance, David slowly pulled himself into sitting position, arms hugging his denim knees, and cleared his throat. He said, "It's been mostly a lot of — uh — kind of depressing stuff, so far. Reviewing some disappointments and frustrations. And a lot of loneliness. I tried switching to another channel, but it didn't work. The same record seems to want to keep on playing. Not a very positive report, I'm afraid."

I wished fervently, not for the first time, that someone could find exactly the right girl for David. She would have to either adore chemistry, herself, and be as excited by it as he was, or else love and admire him enough to be content with the knowledge that chemistry was his first love, his life-blood, and that she would always come second to it — even if only fractionally second — in his heart.

*At least, she wouldn't have to worry about competing with another woman; only with methyl groups and sexy things on the four-position!*

Shura got up, "I'm going to check on George. Be back in a minute."

Theo said, "I think I'm going to try sitting up at the table and see if I can do a bit of writing, maybe start my report on the 5-TOM. I suspect lying around on the floor like this, doing nothing, makes me pay too much attention to small twips and twirps in the body."

I watched him ease himself onto his feet and wished him luck. He was a good-looking young man, with a dark beard and full head of hair. Although the light blue of his eyes was inherited from Shura, his mother's genes had shaped the rest of his face. He called me his "wicked stepmother," and we had become very good friends.

Emma was sharing her impressions of a recent exhibit at the Oakland Art Museum with Leah, when Shura came down the stairs. He went over to Ben and murmured, "Come up to the bedroom, for a sec. Take a look at George. I need your professional expertise." I saw him slip his feet back into the sandals he'd thrown off, hours earlier.

Ben put on his glasses.

Shura had said to me with some amusement long ago, that you could always tell when there was trouble during an experiment, because he would put on his sandals, and Ben would put on his glasses. "For no logical reason," he'd said, "We each react in those particular ways when there's a problem. It's the first instinctive step in gearing ourselves up — getting into focus — to deal with something that's not as it should be."

I went into the dining room, where Theo was writing in his notebook, and sat across the table from him. I said, "Your father just took Ben upstairs to look at George. Something must be going on."

Theo looked up, "What do you think? Has Ruth come down?"

"Nope. I think I'm going to tiptoe up there and find out what's happening. By the way, how're you feeling now? Still not too comfortable?"

"I've been happier," he admitted, "I've been making some notes, but it feels like work, not inspiration. This is going to be a definite no-repeat, for me."

"Me, too," I said, "I keep trying to shake off the discomfort, but it doesn't shake, and there's nothing much else to concentrate on. No concepts, no cosmic revelations, no nuthin'. In fact, if I weren't so annoyed, I'd be just plain bored!"

We both laughed.

"Can I see what you've written, so far? Would you mind?"

"Go ahead." He turned the notebook around and pushed it over to me.

The body of the notes began with the number, [1:25], which meant one hour and twenty-five minutes into the experiment.

"Probably +2. Somewhat visual, particularly in light/shadow texture. Colors tend to run into each other. No problem writing. Some slight stomach cramps, muscle fatigue. Something on the edges disturbing. Distinct time distortion, but time not much concern. Peripheral vision very active. Felt as toxic to the body, not intellectual. 'No Exit' feeling. Motion and depth somewhat disfigured. Wanting to do something, and yet — what?

"Hard time making up mind. Is it a toxic response or just the effect of this chemical? Non-productivity."

I nodded and thanked him, sliding the notebook back across the table. When I went past the living room, Emma and Leah were still talking animatedly about the museum. I climbed the carpeted stairway to the second floor. Shura and Ben were on either side of George, holding him under his arms and urging him to walk. Ruth was standing by the bed, her face set and anxious. Shura glanced at me and said, carefully casual, "A few odd little neurological signs that bear watching. Ben thinks as I do, that the heat from the electric blanket is probably intensifying the effects — he had it up to the highest setting, by the way — and we're trying to persuade him to go downstairs, where we can keep an eye on him."

George had a calm, pleasant look on his face, but he said nothing. I tried to look into his eyes, to make contact of some kind, and it was clear that he didn't see me.

"There are coordination problems with the eyes," said Shura.

"He's certainly conscious," Ben remarked, "But there's no response to external stimuli, and he certainly isn't communicating from the inside."

"Looks like nothing in, nothing out," summarized Shura, "And motor coordination is shot."

They continued to move him forward, through the door and onto the landing, and his steps were shuffling, almost robotic.

"Here we are, George," said Ben, speaking as if to a small child, "Now let's go down the stairs, slowly. We're holding you, so you can't fall."

Shura, on the other side, said, "Come on, George. It's just a few steps. You're absolutely safe."

George had come to a stop within a few inches of the stairway. He still

made no sound, but the body language was clear. He wasn't going any further.

Ruth was pleading, "Honey, you'll be all right. We just want to get you to the living room, please? I'm right here with you. You won't fall, sweetheart! Just take one step at a time," with no results. After a few more tries, Shura speculated that George might be more easily persuaded if Ruth took his place, that maybe the physical contact with his wife would get through to him.

She tried for a while, but George wasn't budging.

Finally, when Ruth said she would have to take a moment out to go to the bathroom, I volunteered to take her place, holding George under the armpit and urging him, softly and continuously, "Come on, George, lift the foot and put it down. We're holding you. Come on, dear, move your foot!"

When Ben and I shifted our hold on him, placing our arms across his back, George's left hand found the curve of my breast and the fingers pressed in and out of the softness spastically, the way a newborn infant's hand kneads the mother's breast while nursing.

I remarked to Shura that some part of him seemed to recognize a female breast, anyway, but that I didn't think he was going to be persuaded to go downstairs by anyone, at least not right now.

Shura and Ben decided to lead George away from the stair and into his study, where he could sit down on the little couch and be at peace until he repaired.

None of us said out loud what we were all thinking: that whatever had happened might never repair, that there was at least a tiny, very frightening possibility that George would remain catatonic, his face permanently open and unguarded, eyes unseeing, unable to remember speech.

When they turned him in the new direction, he moved willingly again, though his steps were still awkward. I had no doubt that if his supports were taken away, he would fall to the floor in a heap.

We took turns sitting with him in the study. Now and then, a soft explosion of sound came up his throat and out of his mouth. There was an urgency to the eruption, a forcefulness, but I detected no sense of fear or anxiety. I had the impression he was communicating, and I wondered, for an instant, how long it would take for any of us to begin understanding his language, if it turned out to be necessary to do so.

I talked to him, slowly and affectionately, about the photographs he had fastened to the wall above his desk, about his friends downstairs, about how we loved him and everything was going to be all right. I talked about anything that came to mind.

When Shura relieved me, I went downstairs and found Ruth in the kitchen, keeping herself busy, preparing food for the table. She seemed

very calm, and when I remarked on the amazing absence of panic or anger — either or both of which would have been justified, under the circumstances — she said, "Well, you know, I keep having this feeling that he's going to be all right. Maybe it's the effect of the 5-TOM, but every time I start wondering what I'm going to do if he doesn't come out of this, a little voice inside tells me not to worry. It says just be patient, he'll be good as new very soon. So I've decided to believe that, and in the meantime, some nice food on the table might make everybody feel better. And as soon as George starts coming out of wherever he is, he's going to feel hungry, right?"

"That much, we *can* be sure of!"

I went outside with my cigarettes and glass of water, after telling her I'd be under the kiwi for a while, in case she needed me for anything.

An hour later, Leah was babysitting George upstairs and the rest of us were seated around the dining table, savoring tastes and smells, grateful for good food and good friends, mentally pulling at George to come back.

We had progressed to dessert, and Ruth's legendary poppy seed cake was being cut when David, who had been taking his turn in the study, came hurrying downstairs and told us, "I have a feeling George is getting better. I'm pretty sure there's some kind of change. His eyes are beginning to focus more, and I think maybe he recognizes me. Why don't we try him on the stair again and see what happens?"

Fifteen minutes later, George had made it down the stairs and was seated in his favorite armchair in the living room, beginning to remember English. Leah brought him a piece of fresh buttered sourdough bread with a slice of cheese, and Ruth sat beside him, spooning soup into his mouth. His face was happy and his eyes seemed to be functioning normally. I had the impression that some corner of his soul was still attached to wherever it was he'd been, but the tie was weakening. He was definitely coming back.

His first full sentence was, "Good grief! Why am I being fed like a baby?"

Ruth handed him the spoon, chuckling, and he finished the bowl of soup on his own. Then he sat back in his chair, burped appreciatively, and looked around the room at the faces intently watching his every move. We were all smiling at him, and he smiled back.

"It's fading," he complained, "I was in the most amazing place, and lots of things were going on, but I'm losing it now. I don't want to forget it. Have to tell you as much as I can remember, before it all goes."

We clustered around him, in chairs and on the floor, while he spoke, slowly, trying to hold on to the images, "I remember the sea. I was on a long, curving beach and the sky was deep blue. Beautiful. At one point, I remember seeing what looked like the bands of a spectrum, and for a

while I thought they were some kind of expression of my energy levels, but now I think maybe the horizontal lines were just my mind's way of trying to make something familiar and recognizable out of whatever was going on.

"Eventually, I could see real images, but they were tremendously distorted, like Cubism paintings by Picasso, with intense and very strange colorations. There were colors I've never seen before, but it's getting hard to remember them, now. Why am I losing them so fast?"

We urged him to tell us as much as he could before the amnesia curtain came completely down, and he said, "I know I wasn't afraid at any time. Everything was benign. As I began coming down, I realized I'd had an extraordinary experience, but I wasn't prepared for it to start slipping away like this!"

Shura asked, "Would you be willing to take this material again?"

George didn't hesitate. "Yes, I'd certainly take it again, but at a way smaller dose, next time."

We all joined in the laughter.

"I asked that question when I did," said Shura, "Because it was important to get your spontaneous reaction to the idea of a repeat, while you were still in the after-glow, so to speak."

"Sure," beamed George, "That was one singular, unique, fantastic experience, and I can assure you I'm going to get homesick for that beach. It was the loveliest, most satisfying place I've ever been in my life, though I can't even begin to tell you why."

Later we all grouped around the table again, to sing Happy Birthday and watch the Birthday Boy open cards and small nonsensical gifts. Then Shura went around the circle and asked for summaries.

Theo said, "It's a no-win, for me, I regret to say. The food helped my stomach, but even now, I'm not really comfortable. If there had been something spectacular going on mentally to compensate for the physical, it would have been a different story, but there wasn't."

I repeated what I'd said earlier about the cloak made of lead, and said that I, too, regretted having to conclude it was not my cup of tea. I added that I would probably pass on any future tries of the material, although I still loved its name.

Emma said, "I'm feeling almost guilty, at this point, for having had such a good time, but I did! I liked it!"

We said things like, That's okay, and Don't apologize, David adding, "After all, *somebody* had to enjoy the poor thing!"

Emma added, "I do agree with one thing Theo and Alice said, though. There wasn't much content, when you get down to it. Very relaxing and I felt terrifically good-humored, but there wasn't much else going on inside. It hasn't the richness of my favorite ones."

Ruth, her chair pulled as close to her husband's as it could go, said, "There's one very positive thing I've got to say about my experience. All the time George was upstairs, going through his troubles — I gather he didn't think he was in trouble, but the rest of us sure did! — anyway, all that time, I wasn't really frightened. I knew I should be, but I just had a strong feeling, as I told Alice, that everything was going to turn out all right. A little voice told me not to worry, so I just kept busy and stopped worrying, believe it or not!"

Shura said, softly, reaching over to grasp her hand, "I was prepared for you to be pretty angry with me, kiddo. I'm very relieved to hear you didn't feel that way, what with your man suddenly wandering around in outer space, and one of my drugs the apparent cause. It would have been understandable, at least for a while there, if you'd damned me and all my works to bloody perdition!"

He was smiling, but his eyes were moist.

Ruth shrugged, "Well, I probably have to give credit to the 5-TOM for keeping me from panicking, because I couldn't help having the thought that maybe he wouldn't ever come out of it, you know — "

"That did cross my mind, too, at one point," admitted Ben, and Shura grimaced in agreement.

She went on, " — and that's when I got the message it was really okay. As for the rest of my experience, aside from the worry over George — "

David interrupted, grinning, with the old joke, "Aside from that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you enjoy the play?"

Ruth chuckled, "Yes, right. Well, actually, the rest of the play wasn't bad, although I didn't really keep track of things after George went upstairs. I think the first hour I was quite restless; it felt sort of bumpy — that's the only way I can describe it — but nothing else of great interest to report."

Shura was making notes. "Would you take it again?"

Ruth said, "Nope."

The summaries continued. Ben said, "I had no difficulty at all, body or mind. It was thoroughly enjoyable, in fact, with a great deal of fancy footwork in the pun area with you, before George went and captured our undivided attention!"

George laughed with the rest of us.

Leah said she'd had a nice experience, but that she couldn't see any reason to take 5-TOM again. She explained, "There are a lot of other materials which give more than just relaxation and a general feeling of pleasantness. This one doesn't appear to have much depth or richness, as Emma said. Not enough to justify spending the time to explore it further, especially considering the cloud there is over it, now."

John was thoughtful, choosing his words carefully, "I had a restless feeling, too, during the early part, and I'll go along with the others, when

they say it lacks depth. I couldn't work with it, there was no insightful thinking, and my general impression was that it's a stoning material, and not much else. And no," he added, anticipating Shura's question, "I don't think I'd go out of my way to take it a second time."

David reported, "Not too good for me. My body was okay, but I guess I'll always associate 5-TOM with getting into a loop of sad and very lonely thoughts that I couldn't get away from. Maybe it wouldn't do the same thing to me another time, but I'm not eager to find out, to tell you the truth."

Finally, George spoke up, "I had the best experience of all, it seems! I don't know where I went, but I do know it was truly fantastic! I wouldn't mind taking it again, maybe at something like 5 milligrams, just to see what happens."

There was a medley of amused responses around the table, Ruth's being the last, clearest and most appreciated, "You and I are going to have a little heart-to-heart talk, sweetheart!"

When we'd settled down again, Shura folded the paper on which he'd been making notes. He leaned back in his chair and said, "Well, it is something of a mixed bag. Some of us seemed to be in a pretty much okay place, but several had a rough time of it."

He looked over at George, "And I suspect that you have a strange and wonderfully idiosyncratic sensitivity to 5-TOM which there was no way of predicting."

"Well, I have been pretty sensitive to other sulfur things," George observed.

"Yes, a little. But nothing like this. As I recall, you always tended to cocoon with the Alephs, but today was more than the usual cocooning; this time, you went full pupa!"

John went into one of his helpless fits of laughter, holding his sides, and the rest of us, watching him, slowly dissolved into giggles and croaks. John's fits were always catching.

When calm was restored, George asked, "Do you think there's something about sulfur that my body doesn't like?"

"I don't know," responded Shura, "But I doubt it, somehow. Your responses to the other 2C-T compounds have generally been okay, remember — in fact, you've had a great time with them, on the whole — and they all have a sulfur somewhere on the ring."

"So it's probably just this one particular compound, then, that I'm super-sensitive to? Just the 5-TOM?"

Shura nodded, "That's what I suspect. But we could test it out, just to be certain."

He turned to David, "How about putting together a sulfur thing that's inactive — totally inactive — and give it to George to see if, by any chance,

he just might metabolize sulfur differently in some way, compared with the rest of us?"

David leaned forward eagerly, "Hey, good idea! Why don't we give it to the whole group and collect urines all round and do a real study! If George turns up with something really unusual, it might just be publishable in some journal!"

Theo laughed, "You could title it, 'The George Effect; A Hitherto Unknown Response to Sulfur in the Five Position.'"

"Or maybe, A Close Call with a Sulfur Atom," Shura added. The puns had started again.

I thought of the laughter, how heartfelt it was, and how deep the relief underlying it.

Later, hugging Ruth and George goodbye, Shura said, "Well, I guess this has been one more reminder of our favorite maxim: 'There is no casual experiment.'"

Ruth agreed, "I suppose it's good to keep in mind that if you're going to do this kind of research, you have to expect to be surprised, every once in a while!"

5-TOM was never taken again.

## CHAPTER 37. FUGUE

(Shura's voice)

The word "fugue" has always had a most pleasant sound for me. It is a French word meaning flight, or escapade. Some adventurous event that lasts only a short while. "*On fait une fugue*," is an idiom that means he ran away from home, but only for a few days.

Musically, a fugue is the spinning of a phrase against itself. It is the flow of a line of music followed, after a few moments' delay, with the same line of music played again, totally locked in pace. The line may be identical, it may be harmonically offset, it may be inverted, but it is clearly recognizable. Yet, the two substantially identical lines, with just a displacement in time, can make a two-voice melody which paints a picture that is quite new and different from the original. There is the feeling of the original theme chasing itself, and you are never quite sure how it could ever end, if it cannot catch up with itself. How can two children chasing one another ever have a winner? Bach was the master of this idiom.

In the world of psychology, a fugue is — as I understand it — a state of mind involving amnesia, and a loss of connection with oneself for a period of time. It is brought about by extreme stress. It is not organic, not a seizure; it is purely psychological.

Three times, I have experienced something I call a fugue, although I probably shouldn't call it that, because I can recall what happened, I can describe every detail, and the only thing I can't do is make any sense out of it. But I love the word, so that's the word I'm going to use. It's my story, after all.

My three experiences were essentially the same; they differed only in duration. There was a separation of about ten years between each of them.

Let me try to reconstruct the first, and longest lived, of these events. It happened one day somewhere in the mid-1970's. I got up, put on my

clothes, started down the road to get the morning paper, and became aware that everything about me had been rotated ninety degrees. I was in completely familiar surroundings, where I knew that north was straight ahead of me, east to the right, and so on. But it was as if I had been lifted up, given a quarter turn, and put back down, so that when I again faced the direction that I knew was north, it seemed to be west. Everything was somehow wrong, all around the compass.

Probably everyone has had some encounter with this sort of location-vertigo. Maybe you were once at a convention being held in a giant box-like hotel in a strange city. You park outside, and go in by the closest of the four entries on the four bordering streets. Inside, there are halls that make right and left turns, meeting rooms off these hallways, and alternate exits from the rooms to other halls.

After a full day, with no attention having been paid to the tally of right and left turns, something somewhere slips a cog and, upon exiting by what you thought was your original door, you find yourself on an unfamiliar street. Which way is the car? You know you're in the wrong place, but you can't be sure why or how it's wrong, and there's no way to intellectually straighten it out. However, in this case, you have only to walk around the hotel to put your surroundings in proper perspective, and free yourself from confusion.

On the other hand, in my fugue state, even though the landscape in all directions was completely familiar, the sense of rotation persisted. There seemed no way of making myself right, again. I was going to have to live with it, and there was no telling for how long.

Back in the house, I discovered another strangeness, a disquieting uncertainty involving the meaning of certain words. It was at this point that I began making the notes which I completed the next day.

"Any words that have concrete meanings are fine and completely friendly. That thing outside the window is a tree. The soft whatsis underfoot is a rug. That is a photograph, over there on the bookcase. I am at peace with these representational names, the tree, the rug, the photo, the bookcase. People's names are OK too, I guess because they represent things. That photo there is of Manuel. Because Manuel is a concrete thing, I recognize his face. So, the representation can lean a little bit towards the symbolic, and proportionally away from the actual tangible reality. The photograph of a person is equivalent to the person."

"But words which are meaningful only in their immediate context come at me as total strangers. The photograph of the face of Manuel makes sense, but reading the time from the face of the

clock does not. There is no face, there. Manuel is a face, but there is no such thing on the clock. The time displayed on the front of the clock is a little too abstract. The meaning is not apparent from looking at the individual numbers and letters, or trying to analyze these components."

I remember a psychological test for certain forms of mental disturbance that asks the patient to explain the meanings of idiomatic phrases. The rolling stone gathers no moss. A stitch in time saves nine. I am sure that, during my fugue, I would have been able to deal only with the literal meanings of each of these expressions, and so have failed the test hands down. I would even have had trouble with the phrase, "hands down." It would have been fascinating to have challenged myself with a familiar foreign language.

Early in the fugue experience, I didn't think of using the radio as a source of spoken language, to test my comprehension. I rather suspect that the sound of speech would have been all right, but that, if I'd had to read a written text corresponding to what I was hearing, I would have found it quite a bit more troublesome.

The best way of making clear the nature of this fugue state is in the use of numbers. Each of the three times it happened to me, I found that the careful, structured use of numbers was an excellent way of defining and describing the actual experience.

"Numbers are straightforward. I can add them, manipulate them, count backwards by sevens from a hundred, or by 27's from 275, and I still can mentally extract square roots. But — as with words — when numbers are presented in a form that requires context, everything falls apart. Telephone numbers have no logical connection with people. I can come up with all sorts of telephone numbers from memory, but the dialing of them has no meaning. Intellectually, I know that if I push the buttons, someone's voice will materialize in the ear piece. But I can't really understand what the pushing of a series of phone buttons has to do with talking to anybody!"

"A street address is just as nonsensical. Let's say, I live at 3038 Birch Terrace. Birch, okay; terrace, nearly okay, but the 3038 thing makes no sense, in that context.

"The numbers on the digital clock are equally worthless. They can give me absolutely no insight as to what time it is at the moment. Sure, it is 10:40, but where and what is a 10:40?

"The date is equally mysterious. It is June 19, 1978. What is a 1978? It adds up to the sum 24, and the reduced integer is 6, but I can't see any apparent relevance to anything else, including the birth of Christ.

"I remember having looked at the morning Chronicle a half dozen times to make some connection between the printed date and the assignment page in my appointment book. The paper says today is June the 16th. It is a Monday, and my little book says that, at 2:30, I have to be in Federal Court as an expert witness for the defense in a criminal case. I must be in a courtroom on the 17th floor.

"The digital clock on my desk has a 10:40 on it. How does that come together with a 2:30? And what is the meaning of 17th floor?

"The day of the week is certain from the morning paper, and from the calendar on the wall, but it has no absolute position in the flow of time as I am experiencing it. Can I find boundaries to contain the phenomenon, then shrink these limits sufficiently to pin-point the Now, with complete certainty?

"Perhaps I am maybe just the slightest bit light-headed. I can hear it now — 'He clearly was suffering one of the most notorious evils associated with consciousness-expanding drugs, a flashback,' which this decidedly is not."

Are there such things as flashbacks? Yes, but they are pretty rare, and there is always some uncertainty involved in connecting them to the action of a drug. There have been proposed both chemical and psychological mechanisms. The chemical argument — the unexpected re-activation of a lingering molecule — is without merit. If 100 micrograms of LSD was effective today, and if the blood level dropped with a half-life of a couple of hours, then in a few days there will be an undetectable amount of the drug present in the body. If such a vanishingly small quantity of any drug were to be active, it would mean that that drug would have an overwhelmingly high potency. No such compound is known to exist.

So it is not a physical thing. Can it be psychological? Absolutely. But I would give good odds that any flashback will turn out to be related in some measure to a traumatic experience. Say, for instance, you had a bad driving accident, several months ago, in which you swerved your car to avoid hitting a pedestrian in a red shirt who had suddenly appeared in

front of you, and you crashed into a large beer truck. You broke your right leg and had over \$2,000 worth of medical bills which your insurance never covered. I'll wager that the appearance of a red shirt in the pedestrian crosswalk, in front of your car — months later — might well produce a sharp pain in your leg. Your right leg, specifically. That is the mechanism of a flashback, whether drug-related or not. It's a conditioned response.

If you'd had a drug experience that was memorably traumatic, then the flashback could well be your way of reliving it. All you need is the catalyst, the red shirt, and the scene could pop up from your unconscious to replay itself, in living Technicolor, not to speak of sound effects and emotions, as well.

But my fugues have no apparent relation to past trauma of any kind.

I decided, on that day, to look closely at blood pressure, and at the possible need of my brain for sugar. Knowing that I had to be in court in the afternoon, I had no choice but to extricate myself from this strange situation.

I had to put on San Francisco clothes (a white shirt, a non-outrageous tie, a jacket, and clean socks). Brute subtraction (present time from target time) told me that I had to be in court in less than four hours. To start with, I was going to have to come to grips with the meaning of the concept, "four hours," pretty damned fast.

A frightful thought hit me. What if I found myself on the witness stand, still in this peculiar state of dissociation? Would I be able to understand the questions I might be asked? Would the very concept of question and answer be meaningful? Could I simply grit my teeth, and carry it all off without anyone being the wiser?

I thought, let's see if I can answer that by turning on the radio; maybe that will help define the geometry of my strange altered place.

The radio gave me a late Mozart piano concerto, coming across with complete integrity. A stellar thing of beauty without any trace of disconnection or disjointedness. Fine, I thought, let's turn to a news station and get words.

I was hit with the time, the weather, an advertisement for a travel service, and a stock market report, all within the first minute of listening. It felt as if I had just been dealt a poker hand in which every card carried a different suite, and each card had a different number. Nothing made sense.

I did not look forward to a spirited cross examination on the witness stand. Maybe this was all due to some unprecedented drop in my blood sugar level. I voraciously ate a couple of oranges, and began getting ready for my trip to the City. I showered (everything went well), I searched for a suitable shirt (that was not as easy), and I found reasonably polished sandals.

Can I drive? I will certainly find out.

As it turned out, my driving was flawless. It was quite another matter to unravel the intricacies of underground parking, there under the Civic Center, but I was able to call up the correct procedure from some emergency memory bank, and all went smoothly.

Still wondering if my blood sugar was involved, I sat down at a lunch counter and ordered a tall glass of orange juice.

Gradually, imperceptibly, things began slipping into their normal place. My body was slowly rotating back into its proper north-south orientation. It became more and more comprehensible that today was Monday, June the 19th, because yesterday had been Sunday. Tomorrow, of course, would be Tuesday.

By 1:00 PM everything was pretty much normal. Normal? Yes, normal. My appearance on the witness stand, I felt, would be under control. And so it was.

In retrospect, what was that all about? I had drifted, like a wide-winged bird, over many things that were without meaning, yet my mind was clicking away quite properly on other levels. The elapsed time of this event, this fugue, was around five hours.

Twice, since then, basically identical experiences have occurred, but in shorter time. The most recent lasted only twenty minutes.

Somebody will undoubtedly say, "Maybe certain of his brain cells got burned out as a result of too many exploratory drug assays!"

But that theory isn't logical, because, if such had been the case, how could they have repaired themselves in a two to three hour period? The professional neurochemists tell us that these cells never repair themselves.

The flashback, as I said, is not a good explanation as there is no obvious trauma being relived. The fugue event has properties quite removed from any drug experience I have ever had.

Might it have been hypoglycemia? I don't think so. My two later fugue experiences simply dissolved and disappeared without my paying any attention to sugar at all.

I think that fugues such as this might be part and parcel of normal brain function. Perhaps they are ascribed, by whoever becomes aware of such an oddness, to stress or lack of sleep or too much drinking the night before. The obvious response is to phone the boss and tell him you're sick, and go to bed until it passes.

Maybe there is a man in the backwoods of Idaho who is walking through the trees on his land, one day, and suddenly realizes that the familiar surroundings have become alien territory; he is a stranger in a forest that belongs to someone or something else. The back of his neck prickles as hair rises, and he turns around and heads for home.

I am convinced that this phenomenon, the fugue, is part of the heritage

of the human animal.

And I have come to appreciate, at a very deep level, the possibility that this state (blessedly transient with me), might be the day-to-day reality of some guy out there on the street.

It's a thought that gives rise to immense compassion.

I look forward to my fourth occurrence. If the apparent pattern is maintained, the next episode should take place in another five years, and may last only a few minutes. That is an extremely short period of time in which to run experiments in word association and counting numbers backwards, but I will try to do both. I am most curious.

## CHAPTER 38. CRISIS

(Alice's voice)

### SUNDAY

This is the story of a major alteration of consciousness which occurred because, apparently, it was time for it to happen.

It began on a Sunday afternoon one November in the mid-'80's. Shura was working in his office and I was in the bedroom, beginning to sort out what I thought of as my shit pile, a collection of such things as clothes, belts, stockings, photographs, and old magazines, all waiting to be put where they belonged. The pile was a symbol, a reminder to me of a side of myself I detested — scattered, disorganized, and procrastinating. I wasn't sure which was worse, looking at that mound of stuff or fighting the sluggishness that always crept over me when I began trying to organize a personal mess of this kind.

I understood the depression; I had long ago figured out the conflicts involved in trying to clear up any accumulation of objects that represented some part of myself — *especially* if it was an unwanted part — but understanding hadn't resolved the problem.

I started in, lifting boxes onto the bed and folding clothes into drawers, feeling slow and dull.

So when Shura called out to me from his office, "Hey, how would you like to help push back the foreskin of science while you're working?" I shouted back that I couldn't imagine anything more appealing, and what did he have in mind?

He crossed the hall and leaned against the door frame, "There's this new thing I've taken up to thirty milligrams. I haven't spotted any activity yet, and I thought you might want to take it one more step up — maybe forty milligrams? You almost certainly won't get any effects, but I would

appreciate having one more level out of the way, if you feel like volunteering?"

"Sure," I smiled, "What is it?"

"It's 3,5-dimethoxy-4-methylphenethylamine. DESOXY, for short."

"Okay, I volunteer," I said, suddenly not tired any more. Even if there wasn't liable to be activity at forty milligrams, I thought, it would help my morale to know I was trying out the next level of a new drug, to have the self-image of Alice the Useful to help counteract that of Alice the Messy.

Shura went to the lab and came back with a glass containing a bit of white powder and beckoned me to follow him to the kitchen. I asked if he was taking anything himself, and he said, "Nope. I had an inactive level of something else yesterday and I need to stay clean today."

I poured out a bit of pink lemonade onto the powder. Shura clinked his coffee mug against my glass, "To science." I replied, "I'll drink to that," and did. Then I said, "Bleah," and poured out more lemonade to wash the taste away.

I hugged him, "Thanks, honeybun! I feel useful and virtuous and important!"

"Well," he cautioned, "As I told you, I don't honestly expect we'll get any activity, but you never know. You could have a threshold, if we're lucky. But I wouldn't count on it."

On our way out of the kitchen, I asked, "What makes you so sure I won't get activity?"

He explained that, if he hadn't detected any effects at thirty milligrams, a mere ten milligrams more couldn't be expected to present anything but a threshold, at the most. "All drugs," he said, "Have what is called a dose-response curve; with more material you get more effect. But most things like these phenethylamines show a pretty shallow slope. If you get nothing at one level, there's rarely much to be seen at even twice that level."

I paused at the door of the bedroom, "Okay. But you don't usually double the dose of a new compound, do you, in the first stages of trying it out?"

Shura shook his head, "Not when it might be getting into the area of activity, but, yes, I might in the earlier stages. Anyway, with this DESOXY stuff, we're not doubling, just going up by one third again. Normally, I jump by half again with each new trial, so this is a pretty modest increase."

I went back to work, making neat stacks of letters and catalogs which had inserted themselves between ancient copies of The Saturday Review and Newsweek, and listened to talk radio to keep my mind from turning to mush.

About forty minutes had passed before it dawned on me that something had changed. I couldn't define it at all; I just knew I was off baseline. I went into the office and told Shura that things were going on, though I

couldn't tell exactly what, and he said, "That's great! I didn't really expect you'd get anything. Think it's distinct enough to be counted as a definite threshold?"

"It feels more like a plus-one, actually," I said, "But let's wait and see."

"Well, keep me informed."

"You'd better believe it!"

I stooped and lifted and grumbled, threw crumpled clothes into the ironing basket, examined photographs and stacked them carefully in a shoe box on the bed, feeling increasingly strange and not entirely comfortable. There was no apparent body load; it was just a general uneasiness, and I couldn't really pin it down.

By the time an hour had gone by since ingestion of the drug, I had come to the conclusion that this was more than a plus-one, and that I didn't give a damn about organizing things any more. I wanted to lie down, so I shoved boxes around to give myself space on the bed. I still couldn't define the discomfort.

There was no apparent visual activity of the kind that we look for when there's more than a plus-one effect; nothing was moving on the walls or ceilings; there was no rippling of curtain edges. But when I looked through the window at Mount Diablo and its foothills, they had taken on a disturbing aspect.

I love Diablo; I've seen many sunrises over it, often standing with Shura's arms around me at the tail end of a good experiment. The distinctive shape is part of us, part of our home, one of the first things our eyes go to when we return from being away. I had never before seen it present itself the way it did now — hard, unfriendly, almost hostile.

I looked away from the window.

Feeling cold, I got an old, soft, taffy-brown sweater out of the closet and put it on before lying down again. It seemed best to stay quiet for a while longer, because movement of any kind caused a chill to go through me, and there was a hint of nausea.

Lying on my back, hands clasped behind my head, I examined the room. There was an ordinariness to it; it was just a room, not the treasured place where Shura and I made love and heard music. It was merely walls and furniture and a mound of stuff against the far wall and a big bed piled with dusty cardboard boxes. I felt no attachment to any of it.

In fact, I realized, I felt no emotions at all, just a faint distaste.

When Shura came in and asked how things were going, I said, "It's really weird. I don't think I like it much."

He sat on the bed and asked me what level of activity I thought it was, and I said, "Close to a plus-two, I think."

His eyebrows shot up, then he frowned, "Maybe you're very sensitive to it; I can't understand how you could be getting a plus-two at just ten

milligrams more than I took."

I said I couldn't understand it either, but it definitely was not going to be one of my favorite materials at *any* level; of that, I was certain. At least, not from what I'd seen of it so far.

He asked about body or nervous system load and I said, "All that seems okay; it's just a mental uncomfortableness."

He stroked my leg thoughtfully, then made a suggestion, "Why don't you go outside and see if that improves things?"

I said, "All right, I'll give it a try," feeling no enthusiasm for the idea. I got up and walked down the hall to the back door. Shura called out after me, "Do you want company?"

"No, thanks, let me try it by myself, at least to start with."

I walked slowly down the path, past the lab and up the short brick stairway. My arms were folded against the cold, and I felt slightly irritable. I wandered to the edge of the grassy shelf. We often sit there when the weather is good, in canvas patio chairs which wobble on the uneven ground, and look out over the valley.

I turned my eyes to the mountain in the east and then north to where the county seat, the old town of Martinez, was hidden under a thin layer of white fog. Aside from the faint irritability, I felt nothing. There was no excitement, no depression, no fear; no real emotion at all. The valley and the mountain were very much present, but I could see neither beauty nor ugliness anywhere, and I felt no personal connection to any of it.

Everything I saw seemed to very intensely exist, but not in relation to me.

*It all looks cold, clear, distant, and there's no response inside me. No caring of any kind. For anything. Which means this damned drug will go no further than Shura and me. Well, well, waddya know! "Damned drug" implies some feeling, after all. Some part of me is angry! That's interesting.*

As I stood there watching the fog layer at the end of the valley, it began to take on a new aspect; it seemed alive — a cold, white, alien entity. It was, I thought grimly, like an externalized form of my own state of mind.

*Am I feeling this way because I'm seeing nature as it really is, without the sentimental overlay that humans put on it? People always think, "I care about this tree, that river; I love the mountain, the hills. Therefore they care about me, they love me, too." Without being aware of it, we project onto the natural world entirely human feelings which it doesn't share and has no concern with. Is that it? I'm feeling no emotion because I'm tuning into what's around me and seeing the way it really is; a physical landscape in which emotions don't exist at all. Only animals and humans have emotions. The rest of nature has none.*

My tummy was still not sure of itself, so I went back to the house and stopped at Shura's office door to tell him maybe I'd try putting a bit of food into the bod.

He asked, "How was the outside world?"

"Couldn't appreciate it, I'm afraid. Everything is very strange and distant and not particularly friendly, so I thought I'd come back and heat up some soup. Do you want some?"

"Sure, sounds good. Do you need help fixing it?"

"Good heavens, no, thanks. I'm okay."

At the table, Shura reached for my hand and held it for a moment. The hot cream of tomato soup and sourdough bread was making me feel a little better.

When we'd finished eating, he sat back in his chair and looked at me, smiling slightly, and said, "Well, I guess we'd have to call it a surprising experiment, to say the least!"

"Yup, I'd say so. Not entirely a pleasant one, either. It pretty much flattens out my emotions, which is something I just do...not...like. It's really strange; I'm aware that some part of myself is angry at this whole thing, but I can't connect with the anger. I know I'll be able to experience it tomorrow, when I'm back to normal, but now, I don't seem to be able to feel it; I just know it's there."

He nodded. "Where are you now, plus-wise?"

"Oh, I think it's easing off. I'm on the down slope, thank heaven. About a plus one, I'd guess."

"Good. I'm going to go very carefully with this one, from here on. That is, if it seems worth taking any farther, and there's some doubt about that, from what you've said. It certainly looks like an extremely steep response curve."

"Uh-huh, it sure does."

"You going to be all right?"

"Oh, yes. I'll do the dishes, then just relax and watch TV for a while and keep myself distracted until I'm back to normal."

He came over to me and held my head against his stomach. He stroked my hair, then bent down and kissed my forehead. I hugged him and got up to clear the table.

By 9:00 P.M., I was pretty much baseline. There was still a sense of emotional flatness and the remnants of disconnection from my surroundings, but I kept myself occupied with television, until an attack of yawning signaled bedtime.

Curled up back to back with Shura, I discovered that my nervous system was not, after all, completely at peace. Once, I jumped — what Shura called "darting" — startling myself out of an uneasy drift into sleep, and a few minutes later my right ear was attacked by a viciously aggressive buzzing which came diving straight into it. I knew it was only a phantom wasp, having experienced it before, but a feeling of vulnerability remained for some time. I made a mental note to tell Shura that the body's wiring

was a bit sensitive to this stuff.

## MONDAY

It was a good sleep. When I woke, I looked at the sunlight streaming in across the ceiling and thought, Oh boy, that was awful yesterday. That was awful! I sat up and put my feet on the floor, aware of a full bladder, and looked around me again and knew, in an instant of shock, that I was still in it. It wasn't over.

For the first time, I felt fear.

I went down the hall to the bathroom, thinking furiously.

*What is this? I thought I was baseline last night; I'm sure I was. How could Shura have had no activity at all at thirty milligrams and I not only had a resounding plus-two, at just a little bit more, but it's lasting into the next day? Is it possible that something in my psyche opened and got stuck open?*

I sat on the toilet, staring at the floor, trying to figure it out.

*I don't want to be here like this. What is it I'm locked into? There's a sense of some kind of intelligence; I can feel it, like a cold, observing Mind. It's everywhere, watching everything. It sees me. What feelings does it have about me? Probe. No feelings. I can't pick up any kind of feelings. Just awareness. I don't want to be anywhere near it. I want to be back to my old self and my familiar old world.*

There was one distinct difference from the day before: I had emotions this morning. Mostly despair. And anger.

After I'd dressed in my jeans and sweater, I made the coffee and scrambled some eggs, then sat at the table with Shura, picking at food I had no appetite for. I waited until he had finished reading the Chronicle before I told him, "I'm still on, honey."

He frowned, "What do you mean? You're still feeling something from yesterday?"

"I know I was baseline, last night. There was some residue, because I darted while I was going to sleep, but I was definitely down. This morning, I woke up and found myself right back on again. About a plus two, in fact."

Shura's eyes searched me, then he reached over and cradled my face in his hands, "I don't know what to say, Buns. This just doesn't make sense."

"I know it doesn't."

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing at all, honey. You don't have to stay home or anything. I'm okay by myself, believe me. If I feel weird or out of control or really worried, I'll phone you at work and tell you so, I promise."

*The truth is, I am feeling weird and I certainly don't have an ounce of control over this, and the word "worried" doesn't even begin to describe it. But I've got to*

*work it through myself.*

Shura got up and began gathering his papers from the end of the bookcase.

"Are you sure you don't need me here with you? I can call in —"

"No, I mean it. I only told you because you had to know there's a continuation of the drug effect. I don't understand how, considering everything, but what else could it be?"

"Don't be silly! Of course you had to tell me! Don't ever withhold something like that, sweetie! You would expect me to tell you, wouldn't you, if our positions were reversed?"

"Yes."

When Shura was dressed for the outside world (he worked with David, twice a week, in a research laboratory in San Francisco), I stood in the kitchen and looked at him, at the blue eyes shadowed by concern, and asked, "What if this state turned out to be permanent, honey? I know that's not very likely, but what if it were?"

He looked into my eyes and took a deep breath, "Well, if it did turn out to be permanent, we'd find out how you can adapt to living at a plus-two. You would have no choice but to learn to adjust to it as your normal state. And you would, you know, just as I would if it happened to me."

I grinned weakly, "Yeah, I suppose that's exactly what I'd have to do."

*That was a scared-child question. He's answering me as if I'm a grown-up, bless him.*

"I really don't think that's going to happen, Alice," he said, putting down his ancient briefcase and hugging me hard.

*Jesus, I can't cry now! I've got to hold on until he's out the door. There's nothing he can do, and he'd just worry.*

I squeezed him back and said, my voice as down-to-earth as I could manage, "I know it isn't, Luv. Just a wild thought. I'll be all right. You know I can take good care of myself. If I had any doubts at all, I wouldn't let you go to work — you should know by now I'm not the martyr type."

I sounded completely convincing to my own ears, and he kissed me, said he'd phone during the day, and turned to go. At the door, he hesitated, then muttered, "I don't understand all this. It doesn't make sense — or have I said that before?"

I said, "I already came to the same conclusion. It doesn't compute. But, in the meantime, I'm going to be pretty busy trying to work my way out of it."

I kissed him goodbye again, and watched his dusty little green car drive off.

As I turned to go back to the kitchen, I remembered an incident Shura had told me about, a long time ago. He had wakened one morning, having done no drug experiments for several days before, and found himself in a

totally altered state of consciousness. He had set to work trying out various things to bring himself back to normal, including eating oranges for the sugar, which had no effect either. I recalled his telling me that, by the middle of the afternoon, the strange experience had apparently run its course, and when he woke up the next morning, he was okay. He'd never figured out the what or why of it, he'd said, and probably never would.

Perhaps this was my equivalent, I thought, and maybe it would be over with by the time he came home.

I started washing the few dishes in the sink, watching myself adjusting the temperature of the tap water, scrubbing forks, rinsing, as if I were a movie camera recording *A Day in the Life Of*. In the bedroom, I observed myself pulling the fitted bottom sheet on the bed to smooth out the wrinkles, noting the efficiency with which I made the ordinary, familiar moves, and tried to remember the correct psychological term for this kind of detachment. The only word that came to mind was "discombobulation," which was certainly appropriate, but not what I was searching for. (Much later the word came back; it was, of course, "dissociation.")

All the while, I kept a determined wall between myself and the Thing, to which I had decided to give the temporary name, White Mind — white, as in fog. And ice. I knew I would have to deal with it sooner or later, but at least I had enough control over the situation — so far — to be able to decide when, and that would be after doing what had to be done in the house.

I didn't bother looking out the window because I already knew what I'd see.

Finally, after sitting for a few minutes with a cup of coffee, I unlocked the back door and went outside. It wasn't that the White Mind was located there; it was more a matter of my having chosen to do my battling of it out where there were trees and grass and sky, where I could move, walk, have space.

A few feet from the house, I paused and looked over the valley and, this time, I was not sensing the cold, dispassionate consciousness only in my immediate surroundings; I stood, arms folded in the instinctive body language of self-protection, next to a patch of bare ground where we had planted spring bulbs — hyacinths and daffodils — and knew that I was tuning in to a pure consciousness of unlimited intelligence and absolute clarity; there was a crystal awareness, everywhere, that watched everything, having neither liking nor disliking nor any other feelings for anything it saw. It observed love and hate and recorded, it observed atoms and elephants and recorded, it observed agony and orgasm and recorded. And it learned from everything; it learned all the time.

Suddenly, I was remembering Carlos Castenada's spokesman, Don Juan, describing what he called the Eagle — an immense, implacable,

emotionless spiritual force which lived for only one thing: awareness. I had read about the Eagle with revulsion, a long time ago; I could still recall my resistance to the idea of such an entity existing on any level of reality.

I went back into the house and found the passage in Castaneda's book, *The Eagle's Gift*:

"The power that governs the destiny of all living beings is called the Eagle ... because it appears to the seer as an immeasurable jet-black eagle ... its height reaching to infinity."

"The Eagle is devouring the awareness of all the creatures that, alive on earth a moment before and now dead, have floated to the Eagle's beak, like a ceaseless swarm of fireflies, to meet their owner, their reason for having had life. The Eagle consumes them; for awareness is the Eagle's food."

Shaken by a burst of intense anger, I returned the book to the shelf and went back outside.

*I will not call it the Eagle. That's Castaneda's image, his world, his universe. I will not name this — whatever it is — after somebody else's lousy, godforsaken bird!*

I was being pressed down upon by its presence.

*Why am I so angry? It's more than anger; it's closer to fury. There's something about this Thing I'm tuned into which pushes all my buttons, and I've got to figure out why. Okay, it's because there's nothing more dreadful to me than impersonal intelligence, thought unattached to feeling. Why is it so terrible? Because it is inhuman — unhuman. What's bad about a mind being non-human? I'm not hostile to the idea of non-human beings living on other planets, and perhaps visiting earth, am I? Why not? Because I believe — I prefer to believe — that non-humans would have feelings, that's why.*

For the first time that day, I smiled. Why did I assume that aliens from other parts of the galaxy would inevitably have feelings of some kind?

*Probably because the fact that they were visiting us would mean they were curious and wanted to find out, wouldn't it? Curiosity is most definitely a feeling, as well as an intellectual function. Rocks aren't curious, rivers and trees aren't curious. Only the animal world has curiosity. So I figure that visiting non-humans would be feeling something we could understand: wanting to know. And if they can experience one emotion, they must have the capacity for others — or so the reasoning goes. And we can make contact, touch, communicate with feelings, even when we can't speak the other's language.*

I looked up at the hazy November sky, and wondered if this crystal-cold awareness was the Mind of the Creator.

*Whatever it is, I loathe it.*

I remembered another time, years before, when I had learned that God is everything that exists, good and bad, and that it experiences every emotion and sensation felt by every one of its parts.

*Okay, this is not the Mind of God. On the other hand, what if the answer I got before was wrong, and this is the true nature of the consciousness that runs the cosmos? If it isn't, then why do I sense it to be universal; why has it taken over everywhere, so I can't tune in to anything else? And what am I supposed to do with it?*

I flashed undiluted hatred at the Thing, the White Mind that watched and recorded, knowing that neither my hatred, nor the fact that I was deliberately communicating it, mattered in the least to it. It would continue to observe and register and learn without prejudice, bias or emotion.

I walked down the little path, brushing past the new grass which had sprung up with the first fall rains. The tawny yellow edges of California's summer-dried hills were starting to blur into long-forgotten green. I saw nothing of the growing things on either side of me as I walked the dirt trail, barely dry from the last rain; I was making a decision.

*I refuse it. I will not accept it as the force that runs my universe. I will not assent to a spiritual intelligence that has no feelings, no caring.*

I found myself outside the dear old scarred, dirty laboratory door. I put a hand out and touched one of the glass panes; they had been painted white on the inside long, long ago, to prevent the uninvited from seeing in.

*Shura. Beautiful, incredible man of mine. How could we have actually managed to find each other? How is it that he has the heart and the patience to put up with me?*

I turned around and began slowly walking back in the direction of the house, my head down, aware of nothing but the streams of thoughts flowing through me.

*What happens to us when we die? Do we get absorbed by this clear, unfluctuating awareness, this inhuman, uncaring Recorder? Does all human experience mean only more material for a cosmic information-bank?*

It didn't feel true. I was missing something.

*How could an Overmind which has no feelings create living things which feel all the time?*

Time had stopped moving. I sensed that I was on the edge of discovering something, at least a piece of the answer; I could feel it, just around a corner.

I knew the Enemy was observing my sequence of thoughts and questions, feeding itself with what was going on inside me, along with everything else going on everywhere else.

*I can't live with this Thinking Machine. I will not accept it as the final truth of the nature of God. I do not accept!*

I stopped next to an oak sapling and looked up at the clouds which

were beginning to gather overhead.

*Anger swept over me again, and it was edged with hate.*

*Do you hear me, you damned monstrous son-of-a-bitch? I say NO to you! I DENY YOU!*

I realized that tears had been flowing down my cheeks for some time; I just hadn't noticed before. They would have to be ignored; I was too busy right now. I had just informed what might well be the Creator that I wasn't going to play in its lousy sandbox. Now what?

*Why am I feeling no fear? Because this is too important for me to waste time being afraid. Besides, what is there left to be afraid of? The worst possible thing which any cosmic Mind could do to a little human one has already been done: it has revealed its own nature, and in doing so, it has managed to effectively strip my world of all meaning, all purpose. I'd rather confront an eight-armed demon with razor fangs! You can battle with a demon, you can embrace a demon; what the hell can you do with a fucking spiritual computer?*

I folded my fingers around a handful of cedar bush, needing the touch of something friendly.

*I have to solve a rather serious question, and soon. The question is: if I refuse to live in a universe run by this — this Thing, and if I have no intention of committing suicide, then what kind of universe will I consent to live in? And how do I go about creating it?*

An interesting observation drifted quietly in.

*If I can experience the White Mind and reject it, that means I have a choice, because I have made that choice. And I obviously have the right to say no, because I have just said it.*

I sat down on a grassy slope next to the brown path, and rocked myself back and forth to help the thinking.

*If the essential core of all life in the universe, including the human, is in truth this Mind that only thinks and learns and does not feel, then my alternative is a universe run by a consciousness that feels. A Mind that is capable of love. Does that mean it has to be capable of hate? We've had that one already in good old lehovah. No. Yes. You can't have just the good half; it's all or nothing, my friend. If my acceptable God-mind loves, it also hates. If it feels any emotion, it feels all emotions. Jesus. Start again.*

One of the cats had discovered me. I knew she wouldn't leave, so I would either have to put her in my lap and try to ignore the passionate clawing which would accompany the purrs, or get up and go inside. For the moment, I decided to turn my lap over to the cat, because I wanted to keep searching for some kind of answer here, outside, under the sky.

I kept working, trying to find out what it would take to create another universe and another God — one I could assent to — and what the rules would have to be. I already knew that there had to be positive and negative, male and female, Yin and Yang. For there to be life, there had to be

death. I understood that much. There had to be pain as a sign of imbalance, of something needing to be fixed. If there was connection with another living being, one would experience loss when that other was taken away; if you open yourself to love, you open also to sorrow.

I shook my head sharply to clear it, wiping off tears with a furiously impatient hand. The sound of purring continued, and I resumed my rocking.

*All those thousands and thousands of years of human beings trying to survive, everywhere on the planet, scrambling to get food and build shelters, finding a bit of joy in loving and working and singing together, and all of them desperate to discover what the meaning of existence is — all the suffering and pain, all the beauty — trying to understand because they've been created with the kind of mind that is compelled to try to understand. It's been built into us, that urge to figure it out.*

Images paraded through me: abandoned old people dying alone in dirty rooms, children crying because their parents hurt them, young soldiers losing arms and legs and their manhood; eons of pain and anguish, fear and loss of hope.

*My God and all the little gods! Is all of it just food for some sort of horrendous Watcher-Recorder-Computer?*

I cried for a while, real crying, for all the innocent, injured, rejected, helpless people and other living things, all over the world. There was a racking pain in my chest, and I remembered having been in this place of sorrow before, one evening, years ago, after taking one of Shura's compounds. I remembered calling it the Sorrow Place, and the Valley of the Shadow of Death, finally realizing that it was a bottomless pit and asking Shura what I should do with it.

He had answered, "Step out. Now that you've learned what it is, decide you've been there long enough, and simply step out. Get back to the world of life and love and humor, which exists right alongside it, and is just as valid."

I had asked how he would get himself out, if this were happening to him, and he'd said, "When I get stuck in a difficult place, I go to the lab and wash glassware, until the difficulty resolves itself, or transforms into something else. Sooner or later, it always does. But, since washing glassware's not your thing, why don't you sit down at your typewriter and put it on paper? You could make it one of your great reports to Dante and Ginger!"

I did exactly that until, very gradually, I began to glimpse images of the Smiling Buddha and then, many small children playing on a field of grass, and I found myself coming out of that place of pain and sorrow.

It was time to step out again, I thought. If I could. That still left me with my number-one problem, though.

*Since I will not assent to this White Mind being the ruling intelligence of my universe, I'm going to have to construct a God-Mind I can accept.*

I sat on the grass, rocking, absently stroking the cat.

*And obviously, the only way I can conceive of another kind of God-Mind is to form it out of myself, my own mind and soul.*

Comprehension began trickling in.

*Is that what I am? A piece of the God-Mind trying to give itself a new definition? Or am I going to make a full circle and end up re-affirming what already exists?*

The ringing of a telephone reached me through the back door. I spilled the cat off my lap and went inside to the office, hoping it would not be a complicated call, but as my hand touched the top of the phone, I knew it was Shura.

He asked, "How are you, Buns?"

"I'm okay, honey. Struggling with the cosmos, but okay."

"Anything changed for the better?"

"I really don't know. I mean, it's hard to look at it all objectively enough to say whether something's better or not. I'm just awfully busy trying to figure things out."

"Not coming down yet?"

"I don't think so, Luv, but I know in my heart of hearts that it won't be permanent, so I'll just keep on doing what I have to do and wait until it's run its course."

*That's interesting. I didn't know I was going to say that. The words came out of some part of me that DOES know it won't be permanent, that it will pass.*

Shura said he loved me and would be home soon, and I told him there was no need to worry, repeating that I was basically okay, in some peculiar sort of way, and that I loved him very much.

As I hung up, a face appeared in my mind, the face of the psychologist, Adam Fisher, our favorite grandfather figure and wise-man. I went to the living room, where I could sit on the couch and use the ashtray, and dialed his number.

"Adam," I said, "This is Alice." He said Hi, in his warm, smiling voice. I told him, "I'm in trouble, and I need help."

I could feel him snapping into focus on the other end of the phone, "Tell me."

I told him, pausing every now and then to gulp down the tears that kept rising in my throat.

I summarized, "I'm living in a universe that is full of some kind of cold intelligence that watches and records everything and has no feelings at all, and it may very well be the truth of what God is, although I don't really think so, but I don't know what else it could be, because it's everywhere and I can't get away from it. I've decided I'm not going to accept it. I know

that sounds ridiculous, but that's the way I feel."

I clenched my teeth to stop the tears from choking me, and plunged on, "All I seem to be able to do is think a flood of thoughts and cry continual stupid tears and inside I'm screaming NO, NO! at something that couldn't care less, and I want to get the hell out." I stopped for a moment, coughing to clear my thickened throat.

I heard him say, his voice sharp and emphatic, "First, you haven't discovered anything about the cosmos at all. Whatever you're facing is not out there, it's inside you. It's you, not God and not the universe. Start dealing with it as an aspect of yourself."

I said Oh.

"Next thing," continued Adam, "What you're going through is a process. You don't have any way of understanding what it is or why it's happening; don't try to understand, right now. You're just going to have to accept the fact that some kind of process is taking place which needs to take place and there's only one thing you can do, *must* do, and that is: don't get in its way."

"Jesus, Adam," I said, "Am I going to be stuck here forever?"

"No," said Adam, the sharpness gone, "You're not going to be stuck there forever. In fact, I can assure you that you'll be out of it by the end of the week."

I understood, with a brief flash of amusement and admiration, that he was programming me — my unconscious, anyway — for recovery by the weekend, and I felt a surge of gratitude. I mentally dug an elbow into my own ribs and flashed the thought, "Listen, you, hear what he said? Out by the end of the week!"

"Thank you so very much, Adam. Listen, if I get to where I can trust myself to drive safely, can I come over and talk to you for a while? Will you be home the next couple of days, in case I can manage the car and everything?"

His voice was gentle and I realized he was speaking more distinctly and a bit slower than usual, so that I would hear him through tangle and confusion, "You call me any time of the day or night, and if I'm not here, leave a message on my answering machine and I'll get back to you as soon as I'm home. And when you can drive safely, you come over here and spend all the time you want. I'm here for you," he said, intently, "I'm here for you any time, just as you would be for me."

I thanked him again and hung up. Then I put my head in my hands and cried, hard, for a long time.

When Shura got home, he kissed me and held me to him, then searched my face and hugged me again. I knew he was concerned, and that it couldn't be helped — so was I. But whatever this was, it had to be lived through. I told him that the streams of thought were very intense and that

I couldn't shut them off, so I would either talk to him or write them out, although the images and the concepts had become so continuous and so complex, it was hard to focus on any of them long enough to write them down. I said I seemed to be reviewing all aspects of human life and experience, but that I was tuned in, most of all, to the painful, sad, tragic aspects, and it was getting to be a drag.

I followed him into the dining room, where he always put down his work papers and the mail. I suggested he go ahead and read his letters while I attended to dinner, which was going to be a matter of taking a frozen meal out of the refrigerator and putting it in the oven. Nothing more complicated than that, I said, which I was sure he'd understand, considering.

He told me he was perfectly willing to go out and get a cheeseburger, if I preferred to leave kitchen stuff alone right now. I assured him I could manage a frozen dinner without any problems at all, and heard myself actually chuckling. It was a nice, normal sound.

When he had finished with letters and bills, I sat down at the table and gave him a shortened version of the day's struggles, and described the call to Adam.

I concluded, "He said everything I'm going through is inside me, that what I'm facing is an aspect of myself. He said it's a process of some kind that has to happen, otherwise it wouldn't be happening, and that all I should do is not get in its way."

Shura half-smiled and nodded, "Sounds reasonable to me."

I smiled back, "And he told me I'd be out of it, all through and back to normal — whatever the hell *that* is! — by the weekend. Isn't that great?"

We both laughed.

When I put his meal on the table, Shura tried to persuade me to eat something, but I said I had no appetite — which was perfectly fine with me, considering my eternal weight problem — and would he mind eating alone while I went and sat down at my typewriter and made notes on all this crazy business? He said he wouldn't mind at all, and to call him if I needed anything, including just plain loving. I kissed him, and turned away so he wouldn't see the tears rolling again.

At the door of the kitchen, I looked back and decided to tell him about the watering eyes, instead of trying to hide them, because that would eventually become impossible.

"Shura?"

He looked up quickly, his face anxious, "Uh-huh?"

"I think I should explain that part of this — whatever is happening — seems to be an almost continual dripping of tears. Sometimes it is actual crying, but most of the time they just flow down my face for no particular emotional reason, you know; they're just there. It seems to come with the

territory, and I haven't the slightest idea why. So you don't need to pay attention to them, okay? Tears don't mean what they usually do, while this stuff is going on."

He smiled at me, "All right; I'll ignore your tears unless you tell me I shouldn't."

"Good," I grinned, wiping away the latest example.

I sat at my desk and turned on the electric typewriter. It was time to start writing an account of this whole very strange business.

"DESOXY, 40 mgs," the report began, "This is the oddest experience I've ever had. I've taken drugs before which were threatening, but the problems were entirely neurological. The difficulty this time is not physical, but psychic."

I wrote a brief summary of the previous day's experience, for the record, then continued:

"Adam said it's all myself. That means I've been projecting onto the world around me some part of my psyche that observes and registers everything and learns. That is its function."

I remembered the pressure of that unseen awareness, an almost physical sense of being pushed at, as I stood outside the back door.

*On the other hand, that old phrase, "As above, so below," could also mean, "As inside, so also outside." The universe outside me mirrors the one inside me, and visa versa; of that, I am sure.*

I was suddenly recalling, vividly, a painting I'd seen in a book on the mythology of the East, of an Indian god surrounded on all sides by huge pearls which reflected his face and body. And I remembered its name: the Net of Indra. A net of pearls which is the cosmos; a cosmos which mirrors the God.

*So whatever I've been projecting onto the world outside is within me, but it's also an archetype of some kind in whatever surrounds me. Out there. Whatever "out there" means. Okay.*

My notes went on:

"It is entirely possible, and at this moment I think probable," I wrote, "That whatever the God-Mind is, my human psyche reflects it, and that means I've been confronting not only my own Fact-Recorder, but the cosmic one, as well. I got into trouble because I was afraid that it was the Whole Truth about God, and it isn't."

*It isn't? Of course, it isn't. I know that. I've known it all the time.*

*somewhere within me. Just forgot because that crystal intelligence took over the whole field and didn't seem to be leaving room for anything else. But it's only a part of the God-awareness, as it's only part of mine.*

As I sat there, reading what I had just typed, a series of concepts formed in my mind, and I started writing again.

"We are indeed being true to this aspect of ourselves — what I was calling the White Mind — in our creation of thinking machines which function without emotions. Computers, for instance. Strange (and funny, in a way) how we've given birth to the computer — a really helpful, power-giving tool — out of those very elements of ourselves which are farthest from what we usually think of as human."

Another thought was forming, and I typed as it took shape.

"What about the part of us — the human species — which showed itself in the so-called 'scientific experiments,' done on the inmates of the Nazi concentration camps? There were people, including doctors, who were able to turn off all empathy, all connectedness, and just watch. They watched pain, fear and horror, and made notes, feeling nothing but intellectual interest. What was that, if not the Fact-Recorder, put to use by the side of us that loves to dominate and control, and wants to devour another's power and freedom?

"The White Mind is, I suppose, pure intellect. It is morally neutral. It serves our survival — individually and as a species — and it functions effectively because it is untouched by the world of feeling.

"An integrated, complete human being, of course, uses all of himself — emotional, intellectual and spiritual — and does not fail to exercise any one part, in favor of another.

"Isn't that what some people are doing when they conduct animal experiments which cause pain to the animals? 'It's necessary to do this; it's in a good cause,' a scientist reasons, 'Therefore compassion cannot be allowed to enter into it.' He's afraid that empathy might interfere with the gathering of factual information for a scientific paper which, he hopes, will earn him the respect of his peers and the continuation of his grants."

After I'd re-read the words, I added,

"Of course, there are many scientists and laboratory workers who love animals and don't cut themselves off from caring and sympathy, but there are too many of the others, and there should be none. In my opinion, that is. There ought to be a law that only people who love animals are to be allowed to do experiments on animals."

I smiled. Fat chance. If you could legislate love and empathy, the world would have been cured of its ills long ago.

When Shura came in to see how I was getting along, I was writing hard, ignoring the tears, which were dripping off my chin.

"How about a good night's sleep, Babe?" he suggested.

"Now that you mention it, I guess I'm ready for exactly that."

When we were under the covers, Shura held me and stroked me gently, watching my face in the dim light from the radio. I closed my eyes and felt the firm, skillful hand on my body for a few moments, then looked up at him and apologized, "Honey, I know it sounds ridiculous, but I'm feeling practically anesthetized down there; it's like a piece of wood. I can't remember this ever happening before!"

Shura said, "Well, it's certainly an unusual development —"

"You mean, 'A reeVOLTIN' deeVELupmint,' don't you," I said in my best Durante.

He was continuing, " — but if lust isn't on the agenda, at least for the moment, its absence will only serve to sharpen our anticipation of its return," his fingers prodded, "To whet our —"

I made a grab at his ribs and he arched backwards, then caught my wrists and pinned them to the bed. He had me laughing again, and it felt wonderful.

*We were both hoping a little bit of playing around might help me get back to some kind of normal. Never expected the whole region to go dead like that. What the hell could be making that happen?*

When we had settled down under the covers, I kissed him and said, "Thank you for being so patient, my love. This is all very peculiar and I don't seem to have much control over any of it, so I just have to wait until it resolves. One way or another. The worst of it is the self-centeredness, you know, all the obsessive involvement with my own inner workings, but I guess that's what I'm stuck with, for the moment."

Shura hugged me to his chest, "You do what you have to, Buns, and I'll do whatever I can to help you. If nothing else, I'm here to love you, all right?"

I nodded silently, knowing that he would feel the heat of tears on his

skin, hoping he would ignore them. He did.

I lay on my back, staring at the ceiling, as Shura settled into sleep, his hand occasionally twitching slightly, in mine.

*So the White Mind is just one component of my own consciousness, an essential part which observes, records and learns. That's all.*

I thought of my own, very personal Observer, which I had always considered a friend, not a disinterested machine; it was able to keep track of events, precisely because it wasn't influenced by emotions, yet I had always regarded it as a caring, concerned interior ally, with a great capacity for humor.

*Perhaps my Observer is the Alice version of this same archetype. I've dressed it up in nice things like caring and humor, but its essence is exactly what I projected onto the world around me and fought as an enemy, today, because I didn't understand what it was. It's not an enemy at all; it's a necessary part of me.*

I wondered if I would be able to sleep. It was the last waking thought I had.

I had vivid dreams, but was able to recall only one of them later. It involved a long adventure with some friends, and I was aware of the White Mind overseeing the whole thing, but this time with fondness, and unmistakable amusement.

All the dreams had a feeling of peacefulness underlying them, as if my soul understood perfectly well what was going on and was satisfied with the way it was all progressing.

## TUESDAY

Before opening my eyes, I checked out the world and myself, feeling around with mental antennae like a nervous cockroach, and knew I wasn't out of my private little hell yet.

This time, getting dressed in the bathroom, I felt grim. We are not amused, I thought, brushing my teeth. When I had washed my face, I picked up a comb and set to work on my sleep-tangled hair, examining my reflection in the mirror with great care. My eyes had a familiar look; they appeared liquid and soft, and the pupils were enlarged, as if I were under the influence of a psychedelic.

*Not young any more, that face. But it actually looks quite beautiful. Eyes swollen, but still — not bad to look at. Ah, well; for small favors, we are grateful.*

Shura taught his toxicology class in the fall, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and he would not have to leave for the University until noon. He was reading the morning paper and I planted a kiss on his neck before sitting down at the table with my coffee.

I decided to find out how much I could understand of the news — to see if I could focus on anything in print — before giving him an update. I

felt him glance at me a few times, but there was no need to hurry, I thought; let the poor man have at least a few minutes of good coffee and Chronicle time, to begin his day.

After a while, I realized I was re-reading everything two or three times. My mind was Grand Central Station, and no more than a few printed phrases penetrated the steady rush-hour foot traffic, the comings and goings of thought after thought, idea after idea. I was busy.

When we had disposed of the paper, I filled him in on the latest developments, and we talked.

I said, "Whatever this damned thing is, there's no question that any standard-issue psychiatrist in the world would label it psychosis, right?"

Shura shrugged, "Probably, for whatever that's worth, and we both know it isn't worth much!"

I smiled in agreement. Most of our friends — those who weren't chemists or writers — were psychologists and psychiatrists, or did therapy of some kind, and we both knew how little any of them really understood about the nature of either mental health or mental disorder. But the term "psychosis" seemed a reasonably good starting place in attempting to define this experience.

"Okay," I said, getting up to sponge off the plastic tablecloth, "Everything about this — the streams of thought, the continual imagery and the intensity of the concepts, ideas falling over each other, there's so many of them; all the crying, the fact that I know I couldn't possibly drive a car, because of the distraction of what's going on inside — it's all the kind of thing you'd label psychotic, if you were an ordinary, unimaginative psychiatrist, right?"

"Well, now, I'm not so sure," replied Shura, "There are a lot of things about this that just don't fit with that diagnosis."

I considered for a moment, reviewing. "Yes, I see what you mean. I haven't lost my center, my sense of Self."

"And your grasp of reality is pretty much intact."

"Like, I notice when the stove is on and remember to feed the cats and make the bed and stuff?"

"Uh-huh. And you don't expect me to share your world; you aren't expecting me to see what you're seeing and feel what you're feeling. You're able to accept that I'm living in what might be called everyday, consensual reality, while you're not."

"Ah! And a psychotic wouldn't be able to maintain that kind of perspective?"

"Something like that, yes."

I leaned back against the kitchen sink. "You know, it's occurred to me several times, how much worse this whole business might have been, if I hadn't had experience with psychedelics? I mean, I'm used to altered

states, and I don't panic. I sure don't like what's happening, but I haven't felt frightened more than a couple of times, and the fear didn't last — probably because I was so involved in being angry."

*Lost the original train of thought. Oh, yes! Got it again.*

"As I said before," I continued, "I haven't lost my core, my sense of being me. In fact, in a funny kind of way, I don't think I've ever felt more centered in my life! Can you imagine what it might have been like to go through this if I'd never had any kind of experience with consciousness-changing?"

Shura poured himself another cup of coffee and asked if I was ready for a refill. I said, "No, thanks. I just need to explore things a bit more with you".

*When I focus like this, talking with him, there's less noise from the thought-parade.*

I asked him, "Can you think of any possible explanation for what's been happening, on the purely chemical and physical level?"

He said, "I'm sure I could come up with a couple of plausible-sounding theories, but we both know you can't get any real answers in this area by isolating just the chemical and physical factors."

"All right, but speaking just of the chemistry, anyway, could this possibly be the result of taking forty milligrams of the DESOXY? Two whole days ago?"

"I'm less and less convinced that it has anything to do with the material you took on Sunday," he replied, "But we can't be sure until I've tried it again myself, at the same level. And, eventually, you should take it once more — at a much lower level, of course, just to see if by any chance you're extraordinarily sensitive to it. If you can bring yourself to do it. I mean, when all this is over, when you've recovered."

*He's thinking he shouldn't have said that, right now, about my taking it again. He's anxious.*

I smiled, to reassure him, "Sure. Maybe try two or three milligrams, and if there's any effect at all, we'll have our answer, but it won't be strong enough to cause a repeat performance."

He nodded, obviously relieved.

"I must admit," I said, "I can't wait to see what happens when you take it, though my instinct tells me you're right; it probably won't have any effect at all. I certainly hope you don't have anything like this happen to you, Beautiful. Ever. This is hell, you know!"

I realized, with a tiny flash of amusement, that my voice had sounded quite cheerful.

*I suppose there actually can be a bit of perverted satisfaction in going through such a strange, dramatic process as this; it is pretty exotic, for all of the misery. Besides, may as well get all the little satisfactions I can — of any kind — since I*

*don't have much choice about being here.*

Shura asked, "Do you think you can detect any kind of change from the first two days, anything you can pin down?"

"Oh, yes. There's a lot of change, but it's not easy to define. The White Mind is still around, but it doesn't dominate the field anymore. I guess my recognition of what it is, and realizing it isn't the Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth, cosmically speaking, helped it to fade into the background. It isn't pushing at me, now. The streams of thought are going great guns, though."

"What kind of content? Can you describe any of it at all?"

I sighed, knowing that the tears would start flowing again as soon as I started telling him, but needing to share it anyway.

"Well, there are often several levels going on at the same time. Right now, on one level, there seems to be a sort of compulsive surveying of human history, images of people from prehistoric times up through the present, creating cities, books, paintings, religions, political systems, wars, making the same damned mistakes, over and over, and every generation asking the same basic questions and having to figure out their own versions of the answers.

"It's hard not to feel a dreadful despair about the whole picture. I mean, why don't we get wiser, as a species? Why can't one generation pass on what it's learned in such a way as to save its children from falling into the old stupid traps?"

I shrugged, spreading my hands, "Then, on another level, I'm seeing that if the elders of each generation were capable of really instilling chunks of wisdom into their children, they would also be able to instill other things. Along with the good stuff, you'd also get all the misconceptions, prejudices, traditional tribal hatreds — all that sort of thing would be absorbed and perpetuated too — and that would mean no new perspectives, no moving forward at all. If there's to be growth, evolution, the children have to shape their world differently, taking some of the good and some of the bad from parents and ancestors, but basically remodeling it, putting their own stamp on it."

Shura was listening intently.

"There's another level where I'm seeing the rise of all the great spiritual teachers, the ones who change the way people think about life — Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, thousands of others we have no record of — and how their teachings are always used, sooner or later, as just another excuse for persecuting other people, taking power over them, making them do as you do, and going to war, killing and destroying in the name of God and Allah and Whomever. You know, the endless perverting of original good into a new form of evil. The old story."

Shura nodded.

"But, alongside that, goes the realization that even such an horrendous power structure as the medieval Church made it possible for a lot of creativity to be expressed, and a lot of beautiful things to come into existence. There's an image of a black field, stretching to the horizon, an awful, smothering blanket which represents all the arrogance and cruelty and persecution that goes along with religious power —"

Shura was nodding again; this was a subject we'd often discussed. In fact, it was he who had told me that, in the Middle Ages, unauthorized possession of a copy of the Bible was grounds for execution by those who enforced the power of the Church. Only royalty and the clergy were allowed to read the Holy Word or dare to interpret it. Ordinary peasants were to believe what they were told and live as they were ordered — by the priests — and were not to ask questions.

" — but out of that black landscape," I went on, "There are little green plants growing, here and there, representing the music and paintings and other forms of art which that same Church encouraged and made possible. Their motives weren't, of course, to encourage individual expression, but to add more glory to the good old Church. Nonetheless, those beautiful things came into being, to a great extent, because of the support of one of the most repressive dictatorships in history! Good out of evil, to balance the evil created out of original good."

"That's just one example of the kind of thing that's working itself out in my head, all the time," I said, "History on parade, sort of, with examples — illustrations — and continual images."

"The hard part," I paused, swallowing, "Is that I'm being bombarded mostly with the sadness, the suffering, the loss of meaning that human beings have gone through during their lives, century after century — and it's still going on that way, of course, all over the world. So much misery and gross stupidity, and I'm really getting sick of it. I'd much rather be in Philadelphia, to quote Whatsisname. I just want it to turn off!"

Shura moved quickly. He held me as I sobbed against his chest. I didn't have to tell him that it was real crying, this time.

After a few minutes, I got my control back and apologized, "Sorry 'bout that! Didn't intend to drag you into it that way. I don't want you to tune into me, honey. You have to keep your psychic boundaries, because it won't help either of us if you lose them. I need you to stay strong and sane in all this mess."

"Don't worry about me, Luv," he said, his voice firm, "I'm not being sucked in and I'm not really worried. I don't like seeing you in pain of any kind, of course, but I know you'll come through this and out the other side with something you didn't have before. This whole experience will turn out to be of great value to you, in some way neither of us can foresee at the moment."

I looked up at him and saw that his eyes were wet, but there was a grin on his face that seemed genuine.

I felt better; relieved and almost peaceful.

*Needed to let it out. It helped to dump on him a little, even though I shouldn't do it. Just makes it harder for him. He's feeling helpless enough already. But I do feel lighter, for the moment.*

I smiled and gave him the only positive thing I had to offer, "I have one very nice and rather odd bit of information for you. My dreams, these last two nights, have had a general feeling of contentedness about them, a sense of everything being in balance and even funny, now and then. As if my unconscious knows exactly what's going on and isn't disturbed or anxious at all. Believe it or not!"

Shura pulled me to him again, murmuring, "That's good. Trust your unconscious, sez I!"

I said I did, as a matter of fact, adding, "I know, underneath the confusion, that whatever this process is, it's going to take a certain amount of time and it's going to proceed in its own way, with or without my consent, but that, eventually, it's going to work itself through, and I'll be back to some version of normal."

I squeezed his waist and told him I was now going to wash the dishes from yesterday, and thanks for letting me unload on him.

He said, "Any time, Luv. I'll get to work at my desk, if that's all right with you. Call if you need me."

When I had finished the few dishes, I spent time scrubbing at the refrigerator, the stove, then the cupboard doors, grateful for the simplicity, the uncomplicatedness of cleaning.

It was while I was keeping busy in this way, that I gradually became aware of the hurting. Everything — thoughts, images, motions of the body — was being experienced through a faint haze of pain. I realized I'd been subconsciously aware of it for a long time, but — because of the intensity of the thought-flow — hadn't fully acknowledged it before.

*Pain is a sign of imbalance, yes? Or a result of some kind of transition. Transition from one state to another usually carries with it some sort of irritation, grating. Snakes are known to feel miserable when their skins loosen, aren't they? Does a butterfly struggling out of its cocoon get cross and resentful? Probably. It's not physical at all, the pain, when I take a good look at it. It's the soul that hurts. Why? What message am I supposed to get? What am I supposed to be doing that I'm not doing? Or is it just another part of the process I have to live with?*

It was really quite subtle, I thought; not intrusive, just continuously there, like a dull psychic toothache.

When Shura had left for his class, with my assurance that I would be safe and all right alone, I sat for a while on the couch, staring out the

window at what had been my mountain, but wasn't any more.

*I'm beginning to get really tired.*

My Observer said, No, you're not tired. You think you ought to be, you're trying to persuade yourself you are, but it's just one more way of trying to escape. Take another look. You're full of energy; you're a living body of energy!

*All right, all right, I'm not physically tired, but I don't want this any more. I need time off.*

I thought again about yesterday, about the pressure, the insistent, inescapable pushing, of the Watcher-Recorder. And how it wasn't doing that to me, today.

*It receded as soon as I really worked on it and began to understand what it was. Now, it's just one more thing humming away beneath all the other stuff. Why did it take over like that? Why did it come at me as if it was everything, as if it really was the mind of God, the only essential Truth, instead of letting me know it was just one of many important parts of the Whole? How was I supposed to know it wasn't the only thing that had any reality in the universe?*

I sat, smoking my cigarette, as the outlines of an answer formed.

*The unconscious psyche doesn't have a way of distinguishing between Whole Pizza and One Slice of Pizza — there's just Pizza.*

*That part of me which wants to bring something to conscious attention doesn't evaluate as to size or importance. On the level where I was operating, yesterday, there are no gradations, no comparisons, to help the conscious mind get some perspective on what's happening. Whatever is active at the moment — whatever is being brought up to be confronted and processed — fills the screen completely, so that, for a while, it seems to be all there is.*

*Why can't the damned psyche label things better than that? It makes everything so much harder than need be. Not to speak of bloody inefficient, for that matter! A lot of time got wasted yesterday in fear and loathing which could have been used for figuring it out and understanding it sooner. Stupid!*

My coffee was cold. I got a fresh cup and returned to the couch.

*How is one supposed to know what the rules are, about going through something like this, if there's nobody around to tell you? What would have happened if there hadn't been an Adam for me to call on, someone who knew exactly what to tell me?*

The Observer answered immediately. There *was* an Adam, it said. He was there, you called him, you got help. What-if's are pointless speculation.

I wandered into the dining room, wondering what else might be inside me that I was going to have to confront and acknowledge consciously, before this grinding so-called process would consent to leave me in peace.

*Any more surprises waiting to pounce, huh? Am I going to have to look my deficiencies in the face, maybe? My inadequacies, my failures? I'm already miserably aware of most of them, aren't I?*

I was standing beside the table, looking at the basket of winter oranges in its center, when I felt something coming at me from behind. I became very still, my back crawling. It was hate I was sensing; the most utterly virulent hatred I had ever met in my life. A murderous, contemptuous hatred so intense, my mouth opened in shock. It was directed at me, at everything I was. Something wanted me gone, destroyed, eliminated, never to have existed.

*Oh, my God! Where did THAT come from! What could hate me so much!  
Has this been living inside me all my life?*

I took a deep breath and groped my way back to the living room and the shelter of the couch, trying to stay open to what was coming through. I sat down and closed my eyes.

I was in a forest, standing at the side of an old, abandoned well. I leaned on the stones and looked over the edge, peering into the darkness of the well's floor.

*I see me — a sort of twisted, squashed version of me — it's hard to see what its shape is — have to focus. Yes. Oh, Christ. Looks like a slimy little pink maggot. Dirty. Disgusting. The maggot feels the hate-contempt and knows it deserves it. Why? Because it's a maggot, and it's filthy and intolerable.*

My hands were locked together in my lap. I opened my eyes to look around and saw the room in a blue half-light. I knew I had to go back to the well.

*I have to connect with the maggot, with that — that terrible self-image — with the feelings it has. I have to do it. If I don't, it'll come back later. All right. Have to go inside it.*

I took a moment to reconnect with my body, to shift to a more comfortable sitting position, legs folded, with cushions at my back. Then I closed my eyes, and was instantly back in the forest, peering into the well.

*The maggot is a part of myself which believes it is the only real me, the essence of what I am. It knows it is unbearable, impossible to love. It identifies itself as a monster, a nauseating little piece of shit — Jesus Aitch! Is this what Jung means by the Shadow? Is this my Shadow?*

I connected with the maggot and felt the wrenching awfulness, the screaming humiliation of being uncovered, revealed, examined.

The phone rang. It was Wendy, asking what time I was expecting to be over in Marin County. I realized numbly that this was my day to drive to Marin for an afternoon with Wendy and Brian (Ann was away at college), and heard my voice, husky and dulled, telling her why I would have to change my plans, "I woke up with the world's worst sinus attack, honey. I'm totally immobilized! Haven't had one this bad in years!"

"Oh, Mom, you poor thing! Don't worry about it. I'll tell Brian, and you just take care of yourself. We'll see you next week, when you're okay."

"Thanks, Sweetheart. I'm getting a prescription filled and I should be fine in a day or two. I'll give you a call when it's all cleared up. Sorry I didn't phone you right away, baby. I couldn't think of anything but my throbbing head!"

"You go rest," she said, "Take care of yourself. Talk to you later when you feel better."

When I'd hung up, I lit a cigarette. I thought about my children, about the almost painful pride I had in them.

*I've been a good mother. For all my faults and mistakes, I've been a damned good mother.*

There were hot tears on my cheeks.

*How does that fit with the pathetic little maggot image? Or is this slimy, dirty thing lying in the dark of the well — is it left over from childhood? Has it lived down there, trying to stay hidden, since I was a child?*

The answer was Yes.

*And the hate? The killing hatred — has that been there from childhood, too? Is it me hating myself? Where did I learn it?*

There was a memory of myself as a child, hearing a voice telling me that my clothes always had an unpleasant smell.

*Someone said that to me, when I was little. The child knows intuitively what that means. Your smell is yourself; everyone smells of themselves. The message is, I am someone whose soul smells bad. Who I am smells bad to others. Who I am is a bad smell.*

A governess? We'd had some good, affectionate ones, but there had been two who weren't. One was a tight-lipped German woman who resented us — we felt it, we knew it, Boy and I — but she hadn't stayed long. We weren't told until much later that she was an admirer of a very bad man called Hitler.

*Was she with us long enough to cause this? A sour Nazi woman, taking care of the children of a Jew?*

My mother and I had come to be at peace with each other, during the past decade; I loved her and knew that she loved me, but I had always believed that she hadn't really loved me when I was a child. She wasn't happy with my father in those days, and I heard the same feelings in her voice when she talked to me that I heard when she spoke to him: impatience, annoyance, and exasperation. I knew, from looking at old photographs, that she had held and cuddled me when I was a baby, but I could not remember her touching me with affection, or hugging me, at any time during the later years, while Boy and I were growing up in Italy.

My brother had been the favorite, and knew it. Incredibly, he took no advantage of his position; instead, he became my ally. I could remember one time when he actually took the blame for something I had done wrong. He knew as well as I did that she never got really angry with him.

*My poor mother! Did I absorb her occasional feelings of impatience and disappointment and create a monster out of them? Did the German governess just add to what was already shaping itself in my unconscious as a self-image of something wrong-smelling and awful?*

The hatred, I thought. Where did I get that from?

*If you suspected you were a disgusting piece of filth in your soul, what would you want to do with yourself? Negate, of course. Kill, wipe out. The part of you that identified with the powerful grownups, and what you perceived as their negative feelings toward you, would become a hanging judge, an executioner.*

My father had always shown love, warmth and caring. And my brother. Why, I wondered, hadn't I modeled my self-image on their feelings toward me?

*Another part of you did, or you would have destroyed yourself long ago.*

I opened my eyes and got up. In the kitchen, I made myself a cup of hot tea.

*Enough. I've done enough for today. No more, right now. Time for a break.*

A sharp stabbing pain hit me on the surface of my left shoulder-blade, and vanished. I held my breath. It meant: you must continue. No break. Not yet. The stab was also a symbolic illustration of what can happen in the body when the needs of the psyche are ignored.

*Okay, I get it. But I want to have an intermission. I really am getting tired. Sufficient unto the day, for Pete's sake!*

The needle stab came again, this time in my upper arm. And I understood, with a sense of astonishment, why those particular physical locations had been chosen. Neither the shoulder blade nor the upper arm were places where a quick pain-strike would cause me to suspect injury or illness.

*All right, all right. Back to work.*

I returned to the couch and took two long sips of tea, then folded my legs under me again and closed my eyes.

*What am I supposed to do with my maggot-self? How do I heal this sick little piece of shit?*

Love it, came the answer.

I gazed down at the cringing thing in the well and suddenly knew what had to come next. I could see, now, that the maggot was contained in an old, worn basket, and that the basket was connected to a rope which came up the length of the well and wound around some kind of crank with a handle which was within reach. I began winding the rope, very slowly, so that nothing would break or fall.

As the smudged pink shape came closer, I saw that it was not a maggot after all; it was a baby. It was emaciated, with skin more grey than pink, lying in its own mess. The baby was dying.

When I lifted it out of the basket, my first thought was that it needed

cleaning up, and all I had handy was a bunch of leaves.

*Not an It; a She. Of course. And there's no time to worry about dirt. She's failing. What do I do now?*

As I stood by the well, the tiny shivering child in my hands, a door opened in my stomach.

*Ah, I see. All right. Inside me she goes. Door is shutting. I am to be its mother, its nurturer, until it can make it on its own. Until it — she — is healthy and full of life again. When she's ready to emerge from my body, she'll be beautiful and strong and proud of herself. That's what has to happen.*

I opened my eyes and drank the rest of the tea, then went inside again.

What about the other thing, the hanging judge, I thought? What was I supposed to do with that implacable, searing hatred?

*Inform it that it's no longer welcome. It has no home here. It will have to transform into tolerance and compassion, because I will harbor it no more as Destroyer.*

I sighed. This time, when I looked around the room, the blue shadows had gone, and I knew my work — at least, this particular piece of it — was done.

An idea came to me, of a possible way out of this whole business. I deserved to have a breather, I thought. If not an end, at least a breather!

I held my breath for a moment, waiting for another stab, but none came.

At the back of the house, I measured out a hundred and twenty milligrams of MDMA, the amount known among therapists as the customary therapeutic dose. This was the drug that always restored my balance, my sense of humor and objectivity. It was an old, beloved friend.

*Maybe it'll get me back to normal — out of all this. If it doesn't work, it certainly won't do me harm. The worst it can do is intensify what's already going on. If that happens, I'll just grit my teeth for an hour and a half, until the effect begins to drop off. I'll be okay. It's worth a try, anyway.*

An hour later, my cheeks were wet again, but this time with tears of relief. The world, inside and outside, was settling into a relaxed, friendly, even humorous normalcy. I could still feel the remnants of what I'd been dealing with, but they were subsiding now, fading from awareness. For the first time in three very long days, I could stand at the window and look out at the mountain, watch its top being folded into rain clouds, and feel my soul at peace.

*Thank God — whoever and whatever You are, Thank you. Thank you.*

When Shura came home, I told him what the MDMA had done. I didn't tell him about the maggot at the bottom of the well and the Judge-Executioner. That could wait for another time. He ate the simple dinner I had prepared for him, listening to me and reaching for my hand between forkfuls, while I apologized again for having been so self-centered during

the past few days.

"I know you understand, and it's not the kind of thing I usually do — all that self-involvement, to the exclusion of everything else — but I wasn't able to stop it. I feel better if I can apologize and thank you for being so good and so patient."

"Sure," Shura said, "As I said before, it doesn't seem to me you had much choice, but I know you're a guilt-addict, so apologize all you want! Whatever makes you happy!"

He shifted his ankle out of range just in time.

We went to bed early.

A brief experiment established the fact that my body hadn't yet returned to its normal responsiveness, but we both knew that the apparent anesthesia might be attributable to the MDMA. It was widely recognized as a material which, while enabling one to feel empathy and love, was — for most people — *not* an aphrodisiac.

That night, I had my first experience of lucid dreaming. I was conscious, my ego intact, aware that I was asleep and dreaming, aware also that I was meant to learn something of importance. I knew I would remember what I was being shown, and what its meaning was, when I woke up.

In front of me was the upper portion of a great stained glass window. Its simple, petal-shaped design was divided into an upper section and a lower one. There were two colors of glass, blue and green. At first, the green was on the top and, across the dark line of leading, the lower petals glowed blue.

As I watched, the blue and green quietly seeped through the leading until, finally, they had changed places. I remained there, observing, while the exchange happened again, slowly, silently, each color diffusing through the dividing line until it had taken the other's place.

I knew what it meant. The blue and green represented the dual nature of the living universe, and of the human soul. Plus and minus, male and female, Yin and Yang. The colors had been chosen deliberately to avoid any possible inclination to ascribe positive or negative qualities to either. The ancient symbol of Yin and Yang is traditionally portrayed in black and red, colors which would have tempted me to say yes to one and no to the other. Blue and green were morally and spiritually neutral.

The lesson was clear: each is equal to the other and each, in time, transforms into the other. Accept the two aspects, do not reject or shut out either one; let both the blue and the green teach you. Prefer one, ally yourself with one if you must, but live at peace with both.

It was a simple statement of truth about all existence, conscious and unconscious, inside the soul and outside it, and the necessity of learning acceptance.

I said it was going to be difficult for me, but I would try to find a way to do it. I added that I would appreciate any help I could get, from anywhere.

I remained conscious, watching the beautiful green and blue and their continuous, gentle exchange, until it was time to wake up.

I opened my eyes, for the first time in four days, with a feeling of pleasure. I told Shura that I had just had my first lucid dream, and that it had been an extraordinary experience, which I would explain over breakfast.

I was really quite proud of myself.

#### WEDNESDAY

Except for an energy level somewhat higher than usual, I felt entirely normal. I got into my car and decided I wasn't really baseline, but close enough to it so that I could risk driving, at least as far as the shopping center a few blocks down the road.

There were no problems that day. I was delighted with my freedom, and with my body's sense of well-being.

At night, Shura and I made love. It was reassuring to both of us. I begged off trying for my own climax because I was too tired to bother, and insisted that his own had given me all the pleasure I needed, thank you. I didn't see any point in telling him that I was still feeling nothing in my genitals. I persuaded myself that I had detected a faint response, the beginning of recovery, and left it at that.

#### THURSDAY

I woke up with the sunlight streaming through curtains which were completely inadequate for room-darkening purposes, and my first thought was that I would have to replace them with honest-to-God drapes, and soon. I sat up and searched for the electric blanket on/off switch with my left big toe. As I pulled on my robe, I remembered that there had been something happy, and much laughter, going on in my dreams, although I couldn't recall any details.

I had reached the bedroom door before it dawned on me that the almost-normalcy of the day before had disappeared and that I was, in fact, right back at a plus-two.

*Yesterday was just a day off. A 24-hour vacation. What was it I asked for — a breather? That's exactly what I got. Shit — SHIT!*

I dressed and brushed my teeth and washed my face in hot water. Comb in hand, I turned to the mirror and saw in it a woman with thick, wavy hair whose face was a study in dull resentment.

I decided not to complain to Shura, at least for a while. While cutting a grapefruit in half for breakfast, I glanced over at him as he sat, sipping coffee and reading the paper, and realized I was open to his state of mind and feelings. I was picking up very clearly a level of intense thinking (he always read the paper quickly, with absolute concentration) and an underlying current of something else I couldn't immediately identify. It took me a minute to realize what it was: a quiet, steady flow of impatience.

I wondered why he was feeling impatient, then understood that this was his normal state in the morning; I had simply become aware of it, for the first time.

I took the grapefruit to the table and waited until we had finished eating before I told him, casually, "By the way, I seem to be a wee bit telepathic, this morning, and if I describe what I've been picking up, would you please tell me whether or not it's an accurate reading?"

He said, "Sure! Let's hear it."

When I'd told him what I'd been getting over the airwaves, he thought for a moment, then said, "Yes, that sounds pretty much like what's going on while I'm reading the paper: focused thinking and a chronic impatience underlying it. I'd have to say you're right on the button!"

I asked, "What are you chronically impatient about?"

There was another brief silence, then he replied, "Myself, mostly. All the things I want to get done and am not getting done." He shrugged, "You know, the usual."

I smiled, thinking perhaps it was just as well I wasn't that good a receiver, under normal conditions.

Shura's expression told me he was waiting for an explanation.

I said only, "Seems I'm back on again. Yesterday was a little intermission, I guess. I'm beginning to feel like an old hand at this, by now."

Today, so far, there were no tears flowing, to my relief. I also noted that my earlier feelings of betrayal had gone, and in their place was a dry kind of almost-humor.

Thursday was another teaching day for Shura, and he had the Owl Club in the evening. He played viola in the club orchestra, and I approved of the weekly ritual, if for no other reason than that it kept his skill with one musical instrument reasonably well-honed; his piano playing had gradually come to a stop over the years, to my regret, because — as he always said, when I asked him about it — there were so many other things to do. However, while he remained a member of the Owl Club, his viola playing would not be allowed to get rusty.

When it came time for him to leave, he asked, "Are you going to be okay, or would you be more comfortable if I skipped the club and came home right after work?"

I repeated that I was getting used to it, and it would be fine for him to

go to the club. We agreed that he would phone after his class, before he left for San Francisco, just to make sure I didn't need him.

After he had gone, class papers in one hand and the viola case in the other, I poured myself a fresh cup of coffee and sat down on the couch with my cigarettes.

The phone rang. It was Ruth, and I said I was having a very bad sinus attack and would she forgive me for not talking at all today. I promised I would get back to her soon, maybe tomorrow, when the worst of the pain was gone. She was immediately sympathetic; I could feel her concern, her empathy over the wires and knew it was completely genuine, an intrinsic part of her nature. I hung up the phone with a feeling of intense love for her, and gratitude for her ability to accept me, even when — as sometimes happened — she found me not entirely understandable.

The streams of thought were back, but I could keep track of them more easily than before; they seemed to have slowed down a bit.

*Somebody said that the function of the conscious mind — or one of its major functions — is to suppress the barrage, the noise, of everything that's continually going on in the unconscious; that what we call consciousness functions as a filter, in order to avoid exactly what I'm experiencing: an overwhelming flood of activity in mind and soul. It certainly makes it hard to go about your daily life, when the input to the conscious mind is this overwhelming.*

I wondered if it would be possible for me to drive to Berkeley.

I phoned Adam and, when he said he was free after noon, I said, "I'm going to try to get to your place. If I don't feel safe on the road, I'll come back here and phone, to let you know."

He said, "Take care."

Driving slowly down Borodin Road, on my way to the highway, I kept watch for anything that might make driving my little Volkswagon car difficult or dangerous. The actions necessary to shift gears, engage the clutch or use the brakes were still automatic; there seemed to be no interference with that kind of function. But my mind continued to pour thoughts, and the change of scenery served to stimulate yet more observations, more images, all moving through me with extraordinary rapidity.

Halfway down the road, I looked at the hill across the highway where rows of beehives were sitting beneath our neighbors' fruit trees, and found myself thinking of the ancient mythical relationship of bees to the archetypal Earth Goddess. I saw the figures of men and women, throughout the millennia, making their pacts with the bees — thus with the Goddess — setting out homes for the swarms, moving the hives as necessary to keep the bees comfortable as the seasons changed, and harvesting, in return, the golden treasure, whose name defined sweetness.

Then I was picturing the open spaces between the wooden beams that supported our dining room floor, spaces where generations of 'possums

(which I loved) were born and sometimes died. There were images of the small rooms under the house, called Basements One, Two, and Three, respectively, where our two independent cats held their territory against curious raccoons. I was seeing the hollow wooden supports extending outside from Basement One which swarms of honeybees, year after year, returned to claim as their home. They built their honeycombs inside the sturdy walls and, after a couple of futile attempts involving friends, protective clothing and smoke — together with a lot of nervous laughter — we'd given up trying to discourage them. I remembered the day when our bees had swarmed; they rose in a cloud over the roof, and I sang the single note they were humming and ran into the house to find the note on the piano. It was A. So bees swarm in the key of A, I told Shura that night. At least, I amended, our bees did.

As I came in sight of the mailbox at the end of our road, I was busy with the realization that Shura and I stayed in harmony with the Earth Goddess, by allowing the downstairs animals and insects to go about their business without interference. And with the necessary acceptance of occasional deaths among these creatures, we kept in touch with — and came to accept — the destruction and death aspect of the Great Mother, whether we realized it consciously or not.

*And there's no mistaking, in our house, when a death has occurred downstairs, especially in summer! The awful smell stays around for weeks. Shura says, "Well, look at it this way; it's a reminder not to get all romantic and sentimental about Nature, right?*

Borodin Road was short — a half-minute drive at the most — and I had reached the entrance. Examining my mental state carefully, I concluded that it would be possible to drive to Berkeley only if I stayed aware of everything I was doing and everything all the other cars were doing. I sent a telegram to whatever might pass for a guardian angel, "Please keep me safe," and edged out into the traffic.

On the highway, I focused on what I knew was an absolute necessity for survival: driving carefully and paying attention. The stream of ideas and concepts were continuing, but muted now, like music playing on the radio with the volume turned down.

I noted, without surprise, that I seemed to be able to pick up the general mind-state of any driver in my vicinity. I was getting brief exposures to a succession of emotions: impatience, resignation, irritability and, in one case, an almost delirious happiness.

It occurred to me that I might be broadcasting my own psychic state quite strongly, and that it would be a good idea to practice some kind of shutting-down, if I could figure out how to do it. After a while, I knew there wasn't going to be a problem; other drivers were occupied with their own thoughts, and no disturbed or curious glances were being directed at

me. I began to feel less anxious, and finally concluded that, if I stopped extending my antennae to discover other people's feelings, and instead kept the focus on myself, my car and the road ahead, I would be minimizing my risks, both real and imagined.

I felt fear only once. Driving off the connecting ramp onto Shoreline highway, I saw in my rearview mirror a man at the wheel of a heavy, silver-colored American car in the lane to my left. He was driving fast, and his face wore an expression that was truly startling, a mixture of exaltation and malevolence. He was grinning to himself. As he passed me, I caught the impact of a shark-mind, strong and predatory. I glanced quickly at his profile, and away.

*Keep castle walls strong and the drawbridge up. Don't make mental contact. That one's dangerous. Slow down a bit and let him get well ahead of you.*

When he was finally out of sight, I became aware that I'd been holding my breath. I let it out slowly,

*Oh, baby! What kind of human being is THAT?*

It took me a while to shake off the clinging remnants of darkness which the silver car had left in its wake.

Twenty minutes later, I was knocking on the door of Adam's little house. He showed me in, and held me in the hug for which he was famous in our circle of friends, and undoubtedly well beyond it, a hug which always communicated energy and strength and a deep level of acceptance. I often told him that his was the most seductive hug in North America; it took all one's will-power to leave those encircling arms. He would chuckle and pat my cheek. Once, he said, "Well, I claim a good hug as one of my few remaining sensual privileges!"

I knew that, in truth, Adam used his hug the same way I used mine — not only to welcome, but to make contact with the core of the other person, to feel out the state of a friend's emotional and spiritual health. The information doesn't come through the arms; it is transmitted from one solar plexus to another, and a hug is the only socially acceptable way of coming that close to the body of someone who is not a lover.

I sat on his old brown leather couch and stayed silent while he did things to his tape-recorder on the low table in front of me. "All right," he said, finally, sitting back in his chair, "The tape's started. I'll give it to you when you leave. Now, tell me what's going on."

I started talking.

As I gave the highlights of the past few days' experiences, the tears welled up again. I apologized and explained that this went on all the time, and asked him not to pay attention. He said, "All right, I won't."

Once, he interrupted me to say, "You know, there's no use your trying to make sense out of what you're experiencing, because any conclusions you come to will probably be wrong. Stop wasting time with theories.

Just describe it."

"Okay," I answered, bewildered, because I didn't see how I could divorce myself from efforts to explain, comprehend, and give some kind of structure to all I'd been going through. Then I understood; he didn't want me using my intellect to control whatever turmoil I was feeling, thus risking repression of emotions which needed to be experienced and released.

Adam sat across the table from me, watching and listening.

I concluded, "A lot of the stuff that's been happening has been really extraordinary — like the lucid dream, for instance — and if they were coming at me during a psychedelic experiment, I'd be fascinated and grateful, you know? But there's too much of the sad, painful aspects of existence running through my mind, and worst of all, moments of feeling that it's all meaningless. Maybe I'm just tuning in to the sense of meaninglessness that most human beings suffer at least once in their lives, and the despair that goes along with it. That's the worst of all."

He was nodding his head.

"And it makes no sense for me to be feeling that way, because if there's anything I'm certain of, Adam, it's what the psychedelics taught me: that everything — every damned thing — in the universe is *intensely* meaningful!"

I told him about Shura, "He's always there for me, giving me love and being supportive and reassuring, but I worry about his tuning in too much, hurting for me —"

"You can't change that," said Adam, firmly, "It isn't possible to love someone without sharing some grief, now and then; you have to stop trying to protect everybody else. People who love you will try to help — and they can't — and they'll hurt for you, just as you would for them. And you wouldn't want it any other way, you know! But you can remind Shura of something that'll help him keep his boundaries, and that's the same thing you told me: that somewhere in your soul, you know everything's all right."

"Yes, I have told him that. I guess I can repeat it, now and then, to remind him."

"Good."

"Why does this kind of process have to be so hard, Adam? Everything hurts a little bit, all the time."

He replied, "I don't know why it hurts, but I know it does."

"What I need help with is — well, I don't know what to do with all this, where to go with it. What am I supposed to be *doing*?"

"I told you on the phone," he said, "That this is a process, and the only thing you can do is not get in its way — don't try to direct it, don't try to explain it — just let it be, and learn as much as you can."

I heard the sound of breath whistling out from between my teeth.

"Whatever is happening," he continued, "Has to happen, and right now all you can do is experience it. Understanding is for later. Maybe. It's possible you may never completely understand it, but believe me when I tell you that whatever is going on is necessary — necessary to who you're going to be — otherwise it wouldn't be happening. Don't censor it. You'll do your darnedest to get away from it —"

"Like the MDMA experiment. It worked, for a while."

"Yes. For a while. One day's vacation, you called it. By now, I think you realize that this process is going to do its thing, whatever that is, and you may as well go with it and stop wasting energy fighting it."

I was silent for a moment, thinking. Then I sighed and asked him, "Is there a name for this —? Aside from 'psychosis,' that is?"

"Sure — lots of names. Psychosis is not among them, by the way. Names don't matter."

"But it helps, Adam, it helps to give it a name — any name! Not the wrong one, of course," I added quickly, "But it would be something to hold onto; it would give me some of my power back, to be able to name it."

"Okay. If it helps you, fine. Just don't take names seriously, don't let them limit your experience. So let's give it a name. The right one. It's called a spiritual crisis."

I burst out laughing, "But *everything's* a spiritual crisis, Adam! *Life's* a spiritual crisis!"

He smiled, "Nonetheless, that's what it's called, and it's hell. It's one of the toughest things anyone can go through, but someday you'll be grateful for it. You'll be glad it happened. Believe me. I know."

I blew my nose. Then his words registered, and I looked up, "Did you ever go through anything like this, yourself?"

He sat back in his chair and took a moment before answering, "I lived through something very similar for two whole years."

"Oh, Lord, no! Two years of *this*? When?"

"Oh, about twenty years ago. I was around fifty-something, I think."

"What happened? How did you get out of it?"

"I guess you could say I just outlived it. But there was at least one time when, if I'd had a gun, I would probably have used it on myself. The pain was that bad. Everything hurt, all the time."

I nodded in recognition. I asked, "Did you have anyone to go to, to help you get through it?"

"No one. I tried to sign myself into mental hospital, at one point. I had to drive one of my patients up to a hospital in Sonoma and after he was taken care of, I looked around and figured I needed to be in there as much as he did, so I asked if I could sign myself in for a couple of days. They said no. Wouldn't take me."

I grimaced in sympathy. "I found myself thinking just that, today — how nice it would be to tuck myself into a safe quiet room in a hospital or a retreat, some place where I wouldn't have to deal with anybody else, or worry about affecting anyone else, until this was all over with."

Adam nodded, "As a matter of fact, that's what I finally did. I drove to a monastery in the hills, a Catholic monastery, and told them I was a Jew who was having some kind of trouble in his soul, and just needed isolation until what I was going through was resolved, and would they let me stay there for a while. They took me in and gave me a clean, quiet little room and plain good meals and left me alone. I suppose they were keeping an eye on me, but they didn't intrude; they just gave me what I asked for. It saved my life."

"How long did you stay there?"

"About a month, I think. I lost track of time. Which was part of what I needed to do, probably. I stayed until I knew that whatever had been crippling me was finally beginning to heal; the psychic noise was calming down, and I was able to function without feeling as if I was bleeding from every pore."

"How terrible that you didn't have an Adam Fisher to help you, as I do!"

"Funny thing is, I was in analysis at the time, with Phil Wilkerson —"

I smiled. Dr. Wilkerson was a friend of my ex-husband, a fellow Jungian analyst.

"— and I stopped by the side of the road on my way back from getting chucked out of the hospital in Sonoma, and phoned him. He didn't have Idea One about what to do." He chuckled, "Well, the truth is, no one can do much for you while it's happening. It's a solitary journey, like being born and dying."

I protested, "But you've helped me immensely — just the few words you said that day on the phone were exactly the right words, and it means more to me than I can tell you, to be able to talk to somebody who knows the territory."

"That's exactly it. Only someone who's been there and come through it can help, just a little. Poor Phil had never been there. I suppose that's why I've spent a lot of my life since then doing what I do — being here for people who are making this kind of journey, letting them know they're not completely alone. And that they aren't in the least crazy."

Before I left his little apartment, with its photographs of children and friends crowding the mantel of the small fireplace, and shelves of books and manuscripts lining the walls, Adam took the tape out of the recorder and handed it to me, saying, "Phone me any time and come over whenever you need to. I'll be here."

We hugged each other silently.

Driving home on the highway was not frightening and didn't feel dangerous. In the middle of the usual rush-hour slowdown on the western side of the Caldicott Tunnel, an interesting thought came to me that, if I tried, I could almost get a glimpse of what it would be like to be a whole, integrated human being. For a moment, as my car edged along at two miles an hour with the rest of the rats, I moved into a state of being at peace, strongly centered, and accepting of everything around and inside me. There was, for that brief time, a sense of having immense, singing energy, and something that felt like light, radiating from a place just above my navel.

My Observer reminded me not to stay distracted for too long, since I was still behind the wheel of a car.

Late that night, when Shura came home from the club, I told him that I'd actually managed to drive to Berkeley and see Adam, and that I would tell him all about it, but not until tomorrow.

In bed, I finally admitted that I was still made of wood where it counted, and he said that if this did turn out to be a permanent new state of consciousness, we would have to work at redirecting some of the energy back into this place and that, and he illustrated with fingertips, in case I had forgotten. I laughed and kissed him goodnight.

As we settled on our pillows, I let myself become open, as before, to the different layers of feeling inside Shura. On top, there was a quiet concern; underneath that, I felt a place in him that was picking up the ever-present hurting, the chafed-raw feeling, the urgent tumbling of ideas and emotions, and knew that he was trying not to be too receptive to all of it, for the sake of both of us. Beneath all the rest was a layer of serenity, a certainty that everything was all right, that whatever I was going through was meant to happen and would resolve itself. I fell asleep locked into that part of him, at one with it.

During the early morning hours, I found myself conscious again in my sleep, aware that I was dreaming and being shown what had to be learned. What I saw this time were two doors, side by side in a high wall. One was painted red, the other yellow. The lesson was the same as that of the first lucid dream. The doors were the Great Duality in yet another form. The red color on the left slowly changed places with the yellow on the right, and changed back, over and over again, until I became impatient, standing there watching, and finally said, "I already know this one, if you don't mind. It's beginning to get boring."

The doors continued their slow exchange of colors.

I sighed, and addressed whoever might be directing this repetitive scenario. I admitted that I didn't yet know how I was going to come to terms with what I was being shown, but did believe it was a truth I had to accept and assimilate. I promised I would not try to postpone or escape

dealing with it, and I suggested — this time with respect, with humbleness — that it had gone on long enough, already, and could we maybe have another slide, please?

I was ignored. The teaching continued until I woke up.

#### FRIDAY

Shura got ready to leave for work, promising to come home as early as he could manage. I said I would be fine, that things were feeling a mite better, inside, less bumpy, less frantic, maybe starting to mellow out a bit. I added, "I hope you've noticed that my cheeks are dry, today?"

"Well, that's fine, but I love you either way — wet or dry!"

I grinned and we kissed goodbye.

I spent most of the day writing. The pain-haze had faded, and the intensity of the thought-streams seemed to gentle and stay subdued, as long as I kept typing. I was determined to put down every detail I could recall of the week's experiences, and I broke stride only for the time it took to fix myself a tomato sandwich for lunch.

I wrote:

"I have been shown, twice now in lucid dreams, that my resistance to the destructive, killer aspect of the Great Duality must change. I don't know yet if that means an acceptance of only the archetype, the primal energy or force, or whether I must learn to accept all its manifestations, including the evil and repugnant ones.

"Is it simply a matter of understanding and assenting to the basic rule of opposition as a necessity for life — water crashing against shore, the continual reshaping of the skin of the planet by earthquakes, the body fighting for survival against bacteria and viruses — and recognizing that, for life to continue on all levels — animal, human and vegetable — adaptation is vital, and adaptation requires change, which comes about as a response to challenge?

"I can accept, in the deepest part of myself, the existence of aggressive power and destruction as a necessary force in the service of life, but some of its manifestations — especially in the human world — still seem to me evil, wrong, and unacceptable. That's where I run into serious trouble, because my human instincts say no, and I keep being in opposition, heart and soul, to the dark and terrible elaborations on the theme that the human race seems to be constantly creating.

"I can continue to love my cat, even when I see, over and over, the game it plays with the mouse — and since our cats are outside cats and excellent hunters, I've seen it often, because they bring their mice to the patio outside the dining room for the final stages — and Shura's explanation of how the teasing is part of a cat's honing of its hunting skills makes sense.

"The cat has been programmed to exercise her power this way, and it may well be that Nature has made the game satisfying on the emotional level, too — in other words, she enjoys the feeling of power and the mouse's fear — because if it were not satisfying emotionally, the cat would not pursue the activity, and the result might well be that her skills would lose their edge, thus potentially threatening her survival.

"But I have trouble with human cruelty, the enjoyment of another person's pain and fear. I have a hard time believing that it serves human life, as it does the animal's. Besides, it seems to me that human cruelty does not arise from natural survival programming, but is the result of having experienced powerlessness — having been victimized by the cruelty of others, as a child — and having had available as models only the kinds of grownups who take power away from others, people who have never developed their capacity for caring and empathy.

"The whole terrible business of victimized child growing into victimizing adult is, to me, a tragic, twisted, stunted perversion of what should have been. And what should have been, of course, was a free, validated flowering of the child into a fully integrated member of the human family. I see such a taking away of another's power to self-affirm as an evil thing, and I believe in my heart and soul that, while I am incarnated as a human being, I am supposed to make choices — the right ones — between that dark element in my own soul and the loving, yea-saying part of myself. The making of those choices, consciously and unconsciously, over and over again — in small daily matters as well as in important, big ones — is what gives me my individual shape, what makes me the person I am, and eventually — I hope — the person I want to become.

"Am I supposed to continue making choices, but without rejecting or trying to fight that dark side of the human soul?

"I will have to work this out, on all levels of my psyche. I am

supposed to learn a truth, as my inner Self has made abundantly clear in the dreams, but first, I will have to discover exactly what it is — the archetype alone, or the archetype *and* all its manifestations — that I'm being urged to make peace with."

In the afternoon, I sat down at the dining room table with a cup of tea, and my attention fastened on the spine of a tall book. It was an old friend from childhood, a collection of fairy tales, most of its pages loosened from the cracked binding. I took it out of the bookcase and leafed through it until I found "Beauty and the Beast."

I read the ancient story through, as if for the first time.

*The Beast is a beast until he is loved and accepted, green scales, fangs and all; then, and only then, is he transformed into the prince. My maggot, and all such buried dark images of the Self, are the Beast. They must be uncovered, brought up into the light of conscious awareness, and they must be given compassion and love, as Beauty came to love and care for her Beast. Then — not suddenly, as in the fairy story, but gradually — the reshaping will begin to take place, and the Beast will become — what? — a survivor, a guardian, a strong part of oneself that does not fear. An ally.*

*Do all the old fairy stories have the same essential meaning? Are they tales of the journey of the human soul to completion, the struggle to achieve wholeness? Did they all originate as spiritual teaching stories, like the Sufi tales of the East?*

I spent the next few hours reading fairy stories, understanding them in the light of my own experience of the Shadow, and feeling a growing admiration for the people of courage, the wise teachers who had first created them. They had disguised spiritual truths as tales for children, probably because the all-powerful Church of that time reserved for itself the right to instruct in matters of the soul, and enforced its rules with torture and death.

That evening, the final lesson came.

After supper, when Shura went to his office to find out how his new IBM computer worked, I turned on the television. There was a documentary on Channel 9. It had been created by an extraordinary husband and wife team living in Kenya, Allan and Joan Root. Two years of work had gone into their portrayal of the mating and family-raising of a pair of hook-billed birds. The wisdom that revealed itself in the instinctual activities of the pair and, later, their babies, struck me with unusual force. There was a strong, almost palpable, impression of a vast intelligence that lay behind the pattern of behavior being followed by these beautiful birds.

I gradually became aware of something else: an immeasurable love permeating all that was taking place. Not the kind of love familiar to us as humans, but love as affirmation of both life and death, without sentimentality or regret. Love as YES, to everything that is.

My tears started again, this time in response to the presence of a mystery, and to the intense joy that I sensed running like a silent stream within it.

The documentary continued with the yearly migration of the big brown creatures called wildebeest. Thousands of animals were shown by the camera, pouring across the yellow African plains, struggling through the swift waters of a wide river — with the loss of hundreds of them to drowning or exhaustion — on the way to their other home.

I watched the screen, hypnotized, as the wildebeest raced over the dry grass, thundering towards the river, the immense herd photographed from a small plane flying above. Against the yellow background, the running animals took the form of a great brown tree with three branches, and suddenly I knew this was an entity, a single entity composed of thousands of wildebeest. I was seeing a group-soul. I felt, again, a form of consciousness that has no counterpart in the human world. It was immensely powerful, implacably driving all its component parts in the direction it had to go. It was not a comfortable thing to see. I could feel no love for it, only a profound respect and awe.

When the camera returned to the ground, following the wildebeest into and across the river, the Roots took time to record the dying of a large group of animals which had collapsed from exhaustion on the riverbank, half in the water, their heads hanging, legs tangled. Allan Root waded out to the pile of dead and dying wildebeest and struggled to disengage one young male, urging him to continue his journey across the river. The animal was having none of it; he was clearly sinking without fear into death, and didn't want to be pulled back out.

I was being shown the attraction, the seduction of that state of giving in, not fighting any more, dissolving into peace.

*Somewhere within my own psyche there is that same death-pull, that potential for giving up, relinquishing the effort that life entails. I'm seeing the death-drive, there on a riverbank in Africa. All living things eventually come to it, that wanting to cease, to stop trying, to give over and float gently into a final sleep. It's there in potential, in each of us, and one has to push against it, not let it take over, if one wants to continue living. And, for humans as well as animals, that can sometimes be hard to do, if suffering has been going on too long, and exhaustion has drained the will.*

The wildebeest entity I was watching did not concern itself with the death of some of its cells. The loss was an intrinsic part of the necessary movement of itself from one place to another, and served to winnow out weakness. The whole would survive.

After the documentary was over, I was sitting curled up on the couch, thinking about what I had seen, when Shura came into the room and sat down in the big armchair.

"How are you feeling, Buns?" he asked, and I said things were changing continually, and I'd just been through a rather extraordinary experience, watching something absolutely awesome on television.

He said, "I have an idea I'd like to run by you. Tell me what you think."

I smiled at him, "Okay, what is it?"

"You know how good old 2C-B always connects you with your body, how it integrates the mental world with the physical?"

I nodded.

"It's taking a chance," he said, "But it seems to me that if you opened up the possibility of reminding your body of how it normally feels, maybe it would help you bring everything back into some kind of balance, get the scattered parts of you together again. Work through the body, as well as the mind. And 2C-B is familiar to you, after all; it's an old friend. What do you think of giving it a try, just to see what happens? Of course," he added quickly, "It goes without saying that the slightest feeling of hesitation or uneasiness on your part must be respected. Go with your instincts."

I smiled. "It sounds like a perfectly fine idea. I can't see how it could hurt. At worst, it'll have no particular effect, and everything will just keep going on as before. If it does work, well, I must say I'm more than ready to get back to normal, and is *that* the understatement of the century!"

We each took twenty-five milligrams of 2C-B, and lay on our big double bed side by side. Shura found Leonard Bernstein's music on the radio, and we began to touch each other.

Two hours later, we were still making love, sweating in the warm air, and I was crying again, now with gratitude for the familiar sensations of arousal and response in my body. We loved and we talked, for four hours, getting up for occasional pee-breaks and some fresh oranges. I felt whole and full of joy, and told Shura that he was, indeed, a man of wisdom, and said thank you, lovely person, thank you.

## SATURDAY

When I woke up, I was myself. I was at baseline and I knew I would stay that way. The process, as Adam had promised, had completed itself by the end of the week. I phoned to tell him it had gone just the way he had predicted, and thanked him again. He laughed and said that, of course, he would be happy to take credit for anything that turned out well, whether he deserved it or not. He said, "*Vaya con Dios*, my dear."

I walked outside and saw that Mount Diablo was part of what was, part of the natural world of which we humans are also a part, and that it was all right to love it, even though it couldn't love back in quite the same way.

Shura took me out to dinner at our favorite Mexican restaurant to celebrate. We toasted the Mysteries of The Human Mind, Life Its Own Self, and the Wonderful World of The Normal and Ordinary.

It was inexpressibly good to be back.

#### SUNDAY

Shura took the DESOXY at the same level, forty milligrams, that he had given me on the previous Sunday. It was, he reported, completely inactive.

#### SIX MONTHS LATER.

One fine Sunday morning, I persuaded Shura to give me the full forty milligrams of DESOXY again, telling him I was certain that — this time — I, too, would find no activity.

I was right. There were no effects at all.

## CHAPTER 39. DANTE AND GINGER AND GOD

(Alice's voice)

Of all the research group, Dante wrote the best reports. They were long, detailed, and unreservedly honest. Ginger often sent us her own separate account, folded alongside Dante's in the same envelope, and they always sounded like her — enthusiastic, breezy and down to earth — but when she was involved with family matters or house-guests, she confined herself to scrawling brief post-scripts to Dante's typed descriptions. We told her we were grateful for whatever she wrote, long or short, considering how hard it was to pull anything out of the rest of the group; at least it had been until George got his own MacIntosh computer and discovered how much fun it was to write up experiments, especially now that he could illustrate them with little pictures and appropriate symbols!

Dante and Ginger had their private supply of psychedelic drugs, out there in the high desert country, halfway between the town of Gold Tree and their favorite hiking place, Mount Whitney. Over the years, they had gradually developed their own group of fellow travelers, many of whom lived in Los Angeles and would come to stay for an entire weekend, making it hard for Ginger to get to her painting as often as she would have liked.

Finally, she put her foot down and got Dante to agree to no more than one group experiment a month, max. He later admitted to us that it was a decision they should have made long ago, because he had begun feeling quite tired, and Ginger certainly needed fewer hours in the kitchen and more in her studio. After all, he said proudly, her incredible watercolor landscapes were beginning to attract attention in the outside world!

Many times, their experiments with visiting friends turned into therapy sessions, and both of them were becoming increasingly skillful at handling the occasional psychological breakthrough and the inevitable — and often

challenging — surprises.

Shura and I took a trip to Gold Tree once or twice a year, usually with David and the Closes. The Sandeman's lovely big ranch house had sleeping space for five or six guests, if you counted the living room floor and the summer favorite, the outside deck. When the moon was full, and the coyotes at howl in the foothills, the deck became a place of dark-shadowed enchantment; the only difficulty we had, when we spent the night out there, was in closing our eyes and settling down to sleep.

One May, in the 1980's, Dante wrote an account of a complex and quite extraordinary experience with a drug he and Ginger had found very friendly and insightful in several earlier trials. Its name is 2C-T-7. I include the account in this book because it moved me deeply when I first read it and it moves me still. I would call this a plus-four.

It is a beautiful May afternoon. I am sitting in the park in downtown Gold Tree. I've come to my favorite place, a park bench under a huge cottonwood. Nearby a stream is flowing, and I delight in its continual murmuring as it makes its way over the rocks in the stream bed. There is something magical about the breeze rustling through the trees. It is still early enough in the year for the air to be comfortable, and the breeze is fresh and caressing. The expanse of green grass and the shimmering leaves vibrating in the sunlight make this a wonderful place to sit and contemplate.

And contemplate I must, about the intense activities of last weekend. I don't know if it's possible to adequately describe all of it, the arguments and discussions, the searching thinking, the sadness and depression over apparently irreconcilable points of view, and what remains afterwards.

How to describe what remains? This wonderful glow inside my being, the remembrance of having been touched by the most exquisite Feminine Presence imaginable, touched in such a way that goodness, beauty, tenderness and love are reflected all around me, in everything I see. And the wonder and majesty of the Mystery that created this universe, endowing it with the miracle of its Presence.

How long will this last, this delicious feeling of being alive, of having penetrated the veil which hides beauty and the wonders of celestial vistas? It doesn't matter, as there can be nothing but gratitude for even a glimpse of what exists for those who can become open to it.

Here is what happened. Charles [*a friend of the Sandemans who was a student of Asian history and had written several books on the*

*subject]* and Glenn [*an engineer*] arrived on Friday. We hadn't seen each other for many months, and there was much to share, the recent activities of mutual friends, and our growing understanding of what we ourselves are about.

Our continual discussion was augmented by three bracing excursions into the mountains. We enjoyed the stretching of our bodies, and thrilled to the grandeur of the high granite faces of the Sierras. It is especially satisfying to enjoy the beauty of the high country in the company of good friends and stimulating conversation.

We all consider ourselves seekers of God, yet have quite different views of what God-realization is and how it is to be accomplished. Glenn sees God so far away that direct contact is impossible. Only by leaving this corrupt and pain-engrossed world, he says, can one hope to breathe the atmosphere of the Divine.

Charles holds the view that the evil and corruption of the world are far too great to be the result of our own doing. Instead, he views the dark forces as a result of demigods, or the demiurge, an arrogant and power-hungry creator who imposes the darkness on humanity. Thus we do not have to feel guilty for the troubles of the world, as they are not our fault. He says that recognizing who we truly are, and drawing upon divine assistance, we can become free of the works of the demiurge and the archons that assist him.

My own experience is that God is everywhere, the essence of everything that exists, "As near as hand and feet," waiting to join us as soon as invited. For He will not violate His established law of free will. Our role is to grow in consciousness, in awareness, and to so open ourselves that we may be joined with the Divine, that we may become partners, channels, for bringing the Divine into the world. Until ultimately there is complete union, as the great mystics have taught, with no separation between God and man.

I find Carl Jung to hold the most accurate view of the psyche. What stands in the way of integrating with our Inner Self, apart from our reluctance, for whatever reason, to discover who we really are, is the Shadow. As a simplified approximation, the Shadow is composed of all the material that we keep repressed from our conscious awareness. Most of us are not at all pleased with the prospect of encountering much of this material, and in fact usually strenuously avoid it. This readily accounts, in my mind, for most of the difficulties in the world.

In my personal experience, encountering and reconciling

Shadow material results in leaps in growth, brings understanding, freedom from unconscious forces, and also releases for our use the energy that was formerly tied up in the repressed material. And with this freeing comes a heightening of all of our functions.

My dear friend Glenn holds it entirely unnecessary to pursue the Shadow material and the psychological understanding that comes with that pursuit. He says that it is only necessary to hold fast to our sense of the Divine, and all will be well.

While he agrees with Charles as to the horrible state of the world and the hopelessness of saving it, he is not sure that Charles is entirely right about everything else.

We sat down that evening to a delightful dinner which Glenn had prepared for us. We were soon into a hot and heavy discussion, which lasted right up until bedtime.

I argued eloquently for my position, bringing up my personal experiences and evidence that supports it. Glenn was equally eloquent, and stood firmly in his position. God was far too far away to have any direct contact with humans, and we would only find the Divine by freeing ourselves of the bloody mess of this world.

Much to my surprise, Charles came forcefully to Glenn's side, thoroughly supporting him in all of his views, and castigating me for the errors of mine, and for my love and faith in the world.

I went to bed quite saddened. Our differences were so great and seemed so unreconcilable that I wondered about spending the next day together under the influence of a powerful chemical agent.

I had a horrible nightmare that night, far more intense and real than any dream I've had for years. I was at a hotel, and all of my belongings were in my room. Guests of the hotel were being entertained by what seemed like a group of friendly, outgoing men and women, putting on skits and performing for their benefit. I returned to my room, and found that all of my possessions had been taken by the performers. I wanted to raise an alarm, but they immediately surrounded me, and physically restrained me. I was told that if I didn't do exactly what they said, I would receive severe physical punishment. I felt I had no choice but to comply. I was outraged, and continually racked my brain for ways to get free and report them. But no matter what I came up with, they countered and defeated me. I was helpless. I would have to spend the rest of my life in their grasp, doing their will.

I awoke strongly affected, and in a deep, deep depression. I thought to myself, I can never have a psychedelic experience in

this state. I shall have to call off my participation in the session. The only way I could participate is if I could re-establish my contact with God, and get back into a good frame of mind.

It was about 4:00 AM, at that point, and I lay back, holding my mind still, inviting God to enter. It took a long time, but after a while the familiar Presence began to make itself felt. With great relief, I maintained the contact, and was lifted higher and higher, out of my depression. It became clear to me that I could participate in the planned journey by doing exactly as I was now doing: keeping my attention completely focused on God, and ignoring the others and what was happening with them.

I arose about 6:30 AM, half an hour earlier than planned, feeling refreshed and clear. I avoided conversation with anybody else, and completed my preparations for the day.

We all convened at 9:00 AM and the feeling tone of the group was excellent. Ginger and I took twenty milligrams of the 2C-T-7, or T-7, as we call it; the others took only fifteen milligrams each, since it was their first time with this material.

About half an hour or so later, we are all feeling it. By one hour, it is getting intense. I sit on the deck, and it feels very good to close my eyes and go inside. I hold still, and it feels as though this contributes to the mounting of the energy. I refrain from thinking, and the energy grows. This feels like a marvelous procedure, with wonderful, undefined energy swelling inside. I look at the sky, at its utter blueness, and am filled with wonder.

Charles is off by himself. He has been feeling nauseous, and suddenly throws up. This relieves him somewhat.

Glenn is in a struggle. He reports that he is having to eat his words of the night before. He is torn between what he sees as Charles' way and mine. He had felt, before, that I have been seduced and caught by the beauty of the world, and that this has held me off the true path. Now, he himself is seeing incredible beauty in nature, and is not so sure any more that it is a distraction.

Ginger comes outside and announces that she has given birth to the universe. The T-7 is a fantastic material for her, and she is feeling marvelous. After giving birth, she says, she dismissed the universe and told it that it was on its own.

This is my very best entry into an experience. I am enjoying myself immensely, being filled with joy and great love. I put on a recording of Gounod's St. Cecelia Mass, and the music soon carries me away. I begin to reach new heights of experience, touched with beauty, love and understanding, and frequently cry deeply. It is ecstatic to release so completely to such exquisite feelings.

I feel myself being drawn back in time — far, far back — to the Beginning. I do not see clearly, but I am suddenly aware that the whole thing started in Love. A love so great, so tremendously charged that it was like a huge fiery furnace, brighter than any sun.

Suddenly I am completely pierced, down to the core of my being, by what feels like the penetration of the Finger of God. It seems to be a female source that reaches me and touches. I am totally undone by this deep touching, and sob uncontrollably for several minutes, crying out all my pain and fears, and feeling sheer ecstasy. As I feel gratitude for the beauty, I am pierced again and again, and continue to sob.

What has happened is a once-in-a-lifetime event, a touch of God that is worth dying for. It seems as though it will stand forever and ever. I feel totally changed.

I ask to see this essence in my surroundings, and everything around me immediately lights up with unspeakable beauty and love. I enjoy this for a while, then go to find Ginger. We sit alone together on the deck, and I ask to see the Feminine Presence in her. I then begin to see incredible beauty in Ginger, she is astonishing, and I am overcome with love. It's impossible to describe the satisfaction and fulfillment.

Charles is feeling better, and we all take a walk over to my favorite rock formation. We sit and drink in the surroundings. Ginger shares the way she is perceiving the landscape, and everywhere I feel the wonderful Feminine Presence, and am filled with utter gratitude that it stays with me.

I see clearly that everyone has as much God as he or she wishes. One need only ask. I have never before experienced more profoundly the intimacy of God, how close He is, how close He wishes to be, waiting only for our invitation.

My previous experiences with Shura's compounds are richly confirmed. While there may be other truths, I see very clearly that this is my role, to deeply explore the intimate relation of man and God. Others can and will specialize in other things, but I am so filled, and find this path so ecstatic, that I see no need to consider other paths, at least for as long as I can now foresee. And the Presence I am experiencing continues to burn as a flame within me, for which I am utterly grateful. (Writing this, five days later, I still feel it strongly inside, and hope that it never goes away.)

For the first time, on my rock, I don't feel like talking about what I am feeling, but am content to address myself to fully living it. The afternoon and evening clouds are immensely beautiful,

with intricate lacy patterns, and the outstanding lenticulars that often form on the leeward side of the mountains. The closeness and energy among us have grown to powerful proportions, and we are all intensely enjoying the experience.

Charles is feeling better physically than when he arrived. It will be very interesting to see how this session sits with him. All agree that there is great promise in this substance, 2C-T-7, and that more explorations should be carried out.

For myself, I feel more deeply in touch than ever before with another whole level, which seems to pour much more freely into my life. My previous experiences and the value systems I have developed from them have been abundantly confirmed. I feel much more confident with them, their logical consistency has grown, and I feel much less likely to be swayed by other thought systems.

A fierce sense of independence wells up, and I remember that the basis of Gnosticism is each individual's right, if not duty, to develop his own unique path to the realization of God. And to develop his own unique talents. I look at my activities and am pleased with what I am doing.

I feel I can abandon that self-judgment which automatically assumes that I am wrong and the other person is right, and which produces a sinking feeling that blanks out clear thinking and evaluation. I am overjoyed with this deepening of contact, and will keep it as alive as possible.

I have been in a remarkable place since that day. There was a relapse the second day after the T-7, and I felt tired again, but it is my view that, following a profound experience, there are many by-products released in the body which were correlates of the psychic armor and take a few days to dissipate. In fact, I have often found a welling up of deep Shadow material a few days after a good, positive experiment.

For the couple of days following that, I was most pleased with my state of being, with the clarity, ability to think clearly, and the high energy.

Today, five days after the session, I am in such a different state than I have been following previous experiences that I want to document some of the changes I am aware of:

1. My psyche feels clearer and freer than ever before. I am much more able to concentrate on the task at hand, and enter it wholeheartedly. I am enjoying household chores as I never could before, because I usually had a sense of being driven by time, and the need to be doing something more important. I am very aware

of how the degree of intention mobilizes the energy to complete the task.

2. My body feels clearer and more free, too. Much of the stiffness has gone, and the occasional arthritic sensations have diminished. Walking outdoors is extremely enjoyable.

3. My impotence has disappeared. This had grown to quite a factor, and I later realized that loss of sexual ability was a source of some of my very deep anger. I wasn't sure whether the cause was old age, the result of my prostate surgery several months ago, or dissatisfaction with my partner. This T-7 experience has resolved the situation. I have dropped my concerns about aging, and the flow of love between Ginger and me has never been better.

4. I feel in a more elevated state, the way I feel during the good part (usually the descent) of a psychedelic experiment. This is a real shift in consciousness. It feels almost as though I am carrying my head higher, above the concerns that used to distract me, and in contact with higher energies. Occasionally, an unexpected euphoria sweeps over me, a most wonderful feeling. Sometimes I remember pleasant things from childhood which I had completely forgotten. In time, I will work out the connection between a current event, or thought, and the sweep of good feeling, but right now the connection escapes me, and it doesn't matter.

5. My energy is being sustained at a much higher continuous level than ever before. I love it.

6. I am amazed at how quickly I can change my feeling state. Sometimes, especially when first arising in the morning, the old feelings of tiredness and sludginess come over me. I used to think these were heavy burdens that would take a great deal of time to work out of. Now I know that they are only feelings, and that by simply changing the focus of my attention, I can drop them and move into my new state. Hallelujah!

7. When I take the time to be still, I quickly move into a transcendental space of great beauty and realization. I could amuse myself for hours at a time, if I simply wished to sit and look at my surroundings with an open heart. However, I don't intend to over-indulge. There are things I have to accomplish.

Thank you, Shura, for these materials, and for the privilege of working and growing with them.

Ginger had written a separate note. It read:

Had a great time with our delightful guests. This was one of the most pleasant, joyful, high experiences of my life. Visually

tremendous — colors, shapes, smells heightened. At one time, around 3 or 4 hours into it, we all walked to the rocks and zoom-zowie, there it was! The most phenomenal, radiant scene I've ever looked at. The ground was alive with energy, the trees thrust out of the ground with life-force that was visible. The cattle were grazing over yonder on our neighbor's ranch, and it was a picture of true peace — totally pastoral — just exquisite. Charles couldn't believe it was real, and Glenn was amazed at it, too. Our eyes were able to see this new dimension of the universe because they were wide open. I was aware of the great love that permeates the planet — at least as we, or I, see it. From here, it looks wonderful!

I feel blessed, feel such a grace has been bestowed upon me. Gratitude continues.

Am still in a peaceful state after five days. All I have to do to remind myself is look out the window and see the glory.

Love to you both, and thank you — Ginger.

I asked Dante, after reading his letter and Ginger's note, what changes — if any — he had observed in Charles and Glenn, as a result of their 2C-T-7 experience. He replied that he is looking forward to another visit from each of them, on separate weekends, during the next couple of months, and will let me know what he finds out.

## CHAPTER 40. MORTALITY

(Shura's voice)

I have already briefly described the Owl Club, a collection of many different sorts of gentlemen who meet once a week in downtown San Francisco at what is called the City Club. For over a hundred years, the Owlers have had an annual encampment in a large, privately owned forest, several hours' drive from the Bay Area. This takes place each summer and lasts for two full weeks.

When someone asks me just what one does in the encampment that justifies spending such a length of time, I can honestly tell them that a person may do as much or as little as he wishes. He may interact and socialize. He may retreat and meditate. Many members come only on the week-ends when there is a great deal of planned activity, ranging from concerts and stage plays to interminable cocktail parties and gourmet dining. Others spend the during-the-week time there, appreciating the fact that they can be free from exactly such planned activity.

For me, this time of luxurious self-indulgence has become an effective period of rejuvenation in the middle of a frantic year of getting and spending. I have never lacked for activities that make demands on my time, but almost all of them can be classified as "have-to's." However, with this annual retreat to the forest, I can select from a menu of Schubert quartets, Rex Stout mysteries, and miles of back-country hiking. Technically, rejuvenation means to make young again, but a reversal of the living process is not in the cards and I am content to accept a simple undoing process, where I might be able to repair some of the wear and tear that has accumulated during the rest of the year. Just holding even is all I ever ask for.

There is an interesting concept tucked away in that phrase, "just holding even." Each of us knows his biological age — he was born in such-and-such a year, thus he is exactly so many years old. But that is not our age

according to our own self-image. Ask someone how old he is, and you get the biological age. Then ask him how old he sees himself to be, as defined by his life-style, his activities, his opinions. You will almost always get a candid answer. It may be five years younger; it could be twenty years younger.

Another thing that goes along with the "self-image age" is the observation that it does not change with time. With each birthday, the body is biologically one year older, but the self-image remains the same. If you see yourself as twenty-eight when you are thirty-five, you will probably still see yourself as twenty-eight when you are forty.

Each of us has suffered the parental put-down, usually in the form of spoken words, although it might be nothing more than a look of disapproval, "Why don't you act your age?" This has probably never changed anyone's behavior, but it is said in an effort to move the child's self-image into consistency with his biological real-world. "You're a grown-up boy now," or, "Can't you be a bit more mature?" Such rebukes always demand a change of behavior in the direction of greater age. I have rarely been urged to, "Act like a kid, again," or told, "Why don't you just let yourself be a little less responsible!"

I am, of course, fully aware, intellectually, that I am in my sixties. But I have always acted out of an internal, unspoken certainty that I was really in my late forties. Maybe 46, maybe 48. I look out at the world with eyes that cannot see themselves, and thus cannot see me. Both the eyes that are doing the seeing and the world that is being seen are strangely programmed to respond to me as they did at some earlier time. Catching a reflection of myself in a store window, I note the immediate denial that the person being reflected is really me. I'm not *really* that old, wrinkled, gray person with the protruding belly. Yes, of course I know it's myself I see in the mirror, but when you get to know me as well as I know me, I'm not *really* the way I appear.

The many miles of trails in the Owl Club forest preserve have always provided me with a unique opportunity. The privacy and safety of walking in the back woods offer perfect conditions for exploring a psychedelic drug. I have occasionally taken long walks with this or that friend who has chosen to set aside a few hours for talking and exchanging ideas, with the aid of a magic elixir. Sometimes, the purpose of the experience has been the resolving of a problem, an effort to change perspective and thus, it is hoped, to get unstuck; sometimes, it has been a simple matter of opening and deepening communication.

A couple of years ago, a good friend and occasional fellow traveler, Luke, expressed a desire to walk and talk. Well, I thought, this may be an excellent time for him to bring up some aspects of a medical problem that I knew had been bothering him. He had recently undergone elbow surgery

which had been botched by haste and carelessness, and had refused to entertain the possibility of legal redress. Further, he had been dragging his feet in even getting help for the resulting disability. I suggested 15 milligrams of 2C-E, and, being familiar with the material, he agreed, saying he thought that would be an excellent level.

The next morning we skipped breakfast, except for coffee, and at ten o'clock, we took the chemical.

The walk along the valley floor was quiet and peaceful. There were sounds of music from various camps, as we passed; a Rachmaninoff etude from the right, then — a bit further along — a small Dixieland group on the left. There was the ever-present clicking of domino tiles, interspersed with an occasional burst of tipsy laughter (some leaders of the nation start relaxing quite early in the day). In a few minutes, we were at one of the trail heads; we left the merriment behind us and headed for the quiet of the outback.

I found the walking progressively more difficult as we ascended the first steep climb out of the valley. The effects of the 2C-E were unmistakably coming on for both of us, but — despite being well rested and in good physical shape — I found myself breathing heavily. In another hour, we were walking along one of the deserted fire-trails at over a thousand feet, and were probably a full two miles from the populated valley floor. The drug was in full bloom now, at the end of the second hour, and for me, things were getting increasingly grim and morbid. The hiking was becoming harder and harder, with each step having to be calculated before execution. Finally, I said to Luke, "I need to sit down and go inwards for a while."

My hiking companion was holding forth about the unbelievable colors of the trees, mosses, clouds and sky, grasses, everything. There was a continuous palate of greens and blues and browns that co-existed side by side, he observed, without ever quite blending into one another. He talked about what he called, "living toothpicks," trees around sixty to eighty feet tall that have been dedicated to the giving of young limbs for spreading on the ground around campfires. Some bear a greenish fuzz like caterpillar-fur, a few feet in diameter, made up of hundreds of fine branchlets which have grown straight out from the main trunk. Others stand as bare poles, having been recently harvested by a stripping of all this new growth from top to bottom. In a couple of years they will have grown a new crop of fur. A strange blend of mutilation and conservation.

The road was very dusty, but my dear friend Luke saw the dust as a magical sheen which had settled on the leaves and dead limbs lying on every side of us. He pointed out the red-neck hawks circling in the distance, in search of lunch. Everything was completely enchanting and he was enjoying himself immensely.

And where was I? I found myself seeing only the negative: my unexpected physical inadequacy for the climb; the dead limbs covered with brown dust, the mutilated trees and the ugly fate of whomever the hawks would choose for lunch.

I looked down to find myself sitting on an old, dead log which was undergoing a crumbling transition back to the earth. I realized I had no choice but to try to sort out the difficult thoughts that were running my show at the moment. I seemed to be reviewing my actions of the last few years through a very dark glass. Looking to the future, I could anticipate nothing there that seemed any happier. I clearly saw myself for what I really was, an old man who had a physical and emotional age that was no longer in the forties, but, rather, in the all too real and brutal sixties. How the hell did I get here? I hadn't asked for such sudden maturity! I was overwhelmed by this stark and un-looked-for truth, and I could not remember having been aware of any of the subtle steps and stages by which the maturing process must have actually occurred.

Hold on, I thought, just whom am I kidding? This is not maturity. This is simply Old. It's been developing at a steady pace all along, but I chose to look the other way. It isn't maturity, and it hasn't been sneaking up on me. It's the dying process, and I have been moving steadily towards that final moment at a crashing pace. I've simply been fooling myself by all of these game-playing deceptions. I am an old man, and my death is a certainty. Who knows when? Maybe right now. Is this the time and place to close it all off? The Ponce de Leon search for youth was absurd when it took place in the Everglades of Florida, and it is equally absurd when trying to act the young fool with a consciousness-changing psychedelic drug. Dammit it — grow up and act your age! You are a dying old man who cannot face the fact of your own mortality.

I was feeling too exposed and too ponderous, sitting way up there on my log. My instincts said to me, get closer to the earth. I slid forward and down, off my dead log and onto the ground, where the log became my back-rest. I declined Luke's offer to talk, so he wandered off to see more of the marvelous things that surrounded him. I just wanted to dwell in my own thoughts.

I wondered, is the German word that would describe my state of mind, "Weltschmerz?" I was indeed sick of the world, in spades. I reviewed my continuing burden of trying to stay active, to maintain a high volume of productivity in writing, and to keep trying to make this and that in the laboratory for everybody under the sun. It was all such an obvious waste of effort. Everything would slowly close down about me, with nothing completed and all communication forever closed off, and it really would make no difference at all. On the previous evening, Luke and I had talked about death and transition, and the state I found myself in right now could

well be reflecting that conversation. It was not a good place to be.

I once heard a terrible joke about a man who had a trained mule. It would sit when told to, it would lie down, beg or fetch. It would follow any verbal order it was given. But whenever the owner was asked to put on a demonstration, and before he gave the mule his first command, he would pick up a piece of two-by-four and hit the animal over the head with it. His explanation was simple, "First, you have to get his attention." Old mule Shura had been hit over the head with a chemical two-by-four. Something, somewhere, was trying to get my attention.

My buddy bounced up to me again, and this time succeeded in breaking through my funk. He told me he had observed that, "If you look at distant scenery, and there's something located at arm's length that you can focus on, and you do focus on it, then the thing close to you can be seen in full detail, but the backdrop suddenly looks like it's made of cardboard!" He was insistent.

I struggled down a few feet to the right, from where my back-rest log disappeared into the weeds, and found a spider suspended on its web. I sat down and focused on it, somewhat resentfully, (how could Luke have been so selfish as to have wrested me from my rich self-pity?), and indeed, Wow! The distant trees and landscapes were flat and unnatural. They looked like a badly painted back-drop. I moved my gaze to the left. No spider, no illusion. Back to the right; the spider was clear and, again, the distance became artificial.

I was reminded of another experience with 2C-E many years ago in Tennessee, when I had looked through a closed window to see what appeared to be a painting of a medieval lady watering her plants in the back yard. This vivid memory had been with me for a long time and it was just now that I realized it might have been the panes of window glass that had become the focus of my eyes, serving as the counterpart of the spider web. A nifty parallel, I thought, although by no means an explanation.

The memory of that garden illusion caught me up again in turmoil, because there was another resemblance between this 2C-E experience and that dramatic one I had weathered in Tennessee over a decade ago. There had been a death thing there, as well, another playing of the role of the tired old man. But there, I had seen myself externally as wizened, with wasted, wrinkled arms and sunken face. Here, this time, it was a viewing of my inner self. I thought, I am seeing myself as an old person, a tired person, someone saddened by the knowledge that he cannot possibly complete everything he wants to complete. Hell, most of what I want to do, I haven't even started yet! So here I sit, wallowing in self-pity, bemoaning the fact that my most important work is not done and never will be done.

The query came from somewhere inside me, quite gracefully. Are you

interested in walking, by any chance? I chuckled, realizing that the spiral down into the world of despair was an endless one, and I must try to step out of it. Tired, tired, tired. The best way to combat tiredness is to walk it off. I turned my body around in order to push myself up from my strange position on the ground, feeling extremely awkward, and was finally able to get on my feet. I dusted debris off my behind, and moved on again with Luke. The pace started slowly at first, but began picking up as I got out of myself and into the visual pleasures of my surroundings. We were soon at the far-point of the trail where it branched, and had to choose whether to continue on around the outer trail (some three hours of hiking still ahead of us) or whether to cut back onto the middle road. Our canteen was more than half empty, and the 2C-E had given us dry mouths. We agreed to take the shorter route.

We tried and failed to analyze the spiderweb painted-backdrop illusion, and I was just starting to share the dark, dark places where I had so recently been, when, Whammo! There was the two-by-four again. I had a sudden, very strange sensation in my groin. It was on my right side, and I knew that something had happened to me; something was very wrong. It was not really painful, but it felt as if the right testicle had gone back up inside my body. I had an overpowering urge to push it out again.

I stepped to the side of the road (we were still far from home base, both drug-wise and trail-wise) and lowered my pants. I stuck my hand inside my shorts, and discovered that when I put the edge of my right index finger against the cleft between my genitals and right thigh, and firmly pushed inward, I felt okay. When I took my finger away, it felt all wrong again. Oh for Heaven's sakes, please, I thought, not a hernia!

I had had some such thing when I was 10 years old, but couldn't remember how it came to be. There was a vague impression of sliding down a banister in the Spruce Street house, but I have been told that you have to lift something too heavy in order to separate the tissue. Certainly, just getting up from a ground-level sitting position to a vertical hiking stance could not have been such a strain. I could recall with total clarity my wheeling myself to surgery during the childhood event, and the friendly smell of ether. And, since they removed my appendix for good luck at the same time, that hernia had also, probably, been on my right side.

Must I undergo some stupid surgery, now, at my present age, just because something-or-other is trying to get my attention? And just exactly what is my present age, anyway?

With great reluctance I proposed to Luke that we abort our hike, and seek out some competent and unstoned medical opinion as to the status of my body. We walked very slowly back to the valley floor; I with my hand down inside my pants, underneath a loosened belt, and my friend with a benign look of amusement on his face.

Once back, we boarded one of the mini-buses that patrol the Grove roads all day long, and I requested that the driver take me directly to the Owl camp hospital. In the lobby, I found four men sitting in what struck me as ridiculously puffy easy chairs. I asked — a rather silly question, in retrospect — if anyone there was a physician. "Yes," said a voice, "We all are."

"Well," I said, somewhat sheepishly, "I think I may have hurt myself."

One of the young men, a cardiologist as it later turned out, glanced at the others (who nodded at him), and got to his feet. He led the way to a private examination room, donned obstetric gloves, and asked me to drop my pants. Push your finger in there and cough, he ordered, then said something about feeling a bit too much tissue here, and suggested that I go to the nearby town and get a truss (inguinal, medium size, right hand side), to give me support until I could get to my own physician. At least my intestines were not hanging out of my body, he added pleasantly.

I thanked him, ran the gauntlet of quietly smiling professionals in the front room, and rejoined my friend, Luke, who had been contentedly waiting for me on a shaded redwood bench.

For me, the entire experience had been completely bizarre and excruciatingly embarrassing. Upon entering the hospital, I had become somewhat paranoid, seeing the incident from the point of view of a very sober emergency physician, hired to be in attendance at an encampment of 2000 titans of industry — or, to be more exact, 1,900 titans and a scatter of musicians, actors and artists — having been told to expect at least three heart attacks and two accidental ice-pick punctures.

And — so went my uncomfortable fantasy — suddenly there appears a disheveled and uncoordinated grey-hair of sixty-something, with his finger in his crotch, mumbling vaguely about having hurt himself, hiking on the trails. Is it possible, thinks the physician, that at one of the camps a bet had been made that they could get a young emergency MD to jiggle the balls of a titan? How would they do it? Have him stagger into the hospital with some cock and bull story about a maybe hernia, that's how. After all, if such a bet had been made by bored, drunken men with nothing else to do — so reasons the physician residing in my suspicious mind — he, as a doctor, has no choice but to put on his gloves and inspect the presented balls and inguinal canal.

No matter that the examination had been conducted with complete professionalism and no hint of disbelief in either face or voice. I was sure I was suspected, perhaps by all four of the doctors, of playing some part in an elaborate, puerile joke. I felt I had been placed in a situation that was neither of my own making nor under my control, and I was miserable.

Luke and I walked away from the hospital, moving slowly. We would find a cold glass of soda water somewhere, and try to avoid running into

anyone we knew. He was still bouncing happily about with the 2C-E, but I had ended up with a pretty heavy load of stuff for consideration.

I decided, as the effects of the material slowly declined, that I had been whacked yet a third time by the nasty piece of lumber, with the hospital experience and my disturbingly paranoid fantasies of how I was being perceived by the physicians.

Dammit, I said to myself. Enough. I get the message. I'm no longer in my forties, and when I go hiking on the Owl trails, I must pay attention to my body and remember, like it or not, that it's been around for sixty-something years and can no longer be relied upon to have the resiliency of forty-something.

I survived, but the darkness of the imagery was not easily dispelled. It was all of four days before I was able to get completely out of the dying mode, and realize that the instinct for life was still predominant. But I could not effectively reset my self-image clock back to my forties. I was now a much older person than I had been. I had aged twenty years in three hours.

I spent those four days looking about me and observing closely my friends in the Owl Club world — musicians, business men, teachers, retired this and that — who were also in the sixty to seventy year old age slot. How were they conducting themselves? My God. Two of them had walking problems, in one case due to hip trouble and, in the other, a bad knee. One friend had lost his voice box to cancer. Most of them had hypertension, and were being medicated for it. Prostate surgery everywhere. Impotence, incipient senility, and a pandemic narrowing of political tolerance, along with a decreasing curiosity about new things. Several had recently gone to the extreme of dying. But, there was a spark of hope. There were a few, sadly only a very few, but a few nonetheless, who were up there in the eighty to ninety year old slot, but acted and carried themselves as if they were still in their sixties. Might there also be hope for me?

A dozen questions had to be addressed. Was this new, old-man self-image the truth of what I really was? How might my relationships with others change, now that my warts and blemishes had suddenly become apparent to me? Since I had suddenly leapt into a new age bracket, must I conduct myself in some new way? Could I manage to recover that fortyish self-image, or was I destined to be sixtyish from here on? For that matter, did I even have the choice of surviving a little longer from here on? Was the deterioration that comes with aging never to be invisible to me again? Did I want it to be? Might I see myself, when I am eighty, as a person of sixty-five? Or is that remarkable age displacement unique for this particular time in life?

I have been unable to recover the innocence of my earlier age-gap. Some of it, maybe, but by no means all. I find myself now, from time to

time, weighing the virtues of being an antique, in that, for instance, there are some audiences in my world who will not give serious attention to a person who is only in his forties.

I feel that my mind, while it is now housed in a container which is beginning to look like an elder statesman of some sort, still — most of the time — has the bounce and wit of age forty; in fact, I sometimes suspect, with pleasure, that it never left the twenties.

Be that as it may, no matter what my apparent age or appearance, I remain capable of acting on my beliefs, and my beliefs are strong.

I have no intention of softening my insistence on the preservation, at any cost, of the human freedoms and liberties that we still have; I cannot anticipate yielding on the demand that we must recover, again at any cost, the freedoms and liberties which have already disappeared from our society.

I intend to persist in being curious about the unknown. It is in the urge to learn, and in the drive to understand, that youth is to be found.

I will continue to honor the values of all the religions of man, as I believe they were originally conceived and taught, not as they are presently practiced. I intend to remain open to new forms of expression taken by the human spirit, wherever I shall find them.

And finally, I must admit that I now look forward with total fascination to discovering the shape — and age — of my self-image, when the calendar tells me I have turned eighty-five!

## CHAPTER 41. 2C-T-4

(Shura's voice)

A few years ago, I was again graced with a Plus-Four. The following are my notes, written during the experiment and completed a few days later.

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9:00 AM is (0:00) of the experiment. April 3, 1985, on the Farm. 12 mg 2C-T-4 in water. Trivial taste.

(:50) Aware.

(1:20) To a plus one.

(1:30) To a one-and-a-half plus.

(2:00) A full plus two and climbing. Alice ready to leave about here, and I fibbed and told her I was at a plus-one only. If I had said plus-two and climbing, she would have been interested/concerned, and would be trying to reach me by telephone and — maybe not getting me — might have worried. Forgive me the small white lie, my love.

(2:30) Greater than plus two.

(3:00) To a plus three. This is not an out-in-public drug. One would be compelled to be guarded, to tone things down, to continuously monitor one's interactions. Very erotic. Obsession with things physical, sexual. Once past this, one can allow the richer aspects to be manifest.

(3:15) There is some visual brightening — not quite that of 2C-T-2 but the potential is there. This seems excellent for thinking about relationships.

(3:40) This is a very profound plus three. And I will try to compose notes for the first time on the computer, rather than trust to handwriting.

This is so long, so profound and implacable, that an unhappy person would have nowhere to go to get away from it. It would follow him everywhere he went, into the bathroom, into a book, into his memories.

For the last hour I stayed out of the house, in part because I felt blackmailed by the telephone. I was afraid it would ring, and I simply did not want to interact with anyone in that world, not for the moment. So I stayed in the lab and started a reflux on the steam-bath. Then I went up behind the lab and sat a while with my thoughts. These became bitter-sweet memories, strongly encouraged by the magic place I was in; it was warm and I was almost completely hidden. But not totally, so there remained a connection with the outside world. I thought that to avoid the house was giving in to blackmail. Then — so simple — it came to me that I would not answer the phone. Rather, I decided, I will count the times it rings and try to deduce, with some humor, who it is. Or, rather, who it might have been, that was so insistent on demanding a response. So, freed from blackmail, I am here and have started my report on a remarkable substance.

A completely remarkable substance. It is as if I had just rediscovered the Alephs — a plus 1 at one hour, then plus 2 at two hours, and not a full plus 3 until the third hour.

What a marvelous way to express oneself, writing on the computer! Not looking at what is being written, and certainly not correcting trivial mistakes at the moment; simply letting things run on without either barriers or editing.

I have been spending some time trying to deduce where in the brain this is operating. What is it that has disconnected me from the known behavior patterns that would allow me to go out into the world and drive and talk to someone and protect myself from somebody else? At the moment, none of these interactions would seem possible. Perhaps I could screw something-or-other together and interact with an attorney about a court case (assuming he was reasonably un-perceptive) and maybe carry it off. I am glad that I need not do so.

But what has opened up with 2C-T-4? I feel in a simultaneous connection with everything outside of myself, in one moment of time that keeps going on and on, and this is a form of universal knowing.

The music playing in the next room is sadly artificial. It has been played and played a million times to the same tired ears, and has assumed

the criminal status of background. Something to fill the cavities for the moment, to perhaps stop the incessant internal dialog. I wish to stop the music. Much better. I want the dialog, the monolog, to go on, and to tell me things about myself that only I can know, and that only I should hear.

It is said that with psychedelics one can gain communication from the unconscious. That's only partly right. We have continuous access to these deep, primitive things within us, the survival and instinctual things, with psychedelics or without. It is only a self-inflicted pattern of thought and behavior that keeps us from living all parts of ourselves continuously.

We are taught, really driven, to believe that whatever is in our depths must be kept bound and in its place, in our interactions with ourselves and others, else we are naught but animals.

But we are animals in our exterior, and in every way in our interior. We are continuously in communication with our unconscious; this is the heritage of every cell in the body. So 2C-T-4 does not do anything unexpected or new; it simply reminds us of this continuing interaction.

I want this monolog to continue, as I feel that it can bring up to my conscious mind treasures that are buried within me — knowledge that cannot be articulated — genetic histories that are only read, otherwise, as the silly DNA that means proteins to scientists, separated by miles of what they so charmingly call "nonsense." That our heritage is 5% protein and enzyme, and 95% nonsense, is an incredibly foolish idea. We have evolved for millennia to become what we are today, and we cannot decipher 95% of our heritage just because we have only this scientific certainty that DNA stands for protein and nothing else.

I may be playing with a plus four. There is a simultaneous union with everything around me, and thus with everything within me too. A complete identification with my environment. And a sense of being at total peace with it, as well. If this is me, then I thank the dear Lord for a wonderful awareness, at least for a short time, of the fact that we can be so rich and beautiful. The mind flows and with it the soul, and no matter what words I put down in an effort to catch the wondrous monolog, I can do it little justice.

But then, as once before (and I was fooled then), I wonder what if this were not the moment, and me, and an extraordinary experience of an extraordinary day, but a property of 2C-T-4?

I have been fooled, again and again, into thinking that the magic of the unified reality was in the drug, and not in the person. Of course it is in the person — and only in the person — but if a drug could be found that would consistently catalyze this, then it would be one of the most powerful and awesome drugs that could be conceived of by man. If it were this material, 2C-T-4, it would have to be held apart with a reverence that would be impossible to describe or explain in a patent application!!

I am going to tour the farm for a minute to check on things.

All is serene. Not so serene — the telephone just rang, with a shrillness completely unexpected. I allowed it to ring itself out, eleven rings, each dutifully counted. Now, silence again.

(4:30) It is now 1:30 p.m. and this is an amazing experience. I'm excited at the thought of having Alice share this with me, and we will allow ourselves a full day, with the freedom not to answer the phone.

The full plus-four is still upon me, a tinge of omnipotence blended with a modest amount of omniscience. I forget what the third omni is, but it's present also.

How can one describe a bliss state, except to say that it is a state that we are all in, whether in pleasure or in pain, awake or asleep, alone or in crowds, and that we are simply too hurried to be aware of it. Or, as said earlier, we've been taught to believe that it is not part of a productive reality, or a "proper" reality, and must not be allowed to intervene in our day-to-day commerce. More than having been taught to disavow, we have come to actually believe as fact, as gospel, that this bliss-interaction-union state is at best drug-induced, at worst a result of chemical imbalance, and should be left to hippies and other ne'er-do-wells who are naught but cancers on the body social.

But this state is with us at all times. We have sadly learned to tune it out. If this drug can bring this state of unity again in me — and through some miracle in another person — and if this is indeed a property contained in its makeup, then this is truly the most powerful and saintly piece of scripture that could ever be written.

A tour of the body this time. There seems to be no threat from any corner; a good, benign at-peaceness. Pulse 88 and blood pressure 145/95 with good-health sounds. Weight a perennial 200 lbs. and blood alcohol averaging a perennial 0.05 gram percent. I can't afford either one any more.

On the piano I played a Bach two-part quite well without looking once at my hands! Couldn't do that straight! And I have just helped a wasp escape from the kitchen.

A brisk walk to the road entrance, for the mail. Mind still going a mile a minute, thoughts such as: I hope I don't run into anyone on the walk. Not paranoid so much as not wanting to have my internal flow interrupted. A very significant cattapiuller — how do you spell that monster? — was moving across the road at the last turn. When I came back, I saw that there were dozens of caterpillars [*I looked it up*] all over the road, and I felt a gladness that we had not gone after the tent moth nests in the moribund almond tree. In the balance and flow of things, the tree supported the moth-nests (the tent-caterpillar), who in turn mature to moths, who then

do something else somewhere else, which in turn helps another almond tree to replace this one. Don't muck with nature. It had eons to establish a working balance before man and his intelligence appeared on the scene to improve things.

Hearing is more acute. I heard children's voices, and checked the perimeter of the Farm again. Turned out they were way down below the hill.

(5:30) I feel that there has been an astounding amount of integration, and — as with my previous plus-four — a sadness to see things coming together in a way that is socially acceptable again, but there is a sense of indescribable personal wealth that has resulted from the integration of all that internal talk. It is time to start re-shielding myself for eventual public interactions. Tonight is the get-together in Marin County at Walter's house, with Alice's children and our friends, which takes place every two weeks.

In the mail there was a strange and beautiful letter from a young alive chemist in Germany who has found that an antitussive, a cough suppressant called "Isoaminile," at 300 mg has hallucinogenic properties. And since this can be warped into an indole ring that looks like DMT, he wants to make the alpha-methyl analogue, and the psilocybin analog, and thus discover a "new" class of psychotomimetic substances. Of course. This is also a caterpillar. Leave it alone. I will encourage him, but never direct his way of looking. Somewhere in the balance of things his role, although not yet defined, will be played out.

Coffee tastes terrible to drink, but what else can you do with it?

Back to the letter from Germany. What a strange sort of omen, that out of the occupied country of our victory in World War II, appear what seem to be the seeds of a renaissance in awareness, and a naive openness in studying altered states, something quite disallowed in our own FDA-dictated society. Professor S.'s work is continuing, and now this young one.

It is now 3:00 p.m., exactly six hours into the experiment. I am obliged to leave the house in three hours, so I will institute an unwanted but necessary program for reintegration. No, wrong word — I am integrated as never before. My program is for re-installing the social interfacing skills needed for dealing with others.

(7:00) Back to an honest plus three.

(8:00) Still pretty much plus three.

(9:00) Ah, repair occurring for the re-exposure to the outside world; now simply a plus two.

(9:20) Have showered, changed clothes and am heading, with great care and love for myself as well as Alice, to pick up David at the hospital for the Marin dinner.

(10:00) At the hospital, still quite aware, though hard to tell the plusness. There was no difficulty driving, but maybe still a 1-1/2 plus.

(15:00) Still residual awareness. Have consumed no alcohol whatsoever, and am quite alert and substantially baseline.

(17:00) Went to sleep without much difficulty.

Next evening, at (36:00) tried a challenge with 30 milligrams of 2C-B, and had only a modest response. Definitely some loss of sensitivity.

An extraordinary and never to be forgotten day.

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Final note. Alice took 2C-T-4 with me, at the same dosage level, a few weeks later. We both had a very satisfying plus-3 experience. The plus-4 was not repeated.

## CHAPTER 42. LECTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY

(Shura's voice)

For a goodly number of years I have been teaching a class in the Fall, at the University of California, in Berkeley. It is, officially, a toxicology course with both lecture and laboratory, dealing with the analysis of drugs in body fluids with an eye to the preparation of evidence for the courts of law. But some years ago I made a point of writing out all of my lectures, so that they could be read by my students before class, and the actual lecture time could be used in offering additional explanations, or answering questions.

If there were no questions, then the two-hour slot became a rich opportunity to explore any topic I wished to. The consistent underlying theme of these lectures was the excitement of science and of learning. I had been shocked, year after year, by the total distaste that my students had for organic chemistry, which was one of the prerequisites for my class. It apparently had been taught along the lines of, "For next Monday read from pages 134 to 198 in the text and we will have a quiz on the material." They memorized reactions and mechanisms, struggled through the exams, promptly forgot everything that had been memorized, and never took the second year course. They hated it.

So I would try to present chemistry as an art form, rather than as a science. Why are sugars usually white? Why don't food additives ever have smells? Make a guess as to how some interesting drug might change in the body? How would you explain chromatography to a jury with no scientific background?

And sometimes I would be on a particular kick, and the whole time would be devoted to a single subject that I felt deserved emphasis. Recently just such an occasion arose, and I presented the following lecture to my fifteen or so undergraduate students.

I know that I have been scheduled to use this time to build up a picture of the how's and where's of drug action in the brain. It has been listed as a lecture on the pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of centrally active compounds. But I am going to exercise one of the precious freedoms allowed me as a professor — I am going to change the topic, and make it a lecture on politics and government.

In fact, I am going to talk to you about our freedoms in general, and about the loss of certain of these freedoms under the shameful excuse of waging a war on drugs.

Our form of government is known as a constitutional republic. The federal structure was established by the signing of the Constitution, some ten years following our Declaration of Independence from England, and many of our present inalienable freedoms were explicitly guaranteed by the passage of the first ten amendments to our Constitution, the Bill of Rights, some four years later. These freedoms — of speech, of the press, and of the practice of religion, our protection against unreasonable searches and seizures, the rights of anyone accused of a crime to know the nature of the accusation and to be judged by an impartial jury — these are the bedrock of our nation and are integral to our national way of life.

This Bill of Rights is continuously being challenged, largely through the enactment of laws by Congress which have been written without sufficient thought as to whether they might endanger or restrict basic freedoms. The function of the Supreme Court has always been to serve as a safeguard against the enforcement of laws which do not respect the Constitution, but it has become increasingly clear that we can no longer rely on this protection.

There are other freedoms that we retained from England, even when declaring our independence from her. England has never had a written constitution; rather, there has been a structure based largely on a few remarkable acts of reform such as the Magna Carta. From these collective acts came our concepts of *habeas corpus* (of what am I accused) and of trial by jury (by whom shall I be judged), both now embodied in the sixth amendment to the Constitution.

There are three most important freedoms that are part of this heritage which were never included in our Constitution, but which have nevertheless been a foundation of our national self-image. These are the presumption of innocence, the right to privacy, and freedom of inquiry. These are being rapidly eroded. Also, one hears more and more voices declaring that the relinquishing of these traditional rights is of little importance, as long as the national purpose is thereby achieved. The stated national purpose, at the moment, is the winning of the so-called War on Drugs. In the future, it

may take the form of a war against some other threat to our national security — that phrase has worked before, and it can be counted on to work again — and the restoration of the lost rights and freedoms will simply not take place; at least, not in our time, nor in the time of our children or grandchildren.

We must act by ourselves — those of us who are aware of what is happening — either as individuals or collectively, to demand restoration of what has been taken away, and to prevent further losses.

Laws are born as concepts, but must be recorded as the written word when finally put into effect. And the exact interpretation of some of those words depends to a considerable extent upon current popular usage and understanding of their meanings. Since there cannot be complete consensus as to some definitions, there will remain a certain degree of ambiguity. I will examine a few examples of recent shifts in the manner in which such ambiguities are being handled, if not exactly resolved.

Consider the basis for the determination of innocence or guilt of a person who, as a potential defendant, has fallen under official scrutiny because of some accusation. In the past, the accusation had to be stated as a formal complaint, an arrest had to be made, and the task of providing evidence to support the charge was the province of the plaintiff, usually the people.

In a case where the crime is a felony (one which can be punished by a stay in a Federal prison), guilt must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Doubts are obviously challenges to presented evidence, but for heaven's sake, what is meant by "reasonable?" It has evolved in legal practice that what this means is that a jury unanimously agrees that no doubt remains in their minds as to an accused person's guilt. This is the criterion that must be met to convict someone of such a crime.

However, in the current madness involving drugs and violation of drug laws, it is no longer necessary to convene a jury or — for that matter — to even bring a charge, in order to hurt and punish someone suspected of having been involved in drug-related activity. Only the thinnest of evidence, far short in quantity or quality of what would be necessary to obtain a verdict of "guilty, beyond a reasonable doubt" in a courtroom is now regularly used to "get" the suspected wrongdoer.

If you are a person in authority, you now don't have to confront the suspected wrongdoer; you confront his possessions, instead. Accuse his bank account of being the result of illegal activity, and seize it. Accuse his truck of having transported illegal drugs, and confiscate it. Accuse his house of having been bought with cocaine dollars, and take it from him. This is a move from criminal procedures to civil procedures. Such a person, invested with the power of the law, can decide that your car, your boat, your lower twenty acres of pasture land, have been associated with

the commission of a drug-related crime. He can and will seize this car (boat, land), invoking the mechanisms of civil forfeiture, and you can't do a thing about it. By association with a crime, it is meant that the seized item was used in the commission of a criminal act, or that it was obtained as the result of a criminal act.

All of the above acts on the part of the authorities are possible without any jury findings whatsoever; in fact, without a trial of any kind having been held.

Our protection against civil forfeiture was also part of our British heritage of common law, and it had been steadfastly respected here in the United States since the time of the founding fathers. But it was dissolved in 1978 by Congress, with the passage of the Psychotropic Substances Act. That law must be withdrawn.

These acts of confiscation follow the criterion of "a preponderance of evidence."

Consider that phrase, "preponderance of evidence." The first thought that comes to mind is that the word, "preponderance," suggests an excess or a superiority of evidence. That is what the dictionary says, but that is not its common usage in the courts. In legal usage, a relationship (say, between your car and illegal drugs) is established as being valid by a preponderance of evidence if it is deemed more likely, on the basis of the available evidence, to be valid than not valid. In other words, the connection is at least 51% valid. The decision that no additional evidence need be sought, can be made by one person, by one judge, even by one single policeman. Thus, the quality of proof can be minuscule.

Keep in mind that the obtaining of additional information will sometimes show a presumed fact to be fiction; additional evidence might well establish innocence.

If you are reentering the country from abroad and the stub of a marijuana joint is found in your coat pocket, the immigration authorities can seize your passport. If I, as a person with sufficient authority, discover that you have a \$23,000 savings account in the local Wells Fargo Bank, and I think the money came from drug transactions, I can and will seize this money. I no longer have to file a criminal charge or even a criminal complaint, and I certainly don't have to wait until you are convicted of an unlawful act in a court of law. I merely have to state that, in my opinion, there is a preponderance of evidence that you have been naughty.

The frightening extension of this is that someone who feels that you are doing things he doesn't approve of, can effectively take from you your ability to travel abroad, or can seize the assets that might have allowed you to establish your innocence with the help of good legal counsel, if and when charges against you are finally brought.

Very recently, the courts have decided that, after a conviction of a

drug-related crime (using the "beyond reasonable doubt" criterion), the sentencing phase — which must follow the sentencing guideline standards — can be made more severe with the presentation of additional facts that need only meet the "preponderance of evidence" requirement.

As an example of how these distinctions can be blurred, consider a person who was arrested with a given quantity of ephedrine in his bedroom (ephedrine is a listed precursor to methamphetamine, but not illegal to possess). He might be charged with the intent to manufacture the drug, based on the possession of a precursor, and these days he will probably be found guilty. But, in the invocation of the sentencing guidelines, the quantity of the (legal) precursor that was under the bed can be used for determining the severity of his sentence.

Next, consider the fact that, in this country, there has been a long-standing prohibition of any involvement of the military forces in civil law enforcement (the *Posse Comitatus* statute) unless specifically authorized by the Constitution or by Congress. This, too, Congress changed with the 1981 passage of the Department of Defense Authorization Act. This specified in detail the nature of assistance and support that the military will now provide civilian law enforcement personnel involved in the war against illegal drugs.

In 1982 the military provided its initial help in the President's Task Force, in South Florida, with aviation and radar surveillance, and logistic and vessel support. From then on up to the present, with the phasing out of communism as a military target, the drug war has received continuously increasing military attention, as an acceptable justification for continued funding by Congress. The Pentagon has now been given the lead responsibility to serve as the intelligence and communications hub linking the anti-drug efforts of all U.S. agencies. This does not sit well with competing agencies such as the DEA, FBI and CIA, each of which has its own intelligence structure. Recent military involvement with the local government police against the well armed guerrilla groups in central Peru may be laying the foundation for an actual shooting war. And recently, the National Guard was directed to make their personnel available as customs inspectors, to swell the manpower at ports of entry.

The IRS, too, got into the act in 1982. Tax information is now available to law-enforcement agencies, on request, to facilitate their prosecution of drug-related criminal cases.

Now, consider the term, "a reasonable suspicion." This is a still more nebulous measure of guilt. Yet it is one that has been used in the drug area with appalling effectiveness. A Coast Guard boat has always been able to come up to your sailing boat to look for a violation of safety rules, but now the skipper of the Coast Guard vessel can, by simply stating that something looks odd to him and he has a reasonable suspicion that there might be

drugs aboard, search your boat for drugs. What if they find nothing? They may still seize your boat, secure it for hours or days, remove chunks of it as they choose, until they either succeed in discovering something illegal, or give up in their search.

All that is needed is a reasonable suspicion.

Let us turn our attention to the phrase, "in good faith." We are getting further yet from hard evidence, and much closer to an undocumented whim. Here anything goes, because to prove that a man (or woman) of authority acted in bad faith you must show that he or she acted recklessly, or lied. And that is pretty heavy duty proving. "I smelled methyl amine, and this has always meant to me a methamphetamine lab, and I got a warrant based on this statement. So it turned out to be an LSD lab and there was no methyl amine present. That's okay, since I acted in good faith." The warrant stands.

"My cannabis-trained dog told me, 'there is pot in there.' It turned out that there were psilocybin-containing mushrooms, yes, but no marijuana. That's all right, because I acted in good faith, on the basis of my dog's response." The warrant stands.

An extension of this is the use of profiles, and the stopping and searching of people who are judged — again in good faith — to meet the composite picture of a person who is involved in drugs. The exact make-up of a profile is kept secret by the authorities, but in airports it involves such factors as the color of the skin, being in a hurry, having bought a one-way ticket, and having bought it with cash. If the profile is that of a courier, he can be detained, questioned, and searched as intimately as is wanted by the person in authority. If the profile is one of a swallower (one who swallows pouches of drug, to be recovered later) he can also be X-rayed without his consent and, if desired, held until the body contents are expelled naturally.

On the highways, the profile includes not only the driver's appearance, but the quality and make of his car and, believe it or not, the extent of his adherence to the local speed limits (so as not to attract attention). "He had a Florida license plate, and an expensive-looking car, and was traveling at exactly the speed limit. In my opinion, he fit the profile of a drug courier. I pulled him over and found almost \$5000 dollars in cash in his glove compartment. This money showed a detectable presence of cocaine. I seized the money, but I did not charge him with any crime."

The seizure stands, because it was done in good faith, and it can be argued that cocaine on the money suggested that some drug-related criminal act had been committed.

However, government forensic chemists have demonstrated that randomly selected samples of paper money in the United States are presently contaminated with a detectable quantity of cocaine. We have instruments

now that are so sensitive, they can potentially document a trace of cocaine on any piece of paper money of any denomination, in anyone's wallet.

Even though the Supreme Court last year endorsed the use of profiles with airline passengers, I still feel that this form of interception and interrogation can too easily be abused by the authorities, and it is neither needed nor should it be wanted in this country.

Yet further down this graded scale of decreasing quality of proof of guilt, there is a level where no guilt need even be implied by a person in authority against an individual. This is a rapidly expanding area of drug-related police-state activity that simply denies the person any presumption of innocence, and as he is no longer presumed to be innocent he is, by default, guilty. It rests with the accused to prove that he is not committing a felony. I am speaking of the random urine test.

What follows is a pretty harsh statement, but I mean it with total sincerity, from my heart:

There is no justification, at any time, at any place, in my country, for a urine test to be made on any individual, unless there is a reason stated for supposing that there has been a crime committed.

Let me state that again, in different words. To demand that a person pee in a cup whenever you wish him to, without a documented reason to suspect that he has been using an illegal drug, is intolerable in our republic. You are saying to him, "I wonder if you are not behaving in a way that I approve of. Convince me that you indeed are."

Outrageous.

Intolerable.

I don't care if the man is the pilot of Air Force One with the President on board, or the trigger man on a nuclear submarine with 24 Trident II D-5 missiles at his disposal; it is unthinkable that there could ever be a urine test demanded of a person, unless there were reason to suspect him of being impaired. Yes, it is possible that we might lose a plane here, or a skirmish there, but such would be a minor price for us to pay for having a nation that respects the privacy of the individual and the presumption of his innocence.

The pilot/trigger man could be in a bad state of mind for many reasons (argument with a lover, burnt toast for breakfast), so our efforts must be directed to an evaluation of his behavior, his capabilities, and the intactness of his skills; there can be testing of his reflexes and coordination, in order to give evidence of impairment. If he is not considered completely competent to do his job, then — and only then — can a search into his urine be justified.

In any case, a blind search for drugs in a pilot's urine can provide only minuscule protection against aberrant behavior, since he will fly his plane today, and the urine test results won't be available until next week. There

is no protection provided under these conditions.

I believe that a major reason for the wide promotion of urine testing is that, as a new, rapidly growing industry, it is an extraordinary money-maker.

There are other actions of the authorities that illustrate this "assume them guilty and let them prove otherwise" attitude. Last year the DEA contacted all the advertisers in the counter-culture magazine High Times who were offering hydroponic horticultural supplies for sale. Their customer lists were confiscated, and all those who had made purchases of any kind were visited by representatives of the DEA, on the assumption that they were growing marijuana. After a number of innocent orchid growers had been raided, the authorities' enthusiasm died down. But the heavy-handedness of this undertaking does present a frightening picture of our law enforcement authorities in action.

As a way of exacting revenge at the legislative level, and also proving to the electorate that each and every congressman is doing everything necessary to win the war on drugs, there is a continuous demand for increasingly harsh penalties associated with drug-related convictions.

There have now been established inflexible prison terms and fine schedules that must be invoked for doing such-and-such with specifically designated quantities of certain illegal drugs. Your minimum time in prison is predicated on how much drug is involved, whether you have some special skills, whether you have been arrested before, and whether there was a gun involved. Here is a very important thing to remember. If there is any detectable amount of an illegal drug present in a seized mess, the entire weight of the mess will be considered as being the weight of the drug. If you are a boat captain, or a lawyer, or have some advanced education, you have a special skill, and you can be given an increased penalty. You might have a gun in a drawer in your bedroom at home, nowhere near the scene of the alleged crime. These particulars can all contribute to an increased and inflexible minimum sentence in prison, with times ranging from months to years to life, and with penalties climbing up there into the millions of dollars.

If you are a major drug dealer (whatever that means), under certain of the above circumstances, several laws that are now being proposed can demand that you receive a death sentence. A recently proposed law, just passed by the Senate, says that all you have to do is deal in such-and-such a quantity of a given drug, and that quantity alone will qualify you as a "major" dealer. And if you are found guilty, you will be executed. Capital punishment as a mandatory price to pay for possession of more than XYZ grams of dope. Where in the world, but here in the United States, and in Iran, and maybe in Malaysia? The unauthorized possession of an atomic bomb, by the way, is worth a maximum of 12 years.

I am confident that this bill presently being prepared for introduction into Congress (by Senator Gramm and Representative Gingrich) will never be signed into law, but the very fact that it is being seriously proposed is chilling. It introduces a whole new generation of penalties related to drug offenses (in addition to the mandatory execution of a person possessing more than an arbitrarily specified amount). These penalties include the denial of early release from prison until at least five years has been served; it demands that the state be required to conduct urine tests on anyone arrested, jailed, released or paroled (as a condition of the state continuing to receive Federal funds); it mandates that anyone convicted of use or possession of a drug will have to pay the cost of his trial and will also be fined 10% of his annual income; it says that there will be explicit permission given to states, counties, cities, school systems and private entities to engage in periodic and random drug testing.

A much more subtle and insidious form of freedom loss can be seen in our schools. There is *de facto* censorship being implemented within the colleges and universities by the Government, in the way it funds research and thus controls its direction. There is an outright propaganda campaign being presented through the informational media, and there is no challenge being brought by those who know the facts and should be insisting on adherence to truth. Let me touch on these one at a time, as each of them is directed at a different population target.

In the public schools, the efforts are being directed at the student. The message is, "Just Say No." There is no effort to inform, to educate, to provide the complex body of information that will allow the exercise of judgment. Rather, there is given the simple message that drugs kill. This is your brain. This is your brain on drugs. Sizzle, sizzle, sizzle, and the egg is suddenly fried. Your sweet, virginal daughter was killed because she didn't learn about drugs. She should have learned to, "Just Say No." None of this can be called education. It is an effort to influence behavior patterns by repeating the same message over and over again. It is propaganda.

All kinds of drugs are deeply, permanently, infused into our culture, into our way of life. Their values and their risks must be taught to our children, and this teaching must be done with honesty and integrity.

And what is the status of research in the medical schools, and the universities, and the industrial laboratories across the nation? I can assure you that since psychedelic drugs are not officially acknowledged as a valid area for human research, there is no money being made available in any university or medical school for the exploration and study of their actions and effects in humans.

It is a fact of life that all research today, at the academic level, is supported almost exclusively by federal funds, and if a grant application

does not meet the wishes or needs of the granting agency, the research will remain unfunded, thus it will not be done. In the controls which have been put into place over the pharmaceutical industries, there is another effective mechanism of prohibition of inquiry. Research on drugs can only be approved for eventual medical use if the drugs involved have accepted medical utility. And there is an official statement that there are no drugs, not one single drug, in the fascinating area of the psychedelics, that has an accepted medical use. They are all, you understand, Schedule I things, and — by definition — neither they, nor any of their analogues, have any medical utility.

As for the messages being pushed in the media? All too often, a lurid story is presented, and a later retraction is ignored. A couple of examples can illustrate this.

Consider the phrases, "Even the first time can kill," and "Even pure material can kill," as applied to cocaine use. Both were promoted as statements of fact, as an outgrowth of the tragic death of a sports figure named Mr. Len Bias, who died from an overdose of cocaine. This happened at a critical time, just weeks before the biannual drug bill was to be voted on.

According to the newspapers, the autopsy report stated that the young man was a first time user, and that he had used pure cocaine. This is patent nonsense. Neither the purity of a drug, nor the frequency of its use in the past, can be gleaned from an analysis of the body's tissues after death. When the final autopsy report was released, it was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, and it seemed apparent to the scientists involved that Mr. Bias had been given a large quantity of cocaine by mouth (in a soft drink, perhaps, as there was no alcohol in him) and the suggestion was advanced that it might not have been self-inflicted. Translated, that means there was a possibility that he had been murdered.

This latter view was not advertised, and the two catchy phrases are still used for their "educational" value. Even the first time can kill. Even pure stuff can kill.

The anti-drug bill, needless to say, passed by an impressive margin.

Then, there was a train crash outside the city of Baltimore, in early 1987, that killed 16 people and injured 170 others. The newspapers trumpeted the discovery that the engineer responsible for the accident was found to have tested positive for the presence of marijuana in his body. This has been one of the major driving forces in focusing the public's attention on the need for urine testing as a necessary aspect of public safety, especially in the transportation area.

Six months later, a review of the evidence in this case resulted in the appearance of a report which showed that the supervisor of the testing laboratory which had presented the marijuana findings (the FAA lab in

Oklahoma City) had been fabricating drug test results for months. Results were being reported from tests that had never been performed, because there had been no one in the laboratory who knew how to run the sophisticated instruments.

When an effort was made to challenge the specific findings in the case of this engineer, the original computer data had apparently been lost. And there was none of the original blood sample left for a re-analysis. It will never be known if that engineer had indeed been impaired by marijuana, but political and emotional capital is still being made from the original story.

The constant repetition by the press of the very term, "Drug War," has an insidious influence on public opinion. It evokes an image of our side, as opposed to their side, and the existence of a struggle for victory. Not to be victorious is not to survive as a nation, we keep hearing. There is a continuing message being advanced, that most of our nation's troubles — poverty, increasing unemployment, homelessness, our monstrous crime statistics, rising infant mortality and health problems, even dangers to our national security involving terrorism and foreign agents — are the direct results of illegal drug use, and all of these problems would neatly disappear if we would simply find an effective solution to this one terrible scourge.

Do you remember hearing the word, *Krystallnacht*, from the history of the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany, in the late 1930's? This was the night of broken crystal, when there was a sweep of the state-empowered police and young Nazis through the Jewish sections of the German cities, when every pane of glass that was in any way related to the Jewish culture — be it the window of a store, a synagogue, or a private home — was shattered. "If we rid ourselves of the scum known as Jews," the authorities said, "We will have solved the social problems of the nation."

I see a comparable move here, with merely a few changes in the words. "If we rid ourselves of the drug scum of our society, if we deprive them of their homes, their property, their crack houses, we will have solved the social troubles of the nation."

In Germany the Jewish population was attacked and beaten, some of them to death, in a successful effort to focus all frustrations and resentments on one race of people as the cause of the nation's difficulties. It forged a national mood of unity and single-mindedness, and it allowed the formation of a viciously powerful fascist state. The persecution of the Jews, needless to say, failed to solve the social problems of Germany.

In our present-day America, the drug-using population is being used as the scapegoat in a similar way, and I fear that the end point might well be a similar state of national consensus, without our traditional freedoms and safeguards of individual rights, and still lacking resolution of our serious social troubles.

How severe is the illegal drug problem, really? If you go down through the generalized statistics, and search out the hard facts, it is not very large. From the point of view of public health, it is vanishingly small.

Just the two major legal drugs, tobacco and alcohol, are together directly responsible for over 500,000 deaths a year in this country. Deaths associated with prescription drugs are an additional 100,000 a year. The combined deaths associated with all the illegal drugs, including heroin, cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, and PCP, may increase this total by another 5,000. In other words, if all illegal drug use were to be curtailed by some stroke of a magic wand, the drug-related deaths in the country would decrease by 1 percent. The remaining 99% remain just as dead, but dead by legal, and thus socially acceptable means.

What about the highly touted \$60 billion cost to business resulting from lost productivity in the work place? This number came from a single study which contained a number of assumptions that the National Institute of Drug Abuse admits were not valid. In this study done by Research Triangle Park, nearly 4000 households were surveyed, and the average incomes were correlated with the admission that someone who lived there had used marijuana regularly. These families had a lower income, and that decreased monthly pay-check was stated to be due to the fact that there had been marijuana use. When this was extrapolated to the population as a whole, the calculations gave a figure of \$28 billion. Then there were added the costs of drug-related crime, of health problems and accidents, and the number swelled to \$47 billion. Adjustment for inflation and population increase increased it further up to the often quoted \$60 billion. This shameful study is a major basis for our crusade against the use of illicit drugs in industry.

This is the only study of its kind that has been made, and in this study, questions had been asked concerning other illegal drug use. Had the correlations used the findings that were made with cocaine or heroin use, rather than marijuana use, there would have been no lower average income at all. The only conclusion that could have been made (with cocaine or heroin, rather than with marijuana) was that there was no cost to business whatsoever, from drug abuse. The drug that had been used in the calculation was the only one that could have provided the numbers that were needed to fuel the drug war.

The drug problem may not be the size we are being told it is, but it is large enough for concern. What are some of its causes? There is a feeling of helplessness in much of our poor population, particularly among young Black and Hispanic males. There is a total absence of any sense of self-worth in most of the residents of our inner cities. There is extensive homelessness, and an increasing state of alienation between the middle-to-upper and the lowest classes. On one side, there is a growing attitude

of, "I've got mine, and the hell with you," and on the other, "I've got nothing to lose, so screw you."

There is a shameful public health problem of massive proportions (AIDS, teen-age pregnancies, rising infant mortality and the abandonment of any serious effort to help those with debilitating mental illnesses). There are children who have no families, no food, no education, and no hope. There is near anarchy in the streets of our big cities, matched by a loss of community integrity in the rural areas. All of this is blamed on the "drug problem," although the use of drugs has nothing to do with it. Drug use is not the cause of any of these terrible problems. It may certainly be one of the results, but it is not the cause. Nonetheless, a major national effort is being made to convince the American people that winning the "War on Drugs" will indeed cure us of all ailments, if we would but relinquish a few more individual rights in the pursuit of victory.

This war cannot be won. And we will only lose more and more of our freedoms in a futile effort to win it. Our efforts must be directed towards the causes, not just the consequences of drug mis-use. But, in the meantime, things are going downhill at a rapid rate. People tell me that I am a defeatist to suggest the obvious answer, which is to legalize the use of drugs by adults who choose to use them.

I have been accused of giving the message that drug use is okay. Remove the laws, they say, and the nation will be plunged overnight into an orgy of unbridled drug use. I answer that we are already awash in illegal drugs, available to anyone who is able to pay, and their illegality has spawned a rash of criminal organizations and territorial blood-lettings, the likes of which have not been seen since the glory days of Prohibition.

Yes, it's possible that with the removal of drug laws a few timid Presbyterians will venture a snort of cocaine, but in the main, drug abuse will be no worse than it is now, and — after some initial experimentation — things will return to a natural balance. There is no "Middle America" sitting out there, ready to go Whoopie! with the repeal of the drug laws. The majority of the population will, however, benefit from the return of the criminal justice system's attention to theft, rape, and murder, the crimes against society for which we need prisons. Pot smoking, remember, is not intrinsically antisocial.

Let me ask each of you this simple question. What indicators would you accept as a definition of a police state, if it were to quietly materialize about you? I mean, a state that you could not tolerate. A state in which there is a decrease in drug use, but in which your behavior was increasingly being dictated by those in power?

Each of you, personally and privately, please draw an imaginary line in front of you, a line that indicates: up to here, okay, but beyond here, no way!

Let me suggest some thoughts to use as guides. What about a requirement for an observed urination into a plastic cup for drug analysis before getting a welfare check, or to qualify for or maintain a job at the local MacDonalds, or to allow your child enrollment in the public schools? Would any one of these convince you that our nation was in trouble?

More and more companies are requiring pre-employment urine testing, and insisting upon random analyses during working hours. Not just bus drivers and policemen, but furniture salesmen and grocery store clerks. Some local school districts are requiring random urine tests on 7th graders, but as of the present time they are still requesting the parent's permission. Recipients of public housing, of university loans, or of academic grants must give assurance that they will maintain a drug-free environment. Today, verbal assurance is acceptable, but what about tomorrow?

What about the daily shaving of the head and body so that no hair sample can be seized to provide evidence against you of past drug-use? There are increasingly strong moves to seize and assay hair samples in connection with legitimate arrests, as a potential source of incriminating evidence of past illegal drug use.

What if you had to make a formal request to the government, and get written permission, to take more than \$300 out of the country for a week's vacation in Holland? Or \$200? There used to be no limit, then the limit dropped to the current level of \$10,000, but this number will certainly continue to drop as legislation becomes more severe with regard to the laundering of drug money.

A lot of what I have been talking about has to do with the "other guy," not you. It is your drug-using neighbor who will have to live in fear, not you. It is easy to dismiss these invasions of personal rights when they don't affect you directly. But let me ask you a not-quite-so-simple question, the answer to which is very important to you, indeed: where are your own personal limits?

To what extent do you feel that it is justifiable for someone else to control your personal behavior, if it contributes to the public's benefit? Let me presume that the idea of urine tests for cocaine use is okay with you. You probably don't use cocaine. Would you allow demands upon you for random urine tests for tobacco use? What about for alcohol use? The use of coffee?

To what extent would you allow the authorities into your private life? Let us presume that, having committed no crime, you would permit a policeman, who is visiting you officially, into your home without a warrant. But what about officials entering your home in your absence? Would you still proclaim, "I don't mind; I've got nothing to hide!"

I doubt that there are many of you who feel disturbed about the existence of a national computerized fingerprint file. But how about a national

genetic marker file? What about police cards for domestic travel? How would you react to a law that says you must provide hair samples upon re-entering the country from abroad? How would you feel about the automatic opening and reading of first class mail? Any and all of these things could be rationalized as being effective tools in the war against drugs. Where would you personally draw the line?

Each of us must carefully draw that line for himself or herself. It is an exquisitely personal decision, just where your stick is to enter the ground to mark that boundary. This far, and no further.

There is a second and equally important decision to be made.

Let's ease into it by recapitulation. The first requirement is to establish a line, up to which you will allow the erosions of liberties and freedoms, all in the good cause of winning the drug war.

The second requirement is to decide, ahead of time, exactly what you will do, if and when your personal line has been breached. The point at which you say, "This has gone too far. It is time for me to do such-and-such."

Decide what such-and-such really is. You must figure it out well beforehand. And beware. It is so easy to say, "Well, my line has been exceeded, but everything else seems benign and non-threatening, so perhaps I will relocate my line from right here to over there." This is the seductive rationalizing that cost millions of innocent people their lives under the Nazi occupation in Europe.

If you can move your line, then your line was not honestly positioned in the first place. *Where is your line?* And if your limits are exceeded, *What will you do?*

Stay continuously aware of where things are, politically, and in what direction they seem to be heading. Think your plans out ahead of time, while doing everything in your power to prevent further dismantling of what rights and freedoms are left the citizens of your country.

Do not give away your rights simply to make the police enforcement of criminal law easier. Yes, easier enforcement will catch more criminals, but it will become an increasing threat to you, as well. The policeman's task should not be easy; the founders of this country made that clear. A policeman's task is always difficult in a free country.

A society of free people will always have crime, violence and social disruption. It will never be completely safe. The alternative is a police state. A police state can give you safe streets, but only at the price of your human spirit.

In summary, remember that the accused must always be assumed innocent, and allowed his day in court. The curious citizen must always have open access to information about anything he wants, and should be able to learn whatever interests him, without having some other person's

ideology superimposed on him during the course of his learning.

The maverick must be allowed to retreat to his private domain and live in any manner he finds rewarding, whether his neighbors would find it so or not. He should be free to sit and watch television all day long, if that's what he chooses to do. Or carry on interminable conversations with his cats. Or use a drug, if he chooses to do that. As long as he does not interfere with the freedom or well-being of any other person, he should be allowed to live as he wishes, and be left alone.

I believe that the phasing out of laws regarding drug use by adults, and an increase in the dissemination of truth about the nature and effects — positive and negative — of different drugs, the doing away with random urine testing and the perversion of justice that is its consequence, will certainly lead to smaller prison populations, and to the opportunity to use the "drug-war" funds for desperately needed social improvements and public health matters, such as homelessness, drug dependency and mental illness. And the energies of law-enforcement professionals can once again be directed towards crimes that deserve their skill and attention.

Our country might possibly become a more insecure place in some ways, but it will also be a healthier place, in body and spirit, with no further profit to be made on drugs by young men with guns on the streets of our cities. Those who abuse drugs will be able to find immediate help, instead of waiting for six months or more, in confusion and helplessness. And research in the area of drug effects and possible therapeutic use will come alive again in our centers of learning.

And we will once again be the free citizens of a free country, a model for the rest of the world.

Finally, I want to read an excerpt from a letter I received only yesterday, a letter sent by a young man who has found the psychedelics to be of great value to him in his growth as a writer:

Is it any wonder that laws prohibiting the use of psychoactive drugs have been traditionally ignored? The monstrous ego (or stupidity!) of a person or group of persons, to believe that they or anyone else have the right, or the jurisdiction, to police the *inside of my body, or my mind!*

It is, in fact, so monstrous a wrong that, were it not so sad — indeed, tragic! — it might be humorous.

All societies must, it seems, have a structure of laws, of orderly rules and regulations. Only the most hard-core, fanatical anarchist would argue that point. But I, as a responsible, adult human being, will *never* concede the power, to *anyone*, to regulate *my* choice of what I put into my body, or where I go with my mind. From the skin inward is *my* jurisdiction, is it not? I choose what

may or may not cross that border. Here I am the Customs Agent. I am the Coast Guard. I am the sole legal and spiritual Government of this territory, and only the laws I choose to enact within myself are applicable!!!

Now, were I to be guilty of invading or sabotaging that same territory in *others*, then the external law of the Nation has every right — indeed, the responsibility — to prosecute me in the agreed-upon manner.

But what I think? Where I focus my awareness? What biochemical reactions I choose to cause within the territorial boundaries of my own skin are *not* subject to the beliefs, morals, laws or preferences of *any* other person!

I am a sovereign state, and I feel that my borders are far more sacred than the politically drawn boundaries of any country.

To which I can only say amen. That's it. See you next week.