

ROBERT M. SMITH

**Rumpleforeskin Meets
the Abomination of Desolation**



TEICHTNER

Also by Robert M. Smith:

I've Been so Happy since I Got my Lobotomy, Commoners Publishing,
Ottawa, Ontario, 1982 (second edition 1990), 64 p. ISBN 0-88970-046-X

Intimate Raps with the Morning Star, International University Press,
Independence, Missouri, 1986, 53 p. ISBN 0-89697-262-3

True Confessions of a Bunny Rabbit from Hell, RMS Publishing,
Montréal, Québec, 1990, 108 p. ISBN 0-9694376-0-9

Lands of Exile, Topeda Hill, Baldwin's Mill, Québec, 1994, 61 p. ISBN 0-9698258-0-3

Poems & Tales from the River Styx, Teichtner, Montreal, Québec, 1998,
116 p. ISBN 2-922243-00-1

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Canada J0K 2M0
Tel.: (450) 889-2140

Cover: Salvador Dali, *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans - Premonition of Civil War*, 1936

Legal Deposit: Second trimester of 2004
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec
National Library of Canada

ISBN-2-922243-10-9

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MMIV**

*Dedicated to Bonnie,
Isabelle and Cordelia*

A SLICE OF MADNESS DIVINE

*"God Appears and God is Light,
For those Poor Souls who Dwell in Night;
But Does a Human Form Display
To those who Dwell in Realms of Day."
William Blake*

*"If anyone says to you at that time, 'Look! Here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it, for false Christs and false prophets will appear, and they will show great signs and wonders to mislead God's chosen people if they can."
Matt. 24:23-24*

CHAPTER ONE

The Calling in the Night

It all began in Montreal, when I received a telegram from my old college friend Alex, who wrote, "I just found God in Colorado. Come and join me." He added that he was working in a health food store called The Four Winds, on the corner of Tejon and Broadway, in Colorado Springs. So I cashed in my unemployment insurance cheque of fifty-six dollars, and took a bus out of the country, off in search of the miraculous. And, like Columbus, I was going to discover America.

This was in September 1972. Things had been slow that summer. I had been living in a commune, or a sort of freewheeling living arrangement in a hunting cabin with some longhaired people called Patricia Matthews and Richard Trépanier, in Wickham, in the middle of the woods, about fifteen miles out of Drummondville, Quebec, when our friend Harry showed up. The first thing that he did was to sleep in my log cabin, and I noticed that he twitched while he slept. His legs looked nervous. He told me he was returning from Sweden, where he had been selling LSD for a motorcycle gang called the Satan's Choice. I think he mentioned he

bought blotters and blotters of acid in Berkeley, California, with his partner Rémi, and flew to Sweden, where he had a smuggling contact.

I had met this contact, and she came across as Mrs. Spiritual, telling me she would never die. At one point, I was alone in Harry's apartment with her, and I asked her if I could have sex with her, but she replied that she didn't want to complicate her life. I found this an unusual answer. She motor-mouthed a lot, and sounded like an expert on everything. Her politics were that she wanted to abolish borders: a smuggler's dream. I would have figured she wanted to maintain borders and keep her smuggling business flourishing. She also told me she didn't believe in the Black Panthers, because she claimed they went to Sweden and sold heroin to white people in order to buy guns for themselves and their revolution. I was a leftist, and I was shocked to hear this.

Harry owned three apartments at the same time, to throw off the police. He didn't own a phone. He always made phone calls from pay phones, which might have been wise for a smuggler and drug dealer. Otherwise, he was extremely conspicuous because he had shoulder-length hair and a long red beard, wore a military trench coat and a yamulka and pink sunglasses with one lens missing. The apartment I was familiar with was empty, except for a mattress in one room and a few dozen laminated paintings of the Dutch masters. I asked him what was the purpose of those paintings, and he said he planned on planting slabs of haschich into the frames of the paintings and using the paintings as a façade.

So Harry played the saxophone for hours on end, and talked to friends, and made all kinds of money. Now, to say he played the saxophone is an exaggeration. He called it "playing notes," because he didn't resort to commonsense musical concepts such as tone, melody, or rhythm. He just, well, played notes.

One day, when we were smoking hash together, he got mean. He turned to me when I was really high, and he said I was a narcotics officer because I am a French Canadian, and he claimed a lot of French Canadians were narks. I freaked. Not that I was a nark, but I didn't enjoy

being accused by someone I thought I could trust. Harry was a sadist; he enjoyed snapping my mind. I knew he was a sadist, because one time he took me to a topless club, and I had never been to one, and as the nude dancer lay writhing on a sofa, Harry was whispering to himself that he would love to whip her. Was Harry a nice guy? Well, another time, he told me he used to read the men's war magazines we used to see in newsstands in the fifties, about Nazis torturing women. He said with a grin it was "great sadistic stuff." So, can a sadist be a nice guy? Who am I to judge?

Anyhow, that summer, Harry had arrived in Wickham. We took some photographs of me naked and wearing a Viking helmet, standing in a tree, but there wasn't enough light and the pictures never developed well. He started teasing me in front of the others, who lived in a log cabin across the dirt road. He would write on a blackboard, "Robert Smith is a minority group of one."

He didn't get along with Joel, because they both had big egos, and they clashed. She had the dominant personality in the group, because she was the most outspoken and the most aggressive. It was ironic that these people were fleeing from civilization, and the same ape patterns re-emerged in the form of leaders, followers, outcasts and rebels. There was no escaping from human nature.

We lived in the woods, along a dirt road, and on my side of the road, there was a forest and trees trees trees trees trees, stretching into an infinite silence and serenity. Richard Trépanier told me I should make friends with the forest, talk to the trees, and they would be nice to me. Richard was good with his hands and wanted to build a lab combining music with alchemy. He had stolen a book about alchemy from a library, and found it fascinating. He had also built a sauna, where we lay in the steam bare naked, and I remember asking Joel if she would have sex with me, but she already had a boyfriend in the country, Denis, and another boyfriend in the city: she also didn't want to complicate her life. There was all this sex going on around me, and I couldn't even get laid! So I simply stared at Joel naked, and I went into a pipe dream of

drowning myself in sheer pleasure. I remember walking into the kitchen of their log cabin, and there were Joel and Denis making love on a chair, and she was moaning and groaning to high heaven, and there was none of this for me. At night, she would literally howl, as I lay there trying to fall asleep, and I imagined myself making love to my ex-girlfriend Lorraine. I could hear Joel's love screams all the way across the dirt road, and fifty feet deep into the woods, where I was sheltered by the trees.

Joel was a wise woman, but the first time I met her, she blurted out, "Another Christian on the cross!" And later on, she told me that Lucifer used to be a great angel, before the fall. She always spoke with disdain to me, as though lecturing a little boy. Sometimes the little boy was not in her good graces, and one time she told me she didn't like me and she didn't like my poetry either. She told me she did love literature though, because she had written a book called *The Whoozer of Iz*. I didn't get along with Joel too well, because I was young and naïve, and she condescended to me. Her parents had been members of the Communist Party in the forties, but when I met her, in 1972, they lived in Upper Westmount. She had the arrogance of being brought up rich AND leftist too. Actually she was cool, I guess. She thought she was, at any rate. She was one of these people who name-dropped about knowing Leonard, and Leonard said to her, and she said to Leonard, "Why Leonard, you're slumming..."

So we slept a lot of the time, or went skinny-dipping at the quarry nearby, or we would work in their garden, picking vegetables and smoking the grass that they grew in the garden, for that matter, and it was a farniente. We wore clothes whenever we pleased. And there were animals on the farm. I guess we lived a bit like animals: one morning I started having second thoughts about the commune, because it was pouring rain, and there stood Joel, drenched in the rain and bare naked, with a big idiot grin on her face, as she stood knee-deep in mud, with her curly, black hair soaked and hanging over her breasts, and there she stood, eating toast because Richard had moved the kitchen outdoors,

and I stood there staring at Joel, wondering, "What the hell am I doing here?"

And also, that summer, some born-again Christians moved into one of the farms down the road, and they came bursting into our log cabin like a burst of wind, like a mighty roar, sweeping all the energy along with them, and I felt overwhelmed, one day as one of the Christians bent down and rapped on one of my boots with his knuckle, as though to claim me for the Lord. The Christians were also hippies, they wore long hair, rags, big army boots, and generally lived without technology too. All Denis had to say about the Christians was that they drank a lot of coffee and they scared our dogs. But this was a new phenomenon in the early seventies, and we were a sorry bunch, that night after meeting them, as we sat around the campfire and felt we had to put them down to protect our egos. Questions started going around our group, such as, "Well, do you believe in God?" And we really didn't know. I had been brought up Catholic, like a lot of French Canadians, but the religion of my family was not conducive to free thinking or knowledge of God. And I started wondering. I started reading the Upanishads, and I realized that when I had heard the sound OM on acid, that was the sound of God, at least according to the Upanishads. Because I remember I had sat, cross-legged, listening to a huge sound around me, like the hum of a refrigerator, but hundreds of times louder, and tripping, and not knowing at all where that sound came from. What was more, because I was on acid, it never even occurred to me to ask or wonder what that sound was. But years later, in the commune near Wickham, I read the Upanishads, and identified immediately with hearing the sound of God. So, for two days or so, I had found God, and I was rapping a lot about love, until Patricia told me to cool it. She exclaimed sarcastically one day, "OK, Smitty, I suppose love makes the world go round? Oh, sure."

She was more preoccupied about nuclear tests in the Arctic threatening the Natives, and how the city destroyed people's lives. She was very political in her approach to living in the woods ecologically. She didn't pollute, we didn't have any electricity or running water, and we recycled our garbage. We drank water from a well, and when I came down with

hepatitis, Patricia gave me a comic book of Asterix and the Romans, and she said, "See, Smitty, THAT's what we're doing here in the country!" We lived according to a primitive lifestyle, and sometimes I would drift off into a pipedream, because I smoked dope or just because I had seric hepatitis, dreaming that we were seventeenth-century peasants.

Mind you, I hadn't caught the hepatitis in the country, but rather back in the city, shooting drugs with a junkie named Walter, while living in a boardinghouse on Hutchison Street the previous winter. Anyways, in Wickham, my eyes became yellow, and I started getting a lot of pipedreams, and lying around like a veggie, and getting diarrhea, and finally, throwing up the most foul and distasteful bile from my injured liver. I spent a week in the hospital in Drummondville, where I lay dying, and it occurred to me, after having read the Upanishads, "This is my karma. It is cause and effect. If I hadn't stuck a needle in my arm, I wouldn't be sick today. It seems last year I was an altar boy. What has happened to me? I have got to stop taking chemical drugs. I have got to clean up my act." In a way, it was like hitting rock bottom. I had to clean up my act.

And there was a nursing strike, while I was in the hospital, and I made a lot of long-distance phone calls to my friends in Montreal and charged them to a department store. I finally did get caught years later when I reapplied to get my own phone. And Patricia and Richard and Denis and Joel and Bernard and Michel came to visit me on the ward and brought me a little something to smoke. And it was a burst of sunshine to see my friends in the hospital, caring for me. In any case, the doctors discharged me after a week and sent me on my merry way, with jaundiced eyes and a prescription that I threw in the nearest garbage can. I remained sick for at least a year afterwards.

So, that summer, in 1972, I moved back to Montreal with Harry. He wanted to write a poetry book with me, and we did write a book called The Kane-Smith Commission Report on Who's Crazy in Canada. We rented, well I rented a little boarding house room off Carré St-Louis, and we bought an ounce of grass, well I bought it, and we bought groceries,

and guess what: I bought the groceries for the both of us. And we wrote the poetry book within a week.

Around that time, I remember sneaking into abandoned houses along Park Avenue where they built the Hôtel La Cité later on, and crashing on the floor of a living room in the dark. And I remember actually renting a room in one of the boarding-houses a couple of doors down, and wandering off to Queen's Corner one night, on the Southwest corner of Mount-Royal and Park Avenue, on the mountain, in the dark woods, and getting picked up by a homosexual whom I brought home, not to mother, but to have sex in my boarding-house room. This was eerie. The man was a perfect stranger, and as it all happened, I never asked any questions. He spoke French, and he taught me a few neat tricks that one can do with another man. It was rather dingy in that boarding-house, old, dirty, smelly, dank, as though a lot of people had ejaculated there in the previous fifty or sixty years.

And one night, I met the janitor, who was also called Walter, and his drinking buddies, ex-policemen and veterans, old rubbies who swore hard and drank hard and didn't shave and didn't dress well. Well, I felt sorry for old Walter, who couldn't be a day under seventy, and I offered to try to get him off the booze and we would go fishing together. Even back then, I was still quite the missionary.

A couple of days later, we packed our bags and went out to an island Walter knew about, along the St. Lawrence River, just past Douglas Hospital. We reached the small, wooded island by walking along a dam and hopping from rock to rock until we were on firm ground. There, Walter got some branches together and built a small lean-to against a fallen tree. And we fished, and we fished, and we fished some more. We spent eleven days and nights there together. At night, Walter would fry the fish, and we would eat and smoke pot and tell stories. He told me that during World War II, he and his comrades threw a captain overboard on the way to Europe, because the officer was gung-ho and wanted to win medals. They figured he would lead his troops recklessly into battle, so they drowned him. Apparently, the authorities made the

soldiers standat attention for three solid days to have someone come up and confess who did it, but no one broke rank.

By this time, I was getting delirious from the hepatitis, and I would fantasize that I was Napoleon on St. Helen's Island, and I would look across the waters at the distant shore on the other side of the St. Lawrence, and I would wonder how to clean up my soul. I felt filthy inside. I knew how to wash my body, but how could I wash my soul? My body was sick and dying, but inwardly, in my heart, I felt like dirt. And I began wondering about crossing the waters into life after death, and other similar fantasies. I was in a delirious dream most of the time.

Finally, one of the male nurses from the Douglas happened to wander on to the island, and he recognized me. He told me that his son was taking LSD, and the father was in a rage. He was the one who had berated me when I was a patient in Burgess Pavilion in the Douglas, and he had lectured me for being a street person, and told me to go back out to my drugs and my filth and my scum. Was this hard love? Well, it was hard, but I don't think there was much love there.

When Walter had had enough, we packed some fish in our pockets and went back to town. I went to Dave McKenna's house with a fish in my pockets, and told him I was going to go to the grocery store and exchange the fish for a can of tobacco. He never believed I would do it, until I returned to his house with a big, old can of Player's tobacco. He was living in a huge mansion with about five other couples. He had just gotten married to Mary Hunter and he was also young and naïve, as I remember. He even told me he was deliberately naïve. And he didn't rock the boat.

Then Wigbert showed up from Europe. I had met him in Barcelona, a year prior, when I was traveling through Spain with Lorraine Loiselle. He and another Philippino homosexual had made friends with us. I was intrigued. I had given our home address to Wigbert. And he showed up here a year later. I phoned my parents, who lived on Patricia in NDG,

and they told me Wigbert was staying at their house, and to come and visit him.

The first time I saw Wigbert at my parents' front door, I could see vibes of vampirism clutching at me, and wanting me for their own. He was definitely in love with me. So I took him around Montreal to see the sights; I figured I had to entertain him -- what else could I do? And we were at the lookout on top of Mount Royal, and Wigbert came out of the closet and asked me, "Do you have two little apples for me?" I figured, what the hell is this? I was not the least bit attracted to him. He was built puny, with longish thick, black hair, and a gold tooth in the front of his mouth. So one thing led to another and we started having a love affair. I took him to the boarding house where I lived with Walter, and we would have sex in the afternoon, in the musty room.

This started to be a problem for me, because I was becoming gay. In my case, I had a choice. I wanted to be spiritual, but I loved men. I loved men, but I also loved women. The fact is that I had been molested by a teenager when I was a young child, and I had homosexual anxiety. The bottom line was that I didn't want to lose my masculinity or become effeminate. I don't think that was going to happen anyway, but I was not well informed in those days. I had a choice between Jesus and a wild, homosexual sex life. So the day I received the telegram from Alex, that was my cue to escape. I left Wigbert behind at my parents' house, and took off to find God with the merry prankster, the Groucho Marxist, Alex Duarte. I did have some vague longing to purify myself, to redeem myself and get out of the sleaze. I wanted to be able to fly.

CHAPTER TWO

Into God's Country

Getting to the American border was the easy part. I crossed at Detroit, by taxi, and intended to catch a bus to Colorado Springs. Then a strange thing happened in the bus station: a clean-cut man wearing a brush cut and a suit approached me and showed me his badge. He said, "I am from the FBI. You are not allowed to leave this bus station until your bus arrives." This astonished me, to say the least. I never did figure out why he had approached me, but I was extremely paranoid while waiting for the bus. I waited for three hours, and I began pacing back and forth. I couldn't sit still. Everything looked suspicious, as I struggled to maintain my sanity. I thought they wanted me to go running amuck out of the bus station so they could arrest me. I had long hair, and was unshaven and slovenly at the best of times. Had I heard right, when the agent approached me? Did I imagine that episode?

Finally, my bus arrived and it was a long, long journey until I got to Boulder, Colorado. I was sitting beside a man with tattoos of snakes and demons on his arms, but he was a friendly sort, and we got along. I was reading a French Canadian book called "On n'est pas des trous de culs." The passenger beside me asked me if it was written in Spanish, and I said yes. I was very confused, from taking drugs for so many years, from the hepatitis B, from starvation. I kept trying to read the book as though it was written in code. I was getting ideas of reference all the time: if someone said to me, "Good morning," I thought they said, "mourning," and I would reply that no one had died. Two people would be talking on the bus a couple of feet away from me, and I was sure the whole bus was talking about me, me in particular.

I arrived in Boulder one autumn evening, and I was fit to be tied. I spent the whole evening walking up and down the streets asking total strangers if they knew a guy called Alex. I thought I was being funny, because people kept laughing at me. Boulder was a college town, and there were

a lot of young longhaired people; the architecture was largely Mexican, with white walls and orange tile roofs.

The next day, I found Alex in Colorado Springs. I started joking around with him, pretending I was a gorilla preening him, picking fleas off his arms and hair. He mumbled, "Mighty Astrea, help me!" I thought, what is this? And Alex looked so clean, and I looked so scruffy. He served me a health food meal, and I was told to put out my cigarette in the health food restaurant. They played classical music over the P.A. system, and there was a man painting on the wall, a huge mural in 1940s heroic style, like fascist art. Where was I now, I wondered...

That evening, Alex took me out to the house where he lived with other "chelas." A chela was a disciple, I guess. There were hokey looking pictures of gurus on the bookshelves, and the one-story house was spotless. There was not a hair out of place. All the fellows in the house had strange smiles, wore pastel colours, and short, short hair. I had never seen anything like it. When I asked if I could sleep there, they said I was too full of "entities," and I had to sleep outdoors in a sleeping bag, in the rain. I was not too amused, believe me. By morning, I was cursing and swearing, and had caught a cold.

The following evening, I had a weird dream. There were bushes, in the dark, on a starless night, and Christ on the cross came flying out of the bushes, eerily, soaring across the night sky, with flying saucer music in the background: I could only compare it to the sound of a modem whistle on a telephone, although there were no modems back then. I woke up and I knew it! I had had a sign! This was where I was destined to find God!

On the following Sunday, Alex took me out to the Broadmoor mansion of the Summit Lighthouse, which was the outfit he belong to then. On the way there, in a van, the people were chanting mantras, and they explained to me these were called "decrees." They sounded like militaristic army chants, very aggressive, choppy, staccato, and the words were otherworldly: "Beloved I AM presence bright, around me

drop your tube of light..." I thought they were all crazy, but I was exhausted, and relieved to have found Alex. I found all this religious nonsense very oppressive. It was not at all what I expected from Alex!

Alex had been a Marxist, and in college days we had occupied the university library together, but here he was, chanting mantras against Black Power, against rock n' roll, against jazz, against discordant music, against jagged energy patterns, against communism and against the Dark Force, whatever that was. We entered a mansion surrounded by a high brick wall and security guards. On the walls indoors, there were mirrors in solid gold frames, and chandeliers, and precious stones everywhere. We were just in time for the session: we entered a huge hall, and everyone stood facing the American flag! They were dressed in white suits, white evening gowns, with perms and jewelry, and everyone wore pastel colours. They sang nice little songs like God Bless America, the Starspangled Banner and then they started chanting more of those decrees. I thought now they were Nazis! What the hell was I doing there?

I met the artist who painted the fascist art, and it turned out his name was Auriel Bessamer, and he was overweight, with white hair. He looked over sixty. He recognized me, and told me something I could not even hear, let alone understand.

Then a gentleman wearing a business suit and with a broad chin and a thin mustache took the pulpit. There was dead silence. He began a conference, and he told us that there was once a millionaire who dressed in rags, and no one suspected he was a millionaire. Was he talking about me? I was certainly dressed in rags... And he mentioned he had raised his hand one day, and blighted the fields of China. He told us that if he wanted to, he could make us all hover in the air, just if he wanted to. And he told us about meeting the Count of St. Germain and having other apparitions one day while waiting for a train. And he had a mission to carry out for the Great White Brotherhood, the Ascended Masters and whoever else was out there.

But what was Alex doing here? Alex was a rascal, a scallywag, a scoundrel, we used to pull pranks together, we used to drop acid and smoke dope together, and here he was saluting the American flag! Had I gone mad? He told me once the conference was over, that he intended to turn into light. And he smiled.

During the conference, no one moved a muscle, and everyone seemed a little bit uptight, on edge, as though they expected a thunderstorm. They all sat in straight-backed chairs and closed their eyes and held their hands on their laps, like at a séance or something. This had nothing to do with love-ins and outdoor rock n' roll concerts or even demonstrations. I knew Alex was with these people because it was far-out, and for no other reason. He couldn't be serious.

The first thing they did was to convince me to quit smoking, because it attracted entities, and I should keep my aura clean. I wasn't smoking much anyway so it was easy to quit. The next step in initiation was that I had to get a haircut. So I went with Alex and we got a haircut. Then he told me I had to change my clothes, because the colours black, brown, red, khaki and orange had been created by black magicians in Atlantis. Now come on, I am from Missouri, show me! I didn't believe this for a minute. But Alex seemed to know what he was talking about. Then I wanted to go eat a hamburger, but was told I couldn't eat meat, smoke cigarettes, smoke grass, eat chocolate, drink alcohol, because those substances were perverted. This would frustrate me, because I knew they were crazy.

I met Marcia around that time. She was an extremely short, cute, spry little thing, and she came from Savanna, Georgia. She started telling me that no one was entitled to receive welfare, because that was just laziness. I told her she was a redneck. I kept singing her a song that my mother had taught me: "Oh she's a hard-hearted Hanna, the vamp of Savanna, the meanest gal in town; leather is tough, but Hanna's heart is tougher, she's a gal who likes to see men suffer..." And she would laugh. She and Alex worked at the Four Winds Restaurant. There were always people on the second floor chanting decrees to make sure the vibe was spiritual in

the restaurant below. They made a great milk shake, veggie burgers, patés and I ate there all the time.

Finally, I was told that if I was going to stick around, I had to find a job. So Alex's friend got me a job at the Broadmoor Hotel, up by the mansion in suburbia. Now, the Broadmoor Hotel was so big that it occupied an entire neighbourhood. There were living quarters for the staff, and I was assigned a room with a Chicano fellow who worked in the kitchen. The buildings were surrounded with tall trees. The main building of the hotel was built around an artificial lake, which was around a quarter of a mile wide and surrounded by marble statues. I was given a job as a busboy in the main dining room. I had never worked in a restaurant before.

So the first night, I began bussing tables and there was a high-society lady about thirty years old wearing a low-cut evening gown, showing off most of her chest. As I was clearing off the table, I accidentally knocked over the ice cream dish, and didn't it fall right down on her boobs. There was a flurry of screaming and yelling, but I was in control of the situation: I grabbed a napkin and started wiping the ice cream off her boobs and her satin dress. She was furious, and she yelled some more. Then I blushed and apologized profusely, but to no avail. The manager of the restaurant heard all this commotion, and came up quickly, telling me to go fetch a mop. I didn't know where the mop was, so I stood there, as he apologized to the customers. Then he told me to leave the premises, because I was fired. I stepped out of the dining room, but then something weird happened: a fistfight broke out between the manager and me in the hall outside the dining room. No one was hurt, but there was a lot of punching and shoving and kicking. He was a good ten inches taller than me, but I was wild. So I went back to the Four Winds Restaurant that evening with my tail between my legs. I felt like a failure.

Time went by, and I spent days on end hanging around the Four Winds Restaurant, hanging around the library at the University of Colorado, reading books about this and that, going to the séances with Alex, where they conjured up spirits and the spirits spoke through the mediums who

ran the place, Mark Prophet and Elizabeth Clare Prophet. I rented a room in a boarding house near the university, and got other jobs, first as a busboy, then as a houseman. I was working under the table, because I didn't have a green card, a permit to work in the United States. So I made up a bogus social security card, just using my Canadian numbers and changing the order of the numbers. In my first boarding-house room, I could hear the television sets of the other boarders, and this bothered me. But I found enough silence to be able to read. And I kept reading about the New Left, about Black Power, about race relations, and I also read books about theosophy by Annie Besant, Ledbeater and Madame Blavatsky. Alex got me a copy of the Summit Lighthouse manuals and I found the style rigid and grandiose. Some of their claims were extravagant, extraordinary. I thought at first it was all lies. I remembered having read what Hitler said: if you want the masses to follow you, tell a lie, and the bigger the lie, the better. I also remembered having read somewhere that when people ceased to believe in God, they didn't believe in nothing; they believed in ANYTHING.

One afternoon, the lady who ran the boarding house told me there was a phone call for me. I picked up the phone, and it was the FBI. I asked them what they wanted. They said, "You are Robert Smith?" I answered I was indeed. Then they said, "You are from Montreal?" I said I wasn't. They added, "You are working here illegally and there are some people from Immigration who would like to ask you some questions. Will you be there in half an hour?" I guaranteed I would be there, and as soon as I hung up the phone, I promptly packed my bags, which amounted to one traveling bag and two plastic bags, and I headed for the hills. I left the boarding house in a hurry, but eventually, I found another room nearby and another job where no one knew me. So I was on the run.

After a few months, I finally met the guru of the whole Summit Lighthouse, Elizabeth Clare Prophet. We met in the Four Winds. She looked like a pretty bourgeois lady, with dyed brown hair and a perm that went out of style in 1955. She had huge diamond rings on every finger, and she wore a long, flowing Indian sari. She was playing dress-

up. So I approached her and asked her, "I was wondering if I could get a job teaching French at your Montessori school."

"NO!" she replied vehemently, "French Canadian is a perversion of international French!!"

That was a real slap in the face. I replied weakly, "But that's bigotry..."

She laid her authority on me, exclaiming, "DON'T QUESTION ME, THE MASTERS SPEAK THROUGH ME!" (I was so furious that I stormed out of the restaurant and walked around the block about three times to cool down.)

I eventually found out why the Summit Lighthouse had its headquarters in Colorado Springs. First of all, it was in the geographic center of the United States, and secondly, there were three military bases there. It is in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, and right near a huge peak. I was told that under that mountain, there was a replica of the Pentagon, from which any survivors of a nuclear attack by the Russians could conduct a nuclear war in case Washington got nuked. The base was underground, buried under the huge rock of the mountain. Soldiers were not uncommon on the streets of Colorado Springs.

I eventually met some Vietnam veterans. For instance, I moved into a boarding house, where I stayed for several months. Down the hall from me, there was a young black guy. I tried to help him out, but I guess I was being a nuisance. He and his cousin were shooting heroin, so I thought of purging them. I gave them a huge bag of prunes. They ate the prunes, and they told me they had diarrhea for three days. More missionary work. After a while I made friends with the kid down the hall, and I tried to recruit him for the Summit. One day, we read some decrees together, but that didn't work out. I finally met his cousin, who was a veteran. I asked him what it was like in Vietnam. He said he had had the time of his life, with hookers and heroin. And he never saw battle, he never saw action. He just hung around in Saigon enjoying himself.

One night, he took me out for a beer at the Cotton Club, which was an all-black discotheque. We were sitting there in the semi-obscurity, having our drinks, and he would tell me to relax, to relax even more. A band started singing a song called, "Papa was a rollin' stone, where he hung his hat was home, and when he died, there was nothin' left to own." Everyone there was black, except for me. Another time, I took the cousin to the Four Winds Restaurant, and Alex did a doubletake. This guy looked threatening, I guess, and Alex didn't know where I had met him. I suppose Alex could sense the guy was a junkie or a drug addict, and Alex was determined to get me off the streets and cleaned up.

At first, I didn't swallow the doctrines of Elizabeth Clare Prophet. She claimed she was the reincarnation of Claire of Assisi, the friend of St. Francis. Her husband, Mark, told us that he was the reincarnation of such a host of characters as Origen of Alexandria, Louis XIV, and the poet Longfellow, among others. He had composed most of the mantras called decrees that the disciples chanted. These mantras were supposed to align your seven bodies. There was the physical body, the emotional body, the astral body, the mental body, the Christ presence, the I Am presence and the God body. All these people believed they were divine. It was considered blasphemy to say, for instance, I am feeling sick, because the I AM was the affirmation of one's own divinity. So you couldn't say anything negative about yourself. Also, the disciples took enemas on a regular basis, to clean the toxins out of their physical body. As it says in the movie *The Manchurian Candidate*, they weren't brainwashed, they were "dry-cleaned." Whenever they felt sleepy, it was the Dark Force that projected sleep rays at them. And the disciples worked fifteen hours a day, six days a week, to pay off their karma. This was a good deal for Mother, alias Elizabeth Clare Prophet, who was also, incidentally, the Incarnation of the Divine Mother, and the Fourth Person of the Trinity, if you can believe that. And the reason why she wore all that jewelry and collected all the gold was that gold had a high spiritual frequency. And at first I didn't want to hear about this.

But I was isolated from my family, from my friends, and every time I tried to escape from the group, Alex or someone would accompany me, so I was never alone. I was not allowed to associate with non-members, and that was why Alex freaked when he saw me with the junkie. If you had no other frame of reference, you might actually succumb and join this group. And I was cracking up and vulnerable. I lived in Colorado Springs like that for a year, isolated and lonely most of the time, going to the library, hanging around the Health Food Restaurant, chanting my decrees, hoping to get liberated, hoping to fly, to clean up my act, and I was just suffering. I wanted to do miracles, as they promised, but I was just extremely lonely and poor.

Then there was Art Turner.

CHAPTER THREE

Crucifying Clowns

The first time I saw Art, there was this short, black guy flirting with a bunch of young white girls, walking down Tejon Boulevard, and I thought he would be a fun person to befriend. He was a court jester in this world of serious magic. Within one day, I invited him to live at my room in the boarding house, and he moved in, rather than staying on the streets. I never charged him any rent, and at first it was all laughs. We would walk up and down the clean streets of Colorado Springs, and he would burst out laughing, "This town is full of soldiers' farts. Everywhere you look, you smell soldiers' farts." Just as he said that, I stopped dead in my tracks, because I pointed out to him the logo of a company called PacificGas. So he gave me some skin, and I gave him some skin. Meanwhile, Auriel Bessamer was painting frowning, muscular, very Caucasian-looking angels. We were just having fun.

We would walk into a department store, and Art would exclaim out loud, so everybody could hear him, "Oooh, dey don't like us, we's too slick!" And we would get bounced out of the store. He had just gotten a dishonorable discharge from the army.

I was working as a houseman at the Antler's Plaza Hotel, and entertaining the Chicano women who worked there as chambermaids and cleaning ladies. I would pretend I could read their palms. I told one lady, who was really the salt of the earth, that I could see a new lover in her life, and she told me she would get on her knees that evening and talk to the Man upstairs. I used to drive the other houseman crazy, because I preached to him about spirituality. There was another houseman still, a Chicano also, who was very soft-spoken. I told him that Jesus Christ was Jewish, and he replied, "No, no, Jesus was a Catholic!" So we cleaned ashtrays and passed vacuum cleaners around and looked busy. Meanwhile, back in the Summit, they would drive by the Antler's Plaza and shake their heads, saying, "There's a definite sexual consciousness in hotels. A lot of darkness, a lot of darkness." But the staff would sit

around and they knew about rich people: some of the chambermaids said there was a recession because the rich people were sitting on their money; they loved money too much and they were hoarding it. And we would chew the fat, and it was good and wholesome.

So I tried to convert Art Turner to the doctrine of the Ascended Masters. He called them the Ass-ended Masters. I took him to a séance at the mansion in Broadmoor, and Marcia tried to spook him, saying all his karma would hit him at once because he had contacted the Great White Brotherhood. I think all this spooked him, all right, because one night at my place, he was sweating, and extremely uptight. He sat with me on my sofa, and for a minute he didn't trust me. He was yelling, "I know who you are, you're a pig, you work for the government!" And I had to calm him down, speaking gently and softly. I really thought he was going to beat me up. He kept screaming at me, "I'm going to pop you one!" But luckily, nothing happened.

Actually, a lot of things were happening. Art kept bringing home television sets. Lots and lots of television sets. I asked him where they all came from, and he just dismissed it as, "I dunno."

Finally, one Friday evening, Art was absent. He didn't come home. Who did come to our front door and knocked were two FBI agents. They asked, "Do you know someone called Art Turner?"

"Ya, I guess so. Why?"

"Does he live here?"

I answered meekly, "Yes, I work at a hotel and he stays here during the day."

It turns out he was stealing T.V. sets and selling them and shooting heroin in my apartment during the day, while I was busy working at the hotel. The FBI men told me, "Monday morning, we want you to come to the police station and testify. Is that all right with you?"

"Yes sir," I said, "Bright and early."

But I didn't go testify on Monday morning. Instead I took the first plane out of Colorado Springs and back to Canada, rather than testify against my friend. I just had one job left to do, and phoned Art Turner's mom in Philadelphia.

"Mrs. Turner?"

"Who is this?"

I fumbled, "My name is Robert Smith, I am a friend of your son Art."

"Oh my God! Is he all right?"

I answered hesitatingly, "Actually, Art is in jail, ma'am."

Then it got psychotic. She started a lament that broke me up. "Art is a good boy, he just got in wit de wrong crowd. But who are you?"

"I told you my name."

She sounded extremely depressed and afflicted. "Who are you?"

"Mrs. Turner, I..."

"Who are you? Who are you?"

This went on for half an hour on the phone. I was in a pay phone on the street, and this mother was in distress, screaming at me a hollow, empty sound, but all that came out of her dusty voice was "Who are you? Who are you?" And for once, I didn't have an easy answer. I was caught. For once, I meant well, and I don't know what I imagined, that I could phone someone's mother and tell her that her son was in jail, and she would glibly beep out, that's cool, bro, what's de weather like back

home? I was caught with my mask off, and no amount of praying or decrees or compassion could assuage this woman's sheer pain. She was Mother Mary, and her baby was crucified. What do you tell someone? What do you tell her? At that moment she just wants to kill you, and you're the one who got her son in trouble, as far as she's concerned. And I would have given anything to comfort this poor woman. I merely hung up the phone.

When the next day I flew out to Montreal, I was relieved to get out of that jam. I saw Wigbert again, and Harry, and my mother. They were all happy to see me. Meanwhile, Art Turner was in the County Jail in Colorado Springs.

I remember going to Harry's room on Decarie Boulevard, and he was seeing a lot of Michael Cressy, who was getting sicker and sicker. We smoked a joint, and I sat on the floor, listening to voices coming through the wall of the boarding house, voices from the Dark Force projecting cosmic rays on me. And Michael Cressy, who used to be a bright fellow, compared me to a turtle in a shell. And I hung around Montreal for a couple of weeks to let things blow over back in Summit Lighthouse Land. Harry had actually heard of the Great White Brotherhood, and he warned me that the people at the top of the hierarchy were corrupt. What he was worried about was his own psychic wars with other witches he called The Green Gangrene. They would enter his room through the astral plane and haunt him and terrorize him. He was getting interested in Aleister Crowley and tried to get me interested in those teachings too.

Meanwhile, Art Turner was in jail and Wigbert told me that Harry was trying to get money off him. Wigbert was working as a florist and then as a hairdresser, and he kept my parents laughing, because he slept in my bedroom in our house. Wigbert was still waiting for me to come home to him. I stayed aloof, because I was starting to believe in the Summit Lighthouse.

While I was away, Mark Prophet died. I remember, I wrote an ode to him, a rather corny, sickly ode at that, but I thought he had ascended to the Ascended Master plane and had become one of the spirits out there. My mother was disgusted. I asked her to type my poem, and she deliberately spelled "my guru" as "my gugu." I was furious, but chanted my decrees and rose above it.

Time took me back to Colorado Springs like a moth being consumed in a candle flame. I was attracted to the light I found in the Summit; whether or not it was a neon light, or a rainbow didn't matter. There was something otherworldly I was after, and definitely something I was fleeing from, homosexual anxiety.

I returned to Colorado that spring, in 1973. But things were different. Mark was dead, and Elizabeth had already remarried. It was a little too much like Hamlet for my taste.

Finally, I had an appointment to meet with Elizabeth at her quarters in Broadmoor. I arrived at the front door, from where I was ushered in by the security guard. I noticed once again the gold-framed mirrors and the quartz and diamonds and rhinestones in a mahogany cabinet. It reminded me a bit of the Catholic Church. So when my time came, I started walking up a marble, revolving staircase to Elizabeth's boudoir. I was holding the railing, when suddenly, time slowed down. Down. Down. Down. And I could feel a vibe in the air. It was crackling, electric hate energy, bristling through the air all around me, and I could feel it, it was like disembodied evil, like screams of torture in silence, and I paused for a minute. I knew that presence. I had felt it one day when I walked into a house full of terrorists in 1969, and they were making bombs in the back room. I had felt it later in a police station, as I was being threatened with torture and interrogated by the homicide squad of the Quebec police. I knew that vibe, but I kept on walking up the staircase up to Elizabeth's room.

She shook my hand and greeted me and sat me down in front of her beside a double mirror. She was wearing all her make-up, with heavy

bright red lipstick and her hair in a perm. She was smiling at me with her mouth, but I could feel in my heart she was thinking, "I hate you, I hate you." I had read about the heart chakra, and that was my gut feeling. I told her about Art.

I eventually asked Mother, as she liked to be called, if it was all right to go visit Art Turner in jail. And she replied with total scorn on her face, "Don't you ever visit him in jail. Stealing from people. Destroying people's lives. That man has spread destruction all around him. No, a chela doesn't visit someone like that in jail!" She was shaking with anger.

Nevertheless, I did go visit Art in jail, in the Cook County Jail, and was heever happy to see me! "Brother, how you doing?" He was clutching the bars of the jail in the visiting room, and smiling from ear to ear, as I did the only good thing I knew about, I gave him a book about reincarnation I had bought for him in an occult bookstore. And I felt good about visiting my old buddy. We talked for half an hour, and then I had to move on. I told him I had called his mom and he was highly grateful.

Another prisoner came up, and Art cheerfully told him, "This is Smitty, this is my main man! This is my buddy!" And I left him smiling.

CHAPTER FOUR

Robert's Myth

Now, I used to sit with Marcia in The Four Winds Restaurant, and the public address system would be thundering out the Ninth Symphony, while she would tell me that all dissenters should be put in penitentiaries, that once you broke the law, you lost all your human rights, and therefore prisoners of conscience should be locked away, and they should throw away the key. I remember sitting there, listening to marching bands and imagining the beat of marching boots, and talking to one of the cooks, and he didn't believe in foreign aid or in the Peace Corps; I thought this was outrageous. He claimed that people in South America, for instance, had their own traditional cultures, without modern technology, and that when Americans went down there and introduced modern techniques, it just made the local people want to become Marxists. He also claimed that young Americans from the Peace Corps went to other countries and became disillusioned, and came back here communists. (Yes, and what about phrenology, or the ether, for that matter?) While you're at it, I would exclaim, why not keep Galileo in prison? Meanwhile, it seemed to be the Fourth of July somewhere, and men in khaki seemed to be walking in a rather staccato fashion down the main street, past the government buildings, past the post offices, and bridges were swaying between the disciples and me. I remember a tall, meek fellow called Mark, giving me a haircut, and whispering to me, "The poor ye have with you always." And he said this, under a huge crystal chandelier in the mansion at Broadmoor. Then there was Brewster, who had worked in the field of finance before joining the Summit Lighthouse. There was no arguing with him. He quite simply believed in the conspiracy of the international bankers. As for Marcia, well, she would just push my buttons. And it seemed to me men with white hoods and burning crosses were not far off in the distance.

Alex and I decided to phone Wigbert, who was back in Montreal. Alex was listening in on the other phone, while I told poor Wigbert I wasn't coming home. The poor bastard was pleading with me, and there was

Alex cracking up laughing. Then we phoned Harry, and I told him to burn the manuscript of the poetry book we had hammered together, The Kane-Smith Commission Report on Who's Crazy in Canada, because it was diabolical. Alex figured we would balance my karma back home once and for all. And he would tell me that there was nothing wrong with my parents' middle-class lifestyle; what was wrong was their consciousness. At this point, he didn't have a lot of influence on me; you might rather say he did my thinking for me.

Nevertheless, one sunny afternoon, we were walking down Broadway, and he said something inconceivable to me: "Imagine that five years from now, we both leave the Summit, and we look back. We'd say, 'Phew, what a weird trip that was!'" I asked him how he had ended up joining the Summit, and he said he had been traveling through the United States, and a girlfriend of his called Joyce drafted him. One day, he realized he was bored. So he got the God virus. Push came to shove, and he ended up following Elizabeth Clare Prophet. He would point at all the people on the street, and tell me they looked like they were cut out of a magazine. He would look at a Catholic bookstore, and simply say that those teachings were "too pat." He was a master of the put-down and the quick judgment.

The politics of the Summit became increasingly more obvious to me in time. One day, I rifled through the drawers of a desk in a house belonging to chelas, and I found literature about George Wallace. And I imagined I could hear marching boots, screams as another black man got lynched, the shuffle of sheriffs about to break another door down.

The Summit held a conference in the country, under a big circus tent, and a guest lecturer from the John Birch Society came and ranted for a while, while it seemed the spiritual elephants and tigers roared, and lions jumped through hoops of real fire, and the lecturer claimed that in the upcoming revolution, blood would flow through the streets; that we had to return to the gold standard; he warned about the next depression, and told us to invest in silver, which has industrial applications, and therefore would never go down in price. He told us

about Bernard Baruch, who invested in silver before the Crash of 1929, and became a billionaire. What I was most afraid of was Bozo the clown, for he was a communist.

Finally, something really weird happened. I was told to listen to the Illuminati tape. They sat me down in a study in the Broadmoor mansion, and gave me a tape cassette to listen to, that had been recorded by the John Birch Society. It was as if soldiers kept appearing in the windows, SWAT teams in the spirit world were about to raid the terrorist strongholds, and it was all because of Bozo the clown. The tape started off discussing the French Revolution, and that shortly before 1789, a Jesuit priest sold his soul to the devil and founded the Illuminati Society, which wanted to impose the rule of Satan on the whole world. And these people infiltrated the Freemasonry in America, until they controlled all the positions of power in the United States. They mainly worked through the Federal Reserve and the magazine Foreign Affairs. And this is how they manipulated the country's finances. It can't happen here, no no no no, it can't happen here, I tell you my dear that no, it can't happen here. The idea was to cause such big, devastating wars that the people of the world would want peace at any cost. First, there was World War I and then World War II, but their sole purpose was to create the infamous Peace movement. And some day soon, Bozo the clown, the agent of Satan, would come along and offer peace to the world, and the people of the world would be so tired of bleeding that they would allow Satan to rule the world. The populations of the world would be like sheep. And Walt Disney would live happily ever after. The Ford Foundation was communist, because they had given grants to Leroi Jones, a black poet who had been arrested for carrying a gun during the riots in the States. The tape called Martin Luther King "Martin Lucifer King," and at this point in the tape, I just turned it off, because this was too weird. Hey, I knew Bozo the clown, and he wasn't a bad guy after all.

Just at this minute, Elizabeth Clare Prophet and about four of the top disciples came waltzing into the room, wearing their usual ballroom attire, and Mother was waving a three-foot sword, and Munroe, one of the disciples, was carrying a flaming frying pan. There were flames

coming off the pan, and this was supposed to do an exorcism on me. I couldn't believe it. I guess the demons were coming out of my ears, already.

By this time, I was working as a dishwasher in a restaurant in Colorado Springs, and there was a black cook working there, who must have been six foot five at least. I remember, I asked him, "Do you believe in God?" And he came up beside me, wrapped his huge arm around my head, because I came up to his shoulder, and he boomed out, "Babe, widout him, Ah cain't make it!" On the other hand, there was a disciple called Russell who barked at me during one of the conferences in the wilderness, "Those blacks want black power; why don't we fight for white power?" I guess that concept had never occurred to the West. And we could actually civilize them into submission, too.

One weekend in the summer, there was a conference in the country, held on Native holy ground, and Alex and I were looking for arrowheads in the tall grass in a valley. Then we scaled the cliffs surrounding this valley, and we stumbled upon a Native sculpture carved in the rock: facing the east, there was a hollow in the rock, and inside, a face with precious stones ensconced in the eyes, which shined eerily when the rising sun shone on them. Then Alex and I arrived at the top of the cliff, and there was a plateau, where we experienced a strange serenity, a spiritual power we didn't know. All Alex could say was, "Strawberry fields forever..."

And as we walked through the grass on this plateau, I lapsed into a daydream, and there were Natives meditating on this spot, somewhere in the Akashic records, somewhere, Native children were brought up believing in the brotherhood of all life forms, under the Raven. Under the moon, in broad daylight, drums were beating, beating a song of peace for the whole world, and they beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.

And, meanwhile, the conference going on down below in the valley was lumbering on, Mother giving conferences and doing séances, changing

evening gowns and jewels every time she appeared on stage, and it seemed she was doing card tricks and pulling rabbits out of a hat. And she would conjure up spirits that spoke through her. One spirit, K-17, the detective spirit, told us that the lives of the children of the light were worth more than the lives of the children of darkness. Therefore the members of the Summit Lighthouse were allowed to bear arms and kill, if necessary, to protect the light. And we would sing nice little songs like The Battle Hymn of the Republic, while saluting the American flag.

I would wander off from the crowd and go off to town alone, or so I tried, to get away from this mummery and flummery, but there was always some disciple who would follow me and prevent my escape.

Meanwhile, there were other groups in and around Colorado Springs which I found interesting as well: for example, one time I went into a Catholic bookstore called The Prague, and I wanted to steal a book of Catholic doctrine off the bookshelves, but I felt a gentle force preventing me from actually touching the book I wanted. I kept reaching to grab the book, but a power greater than myself prevented me from reaching the fruit of the tree of knowledge. And there were strange graffiti on the walls of Colorado Springs. Some quoted Scripture, saying, "Isaiah 53" or else I would be in a public washroom in a restaurant and graffiti on the wall would read "Jesus revolution." But the people in the Summit Lighthouse didn't believe in Jesus. Elizabeth Prophet claimed the current pope was a communist. At that time, the man in Rome was Paul VI. And there was a street preacher in Colorado Springs. He was a big, burly fellow that looked like a cowboy. He stood on a street corner a block away from the Four Winds, and he would yell out the Gospel at the top of his voice, so you could hear him a hundred feet away. And one time, I saw him handing out pamphlets from door to door in a suburb. He gave me a flyer the size of a business card that read: "When I die, I am going to H____." And you would fill in the blanks. I spooked myself because the word that came to mind, for me, was "Hell." I tried to dismiss that thought as best I could, but I remembered that for years to come. In the library, I found a Bible sitting on a stand, and I read the entire Book of Revelations, and it made no sense to me. And armies were marching in

the night, Caesar was on the move, crossing the Rubicon, into a strange new land.

After a while, all the chandeliers and chants, these unnatural smiles and their eerie diamond-hearted god, the principalities and powers in the air, plus the unreality of life in a town staffing three military bases, the eccentricity of the classical ethos drove me out and out paranoid. Elizabeth gave a talk to her disciples in a study in the Broadmoor mansion, which I attended, and she told them to "beware of French Canadians, because they are all anti-American." Now I was the only French Canadian there, and it seemed that after that, they were allowed to gang up on me.

I was living in a trailer, behind a house belonging to a Chicano family. I paid \$ 5.00 a week rent. Meanwhile, I was working part-time as a busboy in a restaurant. The news reports barked about oil shortages and I read in the paper that armies stationed in Plattsburg had waited for orders to invade Quebec during the October crisis in 1970.

My landlords would come out at night and sit around a campfire, and I would stay inside the little trailer, and listen to them singing hymns like How Great Thou Art. Nevertheless, I got sick, and I would hear air force jets flying over my trailer, and I would actually see a snow of coded messages coming down to me from the sky. And I began being followed by flying saucers. I would try to outsmart them by walking in irrational patterns, which meant I wandered all over the city aimlessly. One night, I had had enough, and tried to break the spell: I had a beer, which was forbidden, and then I hitchhiked. I got a ride in a sports car, and began reciting, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, the great city, and it has become the habitation of every foul bird," and the driver dropped me off pretty soon. Another time, I tried to escape by bus back to Montreal, but everywhere I went, I would see Martians. I knew they were Martians because they had bulging eyes. Finally, I made it to the bus station to catch a bus back home, but the man at the ticket counter had bulging eyes as well. Just when I was safe. Another time, I was alone in a booth in a restaurant, and everything I saw turned into technicolour, and

suddenly I was in the Disney version of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, while all my friends in Montreal were sitting in the next booth. This is the end of dialectic: they were marching Bozo the clown into a concentration camp.

Eventually, I did take a bus back to Montreal, after spending a year in Colorado Springs, and the first thing my parents did upon seeing me come home was to have me committed to the psych ward of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. And I would mumble my decrees when no one was looking, when the lights were low at night, when everything looked plastic and surreal, when no one suspected I was one of THEM. I was Bozo the clown.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Price of Illumination

"Have you seen what happened to Smitty?"

"Ya, I know, it's awful, isn't it?"

"He came down to the coffee shop a couple of days ago. He had a day pass from the hospital, and he couldn't laugh or smile. His face looked like it was made of cement."

"Yes, the little known wonders of modern technology..."

"Christ, those pills he takes must be painful. Did you notice how he twitches? And his legs couldn't sit still. He's constantly shuffling."

"Yes, yes, the joy of being a member of the psychiatric community..."

"By the way, did you understand what he was talking about? What the hell was that all about? The Ascended Masters?"

"I think Smitty is one of the Descended Masters..."

My friends would look at me with concern in their eyes. I would freak out every time someone cracked a joke, because I couldn't tell whether or not they were laughing at me. Someone would say a dirty word, and something would screech in my brain. I just wanted to have a good old time, like I used to, and here I was, frozen from the shoulders up on largactyl and other medication. My fingers felt as though my nerves were crawling out of my skin. My brain felt like glue. I couldn't think, except that I heard voices chattering constantly in my head, speaking so fast that I couldn't decipher what language they were speaking, and if it was French or English, what the codes meant. I was sure these voices which sounded like someone else thinking inside my brain were projections from the Dark Force. My only hope was to keep mumbling my decrees

to Mighty Astrea, the Count of St. Germain and the Lords of Karma. There was no relief in sight, and I was not in the realm of the miraculous at all.

There were, however, some people who extended a hand to me; my mother's friend Lisette Lichtarge would invite me to her house on Patricia Avenue for a coffee, and would tell me how much my parents loved me. She tried to comfort me. She told me that my parents would have lived in a cave, if they had to, out of love for me. And I loved Lisette. She seemed to believe in me. Meanwhile, I was very impressed by the fact that her husband had been in the French resistance during the War. They had both been in concentration camps, but never discussed it. Lisette would invite me over and discuss the books she was reading about the condition of the poor blacks in the Deep South. And she gave me the spirit not to succumb to prejudice. She told me it was a constant battle to overcome the fears and hatred that led to racism. But she said to me she thought that heaven was empty, and there was no God out there. My mother was a friend of hers, and they had mutual respect for each other.

In the spring of 1974, they let me out of the psychiatric ward and I started working as a busboy at a restaurant in downtown Montreal called Club 400. I only managed to keep the job for six months, with the help of a therapist called Barbara Aberman. She was an occupational therapist at the Queen E, and I would meet her twice a week after hours, and I really do believe she cared for me. The only thing that bothered me was that she looked so goddamn happy all the time. She was a loving soul, and she always smiled. I was attracted to her, and I was in agony, every time we had a session of therapy, because I kept repressing my sexuality. The job at the restaurant was excruciating. I would have managed if it weren't for the medication. Business executives and secretaries and lawyers ate there at lunchtime, and as I was bussing the tables, walking between the customers, picking up their leftover vegetables and steaks, I could hear the voices from the Dark Force chattering away in my brain, and I had no way of turning off the radio, and I imagined that the customers in the restaurant were staring at my

backside, and I would blush every time I saw a pretty woman. I hated wearing a uniform with a little bowtie, and my hair was too short.

My only solace was to meet Serge Mainville after hours to go for a bottle of wine at a movie theater or in the park. I had met Serge in another mental hospital years before, and he was another one of the rascals I loved. He was a sadist, and we would be riding in a crowded metro car, and he would say, out loud, in French so everyone could hear it, "If Stanfield becomes Prime Minister, everyone's going to wear shorts in Quebec. Do you know what I would like to do to Trudeau? I would stab him in the back, and the blood would flowwww, and then I would throw him on the tracks of the metro." Serge had little weasel eyes and he was an acidhead. He lived in a room in a boarding house in a poor section of Verdun, and one night we smoked a joint in his room, and he began waving a butcher knife in my face, saying, "Can you imagine the headlines in the newspaper to-morrow? They are going to say that a young man was found carved up in a boarding house in Verdun." And Serge loved torturing me like this. He worked as a shoeshine boy at a barbershop near Club 400. One time, we were walking past another barbershop, and there was a man getting a haircut; Serge exclaimed, "See that man? He is a lousy German!" I replied that no, he was probably English. So Serge ranted, "That's even worse. English men have pointy noses and hair on their bellies!" I don't know, I thought he was a funny guy. But he scared the wits out of me, because of the medication.

And I would drop in on Dave McKenna, Mary Hunter, Dave Winchester and Gerry Mickie, who all lived together in a house on Grand, in NDG. They were just enjoying life, and I desperately wanted to have a good time, but as I mentioned, I couldn't laugh. I was in constant pain. I was living at my parents' place, and I was trying to be spiritual. My friends were not inhibited people, and they would joke around sociably, and I was living in a reign of terror. Sometimes I would forget to take my medication on time, and the streets would be earthquaked, cracking right before my very eyes, and I would see gargoyles on top of houses. The Summit Lighthouse taught that over each city there was a thought form of a beast that made people in that city act like animals. And I lived

in extreme fear. My feelings were all bottled up somewhere inside my chest, and I couldn't hear them anymore. My mind was running loose on its own, and the thoughts in my head were not even my own. I was surrounded by spiritual darkness, I thought, and sometimes when I was at the hospital waiting room, waiting for my appointment, I believed the nurses were giving me a soul transplant, injecting new plastic energy into my heart to keep me frozen solid. And all I wanted to do was to have fun.

I did get a lucky break around August that year. I had lost my job at the restaurant because I had dropped a pile of dishes on the floor, but I landed a translation contract with an agency in Old Montreal. I earned around \$ 1,500 in about three weeks, and it was just a matter of time until I got paid. I was saving up to attend Summit University, in Santa Barbara. I wanted to return to the war zone and be a chela again. I wanted magic powers so that I could heal people.

One afternoon, that summer, I was at my mother's house in NDG, and we were standing looking out the window. A man rode by on a bicycle. My mother told me, in French, "Do you see that man, Robert? He had a motorcycle accident last year, and at first, he couldn't walk. First we saw him going down this street in a wheelchair. Then we saw him walking with crutches. He taught himself how to walk all over again. Then he walked without the crutches, and now, you can see he is riding a bicycle. If he can do it, so can you." And I learned right there and then about courage.

That fall, around November, I got paid by the translation agency, and the next session at Summit University was beginning around Christmas. One evening, a Catholic priest called Father Toni came to visit my parents, and they showed him my literature from the Summit, and he merely wrote it off, saying it was diabolical. It didn't spook him, he just thought it was banal. And I met another priest called Father Walsh, who came to visit, and I was in a state of constant suffering, but he just waved his royal hand and said to me to my face, "I guess you're just one of

those superficial souls." And that burned me up inside, but I couldn't express my anger.

In group therapy, at the hospital, all the patients would be attacking me verbally, sitting in a circle, and I wouldn't respond. And the psychiatrist, who looked like Freud, would ask me, "Mr. Smith, why don't you stand up for yourself?" And when I had enough of this hen-pecking party, I merely stood up. I stood there not talking, not moving, while the psychiatrist analyzed my behaviour and explained to the others what I was doing: "See, Mr. Smith is standing up for himself, by standing up. I see. Mr. Smith is making a little joke here, aren't you, Mr. Smith?" And I thought it was beneath me to answer. I normally just came and went, like a spook. Somewhere, there was a storm raging, in the North Pole.

I finally did go back to the Summit, and I took a train all the way around the South, through New Mexico and up the West Coast, all the way up to Santa Barbara, which is about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. I was enthused. I was on the road again.

When I arrived at Summit University in Santa Barbara, total confusion reigned. Munroe had assigned rooms in the residence to the wrong people, and people had to change rooms, and everyone was schlepping luggage around, and the managers of the university were yelling out authoritarian orders to the chelas, and all heaven was breaking loose. Finally, I was assigned a room with a couple of men I didn't know and didn't want to know. We had one conversation in three months, and they were telling me that not everyone was created equal. They were adamant about that. So I wrote off these guys and I concentrated on my studies.

The first lecture consisted in a fellow called George asking us how many of us believed that the Bible was literally true, and would they raise their hands. George went on to attempt to disprove the Bible and Christianity altogether. Suddenly, a light went on in the back of my mind, and it was flashing: WARNING, WARNING. I hadn't been this alert in many months.

The teachings we were supposed to receive at this university were going to enable us to do miracles, I was told, but I was disappointed. Mrs. Prophet was there, she told us incredible things, such as the fact that the Lords of Karma had judged Hollywood, because in the film Brother Sun, Sister Moon, an actor had depicted an Ascended Master, St. Francis of Assisi, naked. She told us that at the sub-atomic level, electrons were chanting decrees. She told us that if we had ever had oral sex, we could never become Ascended Masters. She told us that when she saw the State Patrol on the highways, she thought they looked like angels. She also told us that flying saucers from the Dark Force were spying on us constantly, because we were children of the light. On a Sunday afternoon, I asked Munroe, "Where are those flying saucers we were told about?" He answered with the absolute firmness of conviction that they were hiding behind the clouds. So I looked around at the California sky, and there was not a cloud in sight. I was having my doubts about all the teachings. And I was still in pain.

Finally, one evening, it was someone's birthday, and all the disciples were hanging around, drinking fruit juice, and I looked around the room, and no one was laughing. There was no joy. No one smiled; no one had fun. I hadn't had fun in ages, and these people looked all caked up like mummies. All I wanted to do was to go back home and perhaps go back in time to the days when I could have a beer and tell a few jokes. The weather was great, it was seventy degrees Fahrenheit in January, and there were a few interesting moments, like doing Tai Chi on the beach, with the surf splashing on the reefs, on a hot day, but even then, no one was enjoying himself. Even Elizabeth Clare Prophet's son, who was around ten, looked old and laid back. And some of the teachings were preposterous, like placing a tape recorder with tapes of Elizabeth's lectures under the children's pillows at night to teach them. And we were taught that at night we wandered off through the astral plane to Ascended Master retreats in the Himalayas and Luxor, in Egypt. I didn't remember going anywhere in my sleep.

We were not allowed to leave the group or wander off from the residence. Nevertheless, one night, I was feeling lonely, and I walked

about a half a mile away to stand on top of a cliff by the side of the ocean. The moon was drifting in and out of windy clouds, there was a cool breeze coming from the ocean, and it was totally dark, apart from the lunar light, and I stood there at midnight, for a long time, with longing in my heart, longing for who knows what, but listening to the waves crashing on the reefs below, and the thought came to my heart, "The ocean has been doing its thing for a long time," and the concept of eternity occurred to me, in the dark, while I was alone, right there and then, the wind blowing through my hair, and I walked back transformed to the residence. When I got back to our room, I didn't make a noise, but I hid under the blankets to pray. I didn't want to pray to Jesus, because I knew there was a false Jesus who was an Ascended Master, and there were a lot of false Jesuses, so I whispered, so no one else could hear me, "Mary, help me."

CHAPTER SIX

Piercing the Heart

Three weeks later found me listening to a conference delivered by Elizabeth Prophet at the Freemason Temple in San Francisco: this was in March 1975, and I was twenty-six years old. The usual séance was going on, when there was a break. I looked out the front door, and there were hippies out on the street, carrying picket signs about Jesus and boycotting grapes. I thought that was a pleasant relief, after the stern disciples inside the Summit premises. I figured I would go out and talk to the hippies; I stepped out and one of them approached me on the front steps, asking me, "Do you believe John the Baptist is the reincarnation of Elijah?" Now, we had been taught by the Summit that this was the case, but this longhaired guy whipped out a Bible and showed me, in John chapter one, the passage where the Pharisees ask John if he is Elijah, and he replies, "I am not." Suddenly, the words flashed across my mind, like lightning, "The word of God is the truth," but I didn't say anything.

A beautiful young hippie girl, whom I never would have kicked out of bed, wearing a brown-rice ankle-length dress, came on to me extremely forcefully, pouring love at me, attacking my heart chakra, cutting at my heart like a knife, and yelling at me, "But God loves you! God loves you!" I retreated, because I had never experienced anything so intense. I asked her, "Then why is there so much suffering in the world?" She replied, desperately, "I don't know, but that's just the way it is." And I asked her, again, pleading, "Why does He want blood atonement for sin?" And she just answered, "I don't know, we just have to accept it." I guess I respected her honesty.

By this time, I had withdrawn inside the Freemason Temple, and out of nowhere, Munroe popped up, his eyes shifting from right to left and left to right, "Uh, Robert, you don't have to preach to those people, they are already saved." I thought, that's funny; I'm not saved... And his eyes

kept shifting back and forth, as though he was lying. But by now, I was in a state of total waking, a state of heightened awareness. Elizabeth had resumed her conference, and was speaking through the P.A. system. I looked around the hall. All the disciples were sitting there, with their eyes closed and their hands resting cupped on their laps, fidgeting, fidgeting, and suddenly something told me they didn't have peace of mind, because their consciences were not at ease. And I assumed more: I listened to the spirit speaking to us through the voice of the medium, Elizabeth, and I discerned that it was a lying, deceitful spirit. This whole séance was false, and I had to get out of there. I looked back outside the front door at the hippies, and they were jumping up and down, whooping for joy about Jesus, singing songs and celebrating, and I told myself, "I want some of that joy!"

At the first chance I got, I left the building and took off with the Christians. The young girl I was attracted to led me to their car, and we all left together. Just as the car was pulling out, I knew I was breaking the rules, because we weren't allowed to leave the premises, especially with non-chelas, and Munroe came to the window of the car, and it was night. I told him, firmly, "I am leaving with them." And we took off. The lady drove around the corner and said some things to me that I didn't understand. Afterwards she told me I had just been born again.

I was getting terribly confused and paranoid. I didn't have my pills with me, and I was shaking all over. I was already going through withdrawal from my medication. My clothes, my passport, all my belongings were with the people in the Summit, but I was leaving everything behind. We drove through San Francisco to Berkeley, to the brothers' house.

When we got there, the house was full of hippies, men with long hair and big beards, girls wearing ankle-length dresses and children. There were a few of them in this disorderly house, sitting around the table and joking. One deranged looking fellow approached me and started telling me about a computer called the Beast of Brussels which contained data about everyone on Earth and that Abraham almost sacrificed his son on a mountain forty miles from the Mount of Olives, where Jesus got

crucified, and forty was the number of years that the Jews wandered through the desert. I wondered what I was getting into, and I thought this was psychotic. Another fellow came and distracted the first sick guy and told him to leave me alone. Then they invited me to sleep there, and this was very strange. Here I was three thousand miles from home, in a city where I didn't know anybody, taking off on a new adventure with total strangers.

The following morning, Sunday, they drove me to a church in Berkeley called Resurrection City, alias Berkeley Community Church, and there I found someone I knew. There was Stan Petrowski, who used to be a disciple of Elizabeth Clare Prophet. I knew him from years ago in the Summit, and I asked him what he was doing here. He was blonde, with a growth of beard and buckteeth, and he grinned at me and exclaimed, "Praise the Lord!" I didn't feel comfortable at all. The church service was just finishing, and there were about a hundred or so hippies milling about, discussing and praying and chatting. The church looked like a regular church, in a fairly modern building. It was Sunday morning, and the sun was out. Right away, Stanley got together with a few of the brothers and they laid hands on me, placing their hands on my shoulders, and they said a brief prayer. I didn't understand, and I was curious. What was I doing here, I wondered. Curiouser and curiouser, said Alice.

I spent that day with Stan. He drove me to meet Sister Vail. That's what he called her, "Sister Vail." Everybody was brother this and sister that. It was all brother-brother. We approached a three-story house in Berkeley with a huge palm tree on the front lawn, and we entered. There in the kitchen, wearing an ankle-length Indian dress was a pretty tall, skinny lady built like Olive Oyl, and she was washing the dishes. Stan introduced me, and she exclaimed, in a high-pitched, squeaky voice, "Oh, praise the Lord! Oh, bless you, brother Bob! Did you know you're a really blessed brother, brother Bob?" And then she proceeded to tell me that she had had a vision of George Harrison repenting at the feet of Jesus. I told myself, "This woman is really nuts..." And when Vail was finished with me, Stan gave me the lowdown about the Summit

Lighthouse. He knew. He told me, with all the authority of the Bible behind him, "MARK PROPHET IS PRESENTLY BURNING IN HELL!" He knew. Stanley knew. I was just overwhelmed by all this novelty and nonsense. That afternoon, Stan took me out for a drive in their Volkswagen Jetta, and he told me, once again without any doubt whatsoever, "JESUS CHRIST IS GOD." And once again, Stan knew. He laid it on me, and I was impressed. I didn't know what to think.

One of the first things we did was to find me a bed to sleep on at the East Bay Prayer Center, which was run by a man called Howard Cook. It was another big house on Telegraph Avenue, but rather in Oakland, and not in Berkeley. That was where I was going to live. They provided me with clothes to wear, and everyone seemed to like me, because they called me "Brother Bob." The people were friendlier than in the Summit, but I was still on frozen hydraulic mode, I still couldn't laugh or tell a joke. My emotions were still all bottled up inside. I was off my medication, but I was not rid of side effects yet. I wasn't used to being around natural people, after years with the robots in the Summit.

The following Tuesday night, there was a Night of Miracles service, at Resurrection City, and Stan and Vail Hamilton brought me there. I was sitting in the back of the church, and I didn't want to be there. There was a preacher at the pulpit called Mario Murillo, a young Chicano man with long, flowing hair and tight jeans, and all I can remember from that sermon was that he claimed that marriage was an institution calling for total unselfishness, and if you put two selfish people together, you were looking for a disaster. I was sitting in my pew, feeling like a bozo, because Christianity was everything I was opposed to all my life, and here I was in a Christian church.

At the end of the sermon, there was an altar call. The preacher called out that if anyone had an affliction, to come forward to the front of the church and they would be healed. And I don't know what got into me, but I marched up the aisle to the front, hating this, hating every minute of it, embarrassed to be in a Christian church, because I was a communist, and I told the lady at the altar that I had a headache. Then I

told her I had been on medication. Right away, the preacher drew me up on to the stage, and told me I didn't have to take my medication anymore, ever again. And he backed up from me, and the whole congregation could see me up on stage, and he told me to close my eyes and lift up my right hand, he wouldn't even touch me. I did this, and I suddenly felt a power come over me. It was like being drenched in a strange liquid all the way down to my legs. I could feel some kind of spiritual energy tinkling at my nerve ends. And Mario Murillo exclaimed, "The Holy Spirit is all over this boy." And the audience applauded. I felt better, and I stayed off my medication from then onwards.

That night, we drove back to the East Bay Prayer Center, and I quickly hid under my blankets in bed, because I kept entertaining homosexual fantasies about Mario Murillo, strutting around on stage in his tight pants, with his buns showing. I hid from my own thoughts, and I was afraid.

Now, there were strange spiritual phenomena going on in those days of revival in Berkeley. For one thing, all the fundamentalists were speaking in tongues, which sounded like gibberish, like nonsense coming out of people's mouths. Other people could interpret these messages, if that makes sense. All this was very Biblical. They had chapters and verses to justify everything they did, and they quoted Scripture at each other all day long. They took the Bible literally, which meant they believed that every comma in the book had been inspired by God. And they even had a verse that said that everything in the Bible is true. And they would give each other "words of knowledge," meaning they would quote a verse to another brother or sister, and it was supposedly God speaking to them. It was their own personal message to that brother, coming straight from God. And they would open the Book at random and whatever verse they opened to would be "quickened to them," meaning it was God's special message to them personally. So this meant the world had been created 6,000 years ago and that the theory of evolution was a Satanic lie. This meant they sent their children to special schools that didn't teach about science. Everything outside the Christian community was of the devil.

And so on. So from the Summit to the born-again Christians, I was jumping from the frying pan to the fire.

All the brothers could speak in tongues but me. So Stan told me one afternoon to pray for the gift of tongues. I said a few words, and Stan responded enthusiastically, "God heard that prayer, Brother Bob; now just believe you have received the answer to your prayer." And that evening, there was another Night of Miracles service, and this time it was held in a gym on Berkeley University campus. There were maybe three hundred longhaired people there, and at the end of the sermon, Mario Murillo called out, in a loud voice, "All those who want to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, come forward!!" So I watched some people on the stage looking like they were getting electrocuted, going through bizarre contortions and twisting around slowly, with their hands gyrating. I thought this was weird, but still, I went forward. I stood there for five minutes, and didn't feel a thing, except an electric tingle in my knees. It felt ticklish, and nothing was happening. Then Stanley and another brother called me over, a few feet over, and Stan hollered, "Bob, come over here." And they laid hands on me, placing their hands on their shoulders, and they started speaking in tongues in an otherworldly language, talking gobbledygook, and Stan said to me, firmly, "Just lift up your hands and worship Jesus, Bob. Let the utterance come." Then they went back to yelling very intensely in a foreign language, and asking God in English to fill me with the Holy Spirit. By this time, I had my hands lifted up, and I was whispering, "Jesus I worship you, Jesus I worship you," when suddenly, I started gushing with tears. All my bottled up emotions were getting shaken loose, my eyes were blurred because I was weeping, and I started uttering words of nonsense, which just seemed to gush out of my lips. Just then, I had my hands lifted up and something appeared. I saw, above me about a hundred feet in the air, but receding back to infinity, I saw a light, which looked like the sun, except it was a white light, and it didn't have a globe in the center like the sun, and I could tell this light was a consciousness out there looking at my heart and loving me and it was filling my heart with total joy and love. All my life I had felt unloved, but for the first time, I could see this Light, loving me with a love so intense and so powerful that it

made LSD look like an aspirin. And there I was, speaking in tongues, and I began dancing and jumping up and down, staring at this light above me, and I began clapping my hands and whooping for joy. This had been the most intense experience of my life.

Just then, Vail Hamilton came up and exclaimed, in her high, squeaky voice, "You look really high." I answered, "I feel high as a kite!" And she laughed and replied, "I know, I've been there too." And the whole experience lasted about half an hour, and I was pretty exalted. However, that evening, after the whole religious service was over, a bunch of us drove home to the Prayer Center in the back of a van, and I felt slightly shaky. I wasn't sure I belonged with these people, because all these experiences were so new to me.

This wasn't quite what I expected to find when I read Alex's telegram a couple of years previously, but for people who don't analyze things too deeply, this God would do. I didn't know it said in the Bible that the devil could appear as an angel of light. So was this intimacy with God, or the ultimate deception? In any case, my spiritual journey was far from over.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mister America

About three weeks after I had that experience of the light, the people around me started interpreting for me what I had seen. Stan Petrowski, for one, would tell me that there was a conflict with other Protestant Churches, because they didn't believe in the so-called baptism of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the light that I had seen. He told me not to compare myself with Jesus, much less try to identify with him (which I think is the whole point of being a Christian, by the way, to identify with the human Jesus), because all of us are down here, and Jesus is UP THERE. Not only did they claim Jesus was the Son of God, but they built him up into a Superman, the epitome of God's glory, something inaccessible and ineffable.

Mind you, some good came out of the baptism of the Holy Spirit: I started loosening up, experiencing natural emotions, although I didn't have sex at all for nine months afterwards. I wasn't even tempted. Also, it helped to be one of the crowd, to be accepted as one of them, and to live in a community of brothers and sisters under the eldership of Howard Cook.

Now, Howard Cook was crazy. He would give prophecies -- not that that was unusual, because a lot of people prophesied, but he would give himself prophecies. It didn't take long to realize that he had a bad temper, and he would blow up at people. One day, for instance, he blew up at the brothers in the East Bay Prayer Centre, saying we thought we were so spiritual, we thought we were so spiritual, but no one thought of washing the dishes, or mopping the floors. Then an hour later he would repent, and prophesy to himself: "Howard, this is God speaking," he would say to himself, "I want you to repent." Well, you had to be there...

And Sister Vail was writing a book, that actually got published, called TM Wants You. She was a former Transcendental Meditation teacher, and

she and Stan ran the cult department of Berkeley Community Church. They wrote and published articles and books denouncing other forms of spirituality in Berkeley, alias Bezerkeley. There were about a thousand different cults in an area of about ten square miles. There were Buddhists, and Hindus, and Sikhs, and Bahai Churches, not to mention Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the whole alphabet soup of regular Protestant churches. Their representatives would all gather on the agora at Berkeley University campus and take turns and preach. I saw men stand up there and yell at people to repent. And then there was Holy Hubert.

Holy Hubert had the reddest hair, the reddest skin, and the reddest neck of all the street preachers. All his teeth had been knocked out because he used to stand on campus in Berkeley, where the Peace Movement started, and he would holler, "EVERY HOMOSEXUAL ON THIS CAMPUS IS GOING TO BURN IN HELL!! EVERY COMMUNIST ON THIS CAMPUS IS GOING TO BURN IN HELL!!" And he had been doing that for years. The other churches would shake their heads and go, tsk, tsk, because Holy Hubert was giving the cause a bad name; they said he was preaching condemnation. So one day, I walked up to Holy Hubert, and I put my arm around his shoulder and gave him a big hug. He actually started to get mellow with me. He had written and published a book called Bless Your Dirty Heart.

On the other hand, Sister Vail used to claim that Stan Petrowski WAS the Old Testament. We would be driving through Berkeley in Vail's little Volkswagen Jetta, and Stan would see a man walking across the street, minding his own business. And Stan would roll down his window and yell at the man, so the whole intersection could hear him, "YOU'D BETTER REPENT!!" And the man would do a double take and turn and ask, "OF WHAT???" And Stan would yell at him, "OF YOUR HOMOSEXUALITY!!" So there was a little bit of condemnation in our group too, to say the least. Stan would "minister" to people by yelling at them and pointing a finger at them until they would break down and weep. And then he would come up and put his arm around them and administer to them the sweet mercies of Jesus.

I was seeing all these phenomena around me, and I couldn't notice anything was wrong. After a while, I started feeling that I was hypnotized or something. And at that point, Stan would notice that I was starting to have some doubts about the faith, so he would give me a so-called shot in the arm, and prophesy on me. One time for instance, we were sitting on a sofa together talking, when we both started to get the shivers. Then an otherworldly, alien voice came out of his mouth and said to me, "As you have abandoned everything in rebellion, now let go of yourself entirely in me. I am sending you out to be a labourer in the harvest, and I will bless you like great fields of oats and wheat and barley."

So naturally, I assumed it was the Holy Spirit speaking to me through Stanley's voice. The message was so solemn, it sounded right. I don't know if Stan rehearsed that voice when he was in the bathroom or anything, but it sounded authentic. I know that about five years later, he left town, he remarried and lived in Utah or somewhere, and worked in a mine, and he admitted to me that all those prophecies were baloney. But at the time, I really believed in the spirit of prophecy. I was receiving the kind of attention and approval that I had been seeking all along.

Howard would prophesy to me, saying my earthly father had condemned me, but that he (the voice) was my real father, and that in him there was no condemnation. So already, they were starting to separate me from and turn me against my family and friends in Montreal. (They had to isolate me, because that's how cults work.) But at the time, I believed their doctrine. And their doctrine claimed that whoever is not born again is going to burn in hell. So my parents, and my relatives who were all devout Catholics were going to burn in hell, and I had to save them. I had to convict them of their sins and get them to repent. As for my friends, who were not religious, and who were just having a good time, well, by God, they were in trouble.

One of them showed up in Berkeley one summer afternoon. I was walking down Telegraph Avenue, where all the street people sold belts and jewelry along the sidewalks, when I bumped into Harry. He was

looking down at a belt that he was buying, and I recognized him and walked up to him. I said to him, "Harry." He merely looked up at me and exclaimed, to himself, "The Devil himself!!"

And I spent about four days in Berkeley with Harry. He was there to buy LSD for the Satan's Choice, but he told me he was looking into biofeedback machines and books on the occult. Of course, I had to convert him. We had a good time for a couple of days, and we would do silly things like skip across the street. He was driving a little yellow Volkswagen beetle. One day he told me we were going on top of the Berkeley hills, and he was going to offer me the kingdoms of this world. I immediately whipped out my Bible and quoted Jesus at him. Then I felt a vibe come into the car, and he told me the Devil had a contract on my life, and in his pocket he had what it took to implement that contract. I rebuked him in the name of the Lord, wondering what was in his pocket.

Well, we went on top of the hills, and we could see the factories below, the smoke, the pollution, the whole Bay Area, and I said to him, as a joke, "You can have the kingdoms of this world, I don't want them!!" I thought I was being very funny, but I kept needling him to repent and bugging him about my beliefs. Finally, he drove me to his motel room and showed me what he had in his pocket: COCAINE. I said I didn't do drugs anymore, and at that point he said to me, "Now I know you've changed."

He was a funny guy: he was an international drug smuggler and dope dealer, and his front was that he was a black witch, a disciple of Aleister Crowley, who claimed to be the Beast 666. And Howard was worried when he saw me hanging around with Harry. He thought Harry's friend was the Devil himself.

And Howard was very self-righteous. Sometimes it was totally absurd. One day, he told me there was a tavern next to the East Bay Prayer Centre. And just out of the blue, he laid hands on the walls of the tavern, and said, "I claim this building for God." And didn't the owner of the tavern die just the next day? Howard wondered, "What have I done?"

Howard explained to me that he had worked in advertising, and that when he first was born again, he offered God to make a whole bunch of money for him, and God told him, and I quote, "Howard, I don't want your money, I want you." And that's the way it was with Howard: God spoke to him, and you can't argue with that.

But I did argue with him a lot. I was still a communist, and Howard was still a Right-winger, and we would have fierce arguments about the dialectic. One night, after a long bout, his parting shot was that only in America could a guy like Richard get out of jail and open his own business. Now Richard Bradley had done time for manufacturing and selling drugs. He owned a ceramics factory, and I worked there for three and a half months, but all Richard paid me was fifteen dollars. So much for the repentance and redemption of Richard Bradley. I had discovered the essence of American capitalism.

One night, I was lonely. I hadn't heard French spoken in several months, so I prayed to meet someone who spoke French. And the next day, at noon or so, up by Berkeley campus, I met a guy called Yves Alarie, who was hitch-hiking through the United States, and he came from Montreal, and he was searching for God, so I invited him to live with us at the East Bay Prayer Centre. And I had someone to speak French with. Yves had long hair down to his bum and a scratch of beard, and we became friends.

One afternoon, Stan took me out to the woods in Vail's car, and we walked out into the wilderness, and he sat down on a rock and said, "Bob, preach to me." He meant, preach to me. So I started improvising a sermon, all about Jesus. And after fifteen minutes of this, Stan jumped up and exclaimed, "Bob that's it, you've got the gift! You're a street preacher!"

So a few days later, I walked down to the end of Telegraph Avenue, in Oakland, which had the headquarters of the Black Panthers, which had a high Black Moslem population, which was the ghetto with the highest

murder rate per capita in the USA, and I sat by the traffic island, and I had stage fright. So I pulled out my Bible and read Isaiah 61 to myself, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he hath anointed me to bring news to the brokenhearted, to comfort those that mourn and to set the captives free." And I mustered up my courage and stood on the street corner and started to preach about Jesus at the top of my lungs, and the more I preached, the more I felt inspired, until after about half an hour, a black guy stood beside me on the traffic island and pulled a knife on me. Meanwhile, down on the sidewalk, by the bus stop, a white man wearing sunglasses had his hand raised towards me and was speaking in tongues. And the black guy was in a rage, he was yelling at me, "STOP PREACHIN' MOTHAFUCKA, STOP PREACHIN' OR YOU GONNA DIE!!" And I kept on preaching. He got closer to me. I answered him with a bare whisper, "I am not going to hurt you. Now go home." And he made a lunge at me with the blade, and I blocked his arm. He said, "What's that?" And I answered that I knew martial arts. So he ran. I bluffed him and it worked. He ran as fast as he could.

Then I turned to the man on the sidewalk, and he told me that his name was Ishmael Villalobos, and he said he was Puerto Rican. Ishmael was also a street preacher, and we became partners. He carried a metal bullhorn which carried his voice for about three hundred yards, and he would stand on corners and belt out his version of the Gospel, yelling, "YA BETTER GET RIGHT WIT GOD, YA MIGHT BE DEAD TONIGHT!! YA NEVER KNOW, A HELICOPTER MAY FALL OUTA DA SKY AND FALL ON YER HEAD. YA BETTER GET RIGHT WIT GOD." Now the bullhorn gave his already raspy voice a metallic hue. So the message was harsh. Ishmael called street preaching being on the front lines for Jesus. Some people had an easy Jesus, but he was fighting a war against the Devil. So we preached together for several months, and we wandered up and down the streets of San Francisco, and sometimes we got in trouble. Sometimes we would offend people and they would chase us away. One time, however, we were in an alley in San Francisco, and Ishmael saw an old wino, an old bum, and he preached to him a superb message of mercy and compassion. He said to him, with the bullhorn, but at a low volume, that maybe society had rejected this old man, but in God's

eyes, he was precious. And the old wino wandered off but first said to Ishmael, "Thanks buddy, I needed that."

And Howard practiced the same kind of tough love. One time I picked up a junkie and took him home to the Prayer Centre. I bought the guy a coffee in a restaurant and he told me he was a published poet. I took him home and he lay down on one of the beds and took his boots off. So Howard comes downstairs and chases the guy out of our house. He yells at the guy that he's living by Satan's rules and if he wants to find God he has to live by God's rules and to get his fanny out of here now. And the poor old guy wandered off, a beaten, broken shadow of a person, back to the streets. Then Howard took me upstairs and said to me, "Bob, you thought I was hard on that guy. You think I am a hard-nosed guy. The fact is that we can't let junkies in here, because soon all the junkies in Oakland will be moving in here. Well, I have had guys dying in my arms."

And another time, I was angry with someone, and Howard told me to read the Psalm where the refrain is, "For his mercy endureth forever." And he asked me to count how many times it said that, "For his mercy endureth forever." And it said it one hundred and sixteen times. And I was still psychic, and another time, I could see a huge golden aura around Howard's head as he told me about God's mercy.

My problem was that I became a fanatic. I had been off my medication for a few months and I started to believe God was angry. It was like the bumper sticker I saw that read: "Jesus is coming back, and boy is he pissed." I projected my own anger on God. I thought the Holy Spirit was the power of my own anger. And as I preached, I started to acquire an ego about being a street preacher. Ishmael would tell me, "Bob some day you're going to be as big as Billy Graham." And I started being a character around Berkeley. I was making the scene. I wrote poetry and was complimented about my poetry, even though it was bad, and it went to my head. One night we were discussing about painting the Prayer Centre building, and Howard said we could wake up at eight o'clock. I cut in that we should wake up at SEVEN O'CLOCK. And Howard said sarcastically that Bob could paint a poem on the ceiling, all by himself. I

didn't quite know how to take that. I was off my medication, and the sky was the limit.

We went to church about three days a week, and I prayed about two or three hours every day. I would lie down with my face on the floor and pray as emotionally as I could. The more emotional the prayer was, the better. We had prayer sessions, and we would bring drunks who were in the middle of a blackout into our living room and lay hands on them and speak in tongues, and they would wake up in a start, wondering where they were. We would have sessions where the elders, like Scott Crawford, and Sister Beth, and Howard Cook, and Stan Petrowski would lay hands on us and we would get slain in the spirit, meaning we would fall over like flies and lie on the floor paralyzed and stunned by the Spirit, while the others spoke in tongues, and it was weird and otherworldly, and had nothing to do with normal everyday reality. I never read a newspaper, listened to the news, watched television, or listened to the radio. I was living in a pipe dream. In heaven with Jesus and the saints. And there were Night of Miracles services at the church or in the gym at Berkeley campus, and the preacher, Mario Murillo, who was no mean super star in his own eyes, would supposedly heal the sick and give sight to the blind, and we would belt out those goddawful Protestant hymns like How Great Thou Art. And there were lots of fanatics there, as well as altar calls and plenty of conversions.

I met people who claimed they had been healed miraculously at Kathrine Kulman meetings, and I guess it was psychosomatic illness they were cured of, but they claimed these were miracles from God.

And then there was all the talk about the coming persecution and the end of the world. The days were coming when the Antichrist would rule the world and there would be a one-world government, and the Christians would be persecuted, and then there was supposed to be the Rapture, when Christ would come back, out of the skies, and take his elect home to heaven. And busses and airplanes were going to crash because some drivers and pilots were Christians, and they were going to vanish from their posts and go and meet the Lord in the air. And there

were mentally ill people like Erik Buderowski, who would yell at you that every word in the Bible was true, and that you had to believe that.

So basically, I had jumped from the frying pan to the fire, from the occult madness of the Summit Lighthouse to the Biblical frenzy of the born-again Christians. What was a constant was the California sunshine, which shone a bit too bright on some brains, I guess. And the image I had of America was a bunch of cowboys sitting around a campfire roasting wieners and singing Gospel hymns. You might say it was redneck religion, grand narratives, concepts of the Big Picture interpreted by idiots, instant religion, like you have instant coffee. If you don't like what you see on the air, you flip the channel. You too could be a mystic and a preacher. Every man was taught directly by King Jesus, and the only difference between this type of Christianity and American democracy was that the Ruler could speak to you directly in your mind. Because that was what happened when you heard voices, God was speaking to you personally. So you had marching orders. And this was a lot of fun as long as you were one of the crowd.

At that time I paid no attention to American painters like Jackson Pollock, filmmakers like Andy Warhol or Stanley Kubrick, designers like Buckminster Fuller, musicians like Frank Zappa or John Cage, poets like e.e. cummings or Allen Ginsberg; I was totally unaware of the latest developments in art, criticism, world politics or modern music. The born-again Christians dismissed art as a worldly distraction. All modern values were labeled in one broad sweep as secular humanism. My worldview was becoming increasingly confined and narrow. My Christian friends were busy battling the Antichrist, the other religions around Berkeley. It seemed as though the whole world was in the hands of the devil and only born-again Christians were right with God. What they didn't realize was that their brand of religion was typically American, even though the Bible had been entirely written by Jews two thousand years ago in far-off Palestine. The largely European doctrine had been adjusted and adapted to suit fundamentalists in California, whose brains had been exposed to television and LSD. So in that sense it

was an American version of Christianity. The naivety and enthusiasm was very Yankee. It was every believer's chance to become a big shot.

And I was told I was a blessed brother. I was Brother Bob, and I wrote letters full of condemnation to my family and friends back home, telling them they had better repent. I had the authority and the power. I was the blessed brother, Brother Bob. If you can grasp that.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Columbus' Nemesis

Suddenly, everything around me turned into science fiction, into dream-stuff, into the material dreams are made of, dopamine.

There was a Jewish fellow who lived in the Prayer Centre called George Shumer, and we used to chat a lot. He had an M.A. in Economics, and he was well versed in Western philosophy, which has always been an interest of mine. He came from New York City. So, one afternoon, in the summer of 1975, he invited me for a walk down to the lake in Oakland. And we sat in a tree overlooking the water, when he told me something that made everything different: "Did you ever think of the science-fiction dimension of what we are experiencing? We are being guided by an Outer Space Intelligence through remote control, and it speaks to us through telepathy." And a dream floated over us both, swallowing my mind in psychosis.

A little while later, I wanted to return to Canada, because I was in overstay in the United States, and I wanted to be legit. So first Yves returned to Montreal, and then I followed suit a couple of weeks later.

When I walked into my parents' living room in Montreal, everything seemed the same. I sat down in a big sofa chair and waited for my dad to come home from work. As he walked into the living room, he greeted me with a big smile, and I could see he had a gigantic gray aura that filled the room. Really, it was overwhelming.

As time went on, my dad was less than enthused about my conversion to Protestantism. I told him God spoke to me, and he typed out one word on an index card: "HALLUCINATION." And eventually, it got horrible. He told me I was not a Christian, he did not acknowledge that I believed in God or had had any kind of transformation. I started getting delirious and writing weird poems about bloodshed and poison. I went to see my former therapist, Barbara Aberman, and I told her God was speaking to

her right there and then. I mailed her insulting letters of condemnation. I began writing to all my relatives, and things were turning sour.

I got a job at Ben's Delicatessen, and got fired soon afterwards for writing smart-ass Biblical verses on the timesheet. But first, I started really cracking up. I was working as a bartender until 3 :00 o'clock in the morning, and I would see patterns of light flowing around the room. I would feel kundalini rising in the back of my spine, up my neck, and illuminating my crown chakra until I was totally exalted. There was another Christian working there as a dishwasher and one night his machine spilled water all over the floor. So I mopped up the mess, and he told me that only then could he see that I was a Christian. He asked me, "It's one thing to be a born-again Christian, but how do you pay the rent?" And I was off on a tangent. I was going to convert all of Montreal. I pestered the waiters and the cashiers at Ben's, telling them to repent. I finally got fired after three weeks.

But I was totally into mischief. I took my last pay cheque and went out to buy a bullhorn. I was up to no good.

Then I went to city hall and got myself a permit to preach on street corners. I actually got a permit to conduct religious services at Philip's Square, which is right smack in the middle of downtown. Then I started preaching, with my bullhorn. It was loud. I yelled loud. At first, I preached a lot about Jesus and then things got to my head and my head swelled and I started preaching about revolution. I started yelling at the police with my bullhorn. One day, in September, after three days of my preaching, a madman pulled a gun on me and told me to stop preaching. He was standing about fifteen feet off and pointing a German luger at my head. I called his bluff. I kept on preaching. He was not going to shoot me in front of five hundred people. I kept on preaching. And a rush of adrenalin went through my whole body. The madman wandered off, waving his pistol and cursing and swearing. The next day, the fourth day, the police arrested me. They took me down to the station and confiscated my bullhorn. Some businessman from the C.I.L. Building had made a complaint that I was disturbing the peace.

By now I was good and high. I had been off my medication for nine months, and I couldn't handle my family and my friends. I started imagining that cars were angels and moving vans were archangels. I went to visit all my friends and laid trips on them and told them all to repent and they all ridiculed me and told me to get lost. I would tell them to repent and they would answer that they hadn't repented yet. They would write 666 on the back of their hands and tell me that I needed to exorcise my demons, while rolling their eyes. I was being a pest, and they responded in kind.

Finally, the day after the police arrested me, I told my dad that I had to rush back to California. I took an airplane back. I imagined that I was in the Mafia or something and that I could kill people with my will power alone. I was getting sick. I was on a secret mission.

The afternoon I arrived in Oakland, I went to the East Bay Prayer Center, and I was so high I was singing songs like, "Oh it ain't gonna rain no more, no more. It ain't gonna rain no more. How the heck can you wash your neck, it ain't gonna rain no more." And I imagined there was some significance in this. I heard Ishmael say behind my back, "What a shame, and he was just getting born again..." And Howard Cook asked me solemnly why I had come back, and I replied that I wanted to see some airports. His wife Arleen said I was cold. I was raving. I watched Richard Bradley flipping pancakes over a stove and thought he was an extra-terrestrial doing magic. I stayed about three days and then I told Howard I had to return to Montreal. He didn't understand, or maybe he knew I had flipped. He simply agreed and took me to the bus station in Oakland. He looked about eighty-five years old, and he wasn't a day over forty. His skin looked all wrinkled and his hair had turned white overnight.

So I took the bus, and couldn't sleep. Therefore I sang hymns to keep the passengers awake. For three days I was singing hymns on the Greyhound bus and yelling things like, "FROM NOW ON THERE WON'T BE ANY MORE MOVIES EXCEPT ABOUT JESUS CHRIST AND MICKEY

MOUSE." The bus stopped in Utah, and I could see giant luminous crosses hovering over the heads of all the people in the bus station. We took off again, and we were going through the Rocky Mountains, and it began to snow. I thought it was still summertime, and we were in October or November. I just knew we were going through Siberia, and the farms alongside the road were concentration camps where they were frying people in crematoriums. What I saw with my eyes was a movie about farms but my inner eye could see past the movie into Reality, Ultimate Reality.

We changed buses in Denver, Colorado. So I was sitting in the bus station and I asked a couple of North American Natives if they knew where there was a drug store where I could buy some Valium, because I hadn't slept in four days. So they gave me a pill, and they told me never to tell anybody about this, or else I would be laughing all the time. They rolled some dice on the sidewalk and charged me seventy-five cents. Then I got back on the bus.

Within twenty minutes, I was tripping. I guess they had given me LSD and I didn't know it. It was the end of the world, and I was trying to fight the people who were slowing down time to prevent the end of the world from happening. One man took a photograph of a sunset, and I just knew he was stopping time.

Then we got off the bus in Chicago and I ran up to an old lady in a fur coat, with a perm and jewels, who reminded me of my mother, and I yelled at her, "LADY I'VE GOT A CONTRACT ON YOUR LIFE." So the Chicago police arrested me and threw me in the common cell overnight. There the winos kept coming in all evening. I knew the police were the Devil and this was Hell. Time slowed down sufficiently that we were in eternity. And I began threatening the other inmates. In the morning, I was put in a waiting room with other inmates who were all black. I knew these were the Nuremberg Trials after the revolution, and I began pacing back and forth nervously until one black guy socked me in the mouth and I went flying across the room, and I was bleeding. Then one guy jumped on my back and pretended he was humping me doggie-

style. At this point the guard opened the cell door and yelled, "Robert Smith, Fred Matthews, come with me." We were ushered, the guy who had pretended to hump me and myself, through the courtroom and sent to a psychiatric institution.

We arrived in the ward and had to wait on benches. Fred kept yelling, "I AIN'T GOIN' TO CHURCH ANYMORE. WE'S ALL NIGGERS HERE AND GOD'S A NIGGER TOO." And I would try to sound hip too, but I was just ridiculous. We stayed in this ward for about four days. There were a lot of black Americans. Some were nice and some were not so nice. One evening the other patients and I were watching TV and I knew they were using witchcraft to do germ warfare against Canada so I kept talking during the TV show. One guy turned around and punched me in the mouth, and I simply turned back to him and said, "God bless you." All the others wondered what the hell I was into. I was lying in bed, and one very soft-spoken gentle black guy about fifty years old walked through my room to go look out the window and I knew he was God the Father. There was one black kid who had an eye missing and he was very friendly. There was another black kid who kept punching me out every day and I would just laugh. There was a white guy who kept cursing the Holy Spirit at the top of his voice. And he blocked the toilets with toilet paper, and it stank, and he kept yelling and cursing the Holy Spirit, which I believed was the unforgivable sin. Then I was transferred from ward to ward by bus, until I was in another mental hospital altogether.

In this place, I found out that I was accused of being a hit man for the Mafia and that there was bail posted for me. So I phoned my parents. And then I got down on my knees and prayed to God to get me out of there right away. There was a Cuban fellow who kept throwing tables and chairs and brooms at me; there was a soldier in fatigues crawling under the furniture. And I was lost.

My father showed up. He explained to the staff that I was not in the Mafia. I had never been involved in any plot to assassinate Fidel Castro. And I was turned over to his custody. We took a cab out to the airport together. We were flying back home. In the cab, my dad showed me his

shaving kit. He said he had brought his razor with him; he brought it wherever he went. I told myself, "My father is the Godfather. He's going to cut someone's throat." And I blacked out. In the taxi in Chicago on the way to the airport.

When I came to, I was working as a busboy at a French Canadian restaurant in Auteuil, in Laval, north of Montreal.

I was working as a busboy and I was singing Christmas carols on the job.

I had no idea how I had ended up there.

My boss fired me and then asked me what was wrong with me. So I told him I had done a lot of heroin. And I have never done heroin in my life.

The next thing that I remember was being in a country house in Auteuil with Yves Alarie, whom I had met in Bezerkeley. He was living there with a few Christian brothers. I was pounding the floor with a hammer and making a racket. I told Yves I felt nauseous when I thought about test tube babies. I stayed there for a few days; then my friends drove me down to Montreal, where we were to meet my father. I remember sitting in the back seat of the car as we drove down to Montreal, and I knew the car was a tank and we were coming through from Siberia to invade Canada. The streetlights were watching us, because they were conscious. Extraterrestrials could read our minds through the streetlights.

Finally, we met my father, who walked me down to the psych ward of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, where I proceeded to jump over the furniture for a few weeks until they got me to slow down. Down. Down. Down. Back. Home. At last. Home. Home. No more soul transplants. No more brains being sawed in two by chainsaws. No more screams of agony. Home. No more Martians. No more madness divine. Just home. And it was Christmas.

EPILOGUE

Waking Up

Many years have gone by since those days, and I had many other adventures, but now I am getting older, more tired, and I have settled down. A new millennium is starting, and the prophecies about the Second Coming have not all come true yet; instead, unexpected developments have taken place, such as the Islamic revival, the popularity of the feminist movement and the spread of personal computers. There are no more hippies or hippie churches; the born-again Christians are now behind the Republican Party in the United States, and they have only started ravaging the social safety net created under the New Deal by Roosevelt in the 1940s. Also, the September 11th terrorist attacks gave the new Republican administration the perfect excuse to begin dismantling, for security reasons, the edifice of civil liberties contained in and guaranteed by the Constitution. What came of the Revolution is political correctness, which amounts merely to a government program and the agenda of feminist university professors who earn \$ 80,000 a year. The same people are still in power, the people with money, the people who buy and sell weapons, the people who import oil and gas, and many more wars have been fought over the world's oil reserves. People are still dying of hunger, except now there are homeless people in all the major cities of North America. The culture has decayed, and morality is slowly disintegrating. Genetic engineering is preparing to alter our chromosomes. There are still nuclear weapons, but the Cold War is over: today countries like Pakistan and India have the bomb. There are still prisons, and a lot of the people who were Jesus freaks in the seventies have become members of Alcoholics Anonymous in the new millennium. We never did find the leisure society we were promised earlier; most parents don't have time to talk to their children anymore. The world goes on, one generation comes and passes, and another generation replaces it; empires rise and fall like the tide.

As for me, today I have two daughters, I don't go to church, and sometimes I work for the government. My lifestyle is rather boring. I am still not rich. The police don't arrest me anymore for being a hippie. I am turning into my father, and sometimes I find myself believing in law and order because I am a parent. We have turned into the people we used to rebel against. We are now middle-aged, and the only Revolution, the only mystical experience is a memory without substance, and the fact that nowadays, they play Beatles' songs under the form of muzak in the subway stations.

What will be remembered of those days in a hundred years from now? Or two hundred years from now? The answer is what we remember about the first American Revolution, in the days of Benjamin Franklin. And the things we fought for will disappear, and a brave new world will take care of itself. As for us, we will be long gone and forgotten.

Remember that America was founded by anabaptists who were fleeing persecution in Europe and wanted the freedom to live in cults in the New World. When you enter America, prepare to catch the vertigo of this freedom, and watch the madness of its landscape doesn't catch you.

THE MARQUIS DE SADE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE

Do you remember being seventeen years old, and coming of age? Do you remember what prompted you to change from a jock to a joe college and thence, to becoming a bohemian? Somehow, the Church didn't speak to you any longer, your parents didn't seem very hip and the internal politics and dynamics of your family seemed morbid and repressive, didn't they? You argued about labour unions with your dad, and he kept telling you that you were imagining things, and he wondered what they were teaching you in college... You read *Les Fleurs du mal* by Baudelaire, you read the Comte de Lautréamont, and that figures, because you were a literature student. When you first started college, you tried to join a frat, but they rejected you because you wore a goatee and a tiki around your neck. You attended a couple of chug-a-lug parties, watched a couple of frat movies about becoming a successful businessman, and you weren't interested. You cultivated a taste for jazz, and long before you had peers, or friends your own age, you went to clubs like L'Ermitage, on Côte-des-Neiges, like the Black Bottom, on St. Antoine Street, and finally, the Penelope, on Stanley Street, in Montreal, of course.

You were acquiring a sense of identity that lasted through most of your adult life.

When you first moved to Montreal, your father set you up with his cousin Maurice Huot's daughter. Now, Maurice would come to your house and argue that at every session of the United Nations, they should begin with the Lord's Prayer. In other words, he was a bigot. And even when you were sixteen years old, you knew that at the UN there were Muslim countries, and communist countries, and you were kind of embarrassed by your father's cousin. As for the daughter, well, you remember taking her to a Jacques Lussier concert at Place des Arts, and she commented that she only liked the Bach, whereas you liked the jazz, and you remember walking her home to Outremont, across Park Avenue, and she said, with scorn in her voice, that these immigrants

were so vile and stupid and dirty and disgusting. She was a tight-assed little bitch, and her pastime was to sit by candlelight in her bedroom and listen to Bach and read Kierkegaard. Mind you, there is nothing wrong with Bach or Kierkegaard, but when you are sixteen years old, you are expected to have a bit more piss-and-vinegar than that. You would take her out on dates, and sit in the park, in Outremont, and she looked so prissy and uptight that you never even made a pass at her. (I guess you secretly hated her.)

So, to sum up, you were dissatisfied with the father's cousins. You wanted to hoist anchor and leave traditional ways behind.

One night, and it was perhaps in February of 1966, you were sitting in the Bistro on Mountain Street by yourself, having a beer, because that's what macho guys did, they drank hard. (Perhaps you were also a budding drunk, but that's another story.) Anyways, you were sitting there, by the door, when in walked a college buddy, Marcel Carpenter. He was in your English Romantic poetry class at Loyola, and he joined you for a beer, and you two got to talking, and he asked you if you wanted to go to a really neat place nearby.

So, you finish your beer, and you both walk down to a place called The Hawaiian Lounge, on Stanley Street, right beside the Esquire Show Bar. You walk in, and you've been there perhaps ten minutes, when you start noticing something funny, something strange going on. For instance, there is a lady with a platinum-blond wig and a beauty spot on her face, and wearing a fancy white blouse with frills and a crotch-high mini skirt, and she comes up to you with a dirty smile and pinches your cheek. And when she speaks to you, she has a man's voice, a deep, sexy, raspy voice, and she tells you her name is Sugar. And there is something going on here, and you don't know what it is, do you, Mister Jones?

And you look around the room, and it's full of boys dressed up as girls and girls dressed up as boys, and you are a middle-class Catholic kid, and you decide to play it by ear. You sit with Marcel and order a beer, and you watch the floorshow, because there is a huge stage right plop in

the middle of the bar. You watch nervously at first, while a stripper dressed at first as a woman, strips down to a pair of underwear, and oh my god! it's a man, and he starts cracking a whip, and jeez, this is vulgar. You watch a lesbian singer called Carole Berval belt out Otis Redding songs about girlfriends. And there is Alice.

At the next table over, there is a cute young thing with long, curly black hair, and the blackest, darkest, most evil mascara you have ever seen, and she is wearing a micro mini skirt, and she is sitting with a butch that looks like E.G. Robinson, with short black hair greased back, and wearing a man's suit, and smoking a cigar. Anyhow, the girl is called Alice, and she is dancing on stage, and you ask her to dance, and she dances with you, and you speak French together, and you are a bit disappointed that she is so vulgar. Now, your sun is in Virgo, your moon is in Scorpio and your rising sign is in Scorpio, which means you are in love with Alice, the woman in black. Anyways, after a while, Marcel tells you not to dance with her anymore, because her butch lover wants to kill you.

And Marcel keeps going to the other side of the room, and disappearing for half an hour at a time, he goes to the other side of the stage, and meanwhile, someone from over there keeps buying you beer. You ask the waiter who is ordering you free beer, and he says it's someone over there. So what the hell, you don't care, you drink the beer first and figure you'll ask questions later. After all, a free beer is a beer, right?

So this goes on until about one o'clock in the morning, when Marcel tells you he's leaving. And you tell him you're staying behind, and you're going to watch the show by yourself. And the band keeps playing, and you are trying to look hip, and finally, it's three o'clock in the morning, and it's closing time. Last call.

At this point, a big, muscular guy built like a professional boxer comes to your table, and he's wearing a suit, and he says to you, "Come with me." You ask what is going on, and he says your friend sold you to him for fifteen dollars, and you now have to go with him. That goddamn

Marcel. So that's who was buying you free beer from across the stage! So what do you do?

Okay, let's go. You get your winter coat, and you (slowly) walk down the stairs with the boxer, and you (slowly) open the door, and you (slowly) and carefully walk down to the street, and THEN, BY GOD! YOU HEAD FOR THE HILLS, RUNNING AWAY FROM TROUBLE, AND YOU TURN AND YELL AT THE GUY, IN FRENCH, "I'M SORRY, I AM NOT GAY!!" And he doesn't run after you, he just stands there, brokenhearted as his date runs away.

Well, you kept going back to the Hawaiian Lounge, for about six weeks, and buying drinks for Alice, and you phoned the cousin's daughter, and you told her you were leaving her for a lesbian from downtown, and she was shocked. But then Marcel had the kindness to tell you that Alice was NOT in love with you, she was REALLY a prostitute and she was ONLY interested in you because she thought you had money. So what goes around comes around, and you were disappointed, to say the least. You were still a naïve bourgeois kid, and it took some time before you woke up, quite a long time indeed.

BATTLESCARS AND STIGMATA

I am Brantwood Beach, and I remember. I sit in Ottawa East, in the capital of Canada, and it was 1959, the year Fidel took over Cuba. There were radio reports, with static over the airwaves, and this was a new hope. I remember it well.

That spring, a bunch of boys were playing with firecrackers to celebrate the Queen's birthday, in the month of May. There was one boy who grew up to be a doctor, and his brother, who was thirty-eight years later one of the generals involved in the Somalia scandal; another boy became a bus driver, and then there was one Robert Smith. Now, Robert was ten years old, and he had 200 firecrackers in his right hand pocket. Nobody is sure how it happened, but maybe a match touched the firecrackers, maybe it was an accident. But suddenly, as the sun watched, the firecrackers started going off, like machine gun fire, crackling and exploding, one by one, then faster and faster, as the boys watched Robert explode.

There was smoke in the air, and the smell of sulphur, and plenty of weeping and yelling, and the machine gun crepitation of firecrackers going off, as the boys pulled Robert aside and tried to pull down his pants, which were on fire, and everyone was in a panic, and then, and then, good old Jean St-Denis came up to Robert in the middle of this hubbub and hue and cry, and asked Robert, "Smitty, can I have the rest of your firecrackers?" (Now there is a poetic justice, because twenty years later, Jean was trafficking coke in fascist Spain, and got busted and did ten years in jail under Franco's regime.)

I am Brantwood Beach, and I remember. It was the heyday of motorcycle gangs, and there were hardrocks. The cops didn't like them, and the cops used to harass them just for wearing their hair in jelly rolls and riding motorcycles. Robert Smith and his friends used to walk through the bushes and woods down by the beach, and find hardrocks sitting around campfires with their girlfriends and a case of beer or two, and Robert liked the hardrocks; he wanted to grow up to

become one of them. Because all the other grown-ups were phony, they would talk down to Robert and say, with a nasal voice, "Oh hello, little boy, what grade are you in?" And they would pat Robert on the head, whereas the hardrocks, who were seventeen or eighteen years old, would talk to Robert as an equal. They would discuss what was on their minds. It's a bit like what Frank Zappa said, to the effect that if children knew what their parents were up to, they would rise up and kill them in their sleep. And the parents all had short, short hair, and short, short tempers, and they worked for the government plotting fascist plots, or so it seemed. The father of Robert, anyway, would argue against communism, whenever given the chance. And Robert longed for a friend to play ball with him or take him fishing, but dear old dad merely helped Robert memorize his catechism lessons every night, for two hours at a time. And if Robert came home with a report card that gave him a 90 per cent average, but saying Robert came in second of the class, Robert was in deep trouble. For the home was élitist, and the expectations were high.

And I am Brantwood Beach. I remember. I remember the time that Joseph de Bané went down to the beach one night, and left a pile of clothes on the sand and walked down into the water, only to swim a hundred feet upstream, and come back out of the water, thence to hitch-hike to Boston, whence he would phone his grieving father a month later, after the police had dragged the waters for nine days, searching for a drowned corpse. And Robert Smith watched the police dragging the waters, and he pondered all these things in his heart.

Likewise, Robert Smith was in the hospital that summer to get his leg operated on for the firecracker burns, for the scar kept pussing and never healed. It was a kiloid wound, and could have turned into cancer. And one morning, in the hospital, Robert wandered around on his wheelchair, and went to visit one of the boys there, who was about the same age, around twelve. And the boy was weeping, and he asked Robert, "Here, touch my leg, tell me it's still there!!" And the boy was desperate, for a train had run over his leg and his leg had been amputated the night before by the doctors, and Robert didn't know what

to say, so he answered, "Yes, it's still there." And there was no leg there, just crumpled bedsheets on a hospital bed.

And I am Brantwood Beach. The girls in bikinis used to come and neck with their boyfriends on the sand, and Robert Smith would lust a tiny little boy lust and then rush off to confession and tell the priest he found girls pretty. And the priests would sit behind the grate and ask, "How many times, my son?" And Robert found out as an adult that you could tell a priest in a confessional that you had slept with three hookers, robbed a bank, killed an old lady, and as long as you were repentant, the priest would give you the absolution. But if you told the priest something like, "Every time I go to mass, I think of the Spanish Inquisition," the priest would blow a fuse and kick you out of the confessional box.

And at Brantwood Beach, the waters were polluted soon later. In 1959, there was a bit of seaweed, but now the beach is closed down for pollution reasons. I guess if the Cold War wasn't going to destroy the Earth, the pollution would. And Robert Smith said his prayers every night, praying we wouldn't get nuked by the Russians during the night. And it was dark outside, and the nuns warned the students that on May 1st, 1960 it was going to be the end of the world. And they looked pretty silly on the next day and the next day. And the Year 2000 is upon us, and Fidel is still alive and well in Havana, and Robert Smith has a scar on his right thigh. Here, look, can you feel my leg?

DOCTOR FAUSTUS

When I was seventeen years old, the girl I loved got pregnant, and well, she put up the baby for adoption. I always felt as though I was the father of that child, and I felt guilty. And I guess guilt is one step short of fulfillment, because you haven't got what you want, but you regret trying to get it for yourself.

I became a snake.

Now I wander through the alleys, mumbling to myself, looking for a half-empty bottle. I see happy couples wining and dining in expensive restaurants and I envy them. I wish I had the nerve to grab a brick and throw it through the restaurant window. I would smash the window and yell, "LOOK AT ME!!! DON'T YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE FUCKING WITH???" I would run off, cursing and gesticulating, dressed like someone's Dr. Jekyll. And I would pee in my pants out of total fear and desperation.

And do you know what I dread the most? Being harmless.

THE GREAT WHITE HOPE

It was a day on welfare like any other. You wake up whenever you please, because there is nowhere to go. Actually, tomorrow is going to be a special day, it will be cheque day, and you will anxiously wait for the mailman to come by. Right now, the fridge is almost empty: there is half a loaf of bread, a jar of peanut butter, and half a liter of milk left. There are some leftover vegetables and mince meat you could heat up for supper. So today, it is the bottom of the barrel. Oh yes, and there are two beers left in the cupboard, in case company comes over.

Caesar may have been ambitious, and maybe you were too at one time. When you were fifteen years old, you hoped to become a prizefighter, but you fractured your wrist in a fight, and your hopes were washed down the drain. I guess that was when you started to drink.

From the very first time you got drunk, you knew that was the magic elixir, the ingredient that made you whole. All your life you had been a dreamer, maladjusted, a tad aggressive, but now that you had that drink in you, you were all right. And you tried for forty years to recapture that moment. No use. Every time you had one drink, there was no predicting where you would end up, how much you would drink, what drugs you would inject, or in whose bed you would wake up.

I remember, one time it was a sunny day in August, and you were walking down the street enjoying the summer. It occurred to you, let's go for a beer at the Bodega, a bar where you drank. You were going to have just two beers and then stop. Well, you had just one beer, and then you came to ten hours later, at 9:30 at night, twenty- five miles away, in some strange girl's bed, in a country house, next to a cemetery. No idea how you got there. And when you came home, the next day, there were empty beer bottles in your apartment downtown.

So with you, the drinking was like playing Russian roulette. Other times, you could have \$ 800 in your pocket, and you would have just one beer. And stop. There was no predicting what would happen.

This made it difficult to find work. You would get the odd contract house painting, and you would hope no one would report you to the welfare office. When you did find work under the table, it was party time. All your disheveled, drunken friends would show up for a free beer. And they would total your house. It was disgusting the following morning.

And of course, since you drank this way, there was no woman who would stick around long enough to raise a family. Yet you had a son, who must be, how old would he be now? Fifteen maybe? She had left town as soon as she got pregnant. She was somewhere by the ocean, out of the big city, and she had mailed you a photograph of your kid once when he was eight years old. It was his birthday party, and he was wearing a party hat and blowing out a candle on his birthday cake. There were other children you didn't know.

Every now and then, some drunken woman would spend the night, but even these one-night stands were getting to be few and far apart. And the women got older and dirtier, smellier and more drunken every time. It was nothing to hope for, to write home about, was it?

So tomorrow will be cheque day. And today is a spring day. No, you won't shave today. Should you take a bath? It is too cold in this apartment, and besides there is never enough hot water. Damn, there goes a cockroach. You've got to tell the landlord. Again. He never does anything anyways.

Another day on welfare. Last night, you were watching television, on your old black and white television set, and the show was Lives of the Rich and Famous. Ya. The rich and famous. One guy was a baron, and he lived in a thirty-six-room mansion, and he had a chauffeur who drove him around in a Rolls Royce. Ya. The rich and famous. Maybe there will be a revolution some day. You used to believe that when you were in your thirties, but now you don't think it will ever happen. And after that show, there was a T.V. preacher, telling us to believe in Jesus

and send him our money. Ya. Pie in the sky. Meanwhile, the cops just killed the guy down the hall. He was a dealer. He was your dealer. He used to sell you a gram whenever you got one of those house-painting contracts. Where will you find such a good dealer again?

You would like to hear the news on the radio, but the stupid thing is broken. Fuck me, another day on welfare. Is there a messiah out there?

RELEASE UNTO US BARABBAS

And lo, it came to pass that I had been off my medication for a season, and half a season, and I remembered something the wise man Nietzsche had once said, to wit that in every generation, and in every country, the Pharisees always crucify Christ. And it behooved me to suffer in similar fashion, for the atonement of the sins of my countrymen and of the whole known world. For I had chosen to partake of the cross.

In that time, I had gone up to the town of Ottawa to visit my parents, while in a fine frenzy, and I found them quite perturbed to see me in such a state. Now, my mother and father decided to watch television that afternoon, and being found psychotic and waxing visionary, it occurred to me that the T.V. set was an oracle, and could mirror the true likeness of things in the room; and lo, it revealed to me that my mother's real name was Henrietta White, and that she and my father were really German refugees, of the Nazi variety, posing as French Canadians. And lo, I came to understand that I was really adopted, and had to denounce these people to the Soviet authorities, for the Soviets had taken over the land shortly before. So I wrote a letter that evening to the Soviet embassy, denouncing my parents as Nazis. By that time, my father was exasperated, and gave me the sum of four hundred dollars, and told me to get out of their lives. And lo, I took the sum of monies and dropped my letter into a mailbox just outside the building where my parents lived. And I took a taxi to the bus station. On the way there, conscience made a coward out of me, and I summoned the driver of the cab to return forthwith to the mailbox, for I was indeed betraying my own flesh and blood.

Arriving at said mailbox, I turned it upside down, and behold, the mail was strewn all over the sidewalk. And just at that moment, as I searched for said letter, the police happened to drive by in their vehicle. And they let me into said vehicle. Now, I was sitting in the back seat and imagining that I could take a miniature spiritual toothbrush and erase the brainwashing from the minds of the officers of the law. But they were not amused, and lo, they took me down to the station, where I spent the

night behind bars. And in the morning, I was brought to the courthouse, whereupon I was scheduled to make an appearance and testify in said court of the law.

Now, I knew I was in deep shit. So, upon being interviewed by a psychiatrist before entering said court, and being asked my name, I said, "My name is Archeon, and I am a demon from Mars!" And they remanded my court appearance and transferred me to the Royal Ottawa Hospital, whereupon I was interviewed by a second doctor. This time, I was pretending that I could hide in various places, like on top of his eyelids, or behind the curtains on the windows. And I waxed psychotic, and I told him in turn, "I know you, you are a bunny rabbit from hell. We were in hell together, I know you..." And it did not agree with him to hear about the place of eternal perdition, and lo, he had me committed to a locked ward in the Royal Ottawa Hospital.

Now, it came to pass that I was behind locked doors, with cameras watching our every move, and I was interned for a month with a gentleman who had raped and killed a sixteen year old girl, another gentleman who had shot his wife and kids, and other persons of the same ilk. And lo, I was in there for turning over a mailbox, and nevertheless charged with stealing federal mail. (I was facing ten years.) So one evening, one of the inmates asked me, "What are you in here for, Bob?" And lo, unlike my wont, I exaggerated and replied, "Oh, I've killed hundreds of people, contracts you know..." And the inmate replied in turn, "Yes, Chicago, I can dig it. The windy city, yes..." And lo, the inmates left me alone for a month. And meanwhile, the doctors were trying various drugs to cure me medically, and I was bouncing off the walls.

Finally, my parents came to visit me, as well as a nun that I knew, Martha Sheppard, and several other denizens of Ottawa, such as my sister and so forth. And lo, I recognized some of them, and others I did not. And my lawyer came to interview me, and concluded, unbeknownst to me, that I should plead insane in court. Which I did, when my court

date came up, and lo, I was committed for life to Douglas Hospital in Montreal, and driven there by ambulance.

Now, upon arriving at the Douglas, it behooved me to try to discharge myself after the space of one week. And I was told that I was under an LGO and committed for life. But upon examining my chart, the psychiatrist noticed that it read, and I quote, "Voluntary admission." There was a mistake in my chart, and indeed, I could sign myself out of the psychiatric institution! Robert Smith was a free man once again! Free to roam wild, free to ride about and terrorize the countryside. Free to do mischief and get into more trouble.

Therefore, I was discharged on the seventh day of the month of April, 1984, under the reign of Brian Mulroney, leader of Canada. And being exonerated of my criminal offence, I roamed about as was my wont until my next hospitalization and imprisonment, but that is another story.

And lo, it was a chilly day in April as I walked back from Verdun to Montreal, ready to do battle with the Antichrist. And my parents worried some more.

LIKE A ROLLING STONE

*“For what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world,
if he lose his own soul?”*

- Jesus

*“You used to be so amused
at Napoleon in rags
and the language that he used”*

- Bob Dylan

CHAPTER ONE

The Lawyer's Story

My name is Ishmael. I am a securities lawyer, for the firm of Calvin and Hobbes, in Montreal. Our offices are located in the Stock Exchange Tower at Square Victoria, at the bottom of Beaver Hall Hill. This is my testimony about my colleague and friend, Charles Gallagher.

Charles had been a legal translator with us for many years, when some events happened that complicated his life. Actually to use the word “complicated” would be a misnomer. They destroyed him.

I would say he was a brilliant translator. I personally resorted to his services many times, asking him to translate a prospectus or a takeover bid in a hurry, and he would always complete the project in record time. He translated with as much ability towards French as towards English. He was one of the only ones who had this ability. (Most translators only work one way, or else they are excellent one way and abysmal towards the other language.) But he did it both ways. He worked overtime whenever required, and oftentimes I would walk past his office on the 36th floor and see him translating a document about mutual funds or something while eating a sandwich for lunch. He was a

hard worker, and had been very highly rewarded for his efforts. I remember one year, it was December 24th and we were all about to leave for Christmas vacation; suddenly, an order came in at 4:30 in the afternoon for a revision to be made for an important client. And Charles worked until 8:45 p.m. finishing the job, rather than going to spend time with his friends or family. He was that devoted to his work.

Mr Gallagher looked elegant as well, standing at six foot tall, slim, muscular, with wavy brown hair and the bluest eyes you ever saw. He always dressed well, with a three-piece suit, and Floorsheim shoes. He bought his suits at Brisson & Brisson, or at Holt Renfrew. He looked spotless.

Well, he had been working for us several years. Let me see, was it for eight or ten years? In any case, a lady moved into the apartment next to his, in the high rise where he lived. He told me all about their relationship over a beer one time after it was all over.

She immediately sized him up and wanted his money. It took Charles about three years to realize that after the fact.

One thing led to another, and soon she had him wrapped all around her little finger. He proposed to her within a few months, and they got married within a year. At first, they looked like the perfect couple. She would come to functions at the office or at the club, and Charles was obviously enamoured with her and very proud to be seen with her in public.

Perhaps the right word to use would be “infatuation.” He couldn’t think straight anymore. She was pulling the wool over his eyes, borrowing his credit cards to go on shopping sprees, buying fur coats and expensive boots as though Charles was a millionaire. She spent her afternoons at the health spa, while my old friend had his nose to the grindstone all day.

Mind you, I can see why Charles was so caught up with her. She was extremely good-looking, and a brilliant conversationalist, witty, knowledgeable, educated, but definitely a gold-digger. You could smell it on her. Her eyes would shift around, and she always said the right thing. She was always in character.

They ate in expensive restaurants every night. One of the reasons for this was that she did not know how to cook if her life depended on it. She was very excentric in a lot of ways. She told me once at an office party that she was writing a novel about Christians in space, and there were long descriptions about the rocket ships and the space costumes they wore. You might say that at some level she was nuts. And this is what she didn't want anyone to discover. Charles found this out the hard way: she had skeletons in her closet. For instance, they had been married for a year, when she told him she had to go to court and settle an old case. He confided in me that he thought the case involved prostitution. Then she told him – and he repeated this to me – that she used to hang around in hotel lobbies. Now why would she do something like that? Anyway, it soon didn't matter any more, because once this court case was over, she was soon history.

Now it appears that she used to throw tantrums, and right from the very start of their relationship. She called it “getting on the high keys.” Apparently, all the women in her family did this. Charles phoned me up one night, at about ten o'clock, and asked me to speak to the police. The cops were at his apartment, because he had called them there. She had locked herself up in the bathroom and threatened to slash her wrists. He didn't know what to do, so he phoned the police. This was a big mistake. This is when he found out that she was terrified of the authorities, as though she had something to hide. So the police came in full force, because they supposed Charles had been violent with his wife. It was not the case, but still, there were six or seven policemen there. I was asked to give Charles a character reference, and I told the officer on the phone to leave him alone, he was a good man. She was the problem. So they left, but she abandoned him a month later. Charles reported to me that she accused him of being “a police informer.”

Then big problems happened. This incident with the police was serious enough. But it got worse.

Her father passed away in California, and he left her quite a bit of money. So she didn't need Charles around anymore. So the next thing we heard was that she was gone. She told Charles that "God told her to move to California." And she packed her bags. Charles pleaded with her to stay, and I found out much later that she had threatened to leave several times before, and he had always clung to her for dear life. But this time, her mind was made up. Charles missed work one day, the day she left. She took a bus to California, and he never saw her again.

I heard about all this quite a while after it happened, because I got transferred to Toronto at this time. When I returned from my stay out of town, Charles and I had a beer, as we often did, and he told me the whole story. The one thing he said that stands out in my memory was, "I think I will become an alcoholic or something." And he also mentioned that he was angry with God for letting this happen to him. Personally, I don't care about that, I am not a believer. But Charles took it hard when his wife left. We all kept telling him to bury her, forget it. Just get a divorce and forget it. He kept hoping she would come back. He kept phoning her mother in California and asking how was his wife. She wouldn't take any calls from him.

Now she had been gone about six months, when my friend Charles got served divorce papers. It was a quick-fix California divorce. This time, Charles was lucky. All he had to do was sign his name to a document, date it and mail it back to her lawyer. It never cost him a cent. The grounds were "incompatibility."

Meanwhile, Charles began to drink. He began associating with lower companions, fellows he met in bars who dragged him down further. They obviously wanted him to buy them a beer, and that was all they cared about. I warned him, once, twice, and then I cut him off as a friend. I cannot be the friend of an alcoholic.

Oh, I still saw him around the office, and then one day I heard that he had been fired. And that was the last I heard about Charles Gallagher. I hope he is well, but I don't think so. You will have to ask some of his new friends how he is doing. I haven't seen him in at least ten years now.

CHAPTER TWO

The Escort's Story

Ya sure, I know a john called Charles. Charles Gallagher. Used to phone out for me all the time, until just recently. As a matter of fact, I don't know what happened to him, but I haven't heard about him for some time now.

Say, do ya mind if I smoke while we talk? No? Okay.

Ya, like I was saying, this guy Charles started phoning out for escorts a few years ago, and I was one of the first ladies that ever went to his place. I remember, it was a nice pad, equipped with all kinds of gadgets like a microwave oven, and a scanner for his computer. Hey, dis guy had bread, man. Maybe he wasn't a lawyer or anyting, but he told me he worked for lawyers.

My name? Let's say my name is Maria, okay? And I was working for Heartbreaker's Dating Agency when I first met Charles.

Of course, I remember him well. Because he looked so good. Tall. Muscular. Well hung. But towards the end, he didn't look so hot. He looked like he was going down de tubes. He told me about it one night, after we had just had sex. He had tears in his eyes, and I asked him, "What's wrong, honey? You don't like me or what I do for you?" And he started telling me his whole story.

I was there that night for three hours. I remember, it cost him, let me see, two hundred and sixty-five dollars an hour, it was, because we had raised the rates on him gradually, so go figure. I haven't got my calculator wit me here, if ya know what I mean. He served me a couple of gin and tonics, but I wasn't thirsty. Meanwhile, he finished off a whole bottle. And towards de end, he was crying and sobbing, so I thought it was getting a bit heavy, and I told him I would see him later. But dis is what he told me. And it's de truth, I swear.

He had met dis lady some time before, and she was a real looker. I mean a knock-out. He told me her name, but honest to god, I don't remember. He asked me if she had ever worked for Heartbreaker's. I told him I didn't know, and if I did I couldn't tell him. Dat's confidential.

Anyway, it seems like she was after his bread. Ya know, she sounded like she was really mean to Charles. Such a nice fella. And she walked all over him. He would buy her expensive tings, and take her out to de opera. She didn't appreciate it. And people like dat piss me off.

So, to make a long story short, she left him one day, and Charles started phoning out for call-girls. He drank a bit at first, but den, it got obvious dis guy had a booze problem. I told him one day to go to AA, why don' t he? But I don' t know if he ever listened.

He was a real gentleman. Ya know, ya can tell, when dey don't know what to do when ya walks in der house? Dey treat ya like a real lady. Ya, dat's what I liked about him.

Next ting ya know, he gets fired from his job. He'd been drinking on de job, and dey didn't like dat too much. Besides, his drinking buddies kept calling him up at de office and leaving messages wit his secretary or something. And dat's anudder ting that pisses me off: when people got no respect for yer privacy.

Anyway, so dey let him go at de law firm, and he begun to freelance, ya dat's what he called it. Anyway, he had dis big computer in his apartment, and one time he gave me a demonstration of de internet. Now, me I don' t know nutting about computers. I'm not a high-tech gal. But he really impressed me wit all the gadgets in his apartment.

But I could tell dis guy had a problem. Like his heart was broken. Den about a year after he's divorced, his mudder dies. Well, shit. Den he was devastated. It was escorts, and topless clubs, and drinking and blow

every night. He really ran up a bill. I don't know what got into him, but soon he was hell-bent for leather. He looked like he had a death wish. Ya know, it was like dis guy wanted to die or something. He just couldn't cope anymore.

Listen, can ya buy me anudder drink while we're here? It's just dat I'm getting thirsty, ya know. And could ya buy me a pack of cigarettes while you're at it, sweetheart? Ya don't mind if I call ya dat, eh?

Ya, well, a few months went by like dis, de big binge all de time. And den suddenly it was quiet for a while. I tink he tried to clean up his act or something. But then it started again. I don't know how he managed to pay for de escorts, because how can ya work, when ya drinks so much? Sometimes it was two girls at de same time, me and some udder girl. One time, it was three of us there, and man could dat guy party! And de drinks were flowing, and we'd laugh and laugh, like dere was no tomorrow. Especially when Charles would order out for two girls at once, we'd have fun.

But toward de end, it got sad. It would just be him and me, and sometimes, we'd just talk. I'd give him a hand-job or something, but it seemed like he wasn't interested. He seemed to get more and more depressed. I guess he was crossing over dat invisible line into alcoholic drinking, and ya know what dat means. It means you don't get drunk anymore, ya just get sick. Often it means ya CAN'T get drunk anymore. And ya keep trying to get high, to have a bit of fun. And de alcohol depresses ya even more. So ya drink some more, to relieve de depression, and it never works. I know, a friend of mine was like dat. Couldn't get drunk anymore. And it seems like dat's what happened to Charles.

I tink after a while, he started drinking in de mornings, because he started phoning the agency at 10:00 o'clock in de morning, and he was desperate. Ya could tell he wanted to ease de pain.

Anyway, de very last time I saw Charles, he paid me wit is credit card, and he said it was going to be de last time, because he was broke. He couldn't afford to pay his debts. He said he was solvent or something, insolvent? Ya dat's it, insolvent. Like he was broke.

And he hadn't shaved in a week or so, he smelled like a piss pot, man it was disgusting. He wouldn't clean up his apartment anymore. Dere were newspapers all over de floor, chicken boxes and pizza boxes on de couch, and de pictures were coming off de walls. It looks like dere had been some serious partying going on at his place. I don't know who his drinking buddies were, but dey sure totaled his pad. Ya know, ashtrays full a butts and half-empty bottles everywhere. Holes burned in de upholstery and holes in de wall.

Man, it was disgusting. To tell ya de truth, I wasn't interested in going dere anymore. Charles started living like an animal. Udder tings happened to him dat drove him where he was, but I don't know.

Say, if ya wants to know more about it, ask his so-called drinking buddies. And I don't know if de guy is alive or dead at dis point. And ya know what? I don't care. Once a customer goes broke, I am outa dere.

CHAPTER THREE

The Astrologer's Story

Mr Charles Gallagher? Why yes, of course. I know him well. Haven't seen the chap in a few years now, but he is a good friend of mine. I did his chart back in the days when he worked for the law firm. Sure, I know him well.

For instance, I remember just when he was born: August 30th, 1948, at 11:00 a.m. This means his sun was in Virgo, his moon was in Scorpio, and his rising sign was in Scorpio. And all his planets were in the same quadrant, which means he was totally imbalanced. His sun being in Virgo, he was naïve, and worshiped women. He would put them on a pedestal. On the other hand, his moon and his rising sign being in Scorpio, he had a fatal attraction for "la femme en noire," the woman in black. And I believe that is why when he got introduced to prostitution, he went head over heels into the whole sordid mess. The moon and rising sign in Scorpio also meant that he would work in spurts, and should have done creative work. I believe he was a translator, was he not? But he also painted. And he has shown me some of his sketches, and they are rather brilliant.

Yes, poor Charles. If it weren't for that dreadful woman he married, he might still be working with the lawyers and doing well. She certainly did take him down the garden path, didn't she? And when she left him, the last thing she said to him was: "When I met you, I thought you were the great white hope to save me from poverty." That devastated the poor man. He realized there and then that she only wanted him for his money. And yes, he was quite totally devastated. Yes. Yes. That's the word. Devastated.

And then he began to tip at the gin mill. And I believe drugs came into the picture quite soon afterwards, didn't they? Did you know him well? I knew him like the back of my hand, I did.

I haven't heard from him in a while now. I hope he is faring well. The poor chap. He certainly didn't deserve such a downfall.

Let me see, did you know him when he was in university? No? Well, I did, and he was a brilliant mind of our times. It would take the other students in his master's degree class a week to do an assignment, and Charles would wrap it up in three or four hours. Yes, he was that quick. A very inquisitive mind. He read a great deal. He could quote Shakespeare and Joyce and Milton. Yes, a very bright fellow.

Unfortunately, the poor devil was undone by that wife he married and then by the drinking companions. He met his lower companions in bars downtown, like Sir Winston Churchill's and Thursday's. At first, he drank on Crescent Street and Bishop Street, and then he moved on to topless clubs, and finally in dives like the Lodeo and the Diana, on Ste-Catherine Street.

When he started associating with those people is around the last time I saw him. It is not that I ceased to care for the man; it is rather that nobody wants to see a loved one descend into the pit. I tried to help him at first, but I was afraid he was dragging me under as well. The poor chap. He was stronger than I was. After a while, I felt powerless to stop him as he destroyed himself. He was in a rage all the time. As much as he could party and enjoy himself, all the more could he explode at a fellow drinker.

I believe the people he drank with took advantage of him. They saw him coming a mile away. They knew the man had means, and they wanted a free meal. Sometimes, he would refuse to buy someone a beer, and poor Charles would end up with a black eye or a fat lip. Yes, those people were vile.

And then, when his mother died, there was the business of the wake. Oh yes. The famous wake. Every drunken, gambling, cheating, dirty, lying whoremonger in town was at his apartment every day, until they totally

demolished the furniture and turned the place upside down. It was a mess. Yes, sir. A real mess.

He confided in me once in those days that it was his life, and he wasn't hurting anybody but himself. So I asked him what about all those around him? Weren't they affected as well? But the poor bastard couldn't fathom that. Not for a minute.

After a while, the money started running out, and a good thing at that. Because he could have caught AIDS from those ladies of the night. And thank god he never used syringes...

So the money petered out, and he started to borrow sums of money from his professional friends. I know that I lent him a thousand dollars over a period of, say, six months. Never saw a dime of it. He kept promising me that when he received his inheritance from his mother's estate, he would reimburse me. Well, that money came and went. It just escalated his debauchery, but he never reimbursed me one dime.

It was around then that I had enough. I lectured him, and asked him at the top of my voice: "So, Charles, what are you going to do now? You are unable to work anymore. You have lost your job. What are you planning on doing? Going on welfare? Is that what you want, you poor wretch?" And of course he hung up on me. Wouldn't hear of it.

When someone is out to destroy himself, he is so far into it that he cannot see his way out of it. I believe they say that he has to reach rock bottom before things get better. The poor devil. I do feel sorry for him, but I soon realized I was powerless to help him any further. Nobody could help Charles but Charles himself.

Finally, all I heard were rumours about my friend. Some things were probably true, others not. For instance, I heard the janitor kicked him out one night when he saw the mess he had made of his apartment. Sir, it was an expensive apartment at one time, but the janitor claimed it would take two months to renovate the place after he kicked him out.

Then I didn't hear from Charles for quite some time. He resurfaced a few times after that, looking like something the cat dragged in, you know.

I heard finally one last time that he was on welfare, and somehow managing. He was still drinking, but he was broke. He could no longer consume industrial quantities of alcohol. He began taking care of himself somewhat. And thank god for that.

Do you know what the problem was with that man? It was the sun in Virgo – he was always militantly naïve. He never distrusted anybody, unless of course you criticized him for his debauchery. But he trusted the wrong people. People like his wife, who took him to the cleaners, and all those awful people downtown with whom he drank. He never should have trusted those gents.

Yes, they took advantage of him. And once his money was gone, they were gone. They suddenly stopped phoning him, thank god for that.

But at the same time, Charles stopped phoning me up as well. I don't have the faintest who his current friends are. And I certainly hope they are gentlemen, not like those parasites.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Janitor's Story

Me, my name is Claude. I am de janitor at de boarding ouse on la rue Laval, just near Carré Saint-Louis. I been working dere for fifteen years. And yes, I do know Monsieur Gallagher very good.

E first move ere a couple of years ago, I tink. Let me see, dere was Monsieur René, den Monsieur... yes, it as been tree years now since Monsieur Gallagher move in here. And I ad to kick im out last fall, just before de winter, because e didn pay is rent for tree mont.

You know, I ate to see im go, because he was a good guy, tabarnac. And smart. Ey, dis guy was smart. I tink e tole me one time e used to work for de lawyer. Me, at firs I didn't believe im, because everybody say dat. Dey move in ere and dey all wan to look like big shot. But I get to know im better, sometime I ave a beer wit im or even a coffee, an we talk.

By jeez, can dat guy ever talk up a storm, holy cow. An e know all about books. I tink e read more book in one year dan I read in ma whole life.

You know, I feel sorry for im, because e tell me e got married to de wrong woman, une pute, it sounds like, a woman who jus wan im for is money.

An e used to be rich, dis guy, hey. E show me a photograph of imself when e work for de lawyer. An e used to wear a tree-piece suit, by gar. Me, I was, I dunno, impressionné.

But e talk to me like han equal, from eye to eye. Like he's no better dan me, no worse. Me, I like dat. You know, I ham only a concierge here, a janitor, an my parents dey were too poor to sen me to school for long time, but I know a lot too. An I can tell when somebody look down is nose at me.

An yes, Monsieur Gallagher, e like de women. One time, e bring a woman ere dat e met in a bar. She was a bit défraîchie, you know, like a flower dat is getting ole. She smell like dat anyway. An e laugh an party dat night. E introduce me to her, an me, I wouldn't touch er wit a ten foot pole, comme on dit.

E would sit in de park at Carré Saint-Louis an stare at de fountain. All day, all night. Like il mijotait quelque chose, he was planning something. I don't know what was on is mine, but e talked about it wit me a little bit. Dis is all I know.

An what e tell me is, Monsieur Claude, because dat is my name, Claude, e tell me, it doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, Monsieur Claude. It doesn't matter if you ave ten diplomas, or if you are a concierge, a janitor. Because we all hen up in de same place. We all die. An e tell me dat it used to count for im to ave de big car, an all de credit card, an de fancy pants clothes on your back. E tell me, you know, Monsieur Claude, de clothes don't make de man. I tell im, toé, tu l'as dit. I tell im, by gar dat's true.

An I ask im sometime, ow come you know all dis an you are de bourgeois? Ave you hever live on de street? Because, you know it is only de street person who know dat, an dose who ave done time. Des gars qui ont fait du temps. I mean behine bars. An e say no, e never done time, but e tink a lot about le sens de la vie, de meaning of dis life.

E tell me about all de gadget e used to ave, like a four micro-ondes, you know, a microwave oven. Me, I only seen one one time at the store. An e used to surf de Hinternet. I don understan dat, me. E tell me it's one computer connect to anudder computer tru a telephone line. Gee, dat's pretty complicate for me. I ave to see it to believe it.

But Monsieur Gallagher, e still act important sometime. E tell me money it can't buy you appiness, but e still ave de airs of haute société sometime when you get to know im good.

I tink Monsieur Gallagher was a philosophe. E tink tings over and over. Il jonglait tout le temps. E always tink before e talk.

One time, I see im drunk. Ey, e yell, e scream, e act total crazy around ere. I tink e should go to Alcooliques Anonymes, but me I don tell im dat. Because me I don go dere, but I ear it can help people like im. But hit all blow over de next day, an e was back to normale.

I like im, but I ad to kick im out after a while. I don know what e was saving for, but e don pay is rent for three months. Trois mois, sacrament. Ey, de landlord, le propriétaire, e tell me, e give im de walking paper. An e was out for good.

I see im in de park a couple of time after dat, e was looking in de garbage can for some food, an it break my eart to see dat, but I didn't ave any food to gave im dat day. If only I ad ad five dollars on me, ey I would have share it wit im, but I was broke dat day.

I ear he is homeless now, an I don't know where is Monsieur Gallagher hanymore. Nobody haroun ere seen im in a year now. Maybe e is in anudder maison de chambres, wit a room of is own, maybe not, eh?

I know dat one time a man came ere looking for im, but e ad already been gone for a few mont. I guess e miss is lucky break in life, eh?

Anudder time, I ear a rumour dat Monsieur Gallagher used to drink wit bums. Me, I don' t care. A friend is a friend. Monsieur Gallagher e is still a gentilhomme, a gentleman.

Last nite, I ad a dream dat e was dead. Let me tell you de dream. A lot of my friend ad gone undergroun and it was my job to rescue dem. So I go wit my wife to de corner, an I tell er to distract de security guard of hell so I can go rescue Monsieur Gallagher. So I go into de flame, an dere e is, sitting on a sofa chair, taking it easy in de heat of the flame. No sweat, you know.

An dat was de dream. It seem like Monsieur Gallagher is hokay wherever e is, even if e is homeless. Even if e was in ell, I tink e would be hokay, because Monsieur Gallagher is a gentleman. E don sweat over nutting. Like e's cool. C'est ça, dat's owl.

CHAPTER FIVE

The AA Member's Story

Of course, Translator Charles. Charles G. Ya, I know him well. He first came into these rooms a few years ago, when he was all messed up. Had been living on the streets for a few months. For the first little while, every member and his dog thought Charles was a hopeless case, another illiterate homeless person who just came to meetings for a free coffee and to get out of the cold for a night.

Ya, I remember now. He used to sit in the back of the room, with the schizophrenics and other homeless people. He smelled foul, he never washed, never talked to any other members, never shook hands with us. We all figured he was a wet brain. You know, Korsakoff's syndrome. Hey, we didn't even know if he spoke English or not. He just kind of grunted at first.

His hair was long. His beard was unkempt. He dressed in dirty clothes and carried bags of newspapers around with him. He sure looked like a goner. You know, there are some people we can't reach.

Tall fellow, right? About six feet tall? Ya sure, well, you should see him now.

There he is over there, talking to that woman with the fur coat. He is our new GSR. General Service Representative. That means he is the link between the group, that is our local group, and the district. It also means he has to attend service meetings outside the regular meetings. Where they take place? Oh, in other church basements, haha. Our local district meeting takes place on a Thursday every month at St. Mathias church, in Westmount. You know where that is, don't you? On Church Hill Street. About a mile west of here.

Ya sure, Charles is a good member. How did he turn around? Well, his recovery began like most people's recovery, by going to meetings and

getting involved. He woke up one day and took the cotton balls out of his ears and put them into his mouth. And he started listening.

Next thing you know, one day we seen Charles take a newcomer chip. He got an especially big hand of applause, because nobody ever thought Charles of all people would ever do that. Then we talked to him after the meeting that night, and he took down some phone numbers. And he started phoning us. Whenever he got thirsty, he would phone. Then he started phoning every day just to talk and get it all off his chest.

Did you know that guy used to work for a law firm downtown? Oh, you already knew that, eh? And did you know about his wife, the swindler that married him for money? That broke the poor dude's heart, didn't it? We all heard him speaking about it the other night when he was the speaker here at this group. He must have talked for 45 minutes, we thought he would never shut up and sit down. But people listened. You could hear the chairs squeaking, but no one got up to grab a coffee while Charles was on deck.

And he drank, like all of us here. Hey, none of us get here by being saints, ya know. But his recovery was difficult for the first couple of months, because he figures he might have brain damage from all those years of abuse. And ya, he did substances as well.

But look at him now, the picture of health. He hasn't had a drink now in a year and a half, and he is a living miracle. Hey, we're all miracles in these rooms. The Higher Power really works miracles among us every day, every week, every year. You wouldn't believe the changes Charles has gone through in the past year alone.

Mind you, shit happens, ya know. His father died while Charles was in recovery, but he didn't drink over it. And that's the miracle, ain't it? And he has had liver problems because of drinking and other health problems. So he has to take pills now. You know, some members find out they have cancer in recovery, and they don't drink. Living miracles.

But how did he do it, you ask? Well, if you ask me, doing service helps, doing the 12 steps helps, but ultimately, it is the Higher Power that keeps you sober. You turn it all over. All of it. And that's what Charles did around a year after he was in the program. He finally did a third step that was thorough, and then he did his inventory and his fifth step. And look at him now. Smiling. Bright. Alert.

Why I call him Translator Charles? Well, that is what he used to do for a living, when he was out there. He translated legal documents. Nope, I don't think he does that anymore. Would he translate your resumé? I don't think – why don't you ask him yourself?

And yes, he had all the usual problems we all have. Lack of sleep. Bad nerves. Irritable, restless and discontent. But lack of sleep never killed anyone. At first, he couldn't sit still. And he used to always spill over his coffee, because his hands were shaking so bad. But he ain't like that no more.

Yup, it is a living miracle to see God turn people around like that. And Charles is going out with a young lady. There she is, coming in the door right now. Connie.

I sure am glad for him. Alcohol is the great remover, my friend. It removed his job, his wife, his health, his apartment, and now AA is giving it all back to him, one piece at a time. Just watch. I bet they get married or shackled up within a few months. But that's gossip, isn't it?

Don't they look like a fine couple? Not a perfect couple, because we are all damaged goods in here, but yes, a fine couple.

Will he ever need to drink again? Not if he follows the program, one day at a time. And why would he want to do that? He's got the world by the tail right now. Hey, he was dressed in rags when he first came in here, so why would he want to go back to that? Oh, if you choose to pick up the first drink, all your misery can be refunded to you, free of charge. But if you're riding on a garbage truck, you don't need to ride all the way to

the dump. You can get off halfway. Because that is where alcohol will take you, to the insane asylum, to prison or to the graveyard. It is a matter of life and death.

Hey, I work an honest program here. But listen, the chairman is about to begin the meeting...

CHAPTER SIX

The Psychiatrist's Story

Hi, I am Doctor Wiviott. Welcome to the Allan Memorial Institute of Psychiatry. I wanted to discuss with you the case of Mr Charles Gallagher, a patient of ours who seems clinically depressed, after his girlfriend Connie miscarried.

Mr Gallagher is a 45-year-old Caucasian Anglophone. It seems that he is a former translator who met this young lady in meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous. Tests indicated that he has not consumed alcohol or psychotropic substances recently, but there are traces of valium in his blood samples.

His D.O.B. is August 30, 1948. He was born in Hull, Quebec, but claims he was raised in Ottawa, Ontario.

Response to medication has been very weak. There is serious loss of affect or appetite. He has lost a lot of weight from not eating regularly. Sleep patterns seem to be irregular.

Mr Gallagher claims responsibility for the miscarriage and entertains suicidal ideation as a result. He claims he feels "unworthy to live." He has not, however, at this time, made any visible suicide attempts. He seems to be fixated on his girlfriend's predicament.

Now I was wondering whether or not we should resort to EST or shock treatment to interrupt these obsessive thought patterns.

His EEG indicates the presence of a lesion that could possibly be due to former alcohol abuse.

Personal contact with Mr Gallagher in the presence of a nurse elicited no significant response. Personal hygiene left to be desired; rapid eye

movements revealed nervous tension. He just kept repeating to himself over and over again that it was his “fault.”

Interviews with his family were difficult, because both parents have passed away. However, he has one female sibling who lives in Ottawa and could not be reached at this time. He seems to have cousins in British Columbia and California that he has not seen in many years.

Another cousin in Montreal spoke to us in French and told us that Mr Gallagher used to work for the law firm of Calvin and Hobbes. It appears that he was once a legal translator but is not working at this time. He was formerly married for a period of a few years, but this relationship was terminated after the spouse left him for California. Mr Gallagher’s cousin also mentioned that at the time of the divorce, the patient abused drugs and alcohol and turned into a “madman.” All ties to his family and friends were severed, and he began to associate with downtown criminal types. Apparently, at this time, he has not consumed alcohol in two years and has been in remission from alcoholism and drug abuse through the help of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. The cousin we spoke to did not know Connie and was not aware that they she had suffered a miscarriage. He also said that Mr Gallagher’s father was a manic-depressive, and that was all the information we obtained from this relative.

The patient being under my care, I assumed responsibility for him and decided not to administer EST for the time being, or until further notice.

I have instead prescribed strong doses of Effexor and Risperdal to counter depression and psychosis, respectively. However, as I said above, the patient has not yet responded to treatment.

Mr Gallagher came here as a voluntary admission and was accompanied by Connie Smith, his girlfriend. They both came to Emergency and seemed co-operative. She is 38 years old, already the mother of two children, 9 and 13, although she does not have custody of her offspring at the present time. She also is a member of Alcoholics Anonymous and

seems to care for Mr Gallagher. Private interviews with her elicited the information that she met this gentleman a year prior to the miscarriage, and that when he first came to AA he seemed to suffer from Korsakoff's syndrome. He was unable to communicate and had been living on the streets for several months before joining the AA movement. Tests indicated absence of Korsakoff's syndrome, but she maintains that he used to "almost be a wet brain."

Her family background is Negroid and Anglophone. She works as a hostess in an expensive restaurant downtown. Her appearance indicated that she was normal in every respect. However, she says that when she first joined AA, she couldn't even remember her own name. She also abused substances such as heroin and marijuana but hasn't "gotten high" in many years. She seems to certainly care for Mr Gallagher, but she is uncertain about the future of their relationship, now that she has lost the baby and that he is clinically depressed. The outcome of his treatment here at the Allan Memorial will determine whether or not she will remain his partner and significant other. The girlfriend claims that she has enough on her "plate" without taking care of a "zombie." This meant that caring for her own children would occupy all of her time. She on the other hand blames herself for "thirteen-stepping" Mr Gallagher, meaning that she was already sober and involved in Alcoholics Anonymous, while he was a relative "newcomer." She has been here on the ward to visit him twice, but it seems he was abusive with her, and she has since then shied away from visits. Mr Gallagher's spouse has been most co-operative, but as she said, if he does not "snap out of it soon," she intends to sever the relationship with him, especially since he has been abusive with her during visits.

Mr Gallagher has been courteous with patients and the staff, but tends not to mix with people around him. He often stands by the nursing station in his Johnny shirt and stares at the clock with a vacuous expression in his eyes. He seldom speaks to anyone, but with me he opened up briefly last week. He kept repeating over and over again that everything was his "fault." I told him that nobody is to blame for a

miscarriage, these things happen without being planned or wanted by anyone. And yet he insisted he was “responsible” for his actions.

He also told me that he used to abuse escort services, but tests indicated no presence of venereal disease or AIDS. He said he felt obliged to “make amends” to Connie, his girlfriend, because she “lost the baby.” He definitely seemed fixated on these themes.

Future response to medical treatment will determine whether or not we resort to EST or shock treatment. There appears to be no family member in the immediate surroundings who could take in Mr Gallagher upon discharge. Arrangements will be made in due time to have him placed in a halfway house or supervised housing, as he seems to still entertain suicidal ideation. Mrs Hamboyan, his social worker, is already looking into possible housing arrangements for a period of six months.

It seems highly probable that Mr Gallagher will recover from this period of depression, but his girlfriend seems unwilling to take care of him on a long-term basis. It is also possible that severance of their relationship could cause the patient further problems.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Charles's Story

I am Charles Gallagher. I am presently a non-person, a man without an identity, staying in a psychiatric halfway house in Montreal. I drool and I twitch and I stutter – because of neuroleptic medication and its side effects.

First of all, a word about neuroleptic medication and psychiatry: these are very recent sciences, sciences in their infancy – compared to, say, Western philosophy or magic or religion. So doctors try different prescriptions on you, without knowing ahead of time which patient will respond to what medication.

Secondly, I figure psychosis is like a pocket calculator. Say, in your “answer” slot, you have space for six digits, and you do a multiplication with an answer comprising twelve digits. Well, what invariably happens is that the calculator can’t compute such a complex answer, and it makes up an imaginary number in the “answer” slot. Likewise, when the human mind is confronted with a situation so complex that it can’t find a rational answer, it fabricates an imaginary solution or answer. But since the rational mind is then inoperative, it draws upon images from the collective unconscious. Thus the themes of madness reflect the concerns of our age.

A few years ago, when my wife left me, I was faced with an incomprehensible situation. I had all the required signs that she loved me, and suddenly, I realized all she wanted was my money.

Suddenly, all this money, prestige, status, high technology, business sense and the like appeared worthless, like children’s castles of sand by the sea. I had worked all my life to be a high achiever. I had gone to university and applied myself to attain excellence. I had climbed the social ladder and reached the top echelons of my profession. And when my wife left me, I realized it was all worthless.

Furthermore, I was in a rage against the God I had invested in for so many years. On the night before I got married, my mother reassured me, cupped her hands together and said, "Look, Charles. God has carried you all this way so far. He's not going to drop you at the last minute." And yet, I felt like God abandoned me when my wife left me, he just dropped me in free fall, without a net to catch me below. I felt betrayed by this divinity. This was not supposed to happen to me, to guys like me. I had been a good guy so far, I had done a lot of people favours, I had played by the rules. What kind of whim did God act on? Did he want to teach me a lesson?

It never occurred to me that I was the one who wasn't paying attention. By getting married, I was just doing whatever was in my pants. I was enthralled like a moth around the flame. Yes, I was infatuated, and the scandal happened: she took advantage of me and nearly destroyed me.

I don't really remember the rampage that ensued for a couple of years. I was trying to get revenge on this god, but you can't hurt a divinity. God is all-powerful. I ran and ran away, like Jonas, from the work I had to do. I ran away from God. And every time I stopped to catch my breath, God was right there, waiting for me to turn to him/her.

I always thought our civilization was superior, because we had the biggest bombs, the biggest freeways, the biggest airplanes, the most advanced medicine and the most sophisticated legal system. Well, when I embarked on the binge of self-destruction, it seemed all of this civilization was "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." It seemed it wasn't worth it to fuel our cars with oil, if that meant the oceans were to be covered with oil slicks. It seemed preposterous to waste so much electricity, if that meant flooding all northern Quebec and evacuating the Crees and Inuit who had been living there for thousands of years. It seemed absurd that so many people had died in the name of sanctifying grace or prevenient grace or indulgences or even salvation. This blind cavalcade of crusaders, missionaries, conquistadors, exploiters and slave traders were all rushing into the abyss, while waving crosses and flags of different stripes.

And the constant war? While governments used rhetoric in the media to sway the masses, countless young men were bleeding in ditches, for what? For money, for the arms trade, for the flow of oil, for the creation of new markets, for merchants' ambition and greed. And the common man's interests were never taken into account.

When were people ever going to learn from this comedy of errors? When was the next step in evolution, the next "radical metamorphosis?"

And it seemed to me people would never learn. Only a cosmic event like the Second Coming would straighten things out. Human beings left to their own devices would only destroy the earth. That is why I chose to become a homeless person. Only the homeless, only the mentally ill realize the futility of success. Only they do not chase after money perpetually in the rat race. And I wanted out of the rat race once and for all.

Of course, my friends did not understand my philosophy. They thought I was just going down the tubes. I didn't want to work for money anymore. I solicited the company of vagrants and hoboes and derelicts. I found some of these people at AA meetings, unimpressed with the twenty-year cakes being given out on special occasions. Winter kept us warm. I treasured my autonomy from society, from the establishment – I didn't have to please anybody anymore. For establishment values are first of all in your mind.

The homeless people felt persecuted and didn't understand why. Some of them didn't even know the Cold War had ended. They were silent witnesses, silent watchers who were not involved in the collective hysteria. They did not need Office 2000 or Windows XP. They knew they did not need cell phones and microwave ovens. They could walk around town any time; they didn't drive Jaguars or Mercedes Benzes. They didn't go through expensive divorces and lawsuits. They didn't worry about dress codes. What I found was that they were real.

In a nutshell, I found human values among the homeless and the mentally ill. Even they have their own outcasts, mind you, but they would share a sandwich with you if you were hungry...

NOT TO FORGET THE SPANISH INQUISITION

I first met Erik at Washington Square, in the West Village, on a sunny Sunday March afternoon in 1968. One of the first things he said to me was, "Do you want to hitch-hike to California with me?" I agreed, and we immediately began panhandling to raise a couple of dollars. It took us about two hours to have four dollars, and we took off.

First, we took the subway North, up through Harlem, and along a long railroad line, at the end of which somehow we ended up in grimy old, industrial New Jersey. I remember, we walked and walked until we were in the country. The sun was setting, and we had no food, but we found an abandoned barn, where we could sleep. There were rats scurrying about on the ground, in the dark, so Erik and I slept on boards a foot wide on the rafters. I didn't sleep all night, and I could hear the rats shuffling down below. In the morning, we got a ride, and then another ride, and finally we were in Pennsylvania.

By some fluke, we ended up in Amish country, where the men with black coats and long beards rode buggies with no rubber tires. We went into a general store, and the owner asked us with a drawl, "You strange 'round these parts?" And when we went back out to the streets, an old man in a 1940 Dodge or something yelled at us as he drove off, "Punks! Punks!" It was like being in a time warp and thrown back 150 years. The architecture was primitive and the cars were all antiques.

By the time we got to Munroville, Pennsylvania, it was raining atrociously. We were drenched as we stood along the highway and factory workers sped by in their beat-up old cars, rolling down the window and yelling at us, "VIETNAM! VIETNAM!" I don't know who was crazy, them or us. Finally, we couldn't take the rain anymore, so we went into a diner, which was also a drug store. We sat on stools along the ancient counter and had a miserable coffee. Just then, a huge, tall, husky, burly sheriff came and sat beside me on one of the stools and drawled out for us, "WE DON' LIKE YORE KIND AROUND HERE, SO YA

GOT TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TA GET OUTA TOWN... " We felt pretty sore and beaten as we pulled our weight back out to the cold rain.

Erik and I were pissed. We walked and walked some more until we came up to a construction site. It was dark and there was no night watchman around. We found a huge cement truck, with the keys in the ignition. It was tempting. Erik knew how to drive, although he didn't own a valid driving permit. We hopped in and took off through the night, cutting through reality like a knife, doing something very, very illegal, breaking the fucking law, and Erik was nervous, because he told me he had just spent three months in jail in Florida. We committed a further crime by driving across state lines in a stolen vehicle. I felt God could never catch up with us now. And that's what it feels like to steal. You enter another dimension, where common sense and law and order don't exist. We drove the cement truck into Ohio and dumped it by a river. We walked a little farther. We were getting revenge on the people for not giving us rides. We found a late model Chrysler parked outside a motel. The keys were in the ignition, so we took off and we drove all night into Cleveland, where Erik had some friends.

The sun was just rising as we pulled into Cleveland. By then Erik and I were not talking to each other anymore. We didn't get along. He thought I was nuts. We went to visit his friends in Cleveland, and he copped some drugs. He left me waiting at the front door of these people for about three hours. This was not kind.

When he returned, I phoned my uncle Rémi in Ottawa, Ontario and he wired me fifty dollars so we could return to New York City. Uncle Rémi was not amused. We took the bus all the way back from Cleveland to the Big Apple, and it seemed to be a dream, as the bus sped down the freeway back to Greenwich Village. When we got back to Port Authority Bus Terminal, Erik and I didn't even say goodbye to each other. We both walked off in separate directions.

Not to forget the Spanish Inquisition.

BARTOK

Yesterday morning, and it was a cool day in early November, I dropped by the tavern, which is at the corner of Queen Mary and Decarie, to see my old drinking buddies, Derek and Peter. It's been a week since Yves died of cirrhosis, and I wanted to pay my respects, because I know Peter Legault and Derek Séguin were Yves' best friends.

As soon as I came in, Derek Séguin exclaimed, "There you are! Where the fuck have you been?" So I sat down with them and we chatted. The waiter came right up to me, and I ordered a Coke. He jested with me, and replied, "No. We serve only beer here. You can't have anything but a beer." (He knew I don't drink anymore.)

Peter was showing Derek some panoramic photos he had taken in Cape Breton last summer. I asked if I could look at the shots. They were beautiful pictures of the countryside, by the ocean, and I mentioned the nature scenes looked very Canadian : you could see the same trees in Ontario or Quebec. Peter showed me a picture he took of an eagle and told me that when he got close enough, the thing swooped away. And Peter made giant, broad flapping gestures with his arms. He is a great story teller, and that's what you do in taverns, tell stories.

I told them that I felt fucked up for a couple of days after Yves died. Peter commented, looking at the floor, holding his beer, "I still feel fucked up." I told him I had heard he didn't go to Yves' wake. And Derek told us that Yves' daughter Natasha cooked a beautiful meal for the wake. "She invited all her friends from her cooking class to cook this beautiful spread."

And I told them that last week, after Yves died, I had a translation contract, but I couldn't work, because I was too upset. At this point Peter went to play the poker machine, and Derek yelled out, across the tavern, "Win some money, fuck!" And I finished telling my story to Derek. I said that since I couldn't work I decided to subcontract out my translation contract. I almost lost a couple of thousand dollars doing that. And

when my wife saw that I wasn't going to work, she wanted to leave. Then the next morning, she wanted me to move out. And the following morning, I decided to do the translation myself, so Bonnie changed her mind and let me stay at home. "Friday morning, I didn't know where I was going to sleep that night." And Derek got vehement, saying you can't do that, you can't break up because it screws up the kids.

Then he mentioned he had bumped into my wife on the street. I told him she had dyed her hair red. Derek is usually a pretty happy, positive person, and both he and Peter are good-natured, kind people, and they are at the tavern every morning.

Peter came back to the table. Derek mentioned he had seen Frank McCord on television. (Now, Peter has been bugging me to read Angela's Ashes for months now.) I told him Angela's Ashes is on the bestsellers' list everywhere. I said my wife Bonnie likes to read long novels. So Peter interjected that it's not a novel, it's a true story about being raised poor in Ireland.

I replied, "Isn't there a lot of poverty also in the Ozarks?" Peter said that that's where Tolkien got all his characters for the Hobbits. He also said he had read a Ph.D. thesis proving that all those characters really live in those hills, "fucking each other" and everything.

So I went into a long digression about Debbie Anderson, a woman I had an affair with in Fredericton. Derek asked me, "You lived in Fredericton?" I answered, "Yes, for a year." He asked me if I knew of a bar he called the smallest bar in the world. Peter said that no, the smallest bar in the world was on St-Denis Street. And Derek described the bar in Fredericton at the Holiday Inn. He said there were only two stools, and that if you fell off your seat, you landed in the pool. (Come to think of it, I know that bar and it's in the Lord Beaverbrook Hotel.) I told him that when I was in Fredericton, I drank every day at the Beaverbrook Hotel, I drank there after work. I said there were two hotels in Fredericton, four bars, one discotheque, two movie theaters, one unused concert hall and about eighty-five churches. I said I went to

church every night when I was in Fredericton, because that's where you meet people.

Peter and Derek were having a cigarette with their beer, and I told them a story.

One day, I had been in Fredericton for about three weeks, and I was lonely, so I went to church and I prayed to meet a girl who was spiritual, and intellectual, and a good mother for my children, and a sweet loving person. A minute later, I went across the street to a pizza place, and this lady came on to me, telling me the waitress had served her son a Coke in a dirty glass, so she wanted a free Coke and she was raising a stink. So I went to sit at her table, and I noticed she was cute. She was Native, and she told me she was studying to be a social worker at St. Thomas University, so I figured she was a good Catholic girl, and besides she had two young sons. So I thought my prayers were answered.

Well, a couple of weeks later, to make a long story short, she calls me at the office, and asks if she can use an office typewriter to type an essay for school. I ask my boss, and he says no, but I tell her I'll meet her for dinner. You know, I was interested; she was gorgeous, but totally flat-chested, like this table. Well, we meet and she stiffes me for the bill. She walks out without paying. So I call her back and I meet her so she can reimburse me the four dollars or whatever.

So, to make a long story short, she takes me back to her place and she wants me to actually WRITE the essay for her, and I protest vehemently, saying, I can't do that, that's PLAGIARISM, it's INTELLECTUAL DISHONESTY!! But somehow, we end up back at my place, and we start fooling around, and we've got our clothes off and we're on the sofa, and I ask her, "Will you go to bed with me?" She answers, "Will you write my essay?" And I said sure! So that was our relationship from then on. Every time I wrote an essay for her, she'd ball me.

Peter interjected here, "Now plagiarism is one thing, but if sex is involved, it's okay."

I pursue my story : Now her parents had never gone to school. He was a janitor and her mother was a cleaning lady. And Debbie, well, she had a grade five education and she was in university as a mature student. For instance, one time she asked me, "Paris, is that the capital of Rome?"

Here Derek commented, "I couldn't handle that."

And I went on. She slept with a bowie knife beside her bed, and she had a shotgun on the wall. Her boyfriend was in prison. And I'll tell you what she was like, one time I go to her house in the afternoon, and there are four people at her dinner table, one naked lady wrapped up in a towel, and she had lost her clothes in a poker game, and one guy with a patch on his eye. I asked Debbie, How did he lose his eye? She told me someone had stuck a bayonette in his eye at a party. And then she asked me if I wanted to go to a party with her, and I said, "No, no I'll pass on the party."

So that was it, every time I wrote one of her essays, she'd ball me.

Here Peter laughed, "Smitty sure knows how to pick them."

But that's not all. One day I get a phone call from this guy who's been trying to get into her pants. I ask, "Who's this?" And he tells me he's running for the NDP, and he tells me Debbie is wanted in eight provinces in Canada. It turns out she is the local hooker in Fredericton, and she got caught collecting welfare while going to university, so she was selling her body to pay off a four thousand dollar debt. And we get to talking about her, and a minute later, I get a call from her, and she says to me I have four days to get out of town because my life isn't worth very much anymore. You see, she knew I had talked about her. So she wants to kill me. So I go to the police and I get a Peace Bond against this lady. I am talking to the cop and he sends a message to the station and a minute later, the reply comes that her real name is Debbie Millet and she's a runner with the C.N.I... I ask, What the fuck's a runner with the C.N.I.? It means she's a habitual criminal.

So I hightailed it back to Montreal. But I add that there was another woman I was interested in back in Fredericton, and she was the worst bitch I had ever met. She wanted to become a nun, but she never came to visit me when I was hospitalized. Debbie visited me though. And this bitch told me that when she was twelve years old, she sold her soul to the devil and she could make a crack appear in the wall. (And I point at the wall.) But she saw a movie about the nuclear holocaust and she got religion. Worst bitch I ever met.

“She told you this or you saw it?” Well, I had only heard about the cracks, but I told them, for credibility’s sake, that I had met people who had seen the cracks.

And I guess that’s what happens in taverns, people tell stories, and there’s some truth to them and some bullshit, but the point is to have a good time and a few laughs. Besides, there’s a little bit of bullshit even in the best of things. I told my friends I had to leave, because I had to go to the bank. Derek told me that Peter also had to go to the bank, and Peter went back to playing the poker machines. I asked Peter which bank he was going to, and he said the Scotia. So I said I was going to another bank.

Derek said, warmly, “Smitty, it’s always really good to see you. Where can I see you again?”

I answered, “Friday Central. I make the coffee there.”

Derek didn’t seem to understand. Peter added, with a smile, “At the Erskine church.”

I said, finally, “That’s it, Peter knows where it is.”

And I walked out into the cold, damp November weather. I wished Yves were still around.

MISTER PAGE

In the days when I used to go to church, there was a handicapped fellow called Jean-Claude Pagé who used to attend all the charismatic prayer meetings at St. Augustine's Church, in NDG. I felt sorry for the poor man, because he walked on crutches. Actually, he was about six foot five, and rather dragged his legs along behind him. It would take him half an hour to walk a city block. And once I befriended this man, who was in his thirties, I realized he was severely mentally handicapped as well. The reason was that when he was five years old, a young French Canadian boy had hit him in the back of the head with a baseball bat. So his development remained at the emotional and mental level of a five year old.

So far so good. I began taking this gentleman out for dinner in restaurants, trying to be a Good Samaritan or something. And poor Jean-Claude would walk into a restaurant and say to me, in his slow, retarded drawl, "Let's sit beside the pretty girls over there." So we would sit at the booth across from whatever ladies were in the restaurant, and in a flash, Jean-Claude would reach out his hand for a handshake and ask the women, "Hi, I'm Mister Page, I am from St. Augustine, can I get in touch with you?" And then he would pull out his little black address book, and copy down all their phone numbers. Here is what he did with their phone numbers: one night, having my number, he phones me up at 3 :00 in the morning, and drawls out to me, while I am half asleep, "Hi, it's Jean-Claude. I guess I shouldn't be so down. I am feeling lonely." And you couldn't just hang up on the guy, because you knew full well he had a mental impediment. So you would listen to his complaining and moaning for an hour or two, while you were losing your beauty sleep.

So, this went on for several months. I would regularly meet Jean-Claude at the prayer meeting on Saturday afternoons, and take him out for supper, and then I began taking him out to movies. To the point that he began counting on it, and expecting it. For instance, we went to see *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and in the darkness of the movie theatre, I turned to glance at Jean-Claude, and there he was, sucking his thumb

while totally absorbed in the movie. Now, after a few months of this, one Saturday I tried something different. Because I really felt he was taking advantage of me. So we met at the prayer meeting, had supper and then he asked me, with an innocent, little-kid look in his eye, "Now we go see a movie, eh?" I replied, "All right, Jean-Claude, we go see a movie. If you pay." So Jean-Claude thinks and thinks this over, for about three minutes, and then he blurts out, joyfully, "Maybe we can watch television!!!" (So he may have been retarded, but he was not crazy.)

And I would bump into him on the 105 bus going towards NDG, which back then was a mainly English neighbourhood. I would say, "Hi, Jean-Claude. Where are you going?" And he would raise a fist and yell, "NDG, TA-DAA!!" Remember, he had been hit in the head by a French-speaking person.

Of course, he had strange opinions, like he wanted to nuke the Russians, for instance. And one day he came to my parents' place and he used the washroom. As he was walking into the bathroom, he mumbled, "And now, French toilet." And when he walked out, I saw what he meant. He had shit all over the floor, and rubbed his poop on the walls. But you couldn't get angry, because Jean-Claude was Jean-Claude, and everybody loved Jean-Claude. When he first met my mother, who was around seventy then, he jumped on her and kissed her on the neck for all of five minutes. She was in a panic, and my parents decided I could never, ever bring him into our house again.

Of course, at St. Augustine's, he had all the girls' phone numbers, and he phoned them regularly in the middle of the night. So the priest confiscated his little black book. (This is what I was told by several members of the congregation.) So the next time I bumped into Jean-Claude, in the entrance of the McGill metro station, he is in a wheelchair, he lifts up his fist and with a goddawful smile, and blurts out, "NO MORE CATHOLIC!! TODAY ANGLICAN!! TADAA!!" And then he broke out in hysterics, guffawing at his own joke.

After that I never bumped into Jean-Claude again. I guess to some extent, he realized that he could benefit from his handicap. But I am sure he had his ticket to heaven. After all, he went to church, right?

JOSEPH HAVE AND JOSEPH HAVE NOT

When I was working at Statistics Canada, I was hospitalized for a month in the psych ward at the Montfort Hospital, which is being closed down these days by the Harris government. I met, among other people, a lady called Thérèse, who knew my mother and my sister. She was quite loquacious, and appreciated any little act of kindness. For instance, my father came to visit me on the ward, and when he entered the room, Thérèse was lying down. So my dad told her not to bother to get up, madam. And she believed henceforth that he was the foremost translator in Canada.

Around two years later, I quit that job and moved back to Montreal. One day, I received a phone call from Thérèse, and she invited me to a party her family was throwing for her fiftieth birthday. At the time, she was living at her brother Joseph's house, and Joseph was quite well to do. He had been the head of the Atomic Energy Commission, and now he owned an engineering firm and taught university on the side.

So I took a bus up to Ottawa, then to Aylmer, right to Joseph's house. As I followed directions, because I had never been there before, I arrived at a little crescent in a very posh neighbourhood, the kind of street that doesn't have a sidewalk or telephone posts. All I could see was enormous pine trees in front of mansions, and more mansions. I rang at the door, and Thérèse let me in. Immediately, she introduced me to her sister-in-law, and told her my father was, and I quote, the foremost translator in all of Canada. Then she gave me a tour of the house: here was the grand piano, which they had purchased for just a song, and it sat below the fifteen foot chandelier in the study. I won't go on. Original paintings on the walls, etc. etc.

Finally, dinner was served. The sister-in-law, who served the meal, seemed cold and distant, maybe a tad embarrassed to have a mentally ill relative. The brother, Joseph, was warm and congenial. His other brother was a Senator, yes, a Senator in the actual Senate. But Thérèse

said aloud at the dinner table that the Senator was always absent from the family, had nothing to do with the likes of them. And she kept putting her pied in her bouche. And each time, the sister-in-law would cringe.

Then Thérèse's niece came in, arriving late for dinner. My God! A great looker, she was happy, and charming, she was studying architecture at the University of Ottawa, she was engaged to get married. I was in awe. She drove her own sports car, plus she had religion, she was a born-again Christian. How do people like that manage, and how do they cope with us mere mortals?

Well, dinner went on and on, and finally, that evening, I returned to Montreal. Now it was ironic that the first person I bumped into upon landing off the bus was Joseph, not the brother of Thérèse, but another Joseph. This poor man I knew through a friend of mine, Nikki. She took care of him because she found him sweet.

Homely. My God, was he homely. And he had been born in Douglas Psychiatric Hospital, raised there and essentially lived on the streets. Sometimes, he would get a job as a dishwasher for two or three days. Other times, some crook would pay him a few dollars to distribute Hare Krisna literature to strangers on the corner. Joseph didn't know how to read. This was, quite simply, because he had never been to school. And also he was a nudnik. Every time I bumped into him, which was usually at five-year intervals, he would mumble at me, with a slowpoke voice, asking me for five dollars because his father just died. And he told me he loved Playboy magazine. I told him he shouldn't read Playboy, but he told me frankly that he didn't read it, he just looked at the pictures.

So Joseph, this Joseph, slept on my sofa that night and I sent him along his way in the morning. And I sat down and thought that it was strange that some people had so much, and some people had so little.

Time passed. I went to visit Thérèse one more time, about five years later. She was now living in a group home, with other psychiatrized

people. She wore big construction boots and a raggedy dress. She obviously had not washed her hair in weeks, if not months. She had ballooned out to about three hundred pounds.

We got to talking, and I asked her about her fabulous niece. Well, that grieved Thérèse, because the niece had been manic-depressive and had jumped in front of a subway in Toronto.

I guess I can hear her screaming as the train approaches, approaches, forever approaching. And I see Joseph every now and then, on the streets of Montreal. And he is still trucking along, asking me for five dollars because his father died. Again.

SECRECTIONS

I first noticed the war situation when I got arrested under the *Anti-terrorist Act* for jaywalking. I told the judge the streetlights were really God blinking at me, and he had me deported for looking like an Arab.

Whenever I make love to you, fluids are transmitted from my body to yours that contain unicellular coded messages about merchant-marine cargoes, nuclear warheads and shipments of oil across the Persian Gulf. I realize now that we are spies in a cosmic war of viruses. The Muslim world is supposedly an infection that our government will fight to the finish by shipping off white blood cells and parachuting them, equipped with flamethrowers and relief food packages for starving children. Mullahs will have subscriptions to Time Magazine.

Our species' battle of Armageddon will be fought against the viruses.

I pee in the toilet and send microfilm to the fish of the rivers and ultimately, the Ocean: I am summoning them to rise up against oil slicks and mercury poisoning polluting their wet world.

You light up a cigarette that is billions of years old. The atoms that make up your body are as old as the Big Bang. The plastic in the screen of my computer comes from petrified trees in Saudi Arabia, which come from forests, which were created by seeds planted by the wind, going back indefinitely, metamorphoses overlapping since the dawn of the universe.

Will the universe stop expanding, and begin to contract? Time might go into reverse gear, and dinosaurs called George W. Bush will be eaten by cavemen.

Dinosaur pie.

The snowflakes that are blowing about my Canadian window contain radioactive particles and are frozen acid rain. There is a wicked war going on, and none of us will survive this new millennium.

Dinosaur pie.

But my blood flows warm in my veins; my children's blood boils, as they jump on my bed. Molecular wars will be won by the children of the world.

A SPASM CALLED POET

I am a spasm called "Poet." Sometimes I get erect and ejaculate incendiary pamphlets. Then I lay low and dream of Paradise Lost.

I watch cycles of Time flow by, bumping into each other's synchronicities, screaming out for divine intervention and for the muse to howl out a dirge for the dead souls.

I have buried hundreds of my peers, most of them before their time; these were aborted poets, cleft from the rock of alcohol and enjoyment.

You might know me, having given me a coin as I squat on your street corners, looking disheveled and hungry for a war to create a job for me. Actually, I would like to create a job for the war.

It is a pretty useless time we live in, reverting back to Doris Day movies and Fred Astaire musicals, about generals dancing on the ceiling of the stars. I am sure the Nazis will enjoy Django Reinhardt's missing fingers, as they skip a beat.

And how goes the battle, Mr. Bush? How do you sleep with yourself at night? I am sure no one else would want to.

Lovers are not soldiers. Lovers are not soldiers. War orphans do not make good fathers and mothers. Soldiers drink, rape, plunder. Like drunken Vikings.

I am calling on a messiah out there to come and judge the living and the dead, well the living anyway. And maybe take out a few of our leaders.

The Beast will cringe when the UFOs land and take over. The angels might not be amused at the people who murdered children.

But in the Real World, Orwell was right: the future of mankind is a soldier's boot grinding its heel into a human face forever and ever.

THE HANGOVER

Oh my god, what was that? And oh my head. Suddenly, reality is invading my brain, and the light of day is hurting my eyes. What is that sound? It is as though my ears were pounding. And the center of my head is in intense pain, as the whole room starts to spin around. I feel like throwing up, as I get dizzier and dizzier. There, I will take one foot out of the blankets, and stick it on the floor, to keep the room steady, to prevent the room from spinning around. I am sweaty all over, and the taste in my mouth is awful. Nausea. Headache. Fever. Pain.

It seems like a millennium went through my head last night. First, it seemed like the end of the world, and there was a big panic, of such a dimension that it only happens once every thousand years. Christ was supposed to come back, the first time, a thousand years ago; now it seems like last night, there was the Y2K bug, and we were on the verge of a world war, missiles landing on our cities, mushroom clouds rising ominously over the dead.

Then there were countless Renaissances, and returns to antiquity, and Reformations and Counter-Reformations, and it all makes me feel nauseous this morning, as we enter the 2000s. I see witches being burned at the stake, and priests yelling at them to repent, as the smoke of the stakes rises through the public square. I see Napoleons and Hitlers and Maos and Stalins, following up on Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, and Louis XIV. Giant ego's clashing; coronations of dictators; and who are these recent figures? I see Elvis and Marilyn Monroe, and their millions of followers. There is Frank Sinatra, who was as famous as Mickey Mouse.

All these images are swirling around my brain, along with all the nudes in the Sistine Chapel, all the Van Gogh paintings and the Rembrandts. I see Japanese prints, Hindu temples, with sculptures decorating their walls, Muslim mosques, Jewish scholars pouring over the Scriptures, teaching their young behind closed doors, dreading the Gentiles. I see native populations getting massacred by European invaders, and nuclear

tests in the Pacific Ocean causing Polynesian populations to give birth to monsters. And through it all, dollars and francs and yen and shillings being exchanged, changing hands.

The last part of the nightmare, which emerges from the blackout of last night, looks like the sixties, the Revolution, the Anabaptist dream, the commune of Paris in 1870, the Bolshevik uprising, the guillotine, and writers, writers, writers documenting the past, recording history for future generations, and it is all swirling around.

Somebody get me some tomato juice, an aspirin, something to stop the pounding in my brain. Because I just remember generations and generations of drinkers and opium smokers and junkies, repenting in churches, shooting needles into their arms, and drunken dancing and swinging rooms full of merry-making late into the night.

And science discovering innocent messiahs and airplanes, which inevitably get corrupted by the government, which will use them to wage war. In the name of Christ, in the name of Lenin, in the name of Mussolini, armies are marching off to war, chanting, chanting, and now I really feel like vomiting. The Wright brothers are turning over in their graves, as the government bombs cities in Viet Nam, in Germany, in Italy, in Afghanistan, in El Salvador, and there is no more innocence by now, only acid revenge, and punishment, as the Antichrist pours fire from the sky.

I also vaguely remember church services, synagogues and cantors singing psalms, stained-glass prisons on Sunday mornings, Saturday mornings, mosques on Friday mornings, and the imprisonment, torture, massacres and exaltation of holiness – all this makes me want to puke as well. So I am lying in bed, and I am afraid of choking on my own vomit.

The millennium of last night is over, it is over. Today, I can start all over again and have a hair of the dog that bit me, or else I can finally phone out for help. Call a therapist, call Sigmund Freud, call Bill Wilson, call Carl Jung, call my guru, your guru, his guru, call a shaman or a witch

doctor. Call the false prophet, anything rather than face what we have done during the last thousand years.

And what remains is mystery: the pyramids, the pillars at Stonehenge, Easter Island, the abominable snowman, the Loch Ness monster, life after death. And we still can't choose between The Tibetan Book of the Dead, Madam Blavatsky and the teachings of St. John of the Cross. Is Martin Luther in heaven, singing hymns and worshiping the messiah?

And – no it is awful, how sick I feel this morning. I see billions of women, oppressed, raped, beaten, subjugated, obedient to men, giving birth, breastfeeding with another baby on their laps, doing all the menial jobs of the tribe. And the goddess defiled time and again. Mother Mary turned into the Virgin, the female eunuch, the angelic eunuch, and this is sick too.

Whites enslaving blacks. Merchants buying and selling human flesh. For dollars, for francs, for shillings. And in my brain this morning, the marketplace, the stock market, the Nasdaq, the million trillion transactions shuffling coins and dripping blood. Ecommerce. Used car dealers and snake oil salesmen, selling encyclopedias, selling houses and farms, seizing houses and farms, burning villages, selling weapons to prolong the agony – and I am about to puke this time for sure.

But I don't think I will change the world's patterns, not just because we have entered a new millennium. I will just reach over and have a shot of that whisky, that bottle of cheap white wine, that vodka, that Jamaican rum, and start all over again. At least it doesn't hurt as much as facing the truth. And the hangover abates, one more time. Until the end.

Until the last final drunk, from which there is no possible recovery. Because then you are dead. And you join all these souls, in the ground, at the end of the long, dark tunnel, and you will either stay drunk or hung over.

For eternity.

THE MYTH OF THE REVOLVING DOOR

I guess that's what it is, the fear of finally getting a lobotomy. That is what has kept me out of the hospital so long. Electric shock treatment is pretty frightening too. What the psychiatrists have done to us is nothing short of a holocaust. Yup, a holocaust.

So I am laying low. I sit in this Van Houtte coffee shop day after day, and yes, I mumble a bit, I talk to Jesus, but not too loud, so the police don't bother with me. I am asking Jesus why people are so strange around me. Why that old lady over there is staring at me, giving me the evil eye. She has been sitting there having a cup of tea for 45 minutes now, soaking her tea bag in the blood of her children. And that young woman over there, by the door – don't tell her who I am, because she is obviously a social worker.

I remember meeting a social worker, when I was in the Royal Ottawa, and I told him I didn't trust him farther than I could throw him. He did a double-take and ended the interview immediately. He was young, clean-cut and obviously totally wicked.

So I am trying to keep out of the hospital. There is a television set in the opposite corner which is looking for me. Let me explain to you how that works: the satellites in outer space are connected to the television sets, which watch us. Most people don't even realize this, the fact that tv works both ways. They think they are watching a picture, with actors, while in fact the people you see on tv are the people in your room. When I realized that the tv sets watch us, I freaked. I just froze and didn't move a muscle for about eight hours. Now I can fool the tv people, they can't see I am talking to Jesus.

I stopped seeing Dr. Kraus about two months ago. He definitely wanted to give me a lobotomy. He told me I was welcome to come and see him any time, and we could talk. I knew what that meant : a lobotomy. He is about six foot tall, and looks down at me to hypnotize me. And wouldn't he like to know the secret about tv sets, eh?

Well, he won't find me in here, not in this coffee shop. Because this is the first place he would look for me. It is too obvious. You know, if I was sleeping in a public bathroom or something, he would look for me there, right away.

And when you re-enter the psych ward, the other patients put you on trial. They have been trying to get me to appear in court for several weeks now. All the tv sets, the electric circuitry has been looking for me, because the patients' court wants me to testify. Oh, I have been faithful to the codes, I haven't ratted on anybody, I haven't denounced anybody to the doctors. But the patients don't know that I am the friend of Jesus. They don't know about my Mission.

I have never told anybody about this, but the last time I was in the Douglas, I was Archangel Michael, and it was up to me to decide who was going to go aboard the space ship through the television set into the black hole in space. And when they turned off the tv set, I knew they had cancelled it, the end of the world. Imagine that, the end of the world had been cancelled. And I was no longer Archangel Michael.

Now, you might say I just look like an ordinary guy, right? But you can't see my wings. Nobody can see them unless they are spiritual.

As for the police, they just ignore me. If they knew who I was, they would take me in an alley and get me to sin, and then shoot me. Another mental patient bites the dust. And there might be a blurb in the newspaper, about how I got shot. But the devil's police would go unnoticed. I can spot them though.

By the way, can you see my wings? Are you taking your medication? Because if you are taking neuroleptic medication, you can't see my wings. The only people who know who I am are psychotic. And the police, but they don't notice me.

I got kicked out of the coffee shop across the street yesterday, because there was a fight. I had poured the poison coffee on the floor, and the attendant wanted to denounce me to the television people. He told the restaurant manager, and the manager asked me to leave. So I wanted to take the empty cup with me as proof, for the patients' court. You never know when it might come in handy.

Today, I might wash. My beard is getting good. And I am wearing my sunglasses so the tv can't read my eyeballs. They can't see which way I am looking. And I mumble so low that the tv set can't hear if I am talking to Jesus or the devil. I know there is smoke coming out of my ears, but what can you do? I am in hell, and it is hot.

Tonight is the night of the big move. That is why everyone is on edge. I have noticed that everyone who comes close to me gets nervous. That is because they know they are not going aboard the space ship into outer space. In other words, they are going to have to stay on Earth during the Great Tribulation. And you know what that means...

Luckily, I have a room in a boarding house. That is where we are leaving from. And then we go pick up the patients at the hospital, and we are off to heaven. And I will be able to fly again, like Peter Pan.

Just call me Peter Pan. And don't tell the psychiatrists what I just told you, or else you are going to go through the Second Death. Is that a secret? Cross your heart and hope to die? Get it?

THE GODDESS'S DIARY

September 11, 2001

Dear diary,

Hmm... I seem to have lost a stitch here.

So many children born, so many dying: it baffles me, even after all these years.

You know, I get tired of running the universe. It has been billions and trillions of years, after all. Black holes in space, colliding planets, comets smashing into suns – when will it all end?

And what of planet Earth? Little Johnny forgot to say his prayers last night, and sister Ruth fell asleep during Vespers. My children in the caves in the Himalayas have been complaining about the cold. And those who call me Allah seem to have something else on their minds.

I was quite concerned that Mrs. Brown miscarried. She was very disappointed. I bet the whole town of Akron, Ohio commiserated with her.

All in all, it has been a good day. For most people. As they say, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years are as one day.

Another day, another dollar.

THE MAIDEN, THE MOTHER AND THE HAG

One winter afternoon, when my daughter Cordelia was four years old, we were standing on a street corner, waiting for her sister Isabelle to come home on the little yellow school bus. I was holding Cordelia in my arms, and we were talking about God.

Suddenly, I turned to the west and pointed at the setting sun, as it spread and lay royal golden and purple over the rooftops of NDG. I said to Cordelia, "See? That's what God looks like!"

She asked me, with her high-pitched squeaky voice, "Sometimes does God look like a little girl?"

I thought for a split second, and replied, "Yes, Cordelia. Sometimes God looks like a little girl."

THE MAN WHO HATED LEONARD

Everyone loves Leonard. But me, I used to hate Leonard Cohen. I would go to parties, and this poet would be boasting of having had breakfast with Leonard, and having shown Leonard his manuscript. And yes, Leonard loved his manuscript, and do you know Leonard? Why yes, I know Leonard. I was asked to write an epitaph for him when he dies. And yes, everyone I know in Montreal – and his dog – knew Leonard.

Except for me. I didn't know Leonard. I would see his books sold in the late seventies in used bookstores. And every time I turned the TV on, there was Leonard. OOOOOH, how I used to cringe whenever I saw Leonard on TV. And as for his ex-girlfriend Suzanne, well she cut me off because she thought I was crazy and dangerous.

But I am not dangerous. I just told Suzanne that my parents used to hypnotize me into being a spy for them among the artist crowd. I told that to Suzanne because I was off my medication, and well, I had to tell her something...

But I am not dangerous. I just hate Leonard.

Let me explain why. I used to write poetry. Well, probably pretty bad poetry. I guess it was bad, because every publisher in sight and every magazine editor in Canada rejected my material. I even contemplated making it in the States to be accepted here. So I tried even harder to get published. Something was missing. I was not Leonard Cohen. So I hated him.

Nothing personal, Mr. Cohen. But you could blow your nose on a piece of paper, submit it to McClelland & Stewart, and they would sell it. Worldwide.

I used to wonder if Leonard has sold his soul in order to make it. I never found out.

I saw Leonard live twice. The first time was in December 1969, the year the police went on strike in Montreal. I ended up in the Douglas that year. And didn't Leonard come and give a concert for the mentally ill that winter, at the Dalse Center. I was there in the audience, and I was thrilled. Hey, it was a good concert. I had had a bad trip on acid, and Leonard said to the patients, "You people are the political prisoners of our society." Just what I wanted to hear, because I was a politico. A radical. I wanted to plant bombs, but didn't know how.

Anyway, that was in 1969. In 1983, I was out of the Douglas, one day in October. I had just gotten out, by the way, when I was in a smoked meat restaurant on the Main called – what else? The Main, when suddenly, I saw him. Him. You know. The ladies' man.

He was dining with two beautiful ladies at the table next to mine. I whispered to the waitress, "Excuse me, is that Leonard Cohen?"

"Uh-hm," she whispered, meaning yes.

So I surreptitiously finished my smoked meat sandwich, and got my nerve up. I walked right up to the next table over and asked him, boldly I must say, "Are you Leonard Cohen?"

And he looked at me right in the eye, without batting an eyelash, and exclaimed, in a disarming way: "YES I AM!!!"

And lo and behold, I immediately began to stutter, "M-m-m-my na-na-name is Ro-ro-ro-robert S-s-s-smith..."

I started fidgeting as I stood in front of their table, and I said, stuttering some more, "I-I-I-I ma-ma-mailed you my boo-boo-book I've be-be-been so happy since I go-go-go-got my lobotomy."

I managed to blurt that out, and he almost smiled as he answered me, "Yes, it is sitting on my coffee table at home. Tell me, did you really have a lobotomy!?"

And I burst out with, “No-no-no, but I just got out of the Douglas!!” I said it so fast I wasn’t even sure they heard me. Then I added, “I go-go-got your address from my fr-fr-friend Jo-jo-john Max...”

And once again, he gave me a disarming Zen master smile, as I turned around abruptly and walked embarrassed out of the restaurant. As I was walking out, one of the ladies dining with Leonard whispered to him, “That man was just like a little mouse!”

And I went home and proceeded to have a nervous breakdown that lasted ten months.

HONEST GOVERNMENT

The word had gotten out that spring that the fall election would revolve around the theme of Honest Government. The People's Party of Slobovia had adopted the theme, as well as the slogans, logos, program and new policies at the Party Convention the preceding fall. The logo was a giant HG, to symbolize Honest Government. The policy was based on the 1990s Russian theme of glasnost, which was meant to bring transparency to the Soviet system. Everyone was to be honest from now on.

I woke up to the sound of the alarm clock radio. To my dismay, the fall election had been canceled, according to the news. The candidates of the opposition had all been arrested and accused of dishonesty. This meant they had no right to *habeus corpus*, and they were to be detained indefinitely. No one knew their whereabouts. The radio station had sent journalists to investigate the case, and it seems the opposition party members' dishonesty was a cover up for their secret terrorist activities. There was a case of airplane high-jacking involved.

So, I wondered what this would lead to. And I asked myself, "Am I really honest? Do I have the right to walk the streets?" As I got dressed and ready to go to work, I thought about this new turn of events.

As I walked to the subway, I saw electoral posters that were still hanging on trees and telephone posts. They all described the benefits of honest government. They showed the Leader of the Opposition and below his photograph, there was the caption: *Would you buy a used car from this man?* I wondered if that was slander or just regular electoral backstabbing.

As I took the subway, people looked nervous. No one made eye contact with the other passengers. Everyone looked like they had skeletons in their closet. Maybe this man in the gray flannel suit was a closet queen; maybe the Pakistani lady with the shawl over her head was an illegal immigrant. It seemed as though Honesty was taking its toll. There were

advertisements in the subway with the face of the Leader of the country peering into our souls, asking *Have you been honest with yourself today?* Immediately, I thought of the money I had earned the previous year by working under the table. And I too began to cringe, and feel dishonest. I couldn't look at my reflection in the window of the subway, and I was ashamed of myself.

As I got out of the subway station, I noticed police officers stopping regular-looking people on the street. I wondered what was going on. Something was up. One older gentleman with a mustache told me the police were doing spot checks, asking citizens for their papers, just in case someone's I.D. was not in order. Why, I wondered. Then a woman police officer stopped me on the next block. She walked right up to me and asked me my name.

I told her.

She said, "Could I see your papers please?"

I said I was sorry, I didn't know it was compulsory to carry I.D. on the street. I had left my papers at home.

She looked angry. "Where do you work?"

I told her I worked at the newspaper.

"That is not an honest newspaper. It has disagreed with our Leader's policies. What do you do there?"

I told her I bought advertising for the paper but I asked her, "What is going on here? Since when do I have to give you all this information?"

"It is for your own protection. There are liars among us, and we are going to weed them out."

I thanked her.

She replied, "Now get out of my face, and the next time I see you, you had better have your papers. Now go."

I thought to myself, "What is going on here? Is this a coup d'état or something?"

As I arrived at work late, I tried to get in the front door. It was locked. A security guard told me, "The newspaper has been closed by the government. It seems we are not honest enough for them. You can pick up your last pay cheque next Thursday."

Other employees were gathering at the front door. I recognized a couple of them, the cartoonist and the cleaner. Then a police car pulled up and we were told to disband. "Move along, move along. No public demonstrations are allowed anymore. Move or we will arrest the whole lot of you!" It seemed that there were dishonest demonstrations and honest demonstrations. Dishonest demonstrations were attended by liars and terrorists and enemies of the republic. That was the word. Where would all this end? In the name of what?

I walked back to the subway with the cartoonist of the newspaper. He told me his neighbour had turned himself in to the police, for lying to his children and to his wife. He had had an affair with his secretary, and didn't want a soul to know. But now it was public business. He had to make a confession to his wife.

I saw more police arresting people for not carrying their papers. Since the newspaper had been closed down, rumours circulated by word of mouth. There were stories of interrogations, torture, police brutality and total dictatorship. The interrogations were carried out in the name of honesty, in order to get to the bottom of things. There were television shows where everyone hung out their dirty laundry. People were making public confessions about having sex outside of marriage, about having been molested, about being cross-dressers, about seeing prostitutes. And it seemed the more sex-related the crime was, the more interesting it was

to hear. Over the next few weeks publishers began to print public confessions. You could read about the secret lives of public figures, telling all, showing all with graphic photographs. Pornography sales soared; attendance at AA meetings had never been better. And meanwhile, every time I rode the subway, I cringed, and noticed that absolutely no one talked to anyone openly anymore. But by now, there were armed police officers in every subway car, just to keep an eye on the liars and dishonest people.

The government had passed the *Honesty Act*, according to which it was forbidden to lie, to cheat, to work under the table, to avoid paying taxes, to cover anything up, to desire privacy of any kind, or to cheat on one's wife. Cameras were installed in bedrooms and hotel rooms to catch adulterers. So naturally, people went to the bathroom in order to have sex with prostitutes and other people's partners. After all, graffiti were supposed to be honest, and the government condoned graffiti writing in bathrooms. After a while, you couldn't walk into a public washroom without hearing moaning and groaning in the stalls, and then things got crazy.

Some scientist had invented a lie detector. Not just any lie detector, but one that was the size of an electrode, and it could be installed in the brains of people. First, they did experiments with the mentally ill, as these are the guinea pigs of science. Tests indicated that people felt like vomiting every time they lied to themselves or to someone else, especially an authority figure, and every time they covered something up. And there were plenty of people vomiting. Next, the government began installing these gadgets in people's brains in order to catch terrorists; then to catch bank robbers and violent offenders. And finally, the government just found it convenient to install the lie detectors in every citizen's brain – it just made it so much easier to detect dishonesty. It worked better than a truth drug.

So time has passed now and everyone is throwing up every day. It is pretty disgusting to see, but luckily, the government has hired staff to clean up the barf. Except the members of the government are exempt from having lie detectors in their brains. Apparently, the lie detectors

would interfere with running the country. Besides, no one suspects a civil servant or a politician of being a liar or a terrorist.

It has now been months since that first day of honest government. The minority lower Slobovians have been herded into specialized neighbourhoods, because it is a known fact that they are liars. Their leaders have been accused of being dishonest and plotting terrorist acts. Sometimes, you hear that a minority member has disappeared and been tortured by the police for merely thinking of committing a terrorist act.

So I feel safe now. I am pretty happy with the new situation, because I am a pretty honest person. I have even made a donation to the government to promote honesty, and in return I was given a good job in a crown corporation for three months. And my taxes are in order now. But excuse me, I have to run to the bathroom; I think my stomach is upset –

THE COMPLICITY OF TRANSLATION

What is the moral responsibility of translators, especially if they are called upon to translate texts that are obviously false, misleading or obfuscatory? Indeed, most translators work for the powers that be and have to practice their trade translating propaganda, gobbledygook and confusing jargon. Now, any writer's manual will tell you that the purpose of good writing is to be clear, concise and transparent. However, it seems that a translator's duty is to respect the level of language, the tone of a source text and, above all, to convey the meaning of the original, no more, no less.

Ever since the Nuremberg trials, bureaucrats have a reputation for being faceless cogs in a machine, numbers or robots. Likewise, a translator may feel this way when he or she is employed by a multinational corporation, the civil service or any large office. After translating several thousand office memos, government reports or obscure political speeches, he or she may feel quite alienated, just like Winston Smith in Orwell's *1984*. The work may become meaningless, because the source texts are poorly written, laden as they are with administrative jargon. One might wonder if words like "proposition," "proposal," "implement" and "department" will some day be considered dirty words, just like the French catchphrase "collaboration." Remember that in the Vichy government, it was flogged to death in political speeches; however, after the War, "collaborateurs" were quite in disrepute. Likewise, at some time in the future, the fate of today's gobbledygook may take a turn for the worse.

The problem with administrative jargon is that it seems to need to be translated into plain English. In an essay called "Gobbledygook," Stuart Chase attempts to do so. Here is an example: "An office manager sent this memo to his chief: 'Verbal contact with Mr. Blank regarding the attached notification of promotion has elicited the attached representation intimating that he prefers to decline the assignment.' Seems Mr. Blank didn't want the job." The use of Latin, abstract, technical words obscure the meaning of a text. And since the

introduction of computers into the office, a conversation is no longer just plain talking; it is an "interface." I am sure, if you are employed by a government department, you could conjure up numerous examples.

Secondly, suppose you have an assignment to translate a speech by a politician who is obviously lying through his teeth. Will you respect the source text? Quit your job out of moral conviction? Expose the lies with a footnote from the translator? The problem with translation is that we are accomplices of our clients, and our only responsibility is to render the meaning of the source text into the target language, as objectively and invisibly as possible. We have no say in the matter. Our job is to translate English gobbledygook into French gobbledygook, because that means to respect the level of language. If we wrote a politician's speech in plain English, we would, quite simply, blow his cover. Also, we have to give readers the benefit of the doubt. We have to credit them with enough intelligence to comprehend the text for themselves.

I would suggest that the moral responsibility of the translator is precisely to be neutral. To be faithful to the source text, no matter how much it bothers your conscience. Of course, we are not called upon to complicate matters. We are not supposed to translate plain English into gobbledygook; we may even improve the style of the original. But we are doomed to be neutral and respect the tone, intention and meaning of the original writer. Just as some other professionals, we have to be faithful to our clients; take for instance, a lawyer, who has to defend a client whom he knows is guilty. Once you take on the job, you are bound by the inherent limitations of the trade.

THE JOB INTERVIEW

Yesterday, I had a job interview. It was with Ottawa Life Insurance Company, a well-respected establishment in the financial district. The appointment was on St-Jacques Street, in Old Montreal, at 11:00 a.m.

I arrived there bright and early, wearing my suit and my tie, carrying my attaché case and holding a copy of The Financial Post under my arm. The receptionist asked me my name, and then motioned me to kindly have a seat. I was sitting in a comfortable armchair, beside a huge artificial plant that hung over my head. I read the newspaper and glanced at the brochures of the insurance company. They also sold mutual funds.

At 10:55, a stocky, butchy-looking lady motioned me into her office. She had her hair up in a bun and dressed like a lawyer, all in grey. I sat down in front of her at the desk. She smiled at me perfunctorily and sat down across from me. She crossed her hands and leaned forward the way they teach you in personnel management classes. She said, "So tell me about yourself."

I began, "Well, I am 53 years old. I am an artist by nature, but I would like to apply for a position as an insurance salesman."

"And what qualifications do you have for the position?"

I began. "First, I dropped out of university in 1967, because I was taking LSD and that was incompatible with my philosophy courses. I had begun taking acid that year in order to reach enlightenment. I guess it was fun at first, but eventually, I ended up in the funny farm."

"Yes, yes."

"And about three months after my first acid trip, I decided to go insane in order to find inspiration to write. I didn't want to be just another

writer. I wanted to have something original to say. So I proceeded to go insane. Within two years, by 1969, I was committed to the insane asylum. I had written some pretty interesting stuff by then, but my writing really took off once I got committed.”

“Yes, Mr Smith, I am listening. You said you went insane.”

“Once I got discharged from the mental hospital, I wrote some more. And I attended a lot of demonstrations for the liberation of political prisoners in Quebec, to stop the war in Viet Nam, as well as a couple of demonstrations against language laws. I had been attending cell meetings of communist groups that advocated the use of violence to overthrow the government, and so forth. The *raison d’être* of these groups was to provide a venue for former social workers who got nowhere using peaceful negotiations to obtain social justice. So they turned to making bombs and assassinating policemen to carry out revolution.”

“How interesting, Mr Smith. You have lived a very adventurous life.”

“After I got interrogated by the police a few times, I became paranoid and wanted to run away from Quebec. I would take off hitchhiking through Ontario. Eventually, I got arrested again and again, this time for vagrancy. The cops would beat the living piss out of me, because I looked like a bum, with my long hair and my beard.”

“I take it you were an original thinker back then too. We at Ottawa Life value original thinking. And did you wash regularly?”

“Oh no, sometimes I didn’t take a shower for three weeks at a time. I was quite scruffy.”

“Oh, how cute. You must have looked like an artist, a true bohemian.”

“In fact, madam, I was preparing for my career as an insurance salesman. I was an artist, but my goal was to sell mutual funds.”

“Just our kind of person. I bet you were a people person as well.”

“Well, I talk to strangers on the bus, if that’s what you mean. And a lot of my friends may not be artists, but they sure are alcoholics and drug addicts. I even know people who are in hospitals for the criminally insane.”

“But tell me something, Mr Smith, do you have any experience at selling financial packages?”

“No, but I have sold drugs at times to pay my rent, in the days when I was a street person.”

“Well, as we say in the insurance business, a sale is a sale is a sale. Now, tell me something. Whom have you read? Do you know Sartre? And Albert Camus?”

“Why yes, madam. And may I add, as my dear old mum used to say, ‘These are safe writers. Because they are dead. They will never molest your children. You can always trust a dead artist.’ And the longer they are dead, the more they are recognized in the Hall of Fame. Isn’ t that so?”

“Of course, Mr Smith. But we at Ottawa Life Insurance Company want a creative team. People who are not afraid to tell their boss where to go and how to get off. We encourage initiative and a touch of madness. Because genius is close to madness, as they say.”

“Yes, it sure is, madam. Tell me, are there any fringe benefits to the position?”

“Why yes, you can have a sabbatical of one year’s absence to go live in Greenwich Village or Soho or the Latin Quarter. Whichever you prefer.”

“Oh fantastic. I have been to all three. My favourite was Greenwich Village because I shot drugs there and lived on the streets for six weeks. I

even had my first homosexual encounter in New York City. That sure gave me a shot in the arm as an artist, I tell you.”

“By gosh, you sure are an artist, Mr Smith. You seem to be made of the right stuff. And what are your salary expectations?”

“I was hoping to have the same income as I earned as an artist.”

“Why of course, Mr Smith. Would that be in the six-digit ballpark?”

“No, more like three or four thousand.”

“You mean per week?”

“No, I meant per year. You see, I have been a starving artist for thirty years now, but I have gone straight.” And I rolled up my sleeve. “See? No more tracks.”

“Oh you are a real card, Mr Smith. When would you be ready to start work?”

“Anytime. How about tomorrow?”

“And tomorrow it is, Mr Smith. By the way, nice suit.”

“Yes, I bought it at a church bazaar for fifteen dollars. Then I paid a tailor another fifteen to have it adjusted.”

“As they say, Mr Smith, a penny saved is a penny earned.”

“Yes, especially when you are living on the streets.”

“So we shall see you bright and early tomorrow morning?”

“Yes, ma’am.” And the interviewer accompanied me to the front door. I nodded politely at the receptionist.

The door closed behind me, and I took the elevator down 36 floors to the ground floor. It sure pays to be an artist. And am I ever glad to have landed that job. Just what the doctor ordered.

THE HEART ATTACK MACHINE

On September 24th, 1989, I was working as a translator for the Ministry of Education, in Montreal, when that night, at 4:00 o'clock in the morning, the doorbell rang.

It was Harry, and first of all, he was dead drunk. I mean he couldn't even stand up straight. And I let him into my apartment, which was on the 15th floor of a high-rise on Durocher. He started to gush with emotion, claiming that I didn't know how much I always hurt him, and he was so lonely, and I had to help him.

He went into a long monologue, as is his style, telling me that the black magicians from the Freemason Temple had traveled through the astral plane to go cause Harry's uncle to have a heart attack. Furthermore, their purpose in killing his uncle was – you guessed it – to harm Harry himself.

I backed off a bit, because this seemed incredible. And Harry went on to tell me why English-speaking Canadians didn't like French Canadians, and – you guessed it – the real reason is that francophones are all raised Catholic.

This monologue went on and waxed more and more dramatic until the wee hours of the morning, and finally, I decided I would help poor Harry. I offered to let him stay at my apartment for a month rent-free, so he could catch up on his financial situation. The problem with him was that every month, he would get credit from the corner grocer, and on the 1st of the following month, Harry would receive his welfare cheque and he had to reimburse the grocery store. So he was always a month behind on things. This way, if I let him stay with me for a month rent-free, he would catch up. But the only condition was that he was not allowed to drink in my apartment while he lived there. I had just quit drinking myself a few months before.

Well. He lived there for a month. He didn't drink. But for months afterwards, I kept finding stained kitchen knives, which meant that Harry had been doing "hot knives" in my apartment. This means smoking hashich on the tip of a burning hot kitchen knife.

Also, Harry drove me crazy. One night – and I had to go to the office in the morning – I woke up, and there was Harry leaning over me as I slept. He was holding up his right hand and keeping his ring finger down with his thumb. I asked him what the hell he was doing, and he replied that he was "casting demons" out of me. HELLO?

Another time, and this was tragic, Harry entered a long diatribe about East-West relations, and this was just before the end of the Cold War. His politics were totally cynical, and definitely very paranoid. He enjoyed "spooking" people.

Well, he spooked me all right. I went to meditate on the grounds of McGill University, about three blocks from home, and I decided to quit my job. (This was a major mistake.)

Still another time, I gave Harry seventy dollars to buy some groceries while I worked. And he went to the supermarket, and bought a mop, and sixty-five dollars worth of yogurt. He explained to me that when he entered the store, he panicked. He bought the first thing he could see. (And I imagine he bought a dime or two of hash behind my back.)

You see, Harry drives people crazy. He preys upon their insecurities, finds their weak points, and bugs them. He does this out of sheer mischief. Maybe not. Maybe he actually believes in all the stories about the occult. I remember him telling me that the witches from the Scala Bar were sending demons into his apartment. So he took an electric wire from a lamp, cut off the end and splayed it so the copper wires inside were exposed. Then he attached steel wool to the copper wire, and plugged in the other end of the wire. This obviously made sparks, and Harry told me this got rid of demons in his apartment. So I put him on, and told him that what really works to free your apartment of bad vibes

is air spray, like Florient. You just spray a bit of air freshener, and all the demons leave. Poof. And he believed me. I still find that funny today.

At one point, Harry told me he had telepathy with Martians. I asked him how he knew they were Martians, and he got really insulted. He explained to me that he had been riding on the bus, and the man sitting next to him began having telepathy with Harry. And he told Harry that he was from Mars. But what baffled Harry was that he couldn't figure out "how come he spoke English."

And if ever you questioned these stories, Harry would get quite belligerent. He would get condescending, because you obviously have never met a Martian yourself. He finds the rest of us incredibly stupid, because we know nothing about the occult. So he gets haughty with me and any other skeptics.

Finally, I did quit my job at the Ministry, because Harry was driving me crazy. Then two months later, my father died of a sudden heart attack, and then about a week later, I got served my divorce papers. So the caca hit the fan.

First of all, I was in shock when I heard the news that my dad had died. I always sort of thought he was immortal. You know the way children are. Death is not real. If you are playing cowboys and Indians, and you get shot, all of a sudden you get up again, and you are "another guy." Resurrection is that easy.

Well, my father didn't get up again. The first evening after the news of his death, I slept over at my cousin Jean's house, and I couldn't figure it out: I am dead but my father is alive; no, he is alive but I am dead; no, I am alive but he is alive too; no...

Another time, and this was tragic, Harry entered a long diatribe about East-West relations, and this was just before the end of the Cold War. His politics were totally cynical, and definitely very paranoid. He enjoyed "spooking" people..

I went to the funeral, and that was surrealistic, because a couple of days after my father passed away, there was the public funeral of the sixteen young women who had been massacred by a madman at the École polytechnique. And everywhere I went, the radio was broadcasting a funeral. So I just thought the synchronicity or timing of this coincidence was magical somehow.

Well, I attended the funeral, and started drinking again about two months later. I had dreams about my father - we all did. And my simple faith in the resurrection tided me over well during that period.

As for Harry, he moved to Toronto, in order to work. He lost all his jobs because of his drinking. And then he returned to Montreal, where he got into further trouble. But I don't really see him very often anymore. Don't care to go crazy or hear stories about Martians.

“And they bring them to the factory where the heart attack machine is strapped across their shoulders, and then the kerosene is brought down from the castles by insurance men who check to make sure nobody is escaping to Desolation Row” (Bob Dylan).

BERKELEY'S DREAM

It occurs to me that I am dreaming. I am dreaming that I am in a taxi, taking sharp ninety degree turns in a maze, and I am explaining to the driver all about the eighteenth century philosopher Berkeley. Now, Berkeley believed that the objects of the five senses are an illusion, that the world does not exist, that it is a figment of our imagination, and ultimately, Berkeley postulates that our human mind is a figment of God's imagination. So I want to wake up from my dream, because I have been dreaming for ten years that I have a wife and two young children, Isabelle and Cordelia.

And I do wake up, and the children are not there, they are in a foster home. Well, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, praise the Lord. So Job then gets afflicted with boils and sits on a pile of dung, only to mourn and get visited by his three friends who turn out to be a pain in the behind.

And I am telling my wife about Berkeley, how Lord Byron wrote about Berkeley in Don Juan: "*When Berkeley said there was no matter, T'was no matter what he said.*" And it occurs to me that Byron and Berkeley were almost contemporaries, because Byron was also born during the eighteenth century. And I am praying, praying to wake up from my dream, to wake up in God's heaven and wipe my brow, going, "Phew! What a nightmare."

And I am dreaming here, hoping to come to my senses. God has played a joke on me, removing my children from my life. Actually the government has the power and the leisure to forcibly remove children from their parents, and all the secrets of the family get exposed to full view. Science has revealed the secrets of Nature. Science has deflowered Nature.

I remember being a child, and my mother's aunts would come to visit and tell me about phrenology, they would read my palm, my mother would read me the Bible, my mother would exclaim that we were having

telepathy every time I phoned her lately, and in my dream tonight, my mother now has Alzheimer's syndrome and she can't really talk to me on the phone. I am dreaming that I once had a mother and children, and now Satan is going to afflict me with boils and I'll sit on a pile of dung and mourn.

Actually I can't find a pile of dung and I am singing in my dream. I am singing about ancient eighteenth century ideas like the theory of Progress, I am singing Beatles' tunes like *"I've got to believe it's getting better, it's getting better all the time. I've got to believe it's getting better since you've been mine..."* Yes, Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, and I remember returning from Europe in 1967, after hitch-hiking through Europe by myself at the age of 18 years old, and all my friends were all gaga about Sergeant Pepper, and everyone was a flower child except for me. And when they put flowers in their hair, I thought that was downright silly.

"Me used to be angry young man, me hiding me head in the sand, you gave me the word, I finally heard, I'm doing the best that I can..." And this dream is in technicolour with LSD hallucinations, like walking down Ste-Catherine Street at 5:00 o'clock in the morning, and the sky is all pink, the sidewalk is pink, the buildings are pink, and I am a hippie. I have woken up from the dream of being a hippie, wake up little Suzie, wake up...

I am also dreaming of having a fever of 105 degrees Fahrenheit when I am about ten years old, and my head is pounding and I am in delirium, and I can see a huge sea of glass, with lines marching on the horizon, and cannons going off in the distance, boom, boom, and I look beside my bed and they have given me the last rites and there is a little crucifix with candles, baby candles, and my mother is wiping my brow, hoping the fever will go away, and by jeez that must be where I got the brain damage.

And I am dreaming thirty years later of talking to my father just two weeks before he died, and he is making amends, and he is all choked up

emotionally as he admits to me that he is a schizophrenic too, and I get a wake up call two weeks later, and I am weeping at my father's funeral, and my mother tells me she won't give me a cent, but she did, she helped me out financially over the years.

When will this dream end? I have lost my children, my father, my mother and I am left alone with Bonnie, who is off working at the golf course and she left the house before 7:00 in the morning, and I am praying to God to go home, to wake up from this dream, because it has turned into a nightmare, and all I have to look forward to today is going to make the coffee at Friday Central, and it is Good Friday, and yes I am being crucified too. My wife figures she gets crucified all the time. I can see the crucifixion live in my dream, I can see it on-line in my head, in my own virtual little world, which according to Bezerkeley is a figment of your imagination as you read this, as God reads this.

So do I wake up in glory? Are we all naked and riding on a rainbow in a psychedelic heaven? Or do I wake up in the Marriage of Heaven and Hell, a figment of William Blake's imagination?

Am I going to be famous some day? Will I turn into Leonard Cohen and make love to all the pretty girls in Montreal? That might have been Leonard's dream, while the Rolling Stones sang, "*I can't get no satisfaction.*" My dream was that I heard that song over the PA system the first night I entered the Douglas, and they took my clothes away, and I had just been psychiatrized.

No, dear God, it's Robert. I definitely want to wake up from this dream before all my life flashes before my very eyes, before I die in this dream, because I might anytime, and they can't fool me, I read the Imitation of Christ, I have lived every day as though it were my last, I have lived like an existentialist, with Death peering at me from around the corner, I have buried enough people; now it is my turn, and I want to have a near death experience, no I want to wake up in heaven, in nirvana: do I deserve it?

EMPTY HOUSE

I never imagined I could miss anybody, but the kids are not there. I go into the kids' bedroom and look around, expecting to hear them fighting and yelling and jumping up and down on the beds, but there is not a sound. Not a sound except for the wind blowing through the dream catchers by the window, and whistling off-key in the chimes hanging from the ceiling. It is an ominous whistle, full of dissonant noises, unlike the voices of my daughters playing with and hugging their cats. Even the cats are lonely: they wander around the house, looking for the children, searching for a bit of attention.

At the foot of the youngest daughter's bed, there is a crate full of stuffed animals that almost look alive. The raggedy Ann dolls beam out a perpetual, stupid smile, as though still vibrant and joyful from the last time my daughter played with them. There are half-dressed Barbie dolls, with their haunting sexist figures; half-dressed, because the eldest daughter always dresses and undresses her Barbies.

In the closet, there are videos on the shelf, kids' videos. I miss the kids so much I am dying to watch a silly Disney melodrama about good guys and bad guys, with special effects and the voices of famous comedians. The videos stare at me, but I have no intention of playing them on the VCR.

The floor of the closet is a mess, with kids' clothes strewn all over, and it is a recent mess, as though my daughters had just walked through the closet and thrown their garments around.

Back in the bedroom, there are the kids' pictures on the walls. My eldest daughter paints rigid, almost regimented, frighteningly logical, perfect pictures, whereas her sister splashes colors on the canvas in a playful way; the youngest one cannot draw yet, but she certainly enjoys painting.

Of course, the beds are half-made, as though the children had left in a hurry, leaving the beds for someone else to make. On the beds, there is an array of diaries, but I won't read them. There are children's books, in French and English, books with pictures, books with stories, books from the library.

On the floor, there are a dozen pairs of shoes, scribbles, slippers waiting to walk away, a shirt about to move, but lying there lifeless without a kid to wear it.

I go back to the kitchen. It is morning, and I keep expecting a child to wander in her pajamas into the kitchen, and to open the refrigerator curiously to find breakfast. The kitchen is full of kids' foods, super-duper breakfast cereal boxes, and snacks and fruit, things that are of no use to a grown-up.

So I feel useless, the kids are not there, and I wonder about them.

SCREAMING BLUE MURDER

I had first heard about the murders when I was in high school and thought nothing of it, because it hadn't happened to me. But lately, there were reports on the radio about clergymen murdering young boys and destroying their parents' lives. It seems that when you murder someone's child, you ruin the lives of the surrounding people. Because murder causes insomnia, neuroses, alcoholism, madness, and further murders. And especially when you murder children, obviously the children's lives are taken away from them, but the parents are not amused.

Still, the full impact of the scandal didn't hit until it happened to my kid.

One day, my son came home sulking and angry. Neither my wife nor I could figure it out. No amount of asking questions could help. It turned out that he was dead. A priest at school had pulled the trigger, and blown my son's brains out. And from that day on, his marks began going down in school.

We thought of shipping him off to a boarding school, but this was difficult because he was dead. How he managed to walk around dead was hard to figure out also. But when I touched his hand, it was cold and clammy. Sure enough, the priest had shot him in the head.

Then I got angry. There was a cover-up, the authorities denied it had ever happened. I told them that their textbook claimed, "Thou shalt not kill," but somehow a lot of priests were doing in young boys. And there were a lot of dead young men walking around town. You could tell they were dead by the absence of light in their eyes. You might even say they were also blind.

But life goes on. There have been many scandals involving the Church, and I guess the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. No sir. You know, they burned witches at the stake, but that didn't matter very

much, because these were only women, and eccentric women at that. Then there were pogroms and the Holocaust, but that only happened to a minority of people. After all, people are not indispensable. But when the priest pulled the trigger on my only begotten son, I was not amused.

So that is why I am writing this story right now. Does anyone out there know how to resurrect a dead son?

SMOKE HOUSE

You get off the bus. You have an appointment. Ah, here he is, the Chinese man with the fu man chu mustache, your contact. Somehow, he looks strangely like Charlie Chan.

“Sir,” he says to you with a raspy whisper, “you want to come to smoke house?”

“How much?”

“Five hundred dollars to take you there.”

It is a deal. You hand him five hundred dollars. He takes you in his car, down dark, damp little streets, past the government flags advertising non-smoking, under broken and cracked streetlights, down winding little alleys, and finally, you are there.

“Smoke house. Just knock and say Xiao Xu sent you.”

You whisper back, with a chill in your spine, “Thank you. Thank you.” And you shake his hand with both hands.

Then he leaves in his car, and you turn and face the door of the smoking house. The car is speeding off in the distance. You catch your breath. You get your courage up, and you knock.

No answer. Oh no, don’t tell me he dropped you off at the wrong address... You knock again. You hear footsteps inside. A peephole opens, an eye looks out. “What do you want?”

You gasp, “Xiao Xu sent me.”

The door creaks open, a bit of light comes out on the street, for a second. An odour of tobacco inside the building reeks, and yet smells enticing. You step in.

There, a blue cloud of foul-smelling tobacco smoke lingers in the air. There are thirty, maybe forty people sitting there, in baggy raincoats, with dirty looks of guilt hanging over their eyes. They are tobacco smokers. As you walk past them, you notice everyone's breath smells foul. There is a red lantern hanging from the ceiling, like in a speakeasy. This is a smoking house.

You ask the man who opened the door, "Is that what they do here? Smoke?"

The man grumbles and shows you to a seat. There is a waitress with half her chest showing, wearing a mini-micro skirt, handing out packages of Reynolds tobacco, Players tobacco, cigarettes from all over the world. You give her fifty dollars, and she hands you a pack of cigarettes. She is wearing evil-looking mascara, which almost makes her look sexy, although she is easily in her sixties. She has big bags under her eyes, from smoking so much.

Someone coughs. Another person across the smoky room coughs. Everyone suspects everyone else of being a police informer. There is a shadow of guilt and conspiracy over the room. On the walls, there are smoking advertisements, something we haven't seen since the sixties. Some time in the last century.

So you puff eagerly. You loosen your tie, and take off your hat. Mmm, that feels good. There is nowhere else in town where this is allowed. And it is highly illegal here. You look around, and you think of your mother.

Then you wonder how many years in jail you would get if there was a raid here. Fifteen without bail? Twenty?
So you sit in the darkness, under the hue of the red lantern, and you enjoy your first smoke of the day. Yes, a cigarette.

And tears come rolling down your cheeks, because you remember when you used to smoke with impunity. Hey, movie stars used to smoke in

movies! There used to be smoking allowed everywhere! And things have come to this...

You look around, and the people in the smoking house look sleazy, mother rapers, father stabbers, mother stabbers, father rapers! You don't dare look anyone in the eye.

And you start coughing, a loud hoarse smoker's cough. Someone looks at you with approval. Right on.

The night goes on, but you are afraid of a raid. The smoke police might catch you, so you thank the waitress, and you tip the doorman, and out you go, into the night, with your head swimming slightly, your throat hoarse from the smoke. And you walk back to your hotel in the night.

Smoke house.

THE MAGIC KEY

Did you ever wonder why people used to sell their soul to the devil, like Doctor Faustus? What magic power did they dream of accessing, what kingdoms did they wish to control and possess, what occult knowledge and power was just beyond their reach?

I remember a favourite story by Thomas Wolfe, called *There Is No Door*, in which the narrator begins his story at a cocktail party in a penthouse in Manhattan, surrounded by movie producers and actors, successful playwrights, published novelists and people that seem totally magical to him, because he is left out. The narrator simply cannot break into this fantasy world. Everyone is chit-chatting with ease, the drinks are flowing, and the narrator is left out. Finally, he goes back home by subway, back to a slum neighbourhood, where he walks to his room, up rickety stairs to his hovel with leaky pipes, and the sound of the el rattling in his windows. And the theme is that there is no door.

I have wondered what is the magic elixir, the power, the key to success.

I remember writing letters to famous characters, like Margaret Atwood or Allen Ginsberg, trying to get them interested in me. I guess I dreamed somehow – naively - they would discover me, and I too would enter the cocktail party in Manhattan. I would attend book launchings and money would grow on trees. In reality, I worked as a busboy in restaurants, as a factory hand, as a dishwasher, and I barely owned a typewriter. I was in an oblivious world, a nobody among nobodies, a nemo going nowhere.

Today, I correspond by email with successful people. They travel worldwide, they work at fascinating jobs, and they don't seem to worry about survival, like us mere mortals.

And yet, I know of one or two people who have found the key. They found it late in life, around mid-life. These people truly had no door to walk through, they had been bullies when they were young, their only release from frustration was to go out and get drunk, just to get into a

fistfight and smash someone in the face. They had been to jail, and they had lived on the streets.

They were blocked at every hurdle. The obstacles they faced were unsurmountable. And yet, there was one invisible key to their success which most of us in North America take for granted.

I remember, in 1981, I was working as an English-French translator in Winnipeg for the federal government. One day, I received an envelope in the mail from Big Ray, back in Montreal. My name was scrawled on the front of the envelope, in the handwriting of a grade two school child. The stamp was smeared and laid on crooked on the corner of the envelope. And yet, I was thrilled.

I opened the envelope, and there was a little letter from Big Ray, who was in his mid-forties, and he signed with words of total magic and bewilderment, wizardry and transcendence: he said, "See? I have learned how to read..."

BORACHO BANDITO

Are you a troubadour? A singing and dancing highwayman? A disciple of François Villon? Are you going to take off through Africa, smuggling weapons like Rimbaud? Perhaps you have traveled through China, like Blaise Cendrars; perhaps you are a globetrotter.

Do you fit into the System, the Society into which you were born? Do you have enough Imagination to wander aimlessly through a morning in your own mind? Do you have to have a Program for every step you take and every penny you spend?

On the other hand, are you a free spirit? (Are there still any free spirits left, now that the Holy Spirit has begun leaving the Earth?) Do you have the soul of a poet? Are you gifted with genius?

No, sometimes I meet people who are walking/talking prose. They take pleasure in their own prejudice and righteousness. They are always right, because they never stray from the frying pans and lawn mowers of cliché. (If you never take a chance, you can never fail.)

Why don't you kick up your heels, and take off hitchhiking to India? You might be reborn as a rolling stone. Right now, you are just gathering moss, learning the same lessons over and over and over again: a broken record.

I know dozens of places where you can meet adventure on a street corner, under the guise of magic, disguises, delirium, madness, and other opiates. Why not cultivate wanderlust? Why not attempt life? Why not sing a song, right here and now?

Hey, Louis Armstrong told us that it is a wonderful world. Don't prove him wrong. Don't let yourself down. Be faithful to your creative spirit. Wake up; the sun is shining somewhere. Go find it!

SMILE, SMITTY LOVES YOU

So, no matter who you are, how insignificant you feel, no matter how lonely and godforsaken you have become; you may be behind bars, you may have tubes attached to your arms and nostrils; no matter how unhappy you think you are, rejoice and be exceeding glad, for Smitty loves you. Yes, Smitty has walked down the same paths as you, has carried the same burdens, and Smitty knows about your soul, and Smitty loves you.

(Recite this prayer to yourself three times a month and you will get rich. Smitty doesn't think you should drink or masturbate or smoke dope, but if you do, occasionally, don't feel bad because Smitty forgives you. So go out now and spread the word to your neighbour that yes, Smitty loves the whole world. Smitty has come into the world not that they should suffer, but that mankind could rejoice in Smitty's love.)

Do you feel loved by Smitty? Sit down crosslegged and hold your thumb closed on your palm and feel the cosmic vibrations generated by Smitty's love and whisper to yourself, "Smitty loves me, I am okay, everything is okay, because Smitty loves me." (With fervour.)

You have heard of the starving children? Well, Smitty loves them all, with his relentless, thirsty, all-knowing love. So give all your money to Smitty and Smitty will save the starving children. (Amen. Recite three times.)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to pause here and remember and thank all the people who provided me with moral support while this book was being written.

First, there is my companion, my lover, my wife, Bonnie McLean, who has attended all my poetry readings and gave me positive feedback about all my writings. She has brought into this world the two most wonderful people ever to walk this earth, my children Isabelle and Cordelia. They have been a constant inspiration to me and a joy to live with.

I would also like to thank Brentley Frazer and his wife Sun Etheridge, from Brisbane Australia. Their online magazine Retort has published me for several years now, and they believed in me through difficult times. I hope they prosper as their souls prosper. I also thank their friends down under, Damien Krell, Fakie Wilde, Jayne Fenton Keane and many others whom I never met in person. And while I am thanking online friends, I cannot fail to thank Robert Cheatham, the editor of Perforations Magazine in Georgia. He was one of the first people to give me recognition online. Then there is Star Jewel Smith, Claudio Parentela and Todd Swift, whose respective magazines published my writings because they believed in me.

I must also thank the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec for the generous financial assistance they provided while I was writing these texts. I am especially indebted to my agent at the Conseil, Ms. Brigitte Malenfant, who always gives me sound advice and support.

I would like to thank Bill and all his friends, Jack and Amy and Gary and Suzanne and Sandy and Paul and many others.

Special thanks go to Claude Hamelin, the editor of Teichtner, because he is at once a brilliant and warm person. He is also totally dedicated to the arts and has promoted many poets and writers.

Thanks also to Philip Amsel, Martin Duckworth, Donigan Cumming and Victor Wolfe, Kathy and David Gormley, Robin Suri and Greg Pond for their friendship. Thank you, Lorraine Loiselle for creating my personal web site. Not to forget Clifford Duffy and Ann Diamond and Sonja Skarstedt, who have been encouraging me as a writer for many years. And thanks to Dave Winchester, who read this manuscript and gave me critical advice.

To all these individuals I am indebted, and to many more. We don't get to where we are exclusively through our own efforts; we are each a stitch in a tapestry, and we are all members of each other in this life.

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Printed in April 2004
by Ginette Nault and Daniel Beaucaire
Saint-Félix-de-Valois (Québec)



Robert M. Smith is a recycled teenager who thinks he is an underground cult figure. He writes books about the revolution and Jesus and doesn't know the difference. In fact, he is a middle-aged parent raising two daughters called Isabelle and Cordelia in Montreal, Canada. He is no longer an outlaw and does translation for a living.

"Smith is my favourite underground writer. He uses his wit and wisdom to clear up the dirty under-pinnings of this world, making it a more bearable place in which to live."

Martin Duckworth, *National Film Board of Canada*

"Robert Smith captures the deity and the dust of our everyday world, blends it with soul blood and uses it as ink - a unique and mystical experience."

Brentley Frazer, *retortmag.com*

"Robert Smith extends the Beat tradition into the 21st century, with all that implies: streetwise visions and Raskolnikovian marginalia, madly wrapped in raw fiction's grit."

Todd Swift, *Nth Position*

ISBN-2-922243-10-9