

WISDOM'S MAW



CIA + LSD =

THE ACID NOVEL

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*Mama, mama, many worlds I've come
since I first left home.*

-- R. Hunter

*For unrestricted use the West has permitted only alcohol and
tobacco; all other chemical Doors in the Wall are labeled Dope,
and their unauthorized takers are Fiends.*

-- Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*

Wam-pum! Yeehaaww!! Jesus traveling Christ, this stuff's good!" the Captain whooped, tucking the glass vials into his belt-case. "Keep it coming, Henry. And *God bless Sandoz labs!*"

"Al, before you leave--we need to go over the new takers. These Stanford kids are tremendous...it's almost spooky."

"Any of 'em stand out?" the Captain winked. "You got one who might *interest* us, Henry?"

The chemist nodded, staring over his low-cut reading lenses at a lab folder marked: **Perry Lane - Classified**. "A graduate student named Franklin Moore. He got here a few months ago on a creative writing scholarship from the U of Oregon."

"Jesus," the Captain moaned. "Not another one of these sensitive, literary types."

Henry shook his head. "This kid made the national wrestling team four straight years. We sent him over to Czechoslovakia, and he tore their heavyweights new assholes."

The Captain stared at a school photo--bull-necked knotty

copper curls, and that *look* in the eyes--then nodded. "OK, so you've got him into the IT-290. How's he held up?"

Henry smiled. "He could probably pin anyone in the United States, and never mind the weight."

"But that's all bullshit, Henry. What about his *mind*? I want a kid with a goddamn mind like *Aldous Huxley*," the Captain shouted. "Get him on the LSD-25, Henry, we know it's the future. Don't you know it, Henry? Don't you know it's the future? You can eat all that methamwhateverthefuckyouwanttocallit yourself, for all I care, just get the kid on the *L-S-D!*? Do it now, Henry. Do it for *me*. Turn the *whole fucking world* on, Henry! *Yeaawhooooo!*"

The Captain walked out of Langley and stretched his arms in the early morning sun and let out another shout and offered a young agent "some wampum, son? Make you a new man, boy!" Squaring his flat-top in the reflection of a blackened window near the entrance of the CIA's headquarters, Al Hubbard wondered when Sandoz was going to solve that dilation problem. "The *eyes*," he said to no one particular, "*that's* what gives it away. The goddamned President couldn't tell right now, if it weren't for the eyes."

At 8:35 a.m., in a leather notebook, he jotted: *Franklin Moore, kid genius wrestler*, then jogged up a short stack of stairs at the East Wing and knocked at the office door of Dr. Sheldon Gottfried.

A platinum-haired man answered the door, wearing a tan suit and a fixed, professional smile. He motioned toward a chair, then took a seat behind his own desk--a blonde slab carved from a fallen bayou jacaranda. "General," the Doctor said, to a tall, sallow man seated at his right, "I'd like you to meet Captain Al Hubbard. I've put him in charge of the Perry Lane project, reporting to me. Sit down, Al."

The Captain palmed some sweat from his forehead, eyes glittering in the staid government den.

"Perry Lane. Tell us about it, Captain."

"*Yeah*," Hubbard coughed, "well. We've got what I call the Beatnik Problem. These art-literary types and their social consciousness-oriented, well, you know, have a lot of campuses stirred up. And we've got to put a lid on it. But these kids are very keen on martyrdom--a sort of Jesus complex, you might call it--and what we *don't* need right now is a big showdown."

Gottfried smiled. "So what would you have us do about this *beatnik problem*, Al?"

The Captain pulled out a thick Havana seed-roll, chomped the end off and put it back in his briefcase. Lighting up, he rose from the chair. "We take one of them," he puffed, "and train him and make him the spokesman of his generation, and then turn him in on his own people as a sort of Judas Goat--which would be like sticking a screwdriver in that socket over there, Shelly," the Captain glimmered. "The lights go out. Total confusion. Then we go in, sweep away the dregs, and get back to business."

Dr. Gottfried continued to smile.

"It's a long-range solution. We need to throw a switch in their circuitry," the Captain said, nodding, still staring at the socket in the wall. "These liberal types are *bright*. But their hearts are in the wrong place, you understand. They'll sell this beautiful country of ours downstream if they ever get into power."

The General focused grimly on Hubbard, the spy dragging slowly on a mahogany tube.

"So," the Captain said, punching at an imaginary spot in the air, "we keep one of these Beatnik types in his natural habitat--Perry Lane at Stanford University, where they have set up sort of a West Coast base--and prepare him for a leadership position, like I said before, and render him weak to the power of suggestion. Our chemist is working on it right now."

"What kind of suggestion?" Dr. Gottfried asked.

"We're working on an intersubjectivity drug, sir, based on a

South American vine with purported telepathic properties. It's a ways off yet. The best we've got going now is a combination of verbal reinforcement and a hell of a dose of LSD-25. I wonder how some of these kids know tomorrow from yesterday with the dosage Sandoz cooks up," Hubbard chuckled. "This spokesman will respond to a mentor--a like-minded, liberal-thinking guru type whose orders will come from us."

"Are we thinking of the same man, Al?"

The Captain sank back in his seat. "He's been a hell of a service to us, Shelly. He's not in great health, but he's just the sort of elder statesman this project needs," Hubbard said, reflecting deeply, drawing in as thoughts the languorous blue vapors of the cigar now resting gently between his fingers. "Yes. Indeed. Vitally must have."

"Are you willing to share your supply, General?" Gottfried wondered, placing his long, tanned fingers on his desk.

William Creasy, Chairman of the Army Chemical Corps, cocked his head and grinned. "Sounds so fucking crazy, it might work."

Dr. Gottfried stood up. "As Director of Project MK-ULTRA, I will immediately request that special agent Aldous Huxley be assigned to the Perry Lane project."

"*Thank* you, sir...*thank* you," the Captain jumped to his feet, saluting, and gleamed his whole, shining, glittering, goddamned magnificent self out into the warmth of the sun, with a fresh new pellet under his tongue, say hallelujah.



Morning came to Perry Lane with the jaybirds, the smoke from a nearby stove and a vigorous rapping on the front door of cabin #12. Franklin tried to ignore it, but the sound was insistent. He pulled on a worn pair of Levis and shuffled a few steps, bare-

ched, to the front of the cabin.

A bearded man stood on the porch with a peculiar, twisted grin on his face. "Good morning, oh yes, it is indeed a *model* morning, and since we are going to be virtual neighbors, I knew it would only be right to introduce myself. *Carlo Marx*," the man smiled--an appropriate surname, he admitted, in that his political convictions had recently evolved from the Zen order of something Franklin couldn't quite comprehend. "And while our backgrounds may be different, I hold not the slightest doubt that we will *solve*, not merely remediate, the ills of this venal world...together, Franklin Moore--you and I."

Franklin stared at the bearded man with a gallon jug of Burgundy in his grip. "You're too crazy to be dangerous," Franklin decided finally, and invited the man into his one-room cabin. He stoked the big-bellied stove to take some of the chill from the air, then grabbed two cups from the basin, realizing that he was about to get drunk with a sandal-wearing, Jewish-born, wine-toting bearded freak: the type he'd been warned about repeatedly in the pages of the *Corvallis Daily Herald*.

"I read about your arrival in the *Town Crier*," Carlo giggled. "You're a mixed bag, Franklin Moore. Who would have ever thought that a common-day jock would end up gobbling strange pharmaceuticals for the Central Intelligence Agency?"

Franklin lifted his purpled lips from the cup and stared at Carlo.

"I will write a poem about you some day, my dear. A great, epic tome. A grand, ironic thing: *Big Brother Requests Your Services*. Oh yes, I feel the flush of a hundred dichotomies--I *must* be off. *Many* pages to write," Carlo tittered. "Say, dear, you wouldn't happen to have carried off any *benedrine* from the hospital, now would you? Oh, well, of course not," he smiled, eyelids drooping. "I suppose that's just the persistent junky spirit in me."

Franklin followed Carlo to a '54 Rambler loaded down so

heavily with books and blankets and bric-a-brac that its tires resembled last summer's basketball on a forgotten shelf in the garage. "That car's not goin' ten feet," he insisted.

Carlo laughed, gazing at the jalopy, comparing it to the fullness of an idea whose time had come, leaving Franklin wondering, as Carlo drove off, where he had heard that quote before, or if, indeed, it were an original, emanating like breath from the mind of a true genius...or if the strange bearded man was, after all, just one of the gaggle of California freaks he'd read about just last week in the Corvallis *Daily Herald*.

Franklin walked through the doors of the Menlo Park Veterans Hospital that afternoon, as he had a dozen times before, each time wondering which bullet would be spun into the chamber. "Whatcha got for me today, Doc?" Franklin wondered, laying himself on a sanitized cot. "Some of that *speedy* stuff, maybe?"

Mixing viscous spirits, suffused through gleaming needle. Slide shaft insert red poke vessel.

Franklin nestled into the bed, taking in the four white walls and the glistening, metallic instruments arranged on an even shinier tray. "Good talking to you, *too*, Doc."

Within seconds, his fingers and toes began to tingle, hands and feet flushed, tingling up the arms, legs, chest cavity tightening, reflux peristalsis, retching up the wine in his gullet.

"Nurse, clean this boy up," the Doctor said, coolly.

Franklin coughed up another ounce or two of Burgundy and bile as the nurse waited for him to finish vomiting. "Whyntcha tell the Doc that if...*schp*tt...he wants me back here...he should give that Ditran to some other poor, dumb sonumbitch," Franklin spat and choked, as nurse Lorraine Devlin dabbed cold beads of sweat from his forehead.

"Sweet boy," she said, tending his face with a moist cloth.

Franklin's eyes grew huge as he stared down at a nest of thorns growing, growling from out of the blanket down at his waist that he would have otherwise liked to have pulled up and over his head to stave off a sudden, venous cold. He tried to laugh, but the sound came to his ears as the cackling of so many chickens. "Hell, Ditrans only once a month," he said feebly. "The rest is usually good kicks; and I sure can use those 75 smackeroos. What's your name? I've seen you here before...*ahhh*, look at me," he said, wiping a crust from the corners of his mouth, as he tried to ignore the army of tumbleweed thistles marching in divisions toward his head.

"I've been looking," she flushed. "I'll see you Wednesday."

Franklin warmed through the chill of the Ditrans, watching as nurse Devlin ministered to the youthful volunteers. Her long, auburn hair and the way she wore it pulled back in a ponytail reminded him of his mom in old pictures. Through a window in the corner of his eye, Franklin saw a stout man in a khaki suit exit the service elevator aside the Behavioral Research ward. The man burst through the double doors and the two were joined intuitively.

"*Boy*, have I got good news for *you*," the Captain roared, taking in the same four colorless, breathing, pulsating walls. "Stagnant place, terrible scene," he growled. "No wonder so many Americans are unbalanced."

The treating physician rounded a corner, pointing fervidly to a red and white placard. "This ward is for **Authorized Personnel Only**. Can't you *read*!?"

The Captain chuckled, lifting away a flap from his jacket, feeling the coolness of a .357 in its holster. "I can read a set of orders sending you off to a leper hospital in the Andes."

"I'm calling security."

The Captain extracted his Colt. "I'm the only security you need. I run this project, name's Al Hubbard," he said, watching the doctor lose color. Pressing forcefully on the ulnar nerve, he

led the physician to the bed of Franklin Moore. "Looks from here like you've got a chill from whatever the Doc's got running through your veins, boy." The Captain motioned nurse Devlin to remove Franklin's IV, then walked the Doctor into an empty office. "Ever try Ditran, Doc?"

"I've--"

"Course not," the Captain muttered. "You'd never jab it into that fine boy's arm if you had. Terrible stuff, Doc. *Evil*. Gives a man a powerful dislike for the world around him."

Hubbard unlocked the leather satchel on his belt and withdrew a vial of Delysid, fresh from Sandoz Laboratories in Switzerland. "Here. Put Franklin Moore on 400 micrograms of this and let him see the *truth*. And don't let us down, Doc," the Captain grinned. "Someone of your professional standing might have a hard time adjusting to the hills of Peru. It stays awful wet and cold all year. Your skin just rots off."

Al Hubbard winked at the doctor, then strolled through the ward and left as he entered--a marvelous work, and a wonder.

The Grey Eminence of psychedelic letters walked into the Vancouver Yacht Club as gracefully as he had thirty-five years before into an Oxford lecture hall with his vision of a Brave New World. He glided effortlessly, though with a walking stick, bathed in flannel toward a window table where Al Hubbard sat waiting.

The Captain knew Aldous Huxley's time on this earth was limited, but the pain never showed. Hubbard stood up at his seat and grabbed Huxley fully around the body, holding him at stunned attention. "We owe it all to you, you old sonofabitch!" the Captain bellowed, his eyes completely swallowed by the pupils--black pools of burning conviction.

Huxley, standing six-foot five, a league above the Captain, began to smile--a wizened, fulltoothy, ear-stretching grin, giving way to a laugh that caused his frail body to shudder uncontrollably. "I do believe you are under the *influence*."

"Well, it's a damn fine place to be!" the Captain roared, letting Huxley free. "It truly is."

Fire and ice, the two sat down and gabbed until some internal and inexplicable sense order was manifest, at which point Huxley became silent, withdrawing a small magnifying glass, placing it over the menu, line-by-line, restoring sight to a pair of retinas damaged by an untreated bout of strep throat while at Eton. "How appropriate," Huxley said, and began to order the quail on a bed of wild rice.

"And the soup, sir?" the waiter asked.

"Why, the *mushroom*!" Huxley cried, caving both men into a volley of helpless laughter.

The lunch crowd was beginning to focus on the odd pair, sensing, perhaps, a muted genius beneath Huxley's stork-like physique--the regal elegance of a long line of British dignitaries, author of innumerable novels and plays and essays. But there was also something *strange* about the man. Something distinctly *ungrandfatherly*: something, no doubt, having to do with his conversion in 1953 to Psychedelic Drugs. He was the F. Scott Fitzgerald of the British '20s, a mind new and brilliant and captivating; they bowed at his feet in the '30s, and shuddered at his satiric pen, which revered none...but by 1935 something had *happened*. Nobody was quite sure what to call it, but it appeared to be madness, or genius, because nothing else could possibly explain *Brave New World*. It was as if God, Himself, had lunched with Huxley and explained to him the ills of the human condition.

Madness. Genius. Essence of peyote...rhythms of the Cosmos, sending open the Doors of Perception.

"We owe it all to you," the Captain repeated.

"Nonsense," Huxley frowned. "I knew nothing of LSD-25 before I met you, Captain Hubbard. I have said it before, and will no doubt again: that you are the membrane through which all must pass to enter into the Mysteries. You are the key, good Captain," Huxley maintained. "The civilized world may occasionally be amused by my talents, but, when worshipping, pays homage to Al Hubbard."

"wOw," the Captain muttered, "a guy could get a big head hanging around you, Aldous."

Outside the restaurant, across the Puget Sound, a sleek racing boat pulled aside Hubbard's yacht, then cut its engine. Hubbard stood abruptly. "Looks like lunch's over."

Major General William Creasy and Dr. Sheldon Gottfried gripped a narrow ladder and pulled themselves aboard, waiting for the Captain and his foreign charge as they slipped out a side door of the restaurant and strolled down the dock, then onto the deck of the *Wisdom*. Al Hubbard saluted General Creasy, who waved him immediately at-ease.

Sheldon Gottfried, tan and fit like an aging tennis pro, walked over to Huxley and shook his hand. "It's been a long time, Aldous."

Huxley nodded, reddening in the eyes. "It has, Shelly. But we will make up for it, and the world will be a better place."

The four sat at a small table of the open-air deck. Hubbard opened a bottle of Louis-Mouton Courvasier and poured a long round into deep snifters to warm their toes from a crisp wind cutting over the Sound. "General Creasy is Chairman of the Army Chemical Corps, Aldous. He's our resident populist," Hubbard chuckled.

Creasy snickered, his pale face offset by a pair of black eyebrows that flickered as he spoke. "Aldous, I believe in drugs for the masses. To each, according to their needs, from me, who owns the whole stash."

Dr. Gottfried smiled. "Bill has a *special* contract with Sandoz Laboratories--for virtually their total output of d-lysergic acid diethylamide."

"It's a monopoly," Creasy grinned.

"Actually, a *cartel*," Gottfried corrected, "because he's sharing it with the Company."

"And I," Hubbard said, a glitter to his beam, "am sharing it with you." He unlocked the pouch on his waist, extracted a vial and dropped a clean two-hundred micrograms into each of the four cognacs.

"Bon ami," Gottfried said, lifting his glass, and the *Wisdom*, under the direction of Captain Hubbard's personal driver and the power of twin Chevy 327s, raced out of the harbor toward the estate of Captain Alfred M. Hubbard, indeed a Man for All Eons.

Forty minutes later, the approaching shore glowed orange, covered bulbs forming an ascending line from the steps of the dock to Al Hubbard's estate. The *Wisdom* slowed and entered the slip. All four men were consumed by the LSD, their bodies reverberating some inner magic, a vibrant aura illuminating everything around them.

"Feel it?" Hubbard wondered. "I keep thinking one day the stuff won't hit me, that I'll be immune."

"Maybe we should just talk here," Huxley said, running his hands over his frail thighs. "I'm afraid I've forgotten how to walk."

Creasy broke up laughing, embarrassing Huxley. "I thought I pissed my pants once," Creasy admitted, by way of apology. "Got so fucking high I just forgot what I was doing. Lucky for me, it was pouring rain and I had a coat on. Then I got to a bathroom and saw that I was perfectly dry."

After Captain Hubbard got Huxley aright, the author moved on his own volition to the lakefront home, feeling a strange softness in his feet, as if walking on sponge. Hubbard unlocked

the front door and let the men inside.

"Amazing!" Dr. Gottfried marveled. "I never realized..." he said, walking the length of Hubbard's living room, where a long teak table sat majestically on bone-white carpet surrounded by objects d'art of the first order. Over the fireplace, a great, curved sword, with etchings of hunts in the Savannah, refracted the room's light; a minute Tolmec sculpture winked from a far mantle. General Creasy stood inspecting a glass case devoted to Civil War revolvers. In grainy celluloid, Harry S. Truman stood on the deck of the *Wisdom*. On the same wall, unknown photographers had captured Al Hubbard with Lucky Luciano at the opening of the Tropicana Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas; with Robert Welch, founder of the John Birch Society, at its national headquarters in Belmont, Massachusetts, and drinking whiskey with Papa Joe Kennedy in Hyannis Port.

"You keep weird company, Al," Creasy said, staring at the photos. "Bob Welch, I can handle, but the others give me gas."

The Captain laughed raucously. "I believe in the diversity of mankind, General. I have lots of friends: Jews, goys...even know some Fellow Travelers who pitch a mean contract bridge."

Aldous Huxley radiated into the living room and sank into an immense leather sofa. "*Shall we?* I will need to know Franklin Moore. His character. His morals, his weaknesses...his very essence before I meet with him. I should not like to be remembered for a failed experiment."

Dr. Gottfried straightened in his chair. "You won't, Aldous. I've looked over the kid's medical records, his psychiatric profile, his background, and I think he's perfect. He just needs some guidance."

"That's what you said about Neal Cassady," Creasy muttered, "and look what a fucking head-case he's turned out to be."

Captain Hubbard disagreed. "We've gotten some good mileage out of Neal. He's the model for our whole program--the *Urbemensch*, right Aldous?"

General Creasy shook his head suddenly. "I don't know what I'm doing here. I'm not giving away any more of my Delysid to something I don't understand."

After an uneasy silence, Aldous Huxley rose from the couch, like Jesus from the tomb. "General, the *Übermensch* is my dream. It is a perfect human being--a superman, if you will. He is an athlete, a field sergeant, an actor, an irresistible mind and body..."

The men sat rapt as Huxley began creating this perfect man, cell by resplendent cell, one Protean layer atop another, until Friederich Nietzsche's original philosophical invention virtually sprang to life. The world had seen facets of it--Mozart, Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson--but he had disappeared in recent times, and Aldous Huxley wanted him resurrected. Indeed, to Huxley, creating the *Übermensch* was the only way to a perfect utopia. In some ways, Huxley was, himself, this hero: the perfect intelligence, the sharpest wit, the keenest sensibilities. But he was also nearly blind, walked with a cane and was dying of cancer.

"Gentlemen, I have little time to spare. My contribution to this world will be measured not in my literature, but by the calibre of man that I may cultivate from his baser instincts."

General Creasy stared skeptically at Huxley. "Why would a guy change for *you*?"

Captain Hubbard shifted in his chair. Dr. Gottfried sat silently.

"I once had a student at Oxford by the name of Eric Blair," Huxley said softly. "A very timid creature, fairly handsome, but somewhat dyslexic. He came to me for help in the rudiments of the English language. I told him to realize his vision. Conceive of it in his mind, live in it, then transfer it onto paper. As he did, he altered the outlook of the English-speaking world."

"George Orwell," Creasy said, eyes open, suddenly understanding. *1984, Animal Farm*--that was *you*!"

Huxley closed his eyes. "When Eric succumbed to tuberculosis much too early, I was devastated. He had been my prized model and a dear friend, and he was dead."

William Creasy came alive, a believer. "Now...now, what were you saying about Neal Cassady? What *kind* of mileage? You've been keeping me in the *dark*!"

"MK-ULTRA has always been on a need-to-know basis, Bill," Gottfried said. "And you've never needed to know."

"Well, goddammit, I do *now*!" he yelled.

"Of course," the Doctor nodded. "The Company's Behavioral Research Division has been working on personality modification since the early '50s--sometimes on its own agents, sometimes with contract employees, but most of the time with volunteer citizens. When the poetry movement started getting noisy in San Francisco, we decided to try out this *Urbemensch* concept on a few of its leaders. A couple proved worthwhile to a degree, some did not," Gottfried said.

"*Names!*" Creasy shouted. "I want to know who we've got out there as moles."

Captain Hubbard cut in. "Yeah, well, we tried with Jack Kerouac. What a waste. Handsomest man I've ever seen, looked like Clark Gable...then he found whiskey. He's living with his mom on Long Island now; our men couldn't get at him if we wanted to. She won't even put a call through from his friends."

"How did you attach him to MK-ULTRA?" Creasy wondered. "What's the *hook*?"

"It's different every time," Hubbard said. "We got Kerouac through his buddy Carlo Marx, the fab poet from the Bronx. He wrote *Growl*: I've seen the great minds of my era destroyed by anguish, grieving, delirious, hostile, pulling themselves through the vacant city weeds at dusk, looking for a final thrill."

"Jesus," Creasy nodded. "I remember when that thing came out. The bookstores wouldn't carry it. I think he beat a federal

obscenity rap."

Hubbard nodded. "That's him. He was also an accomplice to a murder back in '52. One of his friends stabbed a lover to death and weighted him down into the Hudson. Carlo got rid of the knife. Lucky for us, the guy bubbled back up," Hubbard chuckled. "Marx got off as a nutcase and was shipped off to New York Neuro-Psychiatric. We planted a young agent named Aaron Fischbein in as his roommate, and cooked up a story that Fischbein's pop owned a little press. When they got out, they started publishing some of Kerouac and Willy Burroughs, who's kookier than seven chickens."

Sheldon Gottfried smiled and shook his head. "What a plan. Where did we go wrong?"

Hubbard pursed his lips. "It broke my heart, but in '52 America wasn't ready for something like *On the Road*. McCarthy was swinging for the bleachers. We just kept hoping ol' Joe would drink himself to death or that someone would put a bullet into his brain, because there was no way in hell the public would accept a book about sex with Negroes, and dope and hitchhiking to Mexico, when the Activities Committee was hauling actors into jail for even sounding like Democrats.

"We kept putting Kerouac off," Hubbard continued, "getting him \$1,000 here and \$500 there for some magazine work--I mean, the guy was really good, there was never any doubt. But by the time McCarthy's liver quit, Kerouac was boozing it pretty bad himself. His looks have gone to hell. He has no following. He's just biding his days now until he pickles his innards."

"And what about Neal Cassady?" Creasy wondered.

"Amazing intellect," Huxley smiled, assimilating the classified information. "I should like to know him better. He has an extraordinary capacity of not only listening and digesting every word, but for holding multiple conversations simultaneously. I recently had occasion to meet Mr. Cassady at a Hollywood party. He was listening to Dr. Oscar Janiger talk

about LSD therapy in chronic alcoholics, while Stanley Kubrick was discussing the latest film techniques, and Mr. Cassidy managed to fondle the backs of Candice Bergen's thighs, while answering *both* men *and* puffing a marihuana cigarette, all in the same instance," Huxley giggled. "I went to bed knowing there is still hope for the human condition."

"So why's he such a loser?" Creasy grumbled. "Last I heard, he was down in San Quentin for running dope."

Captain Hubbard groaned. "Some redneck Kern County cops found him with a baggy of joints. Anyone of us could have inhaled them all at once and still driven home," Hubbard said. "They gave him five-to-life. We got him out in two- and a half, but then he started eating speed. His brain's wired like a bomb. He'll aneurism before he hits forty if he doesn't stay off the bennies. We tried to get him the same deal we gave Kerouac, but he doesn't want to sit still at a typewriter for as long as it takes to write his story. He'd rather be stealing cars."

The LSD was wearing down and the men were getting tired.

"Don't suppose I could interest any of you gentlemen in another dose," the Captain shrugged, eyeing his leather satchel, but noticed no takers.

Bill Creasy was nodding at the ground, still trying to deal with it all. "So where are we now? Where's the goddamned *Urbemensch* now!?"

The men looked to each other, then at Al Hubbard.

"He's down at Stanford University," Hubbard smiled. "It's a little early to tell, but I have a feeling he's Captain America."

Shuffling barefoot on the cabin floor, Franklin rummaged through his milk crates, which he hadn't bothered unpacking since aiming his Chevy the hell out of Corvallis over two months

earlier. His needs had been simple enough that, of the nearly dozen wooden boxes, he managed to crack the top on only one, containing some toilet paper, towels, a wash rag, a pair of nail clippers, a razor, a toothbrush and paste, a bottle of liniment and some cleaning supplies that his mom had wrapped in newspaper and which Franklin had found no real reason to take out of the box, given the musty and dusty and downright *ancient* condition of cabin #12.

The sediment built up around the floorboards, the embedded dirt in the window sills and the rotting of the wood made life simple for Franklin. He also found that he could wear a pair of Levi's just as long at Perry Lane as he could back home, and probably a little longer since there was no smell of cow dung or horse hair to need to wash out, so as not to offend the occasional li'l cutie at the feed store. He twisted the top off the bottle of liniment and rubbed the camphorous liquid into his left shoulder, feeling the warmth reach a mass of swollen tissue. The aching signaled the end of body-to-body contact in gymnasiums that sometimes reached 105 degrees, depending on the time of year and how many folks were sitting on the wooden bleachers, yelling for the other boy to twist his goddamned arm off. He would miss the adrenaline, but not the pain.

Franklin placed the bottle back into the medicine chest, then unscrewed a tube of methedrine he had smuggled out of the Behavioral Research ward. He liked the way it made him feel--so cool and sharp, such a rush of confidence in the veins. Tapping the tube against his palm, he dropped out two perfect, shiny-white tablets. He stared at them for a couple seconds--how peaceful they looked, nestled in the cup of his hand--then washed them down his throat with the cold dregs of last night's coffee.

Franklin stepped out onto his porch in the cool, late September morning Northern California air. He sat down on a stool, pulling a harmonica from his hip pocket. Sizing it up in his mouth, he blew a couple bars in D. The speed was kicking in.

"Ahhwwwwhooooo!" he hollered at nothing particular--just feeling good, like a man out in nature with a heart full of love for the wisdom of God and all of His creations.

Perry Lane began to come alive at the sound of Franklin Moore and his noisy chest-thumping, and the awful beauty of that downhome, nasty harmonica. "Oh, give me a *hooome*," *BRRAAAAWHAAAAA...*"where the long-suffrin', bucksnortin' buff'lo *roooaam*," *WHAAAAWHHAAAAABRAAA...*

A pair of Townsend squirrels climbed down from their roost in a tree, tails twitching side to side, and sat chirping in front of Franklin's porch. It was all too much for the resident of cabin #4. Robin Keane charged out of his hovel, shrieking, "Hey, farmboy! It's 8:15 in the morning, you thick-headed jock! We *sleep in* around here!"

BRRAAAWHAAWHAAABRAAAAWHHAAAAAAA... "O, I wish I was in the land o'cotton, old times there are not forgotten," *BRAAWHAA* "way, look away, look away, Dixieland. Franklin Moore," he said, extending his hand. "Got here last week. Kind of reminds me of home," he smiled, cheeks flushing with amphetamine and enthusiasm. "What's *your* name?"

"Oh God," Keane muttered. "Who let you in?"

Franklin smiled widely. "Mr. Stegner. Real nice man. Paid me to come, too."

Robin Keane's expression shifted from disgust to stunned fascination. "You won the William Faulkner scholarship?"

Franklin chuckled. "Guess I did."

Robin cocked his head slightly and continued to stare at the burly young man on the stool with a backwoods grin on his face and some noisy hillbilly instrument in his hand, who looked to be a product of several generations of inbreeding: the low, slightly protruding forehead, the gap between the teeth, the unkempt curls and stains on the dungarees. "You won the William Faulkner award," he repeated in disbelief.

Franklin nodded, but said nothing--just continued to smile, knowing he would eventually drive Robin Keane mad like a foaming raccoon.

The uneasy standoff was suddenly punctuated by the cough of a Nash Rambler chugging down the Lane and into the clutch of cabins, like a terminal disease not yet diagnosed. Carlo Marx leapt out in a fever. "My dear and dispassionate subject of modern pharmacopoeia!" he said wildly, "I've had a vision concerning your *destiny!*"

Carlo ran into cabin #12, extracting the half-full jug of Burgundy, which hadn't been touched since his first and equally unexpected visit to Perry Lane. He charged out of the cabin, hoisting the jug to his mouth, a deep cherry liquid dribbling into his beard. "*Martyr!*" he raved, raising his hands to the sky. "You poor, defiant soul," Marx cried. "Now, I don't know with any true modicum of certainty how or exactly when this will transpire in your precious life," he said, pausing to gulp down another throatful of wine, "but it will be a *celebration!*"

"How many *are* you?" Robin moaned to himself, not understanding what, in the laws of Karma, he had done to deserve this psychotic intrusion. He had himself won the William Faulkner award the previous year, with his Wolfean novel, *Torchfire in Darkness*. And although Harper & Row paid him a princely \$8,000 advance, the book floundered, dismissed by his most complimentary critic as "a capable though sophomoric travail, which begs from the author another indication of his true skill." Robin was stung by the reviews, and his pen had since produced only a meager batch of short stories and a two-act play, none measuring up to his early promise. He stared jealously at Franklin.

"Carlo Marx, I want you to meet m'friend, Robin Keane," Franklin smiled. "Turns out he's published."

Carlo leaned forward to examine the scrawny writer. He grinned and held out a moist, furry hand, which Robin took

reticently. "And where do you get *your* inspiration? Swift? Balzac? The opium of Cocteau?"

Robin Keane shifted on his feet. "I owe my start to Thomas Wolfe," he said flatly, as if there were no other truth.

"That's okay," Franklin smiled, nodding. "Get most of mine from Captain America. Plastic Man's good, too."

Carlo Marx smiled sweetly at Franklin. "A true innocent.? Oh! For the world to be so pure!"

It was all too much for Robin. "I don't know what you two *want!*" he moaned, backing away from Carlo. "*You!*" he pointed at Franklin, "are going to wish you stayed on the prairie," he sputtered, his face a mask of fear and confusion. Then he laid a withering gaze on Carlo. "And I'm positively sure *you've* lost your *mind!*" He trudged off to his cabin and slammed the door.

"Skittish," Franklin said, shaking his head. "Seen it a lot in young horses, maybe an aunt or two, but it's a real shame when it comes after a man."

Carlo laughed wickedly, then fell silent, his face pained by some inner struggle. "This vision. I'm afraid for you, dear boy. I'm afraid that the Master Manipulators have found your number--tapped into your DNA code and unlocked your future without your advisement. They do things such as this."

Franklin was wrestling with what he was hearing, but not understanding it, maybe because of the speed or Carlo's wine or, maybe, even more simply he thought, because Carlo Marx was right properly insane. "Friend," Franklin said finally, "I think you want to tell me something. But I can't figure out why you don't just come out and say it. Make it *easy* on me."

Carlo nodded "They're letting you have your kicks now, so they can have theirs later. I feel the experiments are not what they seem: You're being used."

"*Course* I am," Franklin said, throwing up his hands. "For seventy-five bucks a day, I play monkey and get juiced on grade-

A government chemicals. Beats workin'."

Carlo shook his head dejectedly.

"Say, you headin' to town soon?" Franklin wondered. "Carburetor in my Chevy's 'bout to give, and I've got to be at the hospital pretty quick."

Carlo scratched at his beard. "I suppose if I can't dissuade you from lending your precious mind to laboratory madness, I can at least deliver you into its maw in safety."

"Preciate it, friend." Franklin hopped into the Rambler, brushing some long-ago breakfast from the passenger seat. "You live in this thing?"

Carlo shrugged. "This car has been shelter in many a life's storm." He pulled open the ashtray and came up with a plump roach, which he quickly fastened between the jaws of an alligator clip on a long wooden candy cane. "I remember a time when Neal Cassady and I were broke and living in North Beach," Carlo smiled serenely, breathing in the pungent vapors. "Neal was wearing out his welcome and it began to rain like God, Himself, was punishing the whole of California for our myriad transgressions..." Carlo sailed blissfully toward Menlo Park Veterans Hospital in the spirit of the Road. "Poor cowboy Neal. Always hell for the highway, but not much fun to be around with a bottle of dexedrine for a week in a Nash Rambler during the rains."

Franklin nodded, seeming to understand. "Speed'll do that to a man. Gets y' jabberin' like a crow."

The Beat sedan pulled into the driveway of the hospital. "I'd accompany you inside," Carlo said, "but they'd most likely try to commit me. And in my state," he grinned, ashing the roach, "I'd find it difficult to resist."

Franklin opened his door, releasing an undeniable cloud. "Thanks for the lift. Come by anytime. I'd like to hear more about this Cassady speedball-on-wheels partner o' yours." His

heart thumping with methedrine and anticipation, Franklin jogged down the main corridor and rode the elevator to the fourth floor. A security guard wearing a big-bore pistol sat on a stool outside the Behavioral Research Ward. "Hi, there," Franklin smiled. "y'ever get any perks for guardin' this place?"

The guard scanned a sheet of photographs, recognizing Franklin's gap-toothed grin and wrestler's neck. "Sign here," he spoke in a monotone.

Franklin scrawled his name on the logsheet and winked at the guard. "I'll give you a present one of these days," he whispered. "Something to get your toes tappin'."

Lorraine stood at the edge of a cot, preparing an injection for the arm of a skinny young grad student with a brown goatee. "Mescaline," the man said, examining the label on the vial. "I've been waiting for this."

Lorraine smiled at the man and leaned close. "Want a tip?"

The man nodded.

"Let go of your ego," she said. "It's a long fall, and you won't hurt so bad."

The man winced as the needle slid into his flesh. "Have you done this yourself?"

"Have a good trip," Lorraine laughed and turned around, bumping into Franklin, her tray crashing to the floor. She blushed and bent down to pick up the assorted vials. The DMT had shattered, forming a small pool amongst slivers of glass.

Franklin bent down with a handkerchief to clean the spill, and casually palmed a tiny glass vial.

"Please get up from there!" Lorraine insisted: "You'll absorb it into your fingers."

"That'd be okay," Franklin shrugged, straightening up and tucking the loaded handkerchief into his front pocket.

Lorraine shook her head, pushing him backwards. "It's not on your schedule. You're getting something else today."

Before Franklin could ask, Lorraine took him by the wrist and led him to an empty room around a corner, apart from the common beds in the ward, where his feet sunk into a deep shag pile. Franklin admired an early Andrew Wyeth beachscape on the wall. The tract lighting was set low, and instead of cots, a mound of overstuffed throw pillows lay on the floor.

"Must be graduation," Franklin said, turning around, but the nurse was gone, and he found himself staring into the eyes of Al Hubbard.

"Look at him," George Hunter White chuckled, his belly jiggling over a pair of gray, polyester slacks. "Isn't that the most disgusting thing you've ever seen?"

General Creasy stared through the two-way mirror, at a full-bottomed black woman, about twenty-six, gripping the headboard and gratefully absorbing the rhythmic pummeling of the silver-haired man behind her.

She let out a howl, spreading her legs as far as the tendons would allow, dropping her head in the pillow, her nipples brushing lightly against the top sheet. "No, honey, not the ass. Not the...not the...oh, *yeah*, baby."

Creasy grinned. "Pretty fucking degenerate. Where'd you get him?"

"The bar at the Hilton," White said. The black woman was limp, just the wriggling of her ebony ass responding to one hundred eighty pounds of pressure per square inch. "We spiked his Johnny Walker and in walks Sheila. Took to her like a fly on shit."

General Creasy stopped watching and turned to White, an eighteen-year veteran of the FBI's Narcotics Division. "Who is he?"

The man began convulsing and grabbed the woman tightly around the waist.

"He's the executive vice president at TRW," White smiled. "Figure, ten photos for cleaning up ten men I'd like to have in Narcotics. Hoover's goddamned Roundheads and their Calvinist standards are giving me an ulcer. It's always nice to have a good clean-up specialist on-call," George White said, starting to giggle. "Don't you love it, General? Where else can a red-blooded American lie, cheat, rape and kill with the sanction of the all-highest?"

Creasy stared at George White, then back through the mirror, where the gentleman stood straightening his tie. Sheila lay on her back, wearing nothing but a set of pearly whites.

"Come again," she smiled.

"So what's next?" Creasy wondered.

"We ship the film out for processing, and keep in touch with Mr. TRW," White said.

"And what about the girl?"

White smiled. "She gets fifty bucks from us, on top of whatever that creep paid her. But I get a blowjob before she sees a nickel."

General Creasy buttoned his coat and left the Hilton in a black limousine driven by a junior foreign service officer. Before heading home, he stopped off at the penthouse of Dr. Sheldon Gottfried, where the MK-ULTRA chief was pouring over the text of Operation ARTICHOKE, the Company's early effort into the uses of natural hallucinogenics. Company operatives had successfully cultivated the magic mushroom and the peyote cactus of Mexico, but the hunt was still on for the Manchurian Candidate.

"Hello, Bill," Gottfried smiled, "care for a drink?"

Creasy nodded. "After what I saw back at the Hilton, I'll need two or three. George White is a sick man."

Gottfried closed the ARTICHOKE report. "Midnight Climax is a sick project, General. And we thought George was just the man to run it."

"I get a rotten feeling in my liver when I'm around him. He's poking our whores, Shelly, You know how whores are: they'll sell their bodies when they're healthy, and the minute they get a cyst, they start peddling information." Creasy swizzled his bourbon and water around with a finger. "I consider myself a demented man, Shelly, but George White isn't playing on the beam."

Dr. Gottfried opened the ARTICHOKE report again, changing the subject. "The sweat gland of the bufo toad--supposedly the most powerful hallucinogen known to man. Why aren't we using it?"

"Powerful?" Creasy snickered. "We injected less than a milligram of that goddamned toad into an African elephant back in '57. Poor beast went catatonic for three days...just lying on its side, staring at us. I couldn't take it anymore, so we filled a hypo with speed to bring it around, and its heart exploded."

"Have we tried it out on Company personnel?"

Creasy nodded. "One of my best men is still in Edgeview. Every time the doctors send him home, he does something weird...like last year, when he tried to split a cord of wood with his son's alto sax."

The phone rang and Dr. Gottfried got up to answer it. "Hello, Harold...what is it? What's wrong? Just a second, Harold--wait just a second." Dr. Gottfried cupped the receiver and turned to General Creasy. "It's my tennis coach. His wife left him. He's suicidal."

"We're breeding a society of weak men, Shelly."

Gottfried motioned for Creasy to leave, which the General did, but not before tossing down another bourbon. "Alright, Harold, I'm sorry... *No!*" Gottfried shouted into the phone. "Put

the knife down, Harold. She'll be back. Put the knife down and wait for me. Thirty minutes, I promise."

Sheldon Gottfried put on an overcoat and a fedora to shield his skull from the cold. Through the intercom, he ordered the tower staff to bring his Jaguar around front. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* had just opened on Broadway, and the streets were jammed with theater overflow. "Come on, come on!" Gottfried shouted, honking his horn at an overweight couple dawdling in the crosswalk. He shot through an opening in traffic and barreled over the Queensboro bridge to suburban Woodside.

Harold Blauer sat on an overstuffed sofa near a window which overlooked the courts of the Woodside Tennis Club. His blond locks, normally oiled and combed straight back, had fallen into his face. He stunk of gin, and his eyes were like pomegranates seeds in the head. "Hi, Shelly," he smiled vacantly, "wan'na drink?"

Noticing a long grapefruit knife on the bar, Gottfried picked it up and stowed it away in a coat pocket. "Sure, Harold. I'll have what you're having."

Blauer staggered to his feet. "Would that be the gin?" he giggled, "or the scotch?" he wondered, tipping an empty bottle of Cardhu upside down, "or maybe the Stoly? I've had 'em all, Shelly."

"Harold, what happened with Veronica?"

"Les'try a Manhattan," Blauer slubbered, splashing together random measures of whiskey and bitters.

Dr. Gottfried picked up a framed picture of Blauer's wife, admiring the silky black mane, and the way the tennis skirt rapped around her derriere. "Harold, its midnight and I'm tired. Tell me what the fight was about."

Blauer dropped straight into the sofa, jostling half the Manhattan over the front of his shirt. "Iss my fault," he moaned. "'s always my fault. I love 'er. She's beautiful, she's rich, she's the

rowdiest girl I've ever had in bed, but I can't stay away from other bush. S' came home early today, and my three o'clock was kneeling between my legs," Blauer said, rolling his eyes. "Fifteen lousy minutes and the little slut would'a left a satisfied woman."

Shelly shook his head slowly, then a thought overcame him. "Harold, I think I can help you with your problem."

Dr. Stanley Abramson, chief psychiatrist for the CIA, opened the doors of his office early for Harold Blauer, who was suffering a brutal hangover. The petrol-grade Kenya Roast that Sheldon Gottfried had forced him to slurp down around 2:00 a.m. had only added to the sour stomach, and had given him diarrhea. Blauer's face was pale and peppered with new whisker growth. He sat blankly in a chair opposite a maple desk.

"Harold, I'm Stan Abramson. I want to help you get to the root of your marital problems...get your self-esteem back; make you a winner again." Dr. Abramson took Blauer into an adjoining room. He adjusted the lights to ease the glare on Blauer's bloodshot eyes, then pulled a syringe and vial from his coat. "This is methylenedioxyamphetamine, MDA. We'll be using it to aid therapy--to break down the barriers to communication, so you can decide if you are willing, or even able, to remain in a state of marriage."

Blauer regained a smirk. "Am I going to talk about the times I took baths with my sister?"

Dr. Abramson smiled. "Only if it's relevant. And only if you want to." He rolled up Blauer's sleeve and injected 2 cc's of the drug into a vein. "You'll feel a warm rush first, like a sunburn, then your heartbeat will become rapid for a few minutes. Don't worry, it's harmless."

He eased the needle out of Blauer's arm, covering the hole with a small, round Band-aid. "Shelly tells me you're quite a tennis player."

Harold nodded, stiffening in his chair. "I'm the teaching pro at the Woodside Tennis Club. Got bogged down somewhere around 125 on the pro rankings, and decided...*sonbitch!*" he sputtered, grabbing at the front of his shirt.

"It's okay," Abramson spoke, getting up from his chair and patting Harold on the shoulder. "It's a mild parasympathetic response, not much different from your own natural adrenaline. Now. You were playing on the pro circuit--"

"Wow. *Yeah*. Ummm...I heard the country club paid their pros more than I was getting busting my balls on the Tour. No more living out of suitcases. And the *chicks!*" Harold grinned.

Dr. Abramson nodded. "The chicks."

"I can't turn them down," Harold admitted, his face flushing with the MDA, a bulge forming in his pants. "Yesterday, one of my regular students decided she wants to give me a hummer. I've been teaching her for three months and she drags me into my office and tells me to relax. What am I supposed to *do?*" he shrugged. "I've got my eyes closed, Brenda's doing her job on me, and my *wife* walks in!" he shrieked.

"How did you feel at that moment."

Harold stared at the ceiling, slipping back in 'time. "Terrified. Horny as I've ever been in my life. I didn't know *what* to do."

"What did you do?"

"Well, Veronica stood there for a second. Then she said she'd have her stuff out by morning, and told me to leave her alone while she packed. She slammed the door and Brenda finished me off."

"Was this the first time?"

Harold laughed, but the sound rang hollow in his ears. He heard the arrogant tone of his own voice and he began to cry. "I love her, Doc. I'm an asshole."

"Do you want to save this marriage?"

He stared at Dr. Abramson through a bank of tears, then

dissolving like a sugar cube to tea, his resistance demolished by the MDA.

Two hours later, Harold blew his nose, laughed quietly and sniffed again. "I thought I was over it. I just blocked it out."

"Divorce is a powerful force in a young man's life, Harold," Dr. Abramson nodded, handing the jaded athlete another tissue. "We grow up under the illusion that our parents are one entity, instead of two very independent persons with their own feelings, dreams and desires. The severing of that bond made you vulnerable. And you buried your insecurity in an abundance of women. Let Veronica in. Let her know why you hurt," the doctor advised. "How are you feeling?"

"Better," Harold laughed, wiping the tears from his eyes. "What's next?"

"Well, I'd like to see you again in a month and find out how you're doing," Dr. Abramson said, softly. "We'll go for a lighter dose and examine progress. If it's alright with you."

Harold nodded and held out his hand. "Thanks, Doc. This has been the greatest day of my life."

Franklin stared into the Void, helpless to a current much stronger than himself. In it, he felt peace; with it, power. The Captain grinned back, seeing the face of a lamb, with the gift of guile. Al Hubbard saw himself. He saw the future.

"Franklin, I like you," the Captain exulted, gripping him around the shoulder, "and you're gonna like *me*." He nodded vigorously. "We're a lot alike," Hubbard smiled. "Hell, I'm just a *born sonofabitch*, don't care who knows it." Hubbard seized Franklin by the biceps. "Used muscles all your life, haven't you, kid?"

Franklin nodded, eyes locked on the Captain's broad, smiling face.

"Well, now we're going to work on your *senses*. All six of 'em." Hubbard said. "Ever been driving, kid, and goddamn *felt* a cop on your tail? Now, we both know that can't be explained by the Big Five, don't we, boy?"

"Or when you see a gal you know you're s'posed to call your wife forever?" Franklin wondered. "And you just met her, and there ain't a reason in the world why you should be thinking such foolishness?"

The Captain turned and watched Lorraine Devlin exit through the double doors of the Behavioral Research ward, toward the ladies' room. "I like you, son."

Hubbard shut the door and dimmed the tract lighting. "Come over here, Franklin. Pick out something to listen to," Hubbard said, motioning to a cabinet that housed a sophisticated hi-fi, with a separate amplifier and record changer.

Franklin slid open the cabinet door, exposing two shelves of LPs. He paused at Elvis, stalled momentarily at Buddy Holly, flirted with a Beethoven symphony, until his fingers came to rest on Robert Johnson. Black music. Blues.

"Was brought up poor," Franklin said. "Parents was just root-hungry folksingers. Nothin' like the low-down achin' of a black man with a guitar to make you thank God for all you got."

The Captain lowered himself into a deep mound of pillows. He saw primitive man, and it made him want to cry. "You're a thousand years old," Hubbard said, gazing at Franklin Moore. "Not a mark on you. Even the Sphinx erodes."

Franklin didn't know how to respond--so he followed Hubbard's lead. The Captain popped a pink capsule into his mouth. "What is it?" Franklin wondered.

Hubbard smiled, proffering the same measure. "It's the first day of the rest of your life."

It came on like the blues--just a pull on a string, pitched into the brain like the first droplet of a storm hitting the lake, sending ripples from the edge of some overbrain that's always been there and will be around long after the roads wash out to sea...long after mom tucks you in at night...after dreams bleed through to sleep you awake and a krypton ball lights up the driveway and Billy Batson takes a yellow running shot from the sky. And lives.

****Shazam!!****

"Lot of folks think there's no future in comics," Franklin said, feeling the pill reverberate through his body and tickle the base of his brain. "Like one's just soft in the head to start with for reading 'em, and maybe you'll get dumber if you try to understand what they're sayin'. Least that's how my folks acted," he said. "The only thing keepin' my old man from usin' 'em to line the underside of the chicken cages was Captain America," Franklin smiled. "Dad's a fool for the stars and stripes. Prol'y the first Republican in the family."

Hubbard took a long bottleneck slide in the ribs, doubling over and coming up with a "yowwww! The man had it in his *bone marrow!*"

Robert Johnson's plaintive wailing sent Hubbard back to a dirt-farm porch in the Kentucky hills. "You want to know what poor is, Franklin? Poor's not owning a pair of shoes until you're thirteen. It's getting hookworms in the soles of your feet after the rains every April. My daddy bottled moonshine and got shot by the Feds when I was eight. That left my mother and four kids smaller than me. Some of the townsfolk brought her their stitching to do. I hauled wood, chopped it into kindling and sold it in town to people who couldn't afford it. Never got past third grade."

"You did pretty good for yourself, considerin'," Franklin said.

Hubbard smiled. "Some of us are blessed, Franklin. It's like your metals: There's iron and copper, and some silver, and every

rare hundred miles there's a gold vein that causes a lot of excitement. Then there's the platinum that's so valuable it gets hoarded. That's us, son. Only we're not going to be selfish with our own natural resources."

Franklin shrugged. "I don't know what I've got that'd be worth anything to the next man."

"Bullshit," Hubbard grinned. "You out-wrote a thousand writers to get into Stanford. You've sent hundreds of men crying back to their wrestling coaches. And damnit if you haven't choked down every drug we've given to you, and come back for more.? What do you want, Franklin? *What would you like to be when you grow up?!*"

The LSD swirled through the fertile hayseed, fusing the lonely, lowdown aching of Robert Johnson's guitar with the thick, giddy numbness in his chest and a crazed idea somewhere in his head. "Captain America for a day," Franklin giggled. He ran a calloused hand through what was left of his curls, and went screaming into the vortex: "*Whewwww...I'm mad as a hatter.*"

Hubbard took off his jacket. "*I'm with you, boy!* Now what would Captain America do to advance our blessed way of life?"

Franklin stood up, stretching his legs. "Whatever it took, I 'magine."

"Are you ready to save this country?" Hubbard said, grabbing Franklin at the shoulders. "I'm not talking about carrying a gun for the infantry. Are you ready to use that God-given talent of yours? Your generation is swimming blind far out in a cold ocean, and I want to know if you're ready to lift them up and carry them to shore on your sacred hump. You're the savior they've been waiting for."

Somewhere in his head, Franklin remembered a story of a boy who becomes a man, who slays dragons in their lair, who flies over skylines and into violent, baptizing storms.



Wallace Stegner stood at a blackboard, his face creased by time and experience and an unbridled devotion to the great American West. He smiled as Franklin walked sheepishly through the classroom door.

"Sorry. Guess the coffee was a little late kickin' in."

Stegner nodded. "We're glad you made it. You're up for today."

Franklin sat down at the long rectangular table, between a grinning Robin Keane and a homely girl he thought he knew from the feed store in Corvallis.

"What do we have the pleasure of hearing today?" Robin whispered. "*Tales of a Bestial Farmer*, perhaps?"

Franklin pulled a notebook from his backpack and stared at it for a long moment. Finally, he looked up. "Mr. Stegner, would I lose out on my scholarship for wantin' to change my project?"

"*Rumble Creek*? You want to stop *now*?"

Franklin nodded. "Oregon just seems so long ago. I've met people, done things since I've been here that make that little book seem kinda silly."

Stegner smiled, a crow's foot strapping each heavy-lidded eye. "I know what you're going through, Franklin. We all eventually get ideas that seem more important than what we're working on at the moment. But that's our labor, son. You drive to the finish like a pioneer. And then you have a cool drink, catch your breath, and start something new. I'd like you to finish *Rumble Creek*. The same judges who gave you this scholarship will each have an editor waiting when you're done. Most writers sweat their wholes lives and never see that kind of opportunity."

Franklin scratched in his notepad for a few seconds, then nodded his head. "O.K. That's what my pop taught me, too."

Robin Smirked something under his breath, then looked at their guide. "How do you see William S. Burroughs as a model for change in Western literature?"

Stegner smiled. "Are you planning on changing your style, Robin?"

Some of us have a bet going," he said, his lips contorted in anticipation.

"Well, don't plan on coming to me for coaching if you enjoy that kind of literary poison," Stegner grimaced. "Burroughs is a sign of the sickness of the times. His writing is aberrational. I believe that reason and decency will eventually heal the wounds left by he and the so-called 'black-comics'."

Robin snickered and tossed a sideways glance to the far end of the table.

After class, Franklin returned to Perry Lane and to the sounds of nature and a vague, but real, feeling that something was going on somewhere and that he was missing out. He made a pot of coffee and opened a bound pad someone had given him as a college graduation present a year earlier. Real pretty spot, but the people seem sort of full of themselves, he wrote. And I don't know what for. Wonder if they do, either?

He closed the journal and slipped it between his mattress and frame, and put on a sleeveless ski parka. The air was turning cold as October slipped away. He emptied the last of a cup of coffee into his throat and left cabin #12, for what, he didn't know. Running to a huge oak tree and, hugging the trunk, pulling himself up the scaly bark, he shimmied out onto a bough twice his size, and just sat and stared.

"Nice view, huh?"

Franklin looked down at a man with long, dark hair and heavy, black-framed glasses.

"Reminds me of Texas," the man said. "With all the climbing around I did, I bet my folks thought I was part monkey."

"Come on up," Franklin motioned.

The man shook his head. "Like to, but my wife's got dinner cooking. Hey, I'm Terry McAfee, in #3. Why don't you come eat with us?"

The rumbling loneliness and the coffee, churning together with his natural stomach acids, had Franklin on the ground before he could answer. "Franklin Moore," he said, pumping McAfee's hand. "You're the only person in class who hasn't started off talkin' 'bout some psychodynamic presupposition behind Freud's bathroom habits."

Cabin #3 was built the same as Franklin's: a small kitchen, a sitting area, a bathroom with a simple tub, and a room for sleep. But Virginia McAfee had the walls and tables covered with needlepoint, giving their home a quaint Early American feel, in contrast with the Early American Decay of cabin #12. "He'll be through pretty quick," Virginia McAfee smiled at Franklin, as she nursed a large baby on the sofa, oblivious to his self-conscious ogling.

It had been a long time since he had the opportunity to suckle something so fine as Virginia McAfee. "How long you two been married?" Franklin asked awkwardly.

"It'll be five years next month," she beamed, the texture of the South rolling from her lips. "We was just babies."

Terry nodded, leaning over to kiss the top of her head. When the infant had finished, he laid him to sleep in a crib in the bedroom. Then the three sat down to the first real meal Franklin had eaten since leaving the farm in Corvallis.

"Our gracious, eternal Father in Heaven," Terry said, eyes closed and head bowed, "we thank Thee for this meal before us, that it might strengthen and nourish our bodies. We are grateful to Thee for having Franklin Moore into our home this evening, that a friendship might be established through Thy grace. For these and all things I ask humbly in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ, Amen."

"A-men," Franklin gave a protracted nod. "Grew up with God. But now he's like a blood-brother, 'stead of Dad."

Terry and Virginia stared at Franklin.

"I've learned we're all just matter trying to find a warm place," he nodded. "Guess that's why I'm sittin' here eatin' dinner with the both of you." He smiled and began feasting on Virginia's hominy.

"Descartes?" Terry wondered.

"De-*what*?" Franklin mumbled, through a mouthful of food.

"The philosopher," Terry nodded.

Franklin shook his head. "Never could understand what there is to argue about. A man's born, he eats, grows up like a weed, and then fertilizes someone's property. Not so often, an Edison makes it out of the womb and helps the rest of us who ain't so smart."

Virginia shrugged her shoulders and continued eating.

Terry nodded incredulously. "I guess that's what a man comes to college for."

After Franklin had left and Virginia and the baby were in bed, Terry opened a fresh tablet. At the top of page one, he wrote *Some of These Strangers are Soon to be Friends*, then fell asleep on the sofa to the sound of crickets and a peculiar white noise, which had taken residence in his head and would soon pervade the whole of Perry Lane.

The cobwebs inside cabin #12 glimmered in the sunrise. Franklin padded out of bed and walked naked onto the front porch, dropping a letter to his folks into the mailbox.

"You must be *freezing*!" Virginia yelled, through an open kitchen window across the court.

Franklin breathed deeply, puffing his chest like a shameless Buster Crabbe. "I know what this place needs," he shouted. "Cock-a-doodle-dooooooo!!!"

"Crazy *nut!*"

"Tell your husband he's gotta help me pick out the bantiest rooster in the state of California," he yelled, before ducking into his cabin to spare his manly orbs from frostbite.

Terry walked into the cabin while Franklin was tying a bow in the front of his sweatpants. "What's this I hear about you exposing yourself to my wife?" he laughed brittlely.

Franklin rubbed his chest. "Sometimes a man has to stand like a baby before God and nature to get a good look at himself."

They walked around to the side of cabin #12 and coaxed Franklin's Chevy to life, pulling out of the Lane and down Highway 84 to a chicken ranch Franklin had heard of since arriving at Stanford. Roaring through Portola, the car was slowly enveloped by thick groves of trees turning gold and orange in the waning hours of Fall.

"A man could get homesick real fast in a place like this," Franklin said, feeling the cool comfort of forest entering La Honda. "Ever miss it?"

Terry nodded, "Yeah. This terrible fog almost sent me running back to Texas. I suffocated for three months before I learned to enjoy it."

"How'd *that* happen?"

Terry rolled the window down and stuck out his hand, letting the chill morning air slap against his palm. "I bought a black sweater and a pair of chinos and went to North Beach and pretended I was a friend of Kerouac. Rented the awfulest little hole in a place called the Piltdown, and drank red wine and Turkish coffee until I finally made peace with the weather. Took me two weeks. But I figured I made it this far, and my dad didn't raise a quitter."

Franklin laughed. "My dad didn't raise no writer, neither. Last year, I'd wake up at 4:00 every morning, gather up the eggs, give some teats a workout, and then eat and go off to wrestling practice. Every day but Sunday," he shook his head. "Sometimes I wake up not knowin' where I am. *Who* I am. Dad didn't know what to make of a writin' scholarship to Stanford."

"What does he think of your stuff?"

"He dudn't. Never seen it," Franklin said, forehead furrowing. "He would've told me that time was money, and I was a-wastin' mine. I had an English professor at the U of O who let me spend class time under a big fir tree writin' stories. He's the one who put my name in for the scholarship," Franklin said. "Dad didn't know what to say. Just stood there, shakin' his head. I helped get him some Mexicans for the farm."

It was 9:30 a.m. and Applejacks was doing a lively business. Franklin eased his Chevy alongside the decrepit wooden fence in back of the town tavern, and the two got out to ask for directions.

"Watch your step," Franklin said, avoiding a loose section in the rotting porch. The four men throwing darts behind the screen door stopped and turned, staring at Franklin and Terry, concentrating mostly on the way Terry's hair was pulled back in a rubber band.

"Whad've got here?" said a huge, bearded man in a flannel workshirt. "Lost your way home to momma?"

The men behind him chuckled.

The bartender poured a shot of bourbon. "Hey, Slim, this one's on me," he said, shifting his gaze from the four men to Franklin and Terry, then back again.

"*Naww*," Franklin smiled. "We came down from Stanford all by ourselves to get the bantiest rooster grown in these parts. Which way's the chicken ranch?"

"Whassamatter, boy, your queer friend ain't good enough, so you need to get a chicken?" Slim's cronies chuckled and slapped

him on the back.

"Let's go," Terry whispered. "We'll find it ourselves."

One of the men stepped forward. "Hey, queer. You got something to say, you better say it so's Slim can hear it."

Slim nodded. "We got *standards* in this town. Don't need no chicken-lovin' college boys comin' down to deprave our livestock. Where's your sense of decency? And what's *wrong* with your hair, boy?" he yelled. "Last time I saw hair like that, it was onna goddamn Indian so drunk he couldn't speak without pissin' his pants. You a dirty Indian behind them sissy glasses, boy?"

"No, sir," Terry mumbled, feeling nauseous.

"Then you gotta be a faggot," he nodded, unfolding a long buck knife. "*Which is it, boy!?*"

Terry turned and looked at Franklin. Franklin shrugged, picked up a pool cue, and swung the fat end at Slim's skull. The cue snapped, and a crimson geyser spurt from both nostrils, the fat man falling backwards in a lifeless pile against his buddies.

"*Jesus,*" the barkeep groaned, tossing his dishrag onto the counter. "You pieces of shit better get Slim to the hospital. I'll clean up the blood. Truck's outback: But if you ain't back by dark with it, I swear to God I'll hunt you down." He looked shamefully at Franklin and Terry. "Head west, boys. There's a ranch where the road opens up to the ocean. Tell 'em Burley sent you, and they'll sell you whatever you want. Not everyone around here's got manners like these pigs."

The sun was shining high overhead when Franklin and Terry rolled in, carrying a parcel they could barely contain. Robin Keane looked up from underneath the huge oak in the center of Perry Lane. He grimaced and shut his note pad. A terrible clawing and screeching came from within, a frantic struggle so desperate that it made Robin's skin prickle.

Franklin ran into cabin #12, while Terry stood, one foot on the lid.

"What in God's name is trapped in *that box!*?" Robin demanded.

Franklin came out with a can of corn in his hand, which he sprinkled over a small patch of Perry Lane. "Gotta give it somethin' to stay for," he smiled, nodding to Terry, who kicked the box open. A squawking magenta beast shot out, feathers spraying a foot in all directions.

"Sonof...*bitch!*" Robin shouted, the rooster charging his bare ankles. He high-stepped twenty yards to his cabin and slammed the door behind him. "What's *happening?*" he screamed from within the dwelling. "This used to be a quiet place!"

Franklin searched the grounds until he found a shovel and a big wooden post from behind one of the cabins. He handed the stake to Terry and dug a hole in the soil next to his porch, erecting a perch for the randy fowl.

"A monument to the wild spirit," Terry grinned.

The rooster had calmed down and was pecking arrhythmically at the earthen floor. As the two stood admiring the Lane's new mascot, the calm gave way to the cough of a Nash Rambler.

Carlo Marx stepped out of the car. "You seem to be adjusting to this place, my dear," he mused aloud. "Or it to you. Now, if you don't mind laundering yourself, I will take you to campus."

Terry and Franklin looked at each other.

"Ain't no class tonight," Franklin said.

"Yes, my boy, for you there *is*," Carlo said. "In fact, tonight there is a service of the most exalted order, presided upon by the High Priest, a nuclear-age bodhissatva, which you would have missed--because you do not pay attention. Thankfully, this failure to grasp upon your gloriously predestined lot in such a venal world is an opportunity to be rectified in thirty-seven

minutes. *Get moving.*"

Franklin smiled at a stupefied Terry McAfee. "He does this all the time. Wanna come?"

"Where?" Terry wondered. "Who is he?"

"I dunno. But you can bet it'll be good," Franklin smiled, then trotted into cabin #12 to shower and dress.

"Carlo Marx," he said, extending his hand and grinning through a great, greying mass of whiskers.

"The *Hava Nagilah Sutra*?" Terry said.

"As William Blake is my savior."

"You're pals with Kerouac," Terry nodded vigorously.

The mention of the name sent a shock of sadness through the bearded poet. "Alas, we all were. Jack was a friend to the nation. He won the heart of Steve Allen. We lost contact last Fall, when he went on one of his benders and called me a 'cocksucker' on national TV. If the charge weren't true, I'd be tempted to sue him for slander," Carlo frowned. "There's very little road left for dear Jack. Dwell instead upon the living."

Virginia McAfee called for her husband from the porch of their cabin. "Honey, come help me with the baby. It's been fun and games for you all day."

Terry gave her a sideways glance. "I'm talking to Carlo Marx, Ginnie."

"And I'm talking to *you*," she shrugged. "Hurry up."

"Sometimes--"

"*Shhh*," Carlo said, patting Terry on the shoulder. "It's the sacrifice the valiant make to bind this nation from anarchy."

Terry loped dejectedly to his cabin, leaving Carlo alone to rile the rooster. When Franklin emerged a few minutes later, smelling less like a common barn animal than he had in days, the two hopped into the Rambler and drove to Stanford.

"Open the glove compartment; I believe you'll find a key to

some of the lesser Mysteries."

Franklin pulled out a short wooden pipe loaded with a musky foliage.

"This pernicious weed, along with cockroaches, will be earth's last life-form," Carlo chuckled, inhaling deeply from the pipe. He passed it to Franklin, who gave it a long stare before setting his lips to the stem.

A line wrapped around the Thomas E. Kern auditorium, graduate students and the general public waiting for VIP seating to fill. After waiting a quarter of an hour, Carlo and Franklin were approached by a tall, stern man in a dark suit.

"It's cold out here," the man said. "Let's go warm up inside." He guided a path through the waiting throng to an empty section of seats near the stage, pointing Carlo and Franklin toward a pair in the seventh row. "We'll be back," he said, then disappeared into the crowd.

"Friend of yours?" Franklin wondered.

Carlo shook his head. Something unsettling seized his spirit. Something vaguely familiar; a time and a happening long ago that had since slipped through the grey fissures. Carlo's thoughts drifted back to a night when he, himself, had read poetry to crowds this size, baiting the hecklers... "*Come on*," he once said to a sloppy drunk, "you think you're brave, *huh?* Think you're a man? Take off your clothes. *Come on*, take off your pants," and Carlo had ripped off his shirt and began to unzip his fly. The drunk withered and crept out a side exit, but the adrenaline for Carlo was more satisfying than benzedrine. "*Who am I without the cloak of humility?*" he raged. And suddenly the pants were being kicked off the ankles, and the San Francisco night air felt cool on his balls, and the policemen charged the stage with their batons and would have, he was certain, beaten him into a bleeding, impotent coma, were it not for Neal and Jack, who carried him off while taking a stick or two in the ribs every few seconds, yelling, "Excuse us...*yass*, please excuse the guardians

of words and ideas who are rescuing a Bard from cosmic interference... [crazed laughter] we're gonna slurp down some *inspiration* when we get out of here, by God!"

A man tapped Carlo on the shoulder, rousing him from the epiphany. "Excuse me. If I could get through..." Al Hubbard shimmied past Carlo, and took the seat next to Franklin.

"How are you, son?" Hubbard smiled.

Franklin twisted in his seat, the sight of the Captain wreaking havoc on his senses. "Uhh...alright, I guess. I've got some questions 'bout...'bout *last time*," he whispered.

Hubbard chuckled. "Course you do, son. We all have questions. The real beauty is that the material will provide the answers. Full circle," he smiled. "The more we seek, the more we wonder; the more we wonder, the more we find. It's the goddamned *essence of knowledge!*"

The Captain fell weightless as the hum of the audience ceased, and the auditorium lights dimmed, and Aldous Huxley walked onto the stage, one foot, his weight on a cane, the other foot, resolute to the podium.

"I am hopelessly blind with these dreadful spotlights in my already diminished retinas, but I trust that you all can see *me*," Huxley laughed, and the audience laughed with him. He wrapped his tendrils around a glass of water and drank from it.

"I have recently been diagnosed with cancer," he said, setting the glass down near the microphone. Hearing an audible gasp, he shook his head. "Do not spare a moment's pity on me. It is *you* for whom I stay awake at night, pained and exhausted, deciphering the future. I tremble not before death's welcome relief, but at the spectre of man's unrequited spirit and the multitude of lives unfulfilled."

"*Yesss*," Hubbard nodded, rapt, twelve-gauge pupils affixed on the unadulterated truth that stood Aldous Huxley.

"None of us singularly are long for this world," Huxley

spoke, "but mankind perpetuated is at the very heart of creation. And mankind perfected is my solemn, everlasting hope. It is, to this aim, that I have taken upon myself the nebulous distinction of becoming literature's lonely champion of psychedelics."

The force of the word snapped Franklin's head back, sending his body to attention.

"Discover the mettle within," Huxley said, "as did I with the help from my dear friend, Al Hubbard, who showed me the way."

The foggy mists cleared from Franklin's mind as he turned his head and plugged into the Captain's eyes. Hubbard smiled, placing a firm hand on Franklin's knee.

"*Listen*," the Captain whispered.

A smile creased Huxley's face, penetrating the inscrutable mask of resolve. "The good Captain wrote an epigram to me long ago, which I feel confident that he will not object to me sharing aloud with you now: 'To fathom Hell or soar angelic, just take a pinch of psychedelic.' I have, on many occasions, to the great disapproval of my enemies and the bewilderment of my colleagues. And I still find it quite amazing," he smiled, "that such a bare fraction of a gram of nature can melt away the pretenses and justifications that conceal our own mortal helplessness. *Throw up your hands!*" he exulted, his arms flailing. "*Laugh* in the face of your own bodily demise. These temporal horrors go not with us, but remain for the next generation--which, unfortunately, is many of you."

A silent intensity rang from within the auditorium and hung in Franklin's ears like the sustained crash of cymbals.

"I will pass from this consciousness to another, regretful only for the perpetual ills of the previous," he said solemnly. "But if I can instill even a germ of hope for a truly enlightened man, an *Urbemensch*, then I will depart regretting nothing. Avenues exist for the pursuit of enlightenment. They are proscribed for the many, but for the few there is opportunity to share of this

illumination: *Share*," he whispered and, with that, walked offstage into the warm adulations of Dr. Sheldon Gottfried and General Creasy.

"I feel as though I may now rest assured," Huxley said, gripping both of Gottfried's hands.

"Then the Mark Hopkins is the perfect place," the alchemist smiled, tucking Huxley into the back of a driven limousine, and the three left Stanford for a fireplace and cognac at San Francisco's finest hotel.

The Captain, Carlo, and Franklin squeezed their way through the crowd and funneled out of Kern Auditorium into the chill night air.

"You know, son?--I've never seen Perry Lane," Hubbard said, blowing steam into his hands. "Mind if I drop you off and have a look?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if it reminds you a lot like Kentucky," Franklin nodded. "Wanna come, Carlo? We could eat a couple bennies and stay up all night talkin' about your friend, Cassady?"

"How *is* Neal?" Hubbard winked at Carlo, as Franklin withdrew into a brown and tan Rolls Royce, which then sped away toward Perry Lane.

Carlo shuddered. He stood in the parking lot, staring at the diminishing lights of the Rolls. After several minutes, he lit a joint and drove across the bridge to his apartment in North Beach. Broadway and Columbus was alive with neon and the smell of wine. He passed Holding Hands bookstore and parked in a garage next to Alfredo's Ristorante, and unlocked the door of his unkempt hovel. Baguira rubbed against his ankle and purred. "Hello," Carlo said, picking up the black tom. "My favorite friend has missed me."

The poet scooped some tuna onto a dish, tossing the can on a

pile from the week before. Then he sat heavily on the coffee table and dialed Lorraine Devlin. "You're home, thank God," he sighed. "I think I'm going mad."

"What's wrong?"

"Can I come over? This is all just so upsetting."

"Please do. I'm cooking a late dinner. I had some extra work to do at the hospital," she said. "You can bring the wine."

Carlo laid down the receiver, grateful to again be leaving the dank confines of his living room. He plucked a bottle of pinot noir from a rusty metal tree and threw on an extra coat, then drove to Pacifica, where the heavy salt air made the hairs in his nostrils tingle.

Lorraine watched through the kitchen window, as Carlo parked his Rambler on an oceanfront cul-de-sac and walked up the stairs of her condominium. "Hello, Carlo," she smiled, hugging him, her hands slightly wet from a stubborn pan in the sink. "Sit down, we'll eat in the living room. Here," she said, handing him a rubber band as she turned around. "Can you put my hair up, please, before it gets in the spaghetti."

Carlo ran his fingers through the thick, waist-length hair. He pressed his nose against her scalp. "Lovely, if I were ever to fall out of this hopeless infatuation with men, it would be into your sweet tresses."

"Stop it," she giggled. "I'm starving...and you're getting me turned on."

"I don't suppose that would be fair, now would it?" he tittered, taking a seat on the sofa. "What can you tell me about Franklin Moore that wouldn't violate the nurse/patient privilege?"

"Franklin," she smiled, eyelids fluttering. "Sweet boy--the kind that can come up behind a girl and have her hog-tied in love before she even suspects it. What would you like to know?"

Carlo stared at Lorraine, her face softened by the name. "I

think you're smitten with the cow-poke. Dangerous," he said. "I'd recommend that such a lust be kept separate from the nursing profession."

"Oh, he's through with the tests," she said. "He was amazing. We gave him a dose of DMT so big a shot of thorazine should have been required to bring him out of the psychosis. There he was, bouncing around inside a pinball machine, his whole frame of reference distorted, and the doctor asks him to tell him when he thinks sixty seconds are up. We've had patients float away for an hour and forget their own names, much less of time having gone by. But Franklin stopped the doctor after sixty-two seconds. The doctor just shook his head and walked away. After he'd come down, I asked him how he did it," she said, her eyes transfixed on the memory. "He just smiled, that precious little gap between his teeth. He winked at me. 'My pulse has been around sixty for as long as I can remember,' he said. 'I just grabbed my wrist under the sheet and counted off a minute. Missed it by a little, but not much.'"

Carlo nodded. "He'll fool you with that shit-kicking facade, but underneath, there is the will of David and the cunning of a cheetah. I took him to see Aldous Huxley tonight, and a strange man sat beside us, whom Franklin seemed to know. One Al Hubbard. Who is he?" Carlo shrugged.

Lorraine shook her head. "I have no idea."

"He looked like any state trooper from Memphis to Tuscaloosa. An older man with a crew-cut, and not remarkably dressed." Carlo remembered. "He took Franklin back to Perry Lane in a Rolls Royce."

"What do you think he wants?" Lorraine wondered.

Carlo shrugged again, picking at his spaghetti. He laid down his fork, grabbing for the wine glass instead. "I don't know. But he knows an old friend of mine, and it's very disturbing. I thought he might be Intelligence."

Lorraine swallowed the last of her dinner, washing it down

with the pinot noir. "If he is, I'd never meet him. I just administer the shots, and try to keep the students from having a bad trip."

Carlo put his arm around Lorraine, holding her close. "I'm sorry I pried. I think I've just developed my first thoroughly non-physical attachment to a man, and it will break my heart to see him taken advantage of. The CIA has a way of coopting gentle spirits and turning them into monsters."

The Captain hopped out of his Rolls, sniffing the pungent scents of nature and staring up at the stars through the leaves of the big oak in the center of Perry Lane. "Well goddamn," he chuckled. "This *is* Appalachia. Sometimes I think about giving it all up, and splitting wood again for a living. But then I take a good look at my *car*."

Franklin opened the door to cabin #12, turned the light on and brushed some crumbs from a chair. Hubbard looked around the tiny cabin, nodding vigorously.

"Bet you can get some good writing done in this kind of environment, can't you, boy?"

Franklin shrugged. "I guess I could, if what I'm writin' was still interestin' to me."

The Captain picked up an unbound mass of typewritten paper from a battered coffee table. He sat in a musty chair and began reading of the soft-Oregon meadows from which Hank Strong and his family struggled against big city developers who turn quiet towns into shopping malls and call it progress. Hubbard read for an hour, then closed the volume.

"Son, there's a thing you need to know about destiny," Hubbard smiled. "There's a natural law of force prevailing in this universe that no man can stop. Now, that doesn't mean the Strongs don't have a right to protect their private property from outsiders. No, I'm talking about something more dynamic. Somewhere on this earth, there is a strain of people who are just

naturally superior and should rightfully govern over the rest of mankind."

Franklin nodded slowly, eyes set on Hubbard.

"How do you think millions of kids come to believe the stories of your comic-book heroes, Franklin? Huh?" Hubbard wondered. "Because it's *real*. Because within that strain of naturally superior people will rise a natural leader to rule over the cream. Because he is genetically blessed. Because he has been chosen by nature," Hubbard smiled. "Because he is Superman."

Harold Blauer folded the top down and drove his Jensen-Healey out of the garage toward the office of Dr. Stanley Abramson. He parked the car and trotted up the steps of the complex, feeling the cool New York air cut along his bare calves and ankles. After pocketing his sunglasses, he walked into the building.

Dr. Abramson smiled brightly. "Hello, Harold. Get comfortable, and when you're ready, we'll begin talking about your marriage."

Harold sat on an overstuffed couch, kicking off his loafers. "Well, Doc," he said, sweeping back a lock of hair, "we're talking. Veronica isn't ready to come back, but we've seen each other nearly every night this week. I really think it can work again."

Abramson nodded. "That's encouraging. Now...about the other women."

"They're all gone," he said, his eyes clear and bright. "It's been me and ol' rosy, here, since Veronica left. I've even cut down to a couple bottles of wine a week."

Dr. Abramson stood up, smiling. "*Wonderful*. Let's just filter out any last problems with a light dose of MDA, shall we?" He

filled a syringe with a cc of the clear liquid and walked over to a relaxed Harold Blauer. Kneeling down, he pierced the tennis pro's flesh and injected the dose into a vein. Abramson swabbed the site and stretched a Band-aid over the arm. "Have you smoothed things over with your parents since our last session?"

Harold nodded. "About a week later, I invited them over for *d-d-d*-inner, *whewww*, *uhh-hem*. I didn't think they'd understand about the truth serum, *s-s-s-s-o* I just told *th*-them about *you*," he sputtered, overcome with a terminal blackness.

Dr. Abramson leaped from his chair, feeling for a pulse in the carotid artery, but found only a clammy mask of death. He pumped feverishly at his chest to restore a beat, but the tennis pro lay lifeless. The doctor stumbled over the body, grabbing hold of the vial. He stared at it for a moment, then staggered to the telephone. "Shelly...? This is Stan. I don't know how it *happened*. I just overdosed your tennis instructor with nicotinic acid. My God, I thought it was MDA! I didn't even *look* at the bottle."

Dr. Gottfried bolted through Abramson's office door twenty minutes later, finding the psychiatrist huddled over a purple corpse. "Stan, it's alright. Get up," he said, lifting Abramson by the elbow. "I know you're upset, but nobody will ever know. Nobody *can* ever know," he insisted. "Harold Blauer died of heart failure in your office this afternoon, did he not?"

Abramson stared at Gottfried, then at the body. "Inevitably, yes, I suppose, but--"

"Then that's just what our coroner will write on the death certificate," Gottfried nodded. "Possibly a congenital defect, potentially brought on by alcoholism, but definitely a heart attack. I'll call his widow immediately."

"What about the hole in his arm?" Abramson wondered. "You think a coroner will just overlook a fresh puncture wound!?"

Gottfried looked at the body, shaking his head. "A boy that

healthy shouldn't be fooling around with needles," he said, and drove back to his penthouse, where Veronica Blauer stood waiting for him, a drink in her hand, a smile on her face, and nothing on her body but a blanket of goosebumps. Gottfried closed the door and took the glass from her hand.

"You're the only one who knows," he smiled, running his tongue across her lips. "And if it ever gets out, there's a coronary in it for you, too."



Perry Lane woke early to the twang of a harmonica and the primal reveille of a rooster. Robin Keane put a pillow over his head and fell back to sleep. Terry McAfee sat up in bed, a grin on his face. "It's going to be some kind of day," he whispered to Virginia, then stuck his head in the shower, dried off, put on a pair of boots and jeans and a workshirt and stepped outside as the sun was breaking on the horizon. Through a thin morning fog, he walked to the porch of cabin #12, where Franklin sat, bare feet wrapped around the bottom of an old stool, blowing his hoarse vibrations into the morning sun.

"Some kind of life we have here," Terry smiled, as Franklin blew Dixie through a metal comb.

"Tell that wonderful bride of yours to set a pot on the fire," Franklin said, laying down the harp. "Got a deer just 'fore daybreak, and I'd like to have it made into stew by the time the local rangers get wind of it."

"No shit?" Terry laughed, and the two walked around the side of cabin #12 to Franklin's Chevy, the back window steamed, seeing the glistening muzzle of a fresh kill. "I'd say that gal was about two years old when she met her untimely end."

They dragged the doe onto a tarpaulin and proceeded to cut it up the belly, scooping the entrails into a bucket. "I was never

much for giblets," Franklin said, "but Pop would fry'em for breakfast if they was there."

Terry quartered the animal with a saw cleaned in kerosene, then stripped the skin from the bone with a fillet knife. "It's been about five years since I've worked on anything bigger than a catfish."

"You're doin' just fine," Franklin smiled.

Corpus stripped from the bone, they stuffed the head and limbs into a garbage bag and walked to the edge of campus, tossing the fast-ripening remains into a dumpster. The animal scent on Franklin's hands made him feel virile and alive. "I could live like this," Franklin nodded. "Spear trout from a stream and let my own grapes ripen in a barrel."

Terry examined Franklin as the two walked back to Perry Lane. "I'm writing about this place," he said. "I don't know where it's going to lead, but it's a better story than anything else I can think of."

Franklin nodded. "I might just take a different tack, and see how we fare up. I'm almost done with *Rumble Creek*. One good chapter to go. That's why I went out huntin'--to get the scent of Oregon back into my veins. This life away from home kinda saps the boyhood right out of a man."

After returning to Perry Lane and showering a general stench from his body, Franklin walked out of cabin #12, head still damp, and tossed a can of corn over the ground for the rooster to peck at. He pulled the harmonica from his hip pocket and blew a little music into the air. The sound of blues drifted through the Lane. Cabin doors opened, and people sat on their porches sipping coffee and tapping their heels in 4/4 time.

A shaggy young man walked down the Lane with a guitar in his hand, forming a chain of chords in his head. The man plunked himself down crosslegged in front of the oak, tuned his guitar to a lonesome B-minor and began plucking strings in anguished counterpart to Franklin's mouth harp. Together, they

pulled and bowed and bent the emotions of the forming crowd, and even Franklin was a little surprised when the man opened up and let out a tenor so pure it rattled windows, singing, "Farmer, don't let that hoe strike the dirt no more. Let your farm-hands heal. Lift your crooked back and see the earth that beat you down so long. The sun will shine along just fine..." And so he sang and Franklin puffed, until Perry Lane was teaming with life.

Virginia McAfee stood in her kitchen with the baby strapped into a cocoon around her back, dicing the steaks into cubes, which she mixed into a pot of scallions and beans and hot red powder, sending noses sniffing and stomachs to grumble.

Franklin tucked his harmonica in a pocket and walked into cabin #3 to a sprinkling of applause. "Got a little seasonin' for the pot," he grinned, pulling a tiny ampule of Delysid from his jeans. He cut away the rubber stripping and shook the liquid into the bubbling stew, then licked his fingers dry.

"What is it?" Virginia smiled, loose blonde curls falling around her face.

"It's an old witch-doctor potion," he winked. "Cures everything from the blues to impotence."

"I never know what to believe with you," she giggled, shaking her head, as Franklin walked outside into the sun.

A cloud of dust followed a rusty Nash Rambler down Perry Lane. But instead of the bearded poet, a strapping man with a face taut and tan like a workboot hopped out of the car, after fixing the brake. He hiked up his jeans, which fell loose around the waist, and rubbed at a rough growth on his clenching jaw, his eyes wild like a lynx. "A man rides a rail from Denver to San Jose and he finds that what develops is almost always a hunger so strong it'll pierce the engine of that there Chivvy, unless he gets something in his belly with which to soothe such an awful dis-po-sition," he said, head bobbing to some unknown rhythm. "So if you don't mind," he said to no one particular, "I'm going to make myself a little scarce until my stomach registers to the

contents of whatever might be boiling in that heavenly creation," and walked into cabin #3, as quick as you please, patting Virginia on the rump with one hand and dipping a ladle into the pot with the other. "I don't believe we've met, li'l darlin', they call me Neal, but a lot of folks just call me no good," he smiled, nodding, sampling the contents of the pot.

"Gaaaaaaawwwddamn!" he shouted. "That's gotta be the *hottest* venison chili I've tasted since eating with the Hopis near Taos, must've been back in fifty-seven or eight when I swore I'd never talk again if I didn't get a cold beer in me before the second hand made a full turn..."

Terry stepped inside his cabin to find a manic, T-shirted operator bearing down on his wife. "Honey, who's your new friend?" he asked irritably, pushing Neal's hand from the shoulder of a bemused Virginia.

"Course, of course," Cassady nodded, "it just follows that a woman this cherubic, this saintly-pure, would not naturally find herself absent of a mate in this lonely, dog-legged terrestrial resting place we call home," he smiled and shuffled outside, a skip in his step, carrying off a bowl of red chili.

The gathering began to stream in and out of the McAfee's cabin for a measure of the poached victuals. Even Robin Keane reluctantly left his place next door for some food and the warmth of the noonday sun. He gobbled down a bowlful and walked over to Franklin, who was talking to the hairy guitarpicker beneath the oak.

"Robin," Franklin motioned, "Davey here's a musical poet who just happened to find his way over this mornin' by followin' his ears."

The man nodded without raising his hand. "Play the jug?"

Robin stared at the man, whose eyes were obscured by thin, green goggles. "I don't play an instrument; I write prose.

"Too bad," Davey said. "All I need's a set of spoons and a good jug-thumper, and we could make righteous noise all

afternoon."

Robin backtracked, beset by a sudden thickness in his chest, and a giddy overall numbness and a metallic taste at the base of his brain. "I better...go back inside," he said. "*I-I*'m not...feeling right."

Davey turned to Franklin. "Two tons of fun," he shrugged, digging into the chili someone had left by his guitar.

Neal Cassady walked over to the big oak, extending his hand to Franklin. "Cowboy Neal at your service," he smiled, "driven more miles in more cars owned, borrowed and otherwise than half the townsfolk in the southwestern quadrant of these United States, and I've fixed as many as I've stolen; so if the day doesn't get too late, nor the weather too intemperate, I might just be tempted to have a look at that vintage Chevy sitting beside that cabin, looking mighty out-of-sorts."

Franklin nodded. "'Preciate it, friend. I feel like I know you in a distant sort of way--from my buddy, Carlo Marx."

"Yasss, ah-*hem*," Cassady nodded, staring at the earthen floor. "Having traveled countless miles on many conveyances and always in differing states of consciousness, I can say without the slightest hesitation that all roads lead to Carlo Marx. We have been friends and soulmates for longer than any two people on this earth, with the exception of Saint Jack, who is currently Out Of Service, as they say, suffering from the maladies brought on by an unhealthy love for grain dis-tilled spirits."

Franklin nodded, relishing the natural sunlight on his forehead and the inner vibrations, courtesy of Sandoz. "Any chance ol' Kerouac could be weaned off that bottle?"

Neal shuffled in the dirt, scratching at his chest and shrugging his shoulders wildly. "That question has got to rank closely on the scale of the true nature of God and other existential mysteries, for Jack is wise, and a wise man who drinks must know the perils associated with such a foolhardy life-style, does he not, or how could he be wise?" Cassady mused

aloud. "Yass, this question has caused me many nights of restlessness and agitation," he nodded, "and I have to admit with all undue res-ig-naytion that I can provide neither a sure nor honest answer."

Franklin stretched and yawned in the glory of the sun beating down overhead. "Well, then maybe this venison chili would open his eyes," Franklin smiled. "I'm finding it right therapeutic for my all my ailments, good howdy, AWWWHOOOOOOOOO!!!" he hollered.

"HOOOT HOOOOOT HOOOOOOOEEY!!!" they yelled back, and Perry Lane erupted in a woodstrummin', jugthumpin', leg-slappin', rousin' goodtime. Barechested men and women sat in the branches of the huge oak, playing pattycake...a man pressed handstand push-ups on the roof of Franklin's Chevy. The rooster pecked and clucked at the crumbs and slop falling down between the mass of fleshly chaos. Strangers, students, reluctant associate professors poured into Perry Lane for a sip of wine and an earful of the grungy mountain music and a bowlful of venison chili.

A slim, auburn-maned woman wandered around the human carnival, smiling, lifting her loose, ankle-length dress slightly to avoid dragging it in the dirt. She wriggled through the hysteria toward Franklin Moore, who looked at peace with man and nature in his overalls, his burly arms crossed in front of him, his hair wonderfully disheveled, a grin on his face stretching to parts east of the Mississippi.

"Excuse me," she smiled, tapping him on a bare shoulder. "Does a girl need an invitation to join this party?"

Franklin stared into Lorraine's jade eyes. "Not if you dance," he said, grabbing her 'round the waist with hands like a blacksmith, the both of them twirling into the center of Perry Lane. "*I knew I was missin' somethin'.*"

Terry floated into his cabin on a giddy, lysergic cloud. He dropped his bowl into the sink and stared into the pot, which had

been scooped, scraped and licked clean of every last morsel. "Honey?" he giggled. "Where are you, Ginnie? Where *is* my honeybucket?"

He stumbled into the bathroom and stared into the mirror to examine the creature that was once himself. Deep lines from an unshakable grin added ten years to his face, and his normally hazel eyes were completely black, engulfed by swollen pupils. He shook his head and looked again, but the stranger was still there. He walked to the bedroom to check on the baby, quietly opening the door, but the waiting spectacle seized his brain and turned his tongue to nylon.

Neal Cassady's ass was taut, muscles bunching and jerking, sweat pouring off his head and onto Virginia's lily-white back. She moaned ecstatically as Neal squeezed her breasts and slammed his pelvis forward against her hind-quarters. Terry stood paralyzed, his hands and face dead with shock. Neal let go of Virginia's chest and gripped her shoulders, humping feverishly from the rear. "Gonna...lube your sweet li'l chassis any minute...m'dear," he sputtered, speeding up until sweat flew off both bodies and dotted the walls.

Terry walked over to the crib and snatched the sleeping child, wrapping him in a small blanket, saying nothing. Virginia turned her head and smiled, her eyes glazed and half closed. "He's almost done, honey," she moaned. "I...*ohhh*...don't know what got into me."

Terry nodded, holding the toddler to his chest. "Let me know when you figure it out. I'm sure the judge'll be as interested as I am," he said, and walked outside to find a squadron of police cars lined up along Perry Lane.

"What in *hell's* going on?" the commanding sergeant wondered, his face red and contorted. "Who lives here? *You!*" he shouted, tossing a coat to a naked couple underneath the oak tree, "get your clothes on. I want to know what in mercy's name is happening here!"

Robin Keane staggered out of his cabin, shrieking deliriously. "It's *him*," he wailed, pointing to Franklin. "He...he put something in the chili, something awful, maddening... Oh, dear Lord!"

"Check it out," the sergeant ordered to another uniformed officer, "this is just too weird for booze." He walked over to Franklin and Lorraine. "Son, I want you to explain to me what makes people walk around in public without their clothes, and I want to know *NOW!*"

Franklin shrugged. "I 'spect they've just got nothin' to be ashamed of."

A cop came out of cabin #3 with an empty vial in his hand. "It's from Sandoz Laboratories, Switzerland. Looks like...Delysid," he shrugged.

"Well, what is it?" the sergeant wondered.

"Well, uh...I've never heard of it before," the cop said, throwing up his hands.

Out of the crowd came the sound of singing. Something organized, like a round: "Old MacDonald had a farm, *Eee-Aye-Eee-Aye-Ohhh...* And on his farm he had a...*PIG!*..."

"Goddamnit, so help me if I don't have an answer in ten seconds, every last one of you will be sleeping in a cold cell downtown until I *get* an answer!"

Lorraine stepped forward, smiling delicately. "Sir, I work as a nurse at the Veterans Hospital's psychiatric clinic," she said. "We've been using Delysid in an experiment for about a month. It's perfectly legal, but I'm afraid it's my fault for not keeping a careful inventory."

The sergeant stared at the ground, nodding and pursing his lips. "Am I supposed to believe no one's outlawed a thing that can make a guy act like...*that?*" he said, pointing to a man on all fours, casually gnawing the bark from the trunk of the big oak.

Lorraine nodded. "You can speak with my supervisor at the

hospital," she said, borrowing a pen from the sergeant.

"This goddamn world gets crazier every day," he shrugged, waving his forces back to their cars. "Let's go have a talk with Dr. Frankenstein."

As the police cars pulled away from Perry Lane, Franklin stepped toward the woman he knew someday he'd call his bride. "You didn't have to do that," he shrugged.

"If I hadn't, you'd be in jail until morning," she smiled. "And I want to make you breakfast." Then she led him by the hand toward cabin #12 for a little night music.

Terry McAfee sat motionless on the steps of his cabin, clutching his sleeping son. Neal and Virginia staggered obliviously to the Rambler and chugged away. After darkness fell and the last chord was strummed, Terry came to realize the price of a modern education.



As the objectives of Project MK-ULTRA took on flesh and personalities of their own, General William Creasy grew more and more restless. He lay in bed, perspiring, and counted the particles in the ceiling overhead, while his wife beside him savored the therapeutic benefits of a normal REM sleep. Lysergic acid diethylamide was being produced in Basel, Switzerland, as he lay insomniac half a world away in New York, and the realization filled him with despair. He walked soundlessly into the den and picked up the phone.

"I can't stand it anymore. We've *got* to synthesize it at home. Our whole operation is resting on some neutral, European country who will never understand the art of war. The Swiss are *eunuchs*, Shelly!"

"Come over and we'll talk about it, Bill. I was just rereading the Bay of Pigs report, and I'm feeling pretty low myself."

When Bill Creasy arrived, he poured himself a glass of seltzer and paced around the living room of Dr. Gottfried's penthouse. "I'd kill for a bourbon Shelly, but this goddamned ulcer won't let me," he grimaced. "I had plain tomato juice last week, and I thought I was going to hemorrhage."

Gottfried smiled. "Bill, you're letting MK-ULTRA affect your health. Have you considered *tennis*?"

Creasy set his glass on the bar. "It's not just MK-ULTRA, Shelly, it's Al Hubbard. We're trying to program that Stanford kid, and all he can think about is *Death Valley*. He's *fixated* on it. Claims it's some kind of power center, and he won't continue the process until we get him a place out there. But, goddamnit, we don't *have* a place out there," Creasy shouted. "We've got cabins in Big Sur, penthouses in New York, even a seventy-acre island off South Carolina, but he insists on going to Death Valley." General Creasy looked up at Dr. Gottfried and saw the motor beginning to churn inside the Doctor's skull. "Can you do it, Shelly?"

Gottfried picked up the phone and dialed Interior Secretary John Van Dyke. "John, Sheldon Gottfried. Yeah, it *has* been a long time. I'd love a game. Next week at my club, it is; I'll pick up drinks. Look, John, some Company personnel need a weekend in Death Valley, and I've got an idea. There's a place called Scotty's Castle, controlled by the Park Service. You've been there? Well, we need it. I'd like you to have it closed for repairs for a solid week--have signs put up, and block the access road about two miles down. Dismiss the rangers for a week with pay...while the pipes are being worked on," he chuckled. "Thank you, John," Gottfried said, cradling the phone, and turned to Creasy. "I love my job."

The fog rolled in from the Bay around seven a.m., casting a pall on Jerry's Garage near the waterfront. Jerry had been awake

all night, listening intently to a short-wave radio and trying to ignore the terrible arrhythmia of his own heart. He got up slowly from a metal worktable, so as not to induce some kind of fatal thrombosis or a crippling, clotted stroke to his brain. He walked over to Dirty Mother and kicked him hard in the ribs with a steel-toed boot. "Get up, you lazy shit!" Jerry growled, "you're bad for business."

Ed "Dirty Mother" Perkins grabbed his side and rolled over quickly. "You *bastard!*" he shouted. "I better never catch you crashed at my pad. I'll carve your fucking thumb off, see what kind of mechanic *you* make."

Mother lit up a cigarette and sat down at the table. "You never slept," he sniggered, pulling a plastic tube from a pocket in his oil-encrusted jeans. "I told you them's was for real," he said, grinning through a chest-length brown beard, then popped a ten-milligram benzedrine capsule into his mouth. "I got more where this come from," he said. "That pharmacy never knew what hit'em. Three a.m., right through the back door with a welding torch, and Spanky and me grabbed everything on four shelves. Man, any Angels gets constipation, diarrhea, headaches, swolled up gums...tell'em to come see the Doc!"

Jerry stared at Dirty Mother, his eyes dry and bloodshot, as he massaged his own chest. "Got anything for a fuckin' heart condition? Man, I need some *sleep*."

Dirty Mother rooted through the pockets of his jacket and came up with two small blue tablets. "What's a couple nembies worth to you?"

"I'll give up every dollar this garage makes for the whole day," Jerry said, breathing deliberately. "Just make sure nobody rips off my tools while I crash. You'll pull in at least fifty bucks."

"Right on!" Dirty Mother yelled. "My old lady can get those fillings put in. She's starting to look real wasted 'cause her mouth's too fuckin' sore to eat."

Jerry cracked open a beer and swallowed forty milligrams of

nembatal. A few minutes later he staggered into his office and fell asleep on the couch.

Dirty Mother followed him inside and reversed the sign in the window to open Jerry's Garage for business on this, the thirteenth day of April, 1963. He took a seat in Jerry's chair, put his boots up on the desk, grinning as the morning's first transaction rode up in front of the garage on an English-built Triumph.

A lanky young man with black, wrap-around sunglasses dismounted and put his keys in the breast pocket of a wool and corduroy shepherd's vest. He reached into the opposite pocket, pulling out a clear, plastic cigarette filter, which he loaded with a Camel, lit up and put the lighter in the pocket of his shorts. The man walked nervously around his motorcycle, checking the tires, his bare legs covered with goosebumps, every black hair rigid. Beads of sweat dotted his forehead, and a light steam rose from the top of his balding pate.

Dirty Mother could stand the tension no longer. "Buddy, you look like you could use some help," he said, kicking the glass door open with his boot.

The man jumped slightly. "Well...ahhh...I came to see Jerry. He in?"

The Angel stared at the man. "Who wants to know?"

The man shuffled his feet and took a short drag on his cigarette. "Name's Hunter," he mumbled to the ground. "I just, *uhhh*, came to..."

Dirty Mother strained to hear what the man was saying.

"... yeah, Jerry told me...that...uhmmm. "

"*Speak up, goddamnit!*" Dirty Mother screamed finally.

The man wiped a palmful of sweat from his head and braced his feet on the pavement. "I'm Hunter Thompson," he said in machine-gun staccato. "I'm writing a story on the Hells Angels. Jerry's a friend."

Mother nodded and flexed his eyebrows. "Sure he is. We love reporters. Sometimes we even help'em find their teeth after the chainwhuppin'."

Thompson moved backward, crabwise, to the other side of his bike.

"But it's your lucky day, whoever you are," the outlaw growled. "Jerry's real particular about his customers' happiness, so I won't break your jaw loose just yet. But if Jerry don't recognize you when he wakes up, I'm going to use some of your blood to lube a gearbox." Mother slung his arm over Thompson's shoulder, more or less pulling him into the garage. "Sit down; it could be a long wait."

Thompson took a seat next to the radio, which was tuned to a public news channel out of Sacramento. Over the next four hours, he sat at the metal table, smoking one Camel after another, watching a stream of grimy, tattooed men enter the garage to have their bikes fixed and swap drugs with Dirty Mother. When Thompson pulled a notepad from his vest, Mother snatched it out of his hands and doused it with motor oil, and then tossed a match on it.

"For all I know, you're a snitch for the Sheriff's department. Hell, maybe you *are* a sheriff," Mother scowled. "I've always wondered how many creeps leave this place and head straight to the cops for a paycheck."

Around noon, Dirty Mother began to feel sorry for Thompson, who had run out of cigarettes and was sifting through the ashtray for a butt containing some meager dregs of tobacco.

"Hell, you're probably okay," Mother said, tossing the young journalist a fresh pack of cigarettes. "We can't never be too sure. Last time we trusted a stranger, he came back with three Honchos in the middle of the night and burned down our favorite bar."

Thompson nodded grimly. "You ever find them?"

"Yeah, but no one else will," Mother smiled. "Let's just say there's some trees out east that won't need fertilizing real soon."

Thompson felt the hairs on the back of his neck bristle. "Could I, maybe, *ahhh*...borrow a couple beers? Just until Jerry wakes up."

Mother shrugged. "The fridge is in the corner. Looks like I got me some more customers."

Thompson noticed the sun beginning to break through the fog. He took off his vest, popped open a beer and drained it in three swallows. Then he took another and wandered around the shop, admiring the gleaming chrome, low-slung Harley Davidsons and the smattering of Indians being worked on at Jerry's Garage. The Angels considered his own British Triumph as a sort of functional deformity, but superior to even the newest, fastest Jap bike, which they refused to work on, at any price.

Someone tapped Thompson's shoulder. He dropped his beer and swung around in a fighting stance.

"Man, you're the *jumpiest* sonofabitch I ever met," Jerry laughed. "Good reflexes, though. They'll save you from taking too many headshots. You working today?"

Thompson shook his head. "I was, but your friend torched my notepad. Lucky for me, I hadn't used it yet."

Jerry nodded. "Yeah, ol' Mother don't like new faces. I forgot to tell him about you. Hey, man, you need anything? A new beer? Some speed?"

Thompson's ears perked up. "I could go for just about anything right now."

Jerry culled together four tabs of benzedrine, a fat roach, and the rest of a six-pack from the refrigerator. "Where's your story goin' from here?"

"Fuck if I know," Thompson muttered, letting out a lungful of marijuana. "I'm lost in this goddamned thing. Nothing I've written so far is even interesting. It's just hanging out in this

garage, and drinking at the El Adobe, and a couple of pretty good fights. But I could go to any town in Indiana and get *that* story."

Jerry jumped to his feet. "Well, why didn't you say so? Man, what we need is a run. You got to *ride* with us!"

Thompson nodded vigorously. "That might make the nut."

"And I know where we're gonna go," Jerry said. "Last night, when I was speeding and all the rock and roll stations went dead, I remembered there's an old castle off the 190, in the middle of the goddamned desert. We can park it on the grounds and drink from the cold-running springs they got there. Man, the middle of nowhere, Death Valley, just a weird, abandoned mansion, the Hells Angels and *Mother Nature!*"

They left by night, hugging the 101 through the great, unwashed fields of Gilroy and Salinas, turning east through the exhausted sediment of Bakersfield--fifteen years after Kerouac had subdued his alcoholic tendencies for a time with a humble Mexican woman and a row of callouses on each hand from the bean fields, then dropped down onto the hoary stretch of Trona, where many a strong man had prayed openly that his radiator might be spared from the greedy, waterless molecules of the desert road leading to Death Valley. Riding a surge of IT-290, the Captain, Franklin and Aldous Huxley drove into the heart of the sunrise--the space in time between the first warble of nature and man's recognition of the dawn.

"Thank God for strong valves," Hubbard chuckled, rubbing his sternum.

Franklin nodded, his pupils constricting as the tranquil depth of purple on the horizon succumbed to an earthward tilt of violet, rose, and finally the harsh reality of orange, like an unsympathetic bartender shooing off the last, luckless drunk before locking his doors for the night. "Damn pretty sight," he said, his faced creased with an unconscious smile, the top of his

head tingling of a final amphetamine burst from some dormant fat cell.

Hubbard's Rolls Royce blazed over a waking asphalt, passing only the occasional pickup truck on the highway. "Need some breakfast?" the Captain smiled, patting Franklin's knee.

"Maybe my body does," he said, "if this head don't exactly."

Hubbard nodded, slowing onto a gravel road toward Scotty's Castle. He eased the transmission into low gear and prepared the car for a long, winding grade, the road twisting through lush, green groves of trees, taking on the appearance of a true oasis.

Aldous Huxley broke into a smile from the back seat as the Rolls ascended and came to a stop in the driveway of Scotty's Castle. "Albert Johnson would have loved LSD. He was a man seeking true awareness."

Franklin stared at the sprawling mansion known in the 1930s as Death Valley Ranch. The men left Hubbard's car and walked around the main building, admiring its stucco and tile architecture, which belonged in a Spanish mission. A lonely wind howled through the building's portico and rustled the scrub vegetation.

"He got sick of the Chicago insurance business and built this place as a getaway," Hubbard said. "Almost pulled it off, too. But the Depression ate up most of his finances. This was supposed to be the pool," he said, pointing to a long, concrete depression submerged below the main building. "The same spring that keeps these trees alive would have kept this pool filled forever. He wanted to compete with the Hearsts."

Franklin knelt to a vigorous stream of fresh water. Cupping his hands, he drank from the cool spring, feeling alive. "Not much a man could do in a place like this without water."

Captain Hubbard took a key from his pocket and pushed open the heavy pine-and-wrought iron door of Scotty's Castle, leading Franklin and Huxley into a living room of fountains, red leather

sofas and a half-ton chandelier that hung from the ceiling and illuminated the dark hues of the castle's interior.

"It hasn't changed a whit," Huxley announced, scanning the inlaid tile of the fountain and across the balcony overhanging the living room. "I came to know, however, that the Johnsons had overextended themselves with this show of opulence and were forced to buy many of their furnishings from a Swede in the San Fernando Valley--not from the German craftsmen of which they were so fond to boast. It was all quite contradictory: on Sunday, Mrs. Johnson would give three-hour sermons from the hillside for her husband and the help and a normally sodden Mr. Scott, their live-in prospector." Huxley chuckled. "Her pious convictions were really most interminable, and I doubt that many listened to her. But I suppose that the sermons helped to ease her conscience of the lies that she and Mr. Johnson would perpetuate for the sake of the castle's mystique.

"None of this mattered to the guests, however. Oh, *my*," Huxley beamed, plucking a book from the shelf, dusting off a first edition of *Brave New World*, which bore his fond inscription to Albert Johnson of 1935. "This was the cost of my entrance," he remembered. "They were nouveau, but nobody seemed to mind, with a selection of the finest rifles and whiskey, and with the charming Mr. Scott spinning his ribald tales around an open pit into the wee hours. John Barrymore arrived the same day as did I, in a beastly condition. The press said that he was coming here to *dry out*, but he seemed to spend most of his time shooting rattlesnakes with a pearl-handled revolver and drinking Cardhu from the bottle."

Franklin wandered around the mansion, carefully, so as not to overturn any of its treasures. "How much d'you reckon all this is worth?"

Huxley smiled. "A man's sanctuary has no price. With every dollar spent, a callous and a bead of sweat helped Mr. Johnson remember man's place amidst nature."

Franklin nodded. "I bet he went to bed happy every night he was here."

A buzzing rang faintly outside the mansion. Captain Hubbard stepped into the courtyard, crouching low as he investigated the size of the hive. But he could find none. The sound continued, growing louder. Walking to the edge of the driveway, he looked out onto the road below and watched a thundering herd of motorcycles stream for a quarter mile, like dirty black ants, toward Scotty's Castle. He reached into the trunk of his Rolls for a Colt .357 in a shoulder-holster.

"Looks like we're not alone," he growled.

Franklin snatched a shotgun from a glass cabinet and loaded three shells into its chamber. "A language all men understand," he nodded, palming the rest of the box. Huxley followed closely as Franklin retreated through a kitchen exit, and the two climbed onto a low ridge aside the driveway.

The Hells Angels pulled up and silently dismounted in rows. "You won't need that, old man," Jerry said to Al Hubbard, noticing the gun in his grip. "All we need's a place to park our bedrolls, and you can forget we're even here."

The Angels began unloading their sleeping bags on a stretch of grass in the shade. Hunter Thompson lit a cigarette and pushed it into the plastic filter. "I'd listen to him," Thompson said, admiring Hubbard's revolver. "That's a nice piece, but they could probably match it four or five times, if they really wanted to."

"Who are *you*?" Hubbard wondered.

"I'm Hunter Thompson. I'm writing an article on motorcycle gangs," he smiled through the wrap-around lenses. "Just be thankful these guys brought their own beer," he said, pointing to a beat-up Oldsmobile being looted by three hairy, tattooed Angels.

Franklin and Aldous Huxley watched from the nearby hill as

a festive orgy began to unfold on the lawn in front of the castle. "I think we should join them," Huxley said, finally. "A man of my advanced years can ill afford to observe anything this peculiar without partaking of its merits."

Franklin shrugged and nodded, and the two slid down a dirt embankment and nearly into Hunter Thompson, who had gone around the side of the mansion with his own .44 magnum in pursuit of a fat chuckwalla.

"I don't believe we have met," Huxley smiled.

Thompson staggered backwards, letting the cigarette fall from his lower lip. He ripped off his sunglasses and squinted cock-eyed at Huxley, trying to remember how much of the mescaline he had been eaten that morning in Jerry's Garage, when the Angels were saddling up for the long day's ride. Finally, he slumped heavily against a wall of the mansion's study. "Goddamn," he smiled weakly.

"Indeed," Huxley grinned.

Franklin drew a bead on the chuckwalla, which had fled a mound of creosote into open range. He squeezed the trigger, sending a flat, hollow boom and a cloud of dirt, rocks, and lizard splinters into the atmosphere. "Took your shot," Franklin smiled. "I'll give up a round next time out."

Thompson nodded. "I know who *he* is," he said, pointing to Huxley, "but who are you?"

"Franklin Moore," he said, extending his hand, after brushing the dust from his palm. "Me and Aldous and the Captain decided to hunt down nature where it lives; the folks that owns this place were kind enough to loan it to us for the weekend. You don't look like one of them," Franklin said, pointing to the Hells Angels, some of whom lay sprawled on their bellies as the shotgun blast continued to echo through the canyon. Al Hubbard was drinking from a can of beer and examining the engine of Jerry's chopped Harley, one hand still on his revolver.

"The *Nation* gave me \$500 to get the story on these guys. It's a pretty tough buck for babysitting," Thompson shrugged, then walked with Franklin and Aldous down to the creek where he collared Jerry. "This man wrote the book on weird drugs, and I think we should give him a little respect."

Jerry looked up at a bemused Huxley. "Yeah? Well, how 'bout *smokin'* with us, Pops, and we'll see how cool you *really* are." He turned his Zippo lighter on a finger-sized joint. Jerry inhaled and passed it to Huxley.

"Splendid," Huxley smiled, dragging the smoke deeply into his lungs. "I cultivated a fondness for cannabis while in Garsington," he said, letting out a thin, blue cloud. "It's such a refreshing change of venue, wouldn't you say?"

"*Alright!*" Jerry howled. "Looks like we've got ourselves a *party!*"

Al Hubbard paced amongst the motorcycles. "Okay," he grumbled, pointing to the Angels, "but stay next to the creek, and *leave* the house alone."

Franklin walked, shotgun at his shoulder, beside Huxley and the Captain toward an unmarked gravesite overlooking the castle. A black bank of clouds sat heavy on a nearby mountain range.

"Oh, dear," Huxley smiled, "we may soon have to shelter the unwashed horde from the elements."

"No chance," Hubbard grimaced. "We'll never get our work done if I have to worry about sixty felons stealing antiques."

Huxley laughed. "Dear Captain, we must place our abiding trust in even the most primitive representation of humanity."

Hubbard reached into a pocket and withdrew a small black vial. He unscrewed the top and squeezed two droplets onto his waiting tongue. Huxley nodded slightly and received the same measure. Franklin stared out on the arid valley, at the thunderclouds slowly canvassing the hot desert sky. He turned

his head, tongue protruding, feeling the tasteless liquid melt away the barriers of his own limited understanding.

"We are, as we were," Huxley smiled serenely, feeling the ancient soil beneath him, feeling the cancer feeding within him, feeling the dust and the ash that would soon replace his very mortal being.

Al Hubbard stood up silently, brushing off the back of his pants, and walked again to the creekbed, where he heard the Angels arguing with Hunter Thompson about the word "sodomy" in his magazine article.

"Man, just because we do it, don't mean you have to *write* about it," an Angel named Tiny complained, as he pulled a small wriggling thing from his chest-length beard. "What's my mother going to think when she reads *that* about us?"

Thompson nodded sideways, fingering his cigarette in the holder. "But Jerry said to write the naked truth."

"It's about freedom of speech, Tiny," Jerry agreed. "How many times have I heard you bitchin' about bein' free to do and say whatever comes into your goddamn skull?"

"I know, but *man*--"

"I've got a brainteaser for you," Hubbard grinned, bounding into the middle of the Angels' camp with all the friendly grace of a golden retriever. "What if I told you there's something that would make you forget about what your mother might think? Something that could turn this creekside into a Pleistocene jungle inside an hour."

Thompson stared at Hubbard. "Mescaline?"

"Better," Hubbard nodded.

"I don't know if that's a good idea," Thompson muttered. "Most of these guys are dangerous. I've never actually *seen* cannibalism; but if it happens anywhere, it could happen right here."

"What the hell do *you* know?" Tiny said, brushing Thompson

back like a deerfly. "If I ain't tried it, then I need to," he said.

"I...ahh...really don't know," Thompson persisted.

"Fuck *off!*" Tiny shouted, as the grinning legion lined up around the Captain, who disbursed a single, hundred microgram droplet to the tongues of the Angels and their women.

Finally, Hubbard turned to Thompson, who had withdrawn in fear of the horror that such random administration of dangerous chemicals might wreak on the Angels' unstable psyches. "I hope you can live with yourself if any of these butchers freaks out," Thompson muttered, then tilted his head back as the Captain squeezed the last drop of wisdom into the mouth of America's outlaw journalist.

The sky came alive in a brilliant crimson. Southernly winds had blown the funereal clouds over the mountain range within an hour of the sun. Franklin sat rapt in the desert's beauty, a wind in his face and the words of Aldous Huxley filtering through the grey fissures of his brain. "You and George Orwell," Franklin nodded. "Read you both after the folks went to sleep and the cows were put away. There was just always somethin' connectin' Captain America and those Alphas and *1984*. Never knew you were Orwell's guidin' light."

"Eric Blair was a visionary before he became George Orwell," Huxley said, summoning a bittersweet memory. "His satire of threatening political forces proved too subversive for Oxford's Establishment, and so he changed his name. That was Eric's nature. He was timid and needed a shield against the hostility that rained upon him until his precious soul departed this Earth."

Franklin listened intently. "My visions might not be so important, and it might take me awhile to get'em down on paper, but I've never been real *shy*."

Huxley smiled. "I am dying, Franklin. I would like to pass from this sphere having entrusted the human condition to an able guardian."

Franklin stared at Huxley, at the vitality in his narrow, awkward frame, at the understanding in his myopic eyes, at the love and devotion within his flannel suit. "You need me," he understood.

Huxley nodded. "We *all* need you."

Dirty Mother and two of his brothers sat nestled in the crooks of a tree near the creekbottom, singing a bawdy tune Mother had learned in the Navy before his dishonorable discharge for unspecified "crimes against nature."

"Man, this is the greatest, wildest, most un-fucking-real kick I've ever felt in my *life*," Jerry shouted.

Most of the Angels sat in the grass near the stream, sipping from beer cans, talking peacefully amongst themselves about freedom and good pussy. The remaining few were either behind the maintenance shed with a stray girl they had picked up hitchhiking, or changing the plugs in their Harleys.

Hunter Thompson turned to Al Hubbard in resignation. "These guys are monsters 25-hours a day. I've seen them go completely amok on speed and reds and booze, terrorizing small *towns*."

Hubbard gleamed. "You get out of humanity what you put into it, Hunter. I almost forgot that. Look at them: the lowest form of human scum sitting there like a park full of Rotarians."

A cloud above the creekbed burst, releasing large waterdrops on the heads of the Angels. "Oh, *man*, we're going to get *soaked!*" Tiny moaned. "Last time I slept in a wet sleeping bag, I caught some fungus that stayed with me for a *month*."

Thompson looked at the Captain, who was shifting his feet, trying to ignore the desperate pleading. "I guess these are the times when humanity needs you most."

Hubbard cursed inaudibly, then walked over to Jerry. "You can all sleep on the floor in the basement commissary. It's heated

and dry. But I'll *shoot* anyone I catch roaming around upstairs. Got it?!"

"You're alright, Pops," Jerry smiled and brought the stinking drove into the castle, which Aldous Huxley watched from the hilltop with amusement and fascination.

The remaining sun leaked through a wall of clouds, lighting a pastoral thunderhead that jugged defiantly before Franklin and Huxley. The form bulged and strutted, growing fat with moisture. Something lanky and lean skittered down the hillside. Franklin lifted his shotgun, drawing a bead on a mature roadrunner.

"It rose from the ashes of its own ruination," Huxley marveled, staring at the proud thunderhead.

Franklin locked the bird into the metal sights, squeezing the trigger as the heavens gave birth and a blast of lightning and gunpowder lit up the desert sky, and he knew, instinctively, the secrets of the Phoenix.

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