

MEMORIES OF DROP CITY

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MEMORIES OF DROP CITY

**The first Hippie Commune of the 1960s
and the Summer of Love**

A Memoir by John Curl

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Prologue

Drop City was a legend and, at the same time, a real place.

I lived at Drop City for three years, participating in its precipitous rise and the events that followed. Many years later, I decided that it was time to tell the true story, but what did I really remember of events so long ago, of the world beyond the frames of the old snapshots and fading newspaper articles, beyond the moments of passion? I couldn't decide whether the story could best be told as history or fiction. The truth seemed to keep crossing the line between the two. As they say, fiction writers tell lies in order to tell truths that can't be told any other way. Back in the Sixties, sometimes it felt that the daily events we were living were also happening on another, almost mythical, level. Still, reality is messy and sprawling, while fiction transforms it into neat plots. Drop City involved a lot of people, so there wasn't just one, but many stories. Memories can be deceptive, and we constantly rewrite our life stories. I didn't want to hurt the people I loved and still love, or hurt myself, by writing the truth, but truth is the bottom line, and that is what I had to write, whether I wrote it as a novel or a memoir.

Begun in remote southern Colorado in 1965 by three young artists as a social experiment and art colony, it quickly became the first "hippie" commune, a crucible of the time, a hotspot of creative ferment and radical ideas, a countercultural crossroads stop for numerous seekers traversing America on their way to some better future. Drop City provided some of the earliest form and image to some of the ideas bubbling out of the ferment of related movements for social change of the Sixties. Drop City won R. Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion Award for 1966. The media portrayed it as a center of the drug culture, but Drop City is where I and a lot of others stopped taking drugs. Because something important happened there, the name Drop City still rings in our deep cultural memory over forty years later.

To understand America today you've got to look back at the Sixties, the watershed of forces that changed the second half

of the twentieth century, and to comprehend the Sixties you have to look at the counterculture. I don't mean the rock bands, but the culture of the communes, collectives, and cooperatives, which sprang up in an infinite variety everywhere young people gathered. That was what the term "counterculture" meant: not a musical style, but the collective culture that groups of young people were creating all over the country. The rock groups of course were an important part of that, but just one niche of something much bigger. Those were years in which millions of young people, and some older people too, really believed in what we called the Revolution. Large numbers of young people were rejecting the status quo of American society and turning to each other; in so doing we were seizing the power to recreate our world. That was the energy at the heart of the counterculture, and of Drop City.

The Sixties were a time the likes of which we haven't seen since. If I hadn't lived through it as a young person, I might have difficulty now believing that such a time had ever existed. The America of the 1950s had hit a dead end at full speed, but out of that terrible crash appeared something new and totally unexpected. There was a sudden excitement in the air. Something new seemed suddenly possible, simply because so many young people were banding together it make it happen. At Drop City we took on "Dropper names," new identities for the roles that we thought we were playing. It seemed that literally anything was possible, both in our personal lives and in changing the world. We really thought that a great leap in human consciousness was about to reshape the planet. The Revolution was inevitable, and we were being swept along on its cusp. All power to the imagination.

So these are my memories of Drop City.

MEMORIES OF DROP CITY

Chapter 1

“Get off my case, will you?” Kugo complained to his wife Frinki, while their two baby girls laughed and jumped on the mattress on the floor of the chilly apartment.

A couple of wooden chairs and a small table were the only other furniture. I sat on the cold radiator by the window. The open oven door was radiating a little heat.

Frinki turned to me. “He always thinks everybody’s on his case. But he hasn’t even got a case. He traded it for a couple hits of windowpane.” Her deep green eyes were surrounded by a million freckles and a mop of frizzy red hair flying every which way. If she weren’t always so sarcastic, I thought, she would be beautiful. Windowpane was a kind of LSD.

This was the summer of 1965, a few weeks after the first photos came back from the moon and President LBJ began sending massive numbers of troops to Viet Nam. My friend Kugo and I were both living on the Lower East Side.

It was a strange summer. At first New York passed through a heat wave, the air so stagnant and humid you could hardly breathe. But now it was unseasonably cold.

“Don’t pay any attention to her.” Kugo began to roll a joint. He had been telling me about friends of his, Curly and Jo, who had just been in town and staying with them. “They do things different out there in Drop City. That’s what Curly says. Everything’s different there. At Drop City you don’t have to work. You can do anything you want. Fuck around all day, get stoned. Everybody’s an artist, whatever. They got interviewed by some poet who writes for the *Other*. He’s going to do an article.”

The *Other* was an underground newspaper.

“How do they survive?”

“They just do. Go live there a while and see for yourself.”

“Anybody can just go live there?”

“Anybody. Drop City is Utopia.”

“Don’t believe it,” Frinki said.

“I don’t believe it. Nobody believes in Utopia any more. At least not in Colorado.”

“Okay, it isn’t Utopia,” Kugo said. “Utopia’s got rules. Drop City doesn’t have any rules.”

“Up is down and down is up. Isn’t that right, Kugo? And the tooth fairy leaves Thai sticks under everybody’s pillow.”

Their apartment was on the top floor of an old tenement on Second Street, a planned slum for poor immigrants when it was built a hundred years before. It was a tiny place, just one room with a stub wall about four feet high separating the bedroom from the kitchen. The bedroom side was only a little bigger than the bed, and the kitchen had a lion’s-paw bath tub squeezed into one corner. The toilet was down the hall, shared with the other tenants on the floor.

Kugo ran his fingers through his thick, pitch-black hair. “What’s with you, Frinki? On the rag?”

“Kugo, enough of this bullshit. Go out and get a fucking job.”

“Don’t start this in front of my friend, will you?” He turned to me. “I’m sorry, man.”

“I understand.”

“Curly could explain Drop City to you better. You’d really like each other. I’m sorry you missed them.”

“They were only here for a few days?”

“Just left this morning. Back to Drop City. I called you to come meet them, but your phone was turned off.”

“I got it turned back on.”

Frinki began to lace her boots.

“Where you going?” Kugo asked.

“Where do you think?”

“I don’t know.”

“To the Welfare office, to try to get some fucking foodstamps to feed your daughters.”

I smelled a fight coming and stood. “Got to run. Catch you later.”

Kugo lit the joint. “Sit down.”

A voice came through the door. “The Fates have decreed our return.”

“It’s Jo and Curly!” Frinki exclaimed.

A chubby face hidden behind wrap-around sunglasses and framed by a wild halo of kinky, black hair burst into the room, laughing, talking a mile a minute, followed by a pageboy blonde wrapped in a huge coat, with even features, smooth skin and a bit of a peasant build. Curly set a shopping bag on the table and began telling about a blown radiator. Frinki took their coats morosely and threw them in the closet. Curly’s manner had Kugo and me in stitches. Frinki stared at the shopping bag. Jo kept rolling her eyes and saying, “It didn’t happen like that,” but Curly just went on with the story. I could tell from their accents that Curly and Jo were from Brooklyn or thereabouts.

Finally Curly stopped talking long enough for Kugo to introduce us.

“How’s your morning sickness?” Frinki asked Jo.

“Not bad today. By the way, we brought dinner.”

Frinki immediately perked up, plunged into the shopping bag and began emptying its contents onto the table. Curly pulled out a plastic bag of sinsemilla and began rolling jays.

When our stomachs were warmed by the feast and our minds by the marijuana, Curly let out a loud belch.

“Don’t be gross,” Jo said.

He acted shocked. “Oh, excuse me, I forgot I was back in America. In really civilized places a good belch lets your hostess know you appreciated dinner.”

Frinki bared her teeth. “Thank you.”

“That just demonstrates my point.”

“Which point?” Kugo asked.

“This society likes to pretend it’s the apex of civilization, right? They’re so civilized they get grossed out if you belch. And at the same time, everybody acts like a mad dog.”

“Not everybody,” Jo put in.

“Okay, not everybody, at least not all the time. But on the whole this society is based on the principle of the dog fight.”

“We’ve all got the dog in us,” I said. “It’s human nature.”

“Right. You can’t change human nature. But we’re not just dogs. That’s only the lowest side of our nature. We’ve got better stuff in us too. The question is: how much is this society bringing out the dog in people? Is this a plague that has got everybody diseased? Can it be cured? Is it just that the people on top act like mad dogs, so everybody else has to as well? Does that gear this whole society to bringing out the dog in people, so if you don’t act like one, you get pushed to the bottom of the heap, which brings out the dog in you anyway, and you start biting and clawing your way up?”

“Dogs don’t have claws.” Jo corrected.

Curly ignored her. “Or is the dog so ingrained in us that people will always turn the world into a dog fight?”

“I don’t know. What’s your answer?” I said.

He shrugged. “I don’t know either. At least not yet.”

Kugo growled and lit another joint. “All I want is a full belly and some good reefer.”

“Because you’re a highly advanced soul. Not everybody is at your level yet. And won’t be if the people who run this society have their way. They see people like you as a threat.”

“To what?”

“This is the richest country in the world, there’d be plenty for everybody, if only they’d share it. But this society falsifies scarcity to get people like us to clean the toilets of the world for a few dimes. In order to perpetuate the dog fight. It glorifies the dog fight into a universal truth. It claims the best of all things come out of the dog fight. The dog fight is its pride and joy.”

“So what’s the alternative? Nobody’s going to go for socialism in America.” Kugo cut him short.

“I’m not talking about the government running everything. I’m talking about Drop City. That’s the great experiment of Drop City: Is there an alternative? Given decent circumstances, will people act decently? On their own, not if they’re forced to. That’s what we’re trying to do at Drop City. Start all over again from scratch. Everything fair and everybody equal. No rules or expectations. The only thing we have to agree about is that nobody has the right to exploit anybody else. Work when you want to; relax when you want to; find your own balance. Then we let Drop City grow, give it room to take its own shape, like a big extended family, like a living organism.”

Kugo laughed. “And you’re king, right?”

“In a place where everybody can take a good belch, everybody’s king.”

Curly went on to say there was only one other person living in Drop City so far, a painter named Clard, but other people came down on weekends to help with construction, and some of them were talking about moving there.

“You’re living in domes?” I asked. “Why domes?”

“Domes are advanced. All these rectangles make our heads into boxes. Living in a dome opens your fucking mind. No corners to hide in. Round like the sky. Living in a dome’s like always sleeping under the stars. Frees up your inner harmonies. You wake up every morning feeling like a new man. Helps you let go of your ego and attachments, all the junk that’s hanging you up and holding you back.”

“You ever hear of Bucky Fuller?” Kugo asked.

“Just vaguely.”

“The man who invented the triangle,” Curly said. “Domes are the simplest structure to build. The cheapest. A twenty-five-foot diameter dome costs less than two hundred smackeroos. Do more with less. You put little flaps along the sides and a skylight on top and, bingo, you got free, built-in air conditioning.”

“Kugo said Drop City was kind of like an artist colony. What about people who aren’t artists?”

“You don’t got to be an artist to live at Drop City. But at Drop City everybody’s an artist. When you don’t got to do all

the shit that they force everybody to do,” Curly said, “what’s left but art? Painting, poetry, music. In the future—in the Drop City future—everybody’s going to be an artist.”

Deep into the night, while Jo, Frinki, and the kids were asleep on the mattress, Kugo, Curly, and I went on talking, laughing, and smoking.

Curly handed me a Drop City wallet card with a picture of a domelike structure and an address in Colorado. “Next time you’re tripping across country, stop by and take a load off your mind. Stay as long as you want.”

* * *

Drop City sounded like an escape hatch to a drowning man. I wasn’t making it in New York. I’d gone through a series of menial jobs and loathed them all. I was really at loose ends. I’d dropped out of college because I couldn’t think of anything I wanted to do with a degree. I just didn’t fit into this society, except as an outsider.

It was always like that. The neighborhood I grew up in was divided into separate Irish and Jewish enclaves. Ethnically my family was both, but we didn’t practice either religion, so we were not socially part of either group. My mom’s parents were Romanian Jews, and my dad’s were Irish Catholic and English Protestant. On top of that Grampa Sam called himself a “nature worshiper.” Luckily I wasn’t the only outsider around.

I had a job sweeping a burlesque theater before the midnight show, four nights a week. Ernesto had gotten me the job, and we did it together until he quit. It was old-time burlesque, starring a once famous, fan-dancing stripper in her sixties. She looked pretty good actually, under the colored lights from a distance. They paid me in cash every night, a few quick dollars. I liked being around the menagerie, but they fired me for being late, unreliable, and incompetent.

I found another job at Pleasant Trucking Company, where I worked out on a dock routing packages onto a conveyor belt. It was hard, fast, dirty, freezing in winter, and very low paying. There was a tannery nearby, and the sickening stench of rotting horse flesh constantly blew into my face. As I worked I

would turn away, take a deep gasp of the air behind me, which somehow I convinced myself was cleaner, and try to hold my breath as long as I could. Luckily they only let me work half-time, to keep me out of the union.

One night after work while I was hurrying past the tannery holding my breath, three guys jumped out of nowhere, backed me against a car, stuck a long blade in my face and demanded my wallet.

“I don’t carry a wallet.”

That made the guy with the knife awfully mad. I emptied my pockets and offered him a couple of dollars and a handful of change. He mumbled something about my mother and smashed me in the side of the head. As they stalked away, I felt the side of my head for squirting blood, but there was none. He had turned the knife and hit me with the butt. My skull ached for days, but I was thankful to him.

Then there were the burglars. They always came in through the fire escape. Why even bother for my few worthless possessions? After a point I stopped nailing plywood over the window, and I didn’t replace my stuff. They must have taken that as a challenge, because they kept breaking in even when there was nothing to steal. Then I saw a young man walking across the street wearing my sweater. I just looked at him as he walked by. I didn’t even feel like killing him.

I grew up in The City, in a working class family. Dad was a postman, a letter carrier. Grandpa a garment worker, a shop steward for his union. I loved New York in a lot of ways, but as hard as I tried, there seemed to be no place for me there. I was either incapable or unwilling, or both, to do what was required for success.

My main resource in New York had been my group of friends, mostly people in the same boat. Besides sharing a deep alienation and anger, we also pooled many of our resources and helped each other survive.

I desperately wanted someplace that I could call home. It took me a long time to realize that I really didn’t have a home in New York any more.

A lot of friends went cross country and reported that living was easier on the West Coast, looser, that you didn’t have to

squander all your energy barely surviving there. I'd been planning for a long time to go check it out, as soon as I scraped together some money, but that never seemed to happen. I had a few vague contacts in San Francisco. But I knew nobody between the coasts. Now I got the idea of stopping off in Drop City on my way west.

Although I grew up primarily in Washington Heights, my grandparents also had a little house in the country, across the Hudson river in New Jersey, where mom was raised. Grandpa Sam had arrived in Ellis island at the age of fourteen in 1903, from rural Romania, where Jews were kept in *shtetls* and forbidden to own land. His American dream was to become a landed peasant, or, in American lingo, a farmer. Forced into a sweatshop in the Manhattan garment district, he saved his pennies, and around 1920 he and grandma bought seven acres in New Jersey. But the farm failed in the Great Depression, and they were forced back into the city and he into the sweatshop. They kept the house, but it became a place where eventually they planned to retire. Anyway, we spent summers there, and I got to play with farm kids and know country living. I wondered if I could survive out there any better than Grampa. Since I was such a loser in New York, Drop City might let me see if I could make it any better in the country.

* * *

Drop City reminded me of an idea some friends and I had discussed a few years earlier, in the Fall of 1962, when the threat of imminent atomic war over missiles in Cuba had us all panicked. Most of us were students at New York City College.

We gathered at Otis' apartment the night of the Cuban missile crisis: my buddy Ernesto, an aficionado of radical poetry and social revolution; our girlfriends Odessa and Mandy (this was before I met Patt); and Giovanni. We all knew each other from college, except for Giovanni, who was Otis' offagain onagain lover. It was with this group that I first smoked marijuana. Pot made me paranoid the first few times, but soon it just affected me as a mood enhancer, a lot better than wine or beer.

Ernesto and the people he hung with were mostly Marxists. They'd always talk about how rotten capitalism was and "Come

the revolution this, come the revolution that.” They called themselves communists, but they meant a communism in some distant future, which would liberate humanity, not communism as it was actually practiced anywhere. Present communism didn’t count because the revolution had been deformed, temporarily, by the never-ending struggle against capitalism.

To me it didn’t add up. Something had gone terribly wrong in their revolution. But it wasn’t just communism that failed. All systems had failed. Capitalism itself was once a radical ideology struggling against an aristocratic system, proposing a utopian vision of social justice. Either that promise failed too or it was a false promise. Betraying their ideals, both capitalism and communism wound up funneling the wealth of the world into the hands of small elites, just like the old aristocracy. The whole world seemed built on broken dreams, and the lives around me seemed crushed by false promises.

Still, the concept of the revolution was very compelling. It didn’t matter if everything in the past had failed. Humanity still needed to be liberated. People were oppressed by society, by each other, and, worst of all, by themselves. I too wanted and needed to liberate myself.

This was at the height of the Cold War, when the world seemed divided into two irreconcilable camps. I’d grown up during the McCarthyite anti-communist witch hunts of the 1950s, when the United States was a pretty frightening place to a kid in a progressive political family. Almost all dissent was stifled. History as taught at school was mostly how the US, the fortress of freedom, had saved the world from fascism. Who could disagree? If you didn’t have an approved opinion, you kept it to yourself or got in trouble. My mom, a New Deal Democrat, warned me, “Don’t repeat anything outside that you hear at home.” Mom told me that because Dad could lose his job as a mailman and Grandpa could go to jail. Grandpa was a communist. That’s what he called himself. He wasn’t a Party member, as far as I know, just a “sympathizer” or “fellow traveler,” which are names they used for people like Grandpa in those days. He was a union man and thought that the government and bosses were in cahoots against the working man, and had used World War II as a cover to destroy the union movement. Mom was pretty left too, though her hero was

Gandhi. One of my earliest memories was walking with Mom to one of her favorite stores, but finding pickets in front, she led me away, explaining why we couldn't shop there and saying, "Never cross a picket line." That's what I grew up with.

By the time I was a teenager the witch hunts were over, but everybody still kept leftist opinions to themselves. At college in the early Sixties, people were once more broaching the ideas of revolution.

To my circle of college friends the Cuban Revolution represented the possibility of a breakthrough, a possibility beyond the Cold War, a small country struggling to find an independent way of life, a third way. It seemed like a peasant revolt searching for its own indigenous form of social justice.

Then I met Mandy. She held that the Revolution had failed because it had things backward: personal liberation had to come before social revolution, not vice versa. To achieve this and become fully alive, you needed to overcome your sexual hangups. The Sexual Revolution would replace the nuclear family with an extended or tribal family, which would free everybody from oppressive demands like fidelity. The key to human liberation was good orgasms.

I went around in circles about all this.

Otis was the first black guy I ever became close with. Ernesto and I used to go down to his apartment, listen to music, get stoned and drunk with him and his friends. Otis was brassy and dynamic; his apartment had a continual party atmosphere. They lived in the same old tenement on Second Street near Avenue C. Otis lived in the basement apartment, Ernesto and Odessa lived on the top floor. I lived a few blocks away. Otis sang and played piano in a nightclub style; Giovanni was a wiry classical pianist with spidery fingers. Their common playing, though in antithetical styles, seemed to bind them together. I'd already become good friends with both of them when Otis told me he was gay. I had not even quite figured out what gay people do in bed. Pretty dumb, I guess. The attraction of gay sex was a mystery to me, but was the yearning for closeness and the desire to melt into another entity really different?

We were pretty depressed the night of the Cuban Missile Crisis and stayed up the whole night talking, preparing to die

in a nuclear holocaust before dawn. If we were still alive in the morning, if the world was still here, we would go away to some isolated place and somehow live there quietly and peacefully. We all felt like giving up on this society. It was too violent and corrupt, too involved with domination and competition. We would pool our meager resources, find some land somewhere, share what we had and help each other survive. Otis, who was Creole, said he was thinking of moving back to his aunt's land in rural Louisiana, and we could all join him. If there was a nuclear catastrophe and we were lucky enough, or unlucky enough, to be survivors, we would get the opportunity to rebuild the world, or what was left of it, on new foundations of cooperation and sharing instead of competition and greed. We talked about what we would bring, what writing, art, music, science of this civilization was worth preserving. I had my doubts that our little group, mixed both racially and in sexual orientation, could restart the world in the Louisiana bayous, but I kept my doubts to myself.

The morning of course dawned and we were still alive. The Cuban Missile Crisis had been resolved. We could scarcely believe the world was still here and we had the rest of our lives to live. What a gift! How precious! We wouldn't waste a minute. We walked the waking streets. How beautiful the world looked, how holy!

That night changed my life. After that I felt like I was living on borrowed time. I retained the notion that I would probably die young, so I resolved to live to the fullest. What more was there to fear after the near end of the world?

I spent the next few months staying up all night and sleeping during the day. I stopped going to school or work. Eventually I slid back into the old routines, just to survive, yet the idea of escaping continued to simmer in my mind. It was just a matter of how and when.

Even though Mandy and I were pals, the kind of soulmates who would stay up all night and talk about existentialism, we were never really good lovers. Maybe we were too much alike. Refusing to accept that as our fate, she decided we just needed to rev up our energy systems, and to do that she began sitting in an orgone box. I tried it a few times, but all I got was bored.

After Mandy and I broke up, I decided to join the Sexual Revolution, and ran around trying to have good orgasms with as many beautiful women as I could. It did rev up my energy system, but didn't turn out to be a magic bullet. I started to worry that I was incapable of really feeling love.

Then along came psychedelics, and suddenly everybody was talking about a new revolution through a mass expansion in consciousness.

* * *

Chapter 2

A few days after I met Curly and Jo I received a notice from the Draft Board ordering me to report. I was floored, although I should have expected it, since I'd lost my student deferment six months earlier when I dropped out of school.

In March 1965 the first large number of US combat troops were sent to Viet Nam, followed by the first anti-war demonstrations and draft card burnings. By July, there were 125,000 US soldiers there.

"I'm not going. No way," I said.

I was in Ernesto's pad, a few houses down from Kugo's. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon. Ernesto had just woken up. He'd been called and rejected a month before. "Do you have flat feet?" he asked.

"No."

"How's your eyesight?"

"Not bad."

"Any other disabilities?" We'd met at college, shared a sense of futility, dropping out and back in and then out of school again at about the same time.

"Kind of. You know I'm not good at taking orders," I said. "It makes me angry. I have contempt for authority. They don't want people like me in the Army."

"They love people like you. They'll give you to a drill sergeant who'll grind you into dog food. Then they'll throw you on the front lines and get rid of you." Ernesto felt that the US government was beyond redemption. "I always thought you were a pacifist. Aren't you?"

"Well, kind of."

"Can you get a letter from a minister saying you're a pacifist?"

"I don't know any ministers."

"You might be able to get pacifist credentials from the underground, but that would take some time."

"Anyway I'm not really a pacifist. One of my main goals is to get through life without killing anybody, but if we were attacked, I think I'd fight. That would be different. I'd probably even kill somebody if I had to. But not for this Viet Nam bullshit. I'm not killing anybody for Rockefeller, and I'm not going to die for LBJ's political career."

"Well, you could run back to school and try to get a student deferment again. You could marry a woman with a couple of kids. You could flee to Canada."

I decided to just ask him outright. "How did you get out?"

"I flunked the physical."

"Flat feet?"

"No, I did it the hard way."

"What's that?"

"I psyched out."

* * *

I emptied my laundry bag and found some ragged dirty clothes. My elbows stuck out of my shirt, my knees stuck out of my pants, and my toes stuck out of my sneakers. I'd been up all night.

As I walked along the street I practiced being a paranoid catatonic by watching the cracks in the sidewalk. I didn't look anybody in the eye. The only time I glanced up was to see the street signs.

Guys about my age were converging from every direction and climbing the steps of an official-looking building. This was it.

A van drove up, a few guys jumped out and began handing out leaflets to everybody while one of them yelled into a bullhorn, "Resist the imperialist beast! Refuse to fight an unjust war for world domination. Burn your draft card." He held up a card, flicked a lighter, then raised the burning card

above his head and chanted, "Hell no, we won't go! Hell no, we won't go! Hell no, we won't go!" The leafleters all joined in the chant.

Down the stairs bounded a group of soldiers. In an instant the protester with the bullhorn was down, face pushed into the concrete, the bullhorn bouncing past me. They dragged him up the stairs, screaming, arms behind his back, blood pouring down his face. They rounded up all the leafleters, grabbed all the leaflets they had dropped, and disappeared inside. There was blood on the sidewalk.

I was dumbfounded. I realized I'd forgotten my act. Everybody was stopped, uncertain of what to do. Then a few guys started hesitantly up the steps.

I climbed one step, when somebody called my name. Oh God!

I turned. It was a fat kid I knew in public school. I wanted to melt down the storm drain.

"Where've you been? I haven't seen you since sixth grade!" On his head sat a black leather captain's hat a couple of sizes too small. He was decked in a black leather shirt unbuttoned to his navel, exposing his few chest hairs, and over his jeans were black leather chaps with a hole in the crotch.

I was shocked by the way he was dressed, but just mumbled, "I don't hang out in the old neighborhood any more, Dickie."

He leaned toward me and whispered in a shaky voice, "Do me a favor: if you see any of the guys, don't tell them you saw me here like this, okay? I don't really dress like this."

"Don't worry," I said. "I won't tell anybody."

"You're a pal. I'm just trying to get a 4F. The country is going totally bonkers. They always need a war."

"I know it."

"How about you? Are you going into the Army?"

"I don't know."

I looked around at the guys walking up the stairs around me. Some were limping, others staggering, some seemed almost blind, some drugged, a few were drooling and rolling

their eyes from side to side, some were in rags, a couple of them in drag. I suddenly felt very ordinary.

They herded us all into a big room, sat us down. Dickie was in a chair near me. They gave us a pencil and a form to fill out, with about a hundred questions. I glanced it over. Almost all were innocuous, even silly, questions, but every once in a while they threw in loaded ones about various abnormal psychological symptoms, violence, drugs, homosexuality, masturbation.

I answered yes to all of them.

I know this sounds stupid, but suddenly, above my head, in my mind's eye, I saw my mother's face. She'd been dead for several years. She seemed to say, "Baby, why are you doing this? Don't stigmatize yourself for the rest of your life."

I was losing it. I found myself erasing all the loaded answers, answering no to everything. Then I stopped again and erased those answers too. I pushed too hard, the paper tore. I didn't know what to do. My form was a mess. I was in a cold sweat.

A soldier collected all the papers and disappeared with them into another room.

He was gone a long time. Everybody was fidgeting, nobody talking much. Dickie was twitching.

Then the soldier appeared again. "When I call your name, march front and center, and line up facing me."

He began calling names. One by one guys limped and staggered to the front, until there was a long line of almost everybody. He even called Dickie's name. Dickie pushed himself up, looking shocked and faint. His leather pants swished as he squeezed past me. Only a few of us were left seated.

"The rest of you, stay where you are until you're called." He turned to the line. "Now, follow me! Hup two! Hup two!" He marched the line out of the room.

After a long wait, he returned and called a name. A guy stood who looked like he should be in a hospital. The soldier led him out of the room. After a half hour he called another. It was taking all day.

Finally my name. I was led to a room and seated in front of a balding man in a suit. I crossed my legs tightly, tucked my hands into my arm pits, hugging my chest and staring at the floor.

I could feel him leering at me. "You didn't fill out your questionnaire properly."

"What did I do wrong?" I stammered without looking up.

Through the corner of my eye I saw him waving the form at me. "Look at this mess. We want one answer and one answer only. When was the last time you wet your bed?"

I shook my head.

"Do you ever pee all over yourself while you're sleeping?"

I said nothing.

"Do you ever wake up in a wet bed? What's your answer?"

"I don't know," I mumbled, glancing back and forth.

"How can you not know?"

"I don't remember."

"Do you ever get depressed?"

I didn't respond.

"Do you understand what I mean? Severely depressed. So depressed that you don't want to get up or do anything. Please be cooperative. I'm just trying to help you. Do you consider yourself an angry person? Do you ever get violent? How do you feel about your mother? Do you like women?"

I stared at the floor and shook my head.

"How often do you masturbate? You know, play with yourself? Jerk off? How often do you jerk off? I can see what you wrote here, even though you erased it. You wrote, *Once an hour*. Is that true? Do you really do that? What do you think about when you do that?"

"No," I muttered.

He went on and on. "What drugs did you use last night? I can see what you wrote here. To the question, When was the last time you took drugs, you answered, *Last night*. What did you take? Marijuana? Amphetamine? LSD? Cocaine? Heroin? What drugs did you take last night? I'm getting very frustrated

with you. I wish you'd be more cooperative. Do you want to go into the Army?"

"Yes, no."

"Are you scared?"

I drew my arms tighter around my chest. "I don't know."

"There's nothing to be afraid of. I want to help you. When you go to the men's room, do you pee in the urinal or in a stall? Do you ever look at the penis beside you? Why don't you answer?"

I shook my head, staring at my socks.

"When was the last time you played with another man's penis?"

"I don't remember."

"Have you ever had a dick in your mouth? Come on, what's your answer?"

"No," I stuttered.

There was a long silence. Then he said, "Stand up."

I hesitated, then stood.

He motioned. "Come over here."

I walked around his desk. He swiveled in his chair to face me. I didn't meet his eyes.

"Drop your pants. I need to examine you."

I hesitantly did what he said.

"The underwear too."

I pushed them down.

I felt his hand on my genitals. I froze.

"Now turn around, bend over and spread your cheeks."

I retreated a few steps. "No."

"There's nothing to be afraid of. I'm the person who can help you."

For the first time I took a good look at him. His eyes were red and glassy, with big sacks under them, his bald pate shined under a cap of a few long side hairs combed across

them, and his fleshy lower lip drooped. His neck bulged over his tight collar and tie. His brown suit was shiny in the knees.

"Don't worry. No one will bother us. The door is locked. Now turn around, bend over, and spread your cheeks. I need to examine you. This is very routine."

"No."

"You're going to get yourself into a lot of trouble if you don't be cooperative."

"No."

"You are truly pathetic. Do you want a 4F?"

"I want to be left alone."

"Get down on your knees."

I didn't move. We glared at each other.

Finally he said, "Do you find me repulsive?"

I said nothing.

He went on, "You have no idea how many dicks you'll have up your butt in Viet Nam."

"Take me in the Army," I finally said. "Give me a gun. It won't be Viet Cong I'll be shooting."

We glowered at each other. Then he turned, sat at his desk, scribbled some notes, and, without looking up, muttered, "That's all. You can go."

Out on the street, the exhaustion hit me. I felt drained, utterly humiliated. I tried to pull myself together. I kept hearing the voice of my mother saying, "*He who fights and runs away will live to fight another day.*" She was big on maxims.

I walked all the way home, staggered to bed and passed out.

* * *

Chapter 3

“Frinki and the girls have moved out. Gone to Drop City.” The room was even more bare; the toys were gone. Kugo was hurting. “She got tired of dealing with all the shit here. We’ve been on each other’s case too much. I might go out to Drop City too. This planet’s moving too fast for me. I need a break.”

Over the next few months I periodically asked Kugo what was happening out at Drop City. He and Frinki seemed to communicate pretty regularly. He often said he missed her and the girls. He sank in and out of depression about it. One day he’d say she was coming back, then the next day he’d say she wasn’t coming back but he might go out there. Meanwhile he always seemed to have a new girlfriend, and never more money than he could make dealing a little dope.

It sounded like they were doing well at Drop City, but I couldn’t really tell much. Kugo wasn’t very communicative or straightforward about personal things. According to Frinki, a third man had joined Drop City, bringing their population up to seven, including the two kids; eight if you counted Jo’s fetus.

Kugo didn’t know, or wouldn’t tell me if he did, about their sexual arrangements. I never asked directly. It was a little touchy.

I wrote Curly, Jo, and Frinki a letter, and Curly wrote back, encouraging me to come. I lined up a ride through a newspaper, sharing driving and expenses to Denver. After visiting Drop City I was to meet my girlfriend Patt in San Francisco, where we planned to spend the summer together, if we could get along. She had been to San Francisco the summer before with a group called Students for Social Justice, although she was more into music than politics.

I’d met Patt through Frinki; they’d lived in the same dorm at a small rural college.

Our relationship was rocky and shaky. We found each other attractive, but also annoying. Sometimes the same characteristic would be both. Like the way any little thing distracted her. One minute she would be walking next to me, then the next minute she'd disappear and I'd find her looking at a store window or petting a dog. We'd waste a lot of time bickering, then come back together in bursts of passion.

* * *

As the time approached for my leaving for Drop City and the Coast, the Viet Nam war kept getting hotter. This was the spring of 1966.

My gear was packed. I was to meet my ride at six AM the next morning.

"If this is our last night together for a while," Patt said, "let's go do something wonderful."

"Otis is having a party. It should be a blast. People are getting together at Ernesto's too."

She took my hand. "Will you miss me?"

I should have said yes, but said, "How will I know until I'm gone?"

"If you cared about me you'd know."

"I know it'll be good for us to get a little space, give us perspective on how we feel about each other."

"Don't you know how you feel?"

"Things might look different when we're two thousand miles apart."

"So you think that you might not miss me."

"How can I know how I'll feel until I feel it?"

"What if you meet some nice girl when you're alone?"

"What if you meet some nice guy?"

"What if?"

"You do what feels right for you and I'll do what feels right for me."

“So you want us both to do anything we feel like while we’re not together?”

“If we’re meant to be together, we’ll get back together again.”

“So when we meet in San Francisco maybe we’ll still be a couple and maybe we won’t.”

“It’ll be a great experiment.”

“Relationships are not experiments. People have to work at a relationship.”

“If it’s too much work, why bother?”

“If you only want fun, your relationships aren’t going to last very long.”

“Longevity isn’t everything.”

“Okay. Let’s leave it loose. If that’s the way you want it.”

We walked down Second Street to Ernesto’s. The streets were teeming. Puerto Rican music blared out of windows, cars honked, people shouted in a thick cacophony. I had all my gear with me.

Graffiti covered the lobby walls. We climbed the creaking stairs to the top floor. Through Ernesto’s door, I could hear singing:

“Where have all the graveyards gone?

Gone to flowers every one.

When will they ever learn?

When will they ever learn?”

A couple dozen people were squeezed into the room, including Kugo and his girlfriend Cori. About half the people were singing while Odessa strummed her guitar. The air was heavy with dope smoke, the table replete with food and wine. Ernesto passed me a joint. I poured Patt and myself some chianti. Odessa set her guitar down.

“Have you met my friend Jake?” Ernesto said to me. “He just got back from a tour in ‘Nam.”

There was a sudden lull in conversation, so everybody heard him. It felt like a shroud dropped over the room.

"Now don't everybody get weird," Jake said. "I'm not a babykiller." I could see blue tattoos at the edges of his cowboy shirt.

"Anybody who's against the war should refuse to go," Odessa said. She was always forthright.

"Everybody deals with it in their own way. You've got to understand, friends, that not everybody who goes to 'Nam supports the war. There are lots of the guys over there who are just as against the war as anybody back here. They just want to do their tour and come home."

"That's only going to prolong the war. We need to end it."

"Your student demonstrations are not going to end it. Even if you shut down all the universities, that won't end it."

"Then what will?"

"The enlisted guy. He's out there right now refusing to fight, because he knows there's nothing in 'Nam to fight for. That's who's going to end it. Lots of GIs act to stop it every day, each in their own way. I seen it. Do you know what *fragging* is? It ain't pretty. But it's part of what's going to end the war." He pulled a little bag out of his shirt pocket. "And here's something else that's going to help end it, direct from Saigon." He dropped several Thai sticks onto the table, beautiful marijuana buds sewn onto sticks. He rolled them into huge joints, which he lit and passed around.

I heard a buzzing. Sweat rolled from the top of my head slowly down my body. By the time it reached my feet I was flying. My own voice seemed very far away, my mouth filled with cotton. I was sitting on the floor, but didn't remember how I got there.

"I feel like dancing," Odessa said.

Ernesto stood. "Does everybody know Otis, in the basement apartment? He's having a party tonight too. There's room to dance down there. Odessa and I are going down to dance. Anybody who feels like it can join us. It's okay to stay here too. The door will be open."

About half of the people funneled out of the apartment.

"That's better," Kugo said, digging a piece of French bread into dip. "Now we can hear ourselves think."

"What did that guy mean when he said that fucking is going to end the war?" Cori asked.

"Sounds right to me," Kugo said.

"He said fragging, not fucking," I interjected. "That's when you throw a grenade at your sergeant instead of at the Viet Cong."

"Do they really do that?"

"That's bullshit," Kugo mumbled with his mouth full. "It's all bullshit. Except for fucking and dope."

"And rock and roll," Cori said. She turned to Patt. "I broke up with Bob." Cori's long willowy fingers were always moving.

"That's too bad."

"He wanted his girlfriends but didn't like it if I did it too. He threatened to kill Kugo."

"Don't talk about that," Kugo snapped.

"Besides, he didn't satisfy me. Did you ever fuck him?"

Patt gasped. "Bob? Of course not."

"He's such a liar. He pretends he's fucked every girl I know, to try to get me jealous. I don't know why I get involved with these clueless jerks."

"Cori," Kugo cut in. "Mind your own damn business, will you? You've been rattling on about this guy all night. You're getting on my nerves."

Patt cast me a look as if to say, *You believe me, don't you?* I wasn't sure whether I did or not. At times she hadn't been totally honest with me, nor I with her. I didn't want to push the issue, as this was our last night together. I was also concerned that Cori would let out that she and I had had sex. It had happened a few months before, at a time when Patt and I had kind of broken up. We just had sex a few times. I wondered whether Kugo knew. Cori said he wouldn't care, but I knew he probably would.

Kugo turned to me "When's your ride?"

"Six AM tomorrow morning. I'm staying up all night."

“Are you going to Drop City too?” Cori asked Patt.

“No. Just to San Francisco. We’re meeting there in three weeks.”

Cori grasped my arm with her long, polished nails. “One of my oldest girlfriends was just at Drop City. She said it’s great. Her name is Marigold. She’s a painter. She lives in Boulder, but she has friends near Drop City. You’ll probably see her. Give her a hug for me.”

Kugo held out a fist. “Here’s a going-away present.” He opened his fingers, revealing something wrapped in a napkin. “Don’t say I never gave you nothing.”

Two sugar cubes.

Patt motioned me over to the window. “Look, you can see the party at Otis’.” The courtyard below was filled with people. What did Kugo give you?”

“Acid. Want to drop?”

“You’re not serious. Not on our last night.”

“That’s a good reason to do it.”

“Please.”

“You should try it at least once.”

“I have enough trouble keeping my life in order without that.”

“I’ve learned a lot from it.”

“Like how to destroy your brain?”

“Like, everything is more connected than I thought before. And it’s all inside your head and not inside your head at the same time. And everything is very...precious.”

“You don’t have to take LSD to learn that. A girl I knew in school, a brilliant girl, told me that she understood almost everything from taking mescaline, but the one main thing she didn’t understand yet was death. Then the next thing I knew she walked out a window... Let’s go dance.”

Down the stairs, through the lobby then into the basement. Voices and music throbbed through the door. A blast of smoke hit me in the face. It was packed. Familiar faces were dancing

wildly. Others spilled out through the open back door into the yard.

We made our way to a table strewn with wine and beer, selected a bottle.

Otis danced over, wearing a druggy smile. "Hey, Patt, looking good, girl." He turned to me. "Love your trip, Baby. Give my kisses to the Coast."

A pretty young man slid over and leaned against Otis. Giovanni was right behind him. "Otis, we've got to talk."

"Save your breath for that little queen of yours. I'm partying."

"I told you, he doesn't mean anything to me."

The pretty young man slipped one hand up Otis' shirt. Otis smirked at Giovanni. "I think I'm in love!"

"Don't be such a drama bitch."

The two of them danced away, leaving Giovanni fuming. "I don't have to take this."

Just then Ernesto pulled me to one side. "I've applied to medical school."

"Congratulations."

"I still don't know if it's right for me. I might not want to spend my life in that world."

We got into a long conversation. Through the corner of my eye I noticed Patt across the room, talking with Bob. I glanced at them occasionally as we talked. I wondered if Patt was confronting him with what Cori had said. There seemed something oddly cozy between them, which I'd never particularly noticed before.

At an opportune moment I excused myself. Patt and Bob were gone.

Otis and Giovanni were over in one corner, talking heatedly. A huge pile of curly silver fir was huddled against the far wall behind them, Otis' borzoi, Bubbles.

I wound my way through the packed room, found Patt and Bob in another corner.

"I need to speak with you," I said.

“What about?”

Bob grunted a greeting at me and stood. “See you later.” He slipped away.

“Is there something between you?” I whispered.

“Of course not. Don’t get jealous.”

“I’m not jealous.”

“Do you want to dance?”

“I want to talk.”

“You never want to talk. Let’s dance. We came down here to dance.”

“No.”

Two hands with long, polished nails covered my eyes. “Guess who?”

No one had a voice like Cori. “I give up.”

She turned me around.

“I love this song! Dance with me!” Cori pulled me to the middle of the floor, wedging us between dancers. I kept looking around for Patt, but didn’t see her anywhere. I kept hoping the song would be over, but it went on and on. On the other hand Cori was sexy and I was enjoying myself. I picked up a bottle of beer and gulped it as I danced.

Suddenly I saw Patt next to me, dancing with Bob. She smiled at me. She was playing some stupid game. I still had the beer in my hand. Before I knew what I was doing, I had poured some beer on her head.

Patt looked shocked, then angry. She picked up a glass of red wine from a table, threw the wine at me, turned and rushed off.

I stood there dripping, then followed her to the bathroom, but there was a line.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I apologize.”

She glared at me, then hurried away again. I caught up with her in the backyard.

“Are you happy now?” she said. “We’re both humiliated.”

“I apologize. I wish I could go back and undo it.”

"You're out of control."

"You threw wine at me too."

"You've ruined my blouse. I'm going home."

"Let's go up to Ernesto's and rinse it out. You can borrow one of his shirts."

Back upstairs his apartment was empty; everyone was down at Otis'.

I pulled a couple of shirts out of the closet. "Can you forgive me?"

"We certainly elicit strong reactions in each other."

"Too strong."

Ernesto's shirt fit her like an overcoat. She knelt at the bathtub, began scrubbing at the blouse.

I knelt alongside her. I remembered the acid cubes that Kugo had given me, pulled them out of my pocket. "I think I'm going to trip. How about you? Let's trip together."

She wrung out the blouse "Don't totally ruin the evening."

"It won't ruin it." I popped a cube into my mouth. As soon as I felt the sugar melting on my tongue, I realized I was being stupid.

She hung the blouse over the tub. "How will you ever make your ride in the morning?"

"I just will. Let's go back down to the party."

She bit her cheek. "Have you ever had sex with anybody on LSD?"

"Do you want the truth?"

"Yes."

"I don't want to tell you."

"Now you have to."

"It's like nothing you've ever imagined," I said.

"When we're having sex, do you ever think that we could be making a baby?" She asked as if out of nowhere.

Sirens and flashing red lights bounced around my head. "I don't usually think about it like that. Why do you ask?"

“Is the possibility of a baby sexy to you or does it turn you off?”

“Can’t we talk about something else?”

“To me the idea of a baby is sexy. A baby as a possibility.”

“Assuming it didn’t take all our worst features.” I was trying to make a joke. Her face began to glow, blue flames shot out of her head. I blurted, “You’re a goddess.”

“You’re stoned.”

“You’re a goddess. And I’m a god. You’re Eve. I’m Adam and you’re Eve. We’re all goddesses and gods. We’re all Adam and Eve. I knew that a long time ago, but forgot it.”

“Adam and Eve aren’t a god and goddess.”

“If you took the other hit, you’d know what I mean. We could share this.”

“I’m very sensitive to drugs.”

I fished the other cube out of my pants pocket and held it out to her. “Take it or don’t take it. It’s up to you.”

She picked it up with two fingers and laid it beside the pillow.

“Do you love me?”

“Of course.”

“You’re on acid. Tomorrow you won’t even remember what you said.”

“I will.”

“Then tell me you’ll love me tomorrow too.”

“How can I know that? We might be dead tomorrow. This might be the last day of our lives.”

“If this is the last day of our lives, tell me you’ll love me always, you’ll love me forever. Even if you don’t know if you mean it.”

“If this is the last day of our lives, I’ll love you always, I’ll love you forever.”

She said, “If this is the last day of our lives, then I love you too.”

She picked up the LSD sugar cube. "Should I take it?"

"It would make this night special for the rest of our lives."

"And if I don't?"

"It will be special anyway."

She put the cube in her mouth and we sank into a deep kiss. An endless tropical sunset flowed between our bodies. I lost track of time.

"Somebody just came in."

"Don't let us disturb you." It was Kugo.

I realized we were both naked. Patt pulled the sheet up around her.

"I think I left my purse in here." Cori said.

"Did you drop that acid?" Kugo's face broke down into shifting geometric shapes.

"It's good stuff," I said.

"You too?" Kugo asked Patt. "Did you drop too?"

"I think I'm getting sick," she groaned.

"Ride with it. It'll pass."

"There's my purse," said Cori.

"I don't feel well," Patt said.

"This stuff is very smooth," Kugo said. "I guarantee it."

"I think I'm going to pass out. I need to be held. Somebody hold me."

Cori put her arms around her. "Just a little anxiety. You'll be all right."

I was floating a few inches from the floor, confused. I couldn't remember how to walk. I slipped and landed on the floor at the foot of the bed. A school of tropical fish swam by. I watched them for a long time. Then I got to my knees.

Lying on the bed entwined were Patt, Kugo, and Cori, a naked tangle of legs and bellies, tongues and breasts. I felt sick, shut my eyes. A man in a mask stepped out of a dark alley, plunged a knife into my chest, reached in with his hand,

plucked out my beating heart, and held it, spurting blood, above his head.

“Quiet! The neighbors are going to call the police!” Kugo was shaking me.

I realized I was yelling. I bit my tongue.

Patt was sitting at the kitchen table with Cori, who was feeding her a piece of bread.

“I feel very cold. I’m going to vomit,” Patt said.

“Let’s go to the sink.” Cori helped her over and moved some dishes out of the way.

The door opened and Ernesto stood in the doorway. Odessa peered over his shoulder into the room.

“Is this really happening?” I asked.

“Don’t worry,” Kugo said, “everything’s cool.”

Odessa took charge and bundled Patt up. I paced around crazed. Somewhere in there I got my clothes back on. Kugo and Cori were gone; I didn’t remember them leaving. Ernesto and Odessa kept feeding us tea and saying reassuring things. Patt didn’t want to talk to me.

At five in the morning I said, “Should I cancel my trip?”

“Not for me.”

“Then I’ll have to leave. I’ll take you home.”

“Don’t bother. I’ll be all right. I’m not ready to go yet.”

“She’ll be okay,” Ernesto said. “We’ll take care of her.”

“Call me from Drop City,” she said.

“I don’t think they have a phone. But I’ll call from somewhere. See you in San Francisco,” I said.

Patt gave me a cold peck. “Maybe.”

“What do you mean?”

“That’s the way everything is between us, isn’t it?”

I picked up my backpack and sleeping bag. “I guess it is.” I walked out, started downstairs, but stopped at the landing. I felt confused, overwhelmed. I wanted to rush back, but stopped myself.

I started walking west, to the subway stop where I was supposed to meet my ride.

Someone called my name from behind. It was Giovanni. I didn't feel much like company.

"What are you doing out?"

"I couldn't sleep," he said. "I was depressed. Otis and I got into a terrible fight."

"I got into a fight with Patt too."

We walked through Thompkins Square Park, commiserating. Giovanni was a true innocent, with few worldly attachments; he had been a divinity student. He was also a fine classical pianist, but, to his sorrow, never quite good enough to have much of a career as a soloist.

A ragged old man fell off a bench onto the ground, shuddering, foaming at the mouth, his eyes rolled back.

"He's having a fit," Giovanni said. "We're got to stick something in his mouth so he doesn't swallow his tongue."

I threw down my backpack, grabbed a couple of old popsicle sticks lying on the ground. Giovanni wedged his clenched jaws apart, and I stuck the sticks in.

"I'll go for help." Giovanni ran off.

The man kept trying to spit the sticks out; I felt helpless. A few guys were standing above us. One of them knelt and began rummaging through the man's pockets.

"What are you doing?"

"Mind your own business."

I looked around the group that had gathered. Swimming eyes, ravaged skin, ragged clothes, stench of urine and wine. One of them said, "Spare change?"

"Your friend's dying! Aren't you concerned?"

"He ain't our friend," one of them muttered.

"I got to get to my cousin's in Brooklyn. I need a couple bucks. I know you got it."

I reached into my pocket, pulled out all the money I had in the world. "Take it!" I threw it in high the air. They scrambled

after it, fighting among themselves as Giovanni and a policeman appeared.

I picked up my gear, feeling very weary.

"We better hurry," Giovanni said. "You'll miss your ride."

"It doesn't matter. I can't go. I threw away all my money. I can't go without a dime in my pocket."

"How much do you need?"

"I don't even care anymore."

"How much?"

"Enough to eat. I paid for my ride in advance."

He slipped off a shoe and pulled a wad out of his sock.

"I carry this for emergencies."

It was a hundred-dollar bill.

I met my ride, threw my gear into the trunk, waved goodbye to Giovanni. As we crossed the George Washington bridge to Jersey, it started to drizzle. Droplets trickled down the fogged pane. I wiped the window with my palm and looked back at the cloudbank hovering over the city.

* * *

Chapter 4

Three of us were scrunched into an old Dodge with a pile of gear filling the rest of the back seat. The owner of the car was a born again young Republican on his way home for the summer from NYU business college. The plan was that he and I would share the driving in four-hour shifts, straight through. The other passenger was a weaselly little Mormon who didn't drive. The Young Republican rattled on and on about how everything proved all his opinions; the Weasel explained how it was all prophesied by Joseph Smith. They got into a long debate about Jesus' opinion about the Mormons' practice of converting their ancestors postmortem. Teasing the Weasel became tiresome pretty quick, and the Young Republican kept the radio tuned to elevator music. We got through two days without killing each other.

They let me out on a sandy embankment just outside Denver, at the intersection of route 60 heading due south, cutting through the heart of Colorado. It was a chilly dawn. To my east the Great Plains stretched into the horizon, dotted with dry low brush, tumbleweeds, and cattle. To the west, dark trains of clouds rolled slowly over the towering Rockies, a sea of giant frozen waves, a Great Wall dividing the continent. I felt physically and mentally drained. I hadn't had a shower since I left. My blood had been replaced with gasoline.

I had a few joints with me, in an envelope, that I was bringing as a present to Drop City. I stuck the envelope under a nearby bush. It looked just like a piece of trash. Cars whizzed by but none stopped. After a while I kept thinking about how much more pleasant it would be if I were stoned. I climbed down into a nearby culvert and took a few hits.

Streaked clouds in the distance moved toward me. It started to drizzle. I took shelter under an overpass. The highway patrol checked me out. I told him I was headed north,

since I knew it was illegal to hitch here. You had to pretend to be walking in the opposite direction.

Finally a dented pickup stopped. I stowed my gear in the bed, under an old tarp, and hopped into the cab with two Chicanos around my age.

“Where you going?”

“Trinidad. You?”

“Raton, New Mexico. You got family in Trinidad?”

“No.”

“Then why you going? Nobody just goes to Trinidad, unless they got a reason. Nothing there.”

“No work,” the other added.

“I’m not looking for work. Visiting friends.”

He chuckled, “You’re not going to the Camp, are you? Live out there in round shacks.”

Reluctantly I said, “Yeah.”

“They’re your friends?” the other asked. “¿Tus amigos?”

“A couple of them,” I replied.

“People say they’re *comunistas*.” He chuckled. “And fuck each other’s wives.”

“They won’t admit it,” the driver said. “Crazy people, *maniáticos*, around here would shoot them.”

They both laughed uproariously. A chill crept down my throat.

“Don’t pay no attention to him,” the other said. “Locals around here don’t hurt nobody. As long as you keep your cool.” He stuck his hand in his shirt pocket, pulled out a joint. “Smoke?”

“Sure.”

“To tell you the truth, people around here don’t give a fuck who you are or what you are, as long as you treat people right.”

“Except a few *maniáticos*,” the other added.

As we drove past Colorado Springs, a sprawling bedroom community around a huge air force base, I saw the turnoff to

Pike's Peak. I remembered that the peak was once considered about as far away from civilization as anybody could get, and that the view from the top was once the inspiration for 'America the Beautiful.' I wondered how the urban blight looked from up there.

A hundred miles later the driver said, "That mountain up ahead that looks like a model T Ford, that's Fisher's Peak. When you see it, you know you're near Trinidad."

"Good poaching up there," the other added. "You hunt?"

"No."

"They got a fence around the whole fucking mountain, with keep out signs, but nobody pays no attention. *Chingados* Rockefellers."

"Rockefellers?"

"That's their name. *Pinche gringos*. They own Fisher's Peak. Don't let nobody up, but we go anyways."

"I thought I was getting away from the Rockefellers when I left New York. They own most of New York."

"Now that's a laugh and a half. Own most of Colorado too. CF&I. The mines."

We turned off the highway onto a bumpy dirt road. The dust stormed behind us. Our rear end kept dovetailing back and forth across the ripples in the roadbed. We crossed a small bridge over an irrigation ditch, bounced over a rise and around some trees as the road forked. Suddenly, there was the open latticework of a large dome structure in front of me. It looked like a web of interconnected wheels. Somebody was all the way near the top on the other side, hammering. A hundred yards away, two bright silver metallic domes, one on the top of a small hill, the other in a low area. The lower one had an A-frame attached. They looked like landed UFOs. The sun glinted off their surfaces. A third structure was under construction on a far hill, with a few people working around it.

Near the gate was a roughly painted sign: DROPPERS URGE TOTAL NUCLEAR DEVASTATION OF THE WORLD!! BACK LBJ'S WAR POLICY. PROTEST PEACE!! On each of the sign's legs were lettered, KILL KILL KILL.

I assumed DEVASTION really meant DEVASTATION. They had to have noticed the misspelling but decided to not correct it. I liked them for that.

Most of the land looked barren, cactus, low shrubs and brush. A couple of trees down by the A-frame dome. A few tents and a shed. Some chickens scratching. A dog. A woman with a baby walked down a trail from the dome on the hill, across a narrow bridge spanning a run-off furrow. Looked like Jo. She disappeared inside the A-frame dome.

There were also a few regular houses in sight and a large adobe building directly across the gravel road.

I slung my pack over my shoulder and crossed onto the land near the large open structure.

“Hey!”

I looked up. A guy with no shirt, pudgy, wild kinky hair, sunglasses, about twenty feet above me. It was Curly.

“Throw me up that hammer lying there, okay?”

I slipped through the open struts into the dome.

“Curly! Remember me? Kugo’s friend. We met in New York. I wrote you a letter.”

“I can see it’s you, man. Throw me up that hammer, OK?”

I picked up an old hammer with a cracked and taped handle, and tossed it up. He let it sail past its apex, then snatched it from the air on the way down.

“Good catch.”

“I’m an expert. Now, you see them bolts and washers lying there? Stuff a few in your pocket, grab that socket wrench, come on up here and help me. We got to get this done before dinner.”

I cautiously climbed the structure made from two-by-fours bolted to sections of plastic pipe. I don’t like heights.

“I thought you were coming last week,” he said. “I almost gave up on you, man.”

“It was always my plan to get here about now.”

"Last week, this week. I keep losing track of time. Out here it all fades together into a big pile of time." He chortled. "Chuck me one of them bolts."

I helped him align and screw in the struts.

I could see a panorama from the top of the dome. About a half mile away a band of trees snaked through the desert. To the south was a small town, must be Trinidad. The sun slipped beyond the western peaks. The light was fading fast.

"Is that a river?" I pointed

"The Purgatore. Ain't that perfect?"

"You mean, like Purgatory?"

"That's really it's name. Beautiful Drop City, near the banks of the beautiful Purgatore."

We had a good laugh.

"So who's living here now?"

"Well, me of course and Jo and the fattest baby you ever seen."

"I saw Jo carrying her. Congratulations."

"T'anks," he replied in an exaggerated New York accent. "And Clard and Lard."

"Talking about me again?" A voice from below, a thick midwestern twang.

"I always talk about you behind your back, man," he yelled down. "That's Clard," he said to me.

Clard climbed up the dome. A shock of straight blond hair fell across his forehead.

"Anyway," Curly went on, "the other people here are Miss Margarine and Nani and Rabbit." He ticked them off on his fingers. "And Poly Ester and the kids."

"What about Frinki?"

"She's Miss Margarine now. You got here just in time to see her. She's leaving tomorrow."

"Going back to New York?"

"She and the girls got real homesick for her dumb husband."

Clard made his way up to us. "What lies are you telling about me, Curly?"

"That you're afraid of everything except heights."

"That's true."

"This dome's really Clard's baby," Curly said. "Those little domes are a cinch. But building on a grand scale, we didn't know jack shit about it, but he just came out here and started doing it. It was a fucking inspiration."

"A lot of people can live in this dome," I said.

"Nobody's going to live in it," Clard said. The blondness of his eyebrows made his eyes look small and close to his pinched nose. He had a ruddy complexion and wore cowboy boots. "This is going to be our theater. One big painting inside. Total environment. People are going to be immersed, right inside the painting instead of outside looking in. Strobe lights flashing on revolving paintings, films and film loops projected simultaneously, sound speakers scattered all over. Electronic psychedelics. Cut you off from your conditioning, bump you into spiritual enlightenment. Give you constant orgasm."

"Constant orgasm!" I exclaimed. "What a concept!"

"It's not a concept," Clard replied. "It's my every day reality. Nobody believes me."

"This will be our interface with the world," Curly added. "That's why we're building it here next to the parking lot. Most people will just stay here and leave our little domes alone. When the local vigilantes come out wondering what the fuck we're doing here, we show them the theater, give them a show, they figure we're just crazy artists and put their guns away."

"Good plan," I said.

A gong sounded. I saw Frinki standing inside the screens of the A-frame porch, beating on the gong.

"Chow time," Curly said.

As we climbed down, I could see people straggling toward the A-frame from various directions.

"Is that the foundation of another dome?" I motioned to a far hill, where there were several posts sticking out of the ground, a pile of two-by-fours and other lumber.

"That's Rabbit's dome, if he ever gets it done. Man he's slow. Don't like work much. He's the new guy." We walked down over a little gully toward the kitchen.

"I'm going to work on his dome tomorrow," Clard said. "We've got to help him get it done before the rains come."

"It ain't going to rain again till fall."

"It was drizzling in Denver," I put in.

"Anyway, if we don't do it, it's not going to get done. Let's all help him tomorrow."

"Listen to that guy," Curly said. "He's been sleeping in a tent for six months and he's so concerned that a bozo who just arrived got a dome of his own."

"They've got a kid. Me and Lard'll build us a dome soon. I'll meet you in the kitchen." Clard walked away.

"See that lady, the stringbean?" Curly tilted his head toward a very thin woman with a child, dumping a basin of water outside the kitchen dome. "That's Rabbit's wife, Poly Ester. And Kaitlin, her kid. Not by him. Clard and Lard met them in Dallas a few months ago."

"Dallas?"

"Don't worry, they're not Texans. Well, she is. Rabbit's an Okie. Good white trash. And Texans are just folks too, except for the cowboys. Rabbit's a writer. They're both writers, of sorts."

"What do you mean, 'of sorts'?"

"Rabbit was writing for an ad agency, ad copy. Poly Ester was a typist there. They both write other stuff too. Mostly porn. They showed me some of it. Not too bad, except it's got no grammar. Anyway, Clard had some paintings in a gallery. Rabbit and Poly came to the opening. Met Nani there too. Choctaw. Another Okie. Real nice girl." He blew a little kiss to the clouds. "Unfortunately she keeps saying she's going home." He pushed his sunglasses back up his nose. "Now I'm going to show you the most important place in Drop City, the junkyard."

I followed Curly past Rabbit's new foundation, to the far corner of the land, the highest point on the property, strewn

with piles of old building materials, lumber, plumbing, sculptures, and painted wooden art constructions.

“This represents the secret key to Drop City’s success. We scavenge everything we can lay our hands on. This area’s poor, but the country’s so rich that even here it’s full of stuff that nobody else is using. If you went down to Mexico, you wouldn’t find good junk like this just laying around. And in twenty years you probably won’t be here either. But right now we’re on the great cusp, and there’s grand pickings. Wherever we go we’re on the lookout for it. A lot of people are just glad for us to haul it away.”

On the other side of the junkyard was a barbed wire cattle fence, and beyond that, a farm. All property lines in the region were marked by these cattle fences, which a person could easily cross. It felt weird that they were around Drop City. Yet the fences surrounding Drop City were draped and decorated everywhere with works of art, and the art pieces seemed to create a magical space inside, protected from the outside world.

“Do you get along with the neighbors?”

“Like butter. That white frame house down past the kitchen dome, those are the people we bought the land from. Retired couple. Very Anglo, but okay. She brings us cookies.” He pointed in a circle. “This guy’s Italian. Cattle rancher. A few crops too. Over there’s goat farmers. Make cheese. Got a nice setup. I’ll take you over there some time.”

“How about that big adobe building across the road?”

“El Moro Elementary School. In a weird way, the school’s our protection. The school busses bring the local kids here every morning. When they see us, the kids all flash us V-signs. They dig us. They’re all on our side. And their parents can see we got nothing to hide.”

“How about that little billboard by the mailbox? That sounds pretty provocative.”

“That’s our one overt political statement. They don’t know what to make of it. They just think we’re crazy.”

We started down toward the kitchen.

"The little funky dome on the hill is me and Drop Lady's abode."

"Drop Lady?"

"Jo. Drop Lady's her Dropper name. We all got Dropper names now. Like, *noms de guerre*."

"What?"

"That's French or something. Pen names, stage names, stuff like that. Clard and Lard and Drop Lady and Miss Margarine and Poly Ester and Rabbit and Nani, those are all Dropper names. Everybody's got one but the kids. We first took on Dropper names when a reporter from the *Denver Post* showed up. The only thing we had built then was the chicken coop. You see how it looks a little like a space capsule? Well, I had just been reading *The Lord of the Rings*, so when the reporter asked I told him the chicken coop was a spaceship and that Drop City was a launching pad, that we're from outer space, here on a mission searching for dwarves and elves. A lot of locals see UFOs out here and are really into it. He asked our names and out of my mouth popped Curly Bensen and Drop Lady. I don't know where I pulled that Bensen from. Clark said his name was Clard Svensen because Clard sounds like an idiot and Svensen rhymes with Bensen. Richard said his name was Larry Lard, because it rhymed with Clard. Frinki said Miss Margarine, because it's better than lard. We were all vegetarians then. Before Rabbit got here."

"He took the name Clard because it sounds like an idiot?"

"Everybody told him he was really dumb when he was a kid. He wasn't good at anything except painting pictures. Lard says his folks told him the same thing, that he'd have to be really stupid to expect to make a living off painting. That's what they got in common. Both of their families think they're idiots."

"Clard and Lard. Sounds like a comedy team."

"They kind of take turns being each other's sidekick. Sidekick to an idiot. Clard's from Wichita, son of a Mennonite minister. You know, one of them German sects who still live like it's the eighteenth century, kind of communal, like the Amish but not quite so fanatical. Lard's a working class stiff from Buffalo, New York. A half-Jew. Dad's a postman."

"My dad was a mailman too. And I've got some Jew in me."

“Far out. I took you for a fucking wasp.”

We walked down near a big cottonwood tree, past a chicken coop, rabbit hutches, a goat on a long tether tied to a stake, an outhouse, a little garden in an area that looked flooded.

“That’s the swamp. This whole end of the property is soaked, the other end is desert. Go figure.”

“Your garden’s not looking too good.” A lot of the vegetables seemed dying or stunted.

“I’ll take that for a compliment, man. The garden’s my baby. The trouble is that the ground water here is salt. Nothing edible can grow in it. Just them rushes and reeds.”

“Then how do all those farms survive?”

“There’s a great system of irrigation ditches through the whole area. Cooperative. Set up in the thirties. New Deal. They bring in fresh water from the mountains. But there’s only a certain number of taps, and they’re full up, so we could only have one if we bought it from somebody. Nobody’s selling and we don’t got the bread. We got drinking water, but we can’t use that for gardening. I use it anyway. They’d kick us off if they found out.”

As we walked toward the kitchen I asked, “What’s your real name?”

“Why do you want to know?”

“You know mine.”

“Okay. It’s Betnovskovitch, not Bensen. Eugene V. Debs Betnovskovitch.”

“Gene Debs! Were you’re named after Gene Debs?”

“You know who he was? He used to be world famous, but nobody knows his name anymore.”

“I only know because I’ve read some American labor history. My grandpa was a leftist and a union guy, a shop steward, so I wanted to find out what it was all about.”

“My family are old lefties too. So are Jo’s. Both of our families were communists. Russian Jewish commies. Jo was named after Joe Stalin.” He loosed a hearty laugh; his belly bounced.

That blew me away. I told Curly about how, when I was a kid, my grandpa always used to talk about Russia as Uncle Joe. He used to say, ‘Some day Uncle Sam and Uncle Joe are going to be buddies again.’ He didn’t believe all the horrible things they said about Russia.

“Same with my folks,” Curly said. “With all the shit and propaganda, who knew what to believe?”

“Were your families very active?” I asked.

“Nah. None of them were really politicos. Jo’s dad was just an ordinary kosher butcher in Queens. My old man was just a little guy who ran a buttonhole store.”

“A what?”

He chuckled. “A tiny storefront in Brooklyn where he sold buttons and sewed holes. You a union member?”

“I’ve never worked long enough in a place with a union.”

“I belong to the Seamen’s Union.” He pulled out his wallet. “Here’s my seaman’s card. You ever hear of the Ludlow massacre? A famous disaster in labor history. There’s folk songs about it. Just twenty miles from here.”

We approached the kitchen dome with its A-frame porch entrance. I could see its small windows were made out of car glass. I asked, “What’s that little pagoda thing on top?”

“That’s the skylight. See them flaps up there? Look down around the bottom of the dome. Those are flaps too. You open them all up and, presto, you got air conditioning. Hot air rises out the top and cool air gets pulled in the bottom.”

“It really works?”

“Kind of.”

I stopped outside, then walked around the dome.

“Don’t look too close,” Curly said. “We covered this one with plywood. Only we got indoor plywood—didn’t know no better—and it’s peeling like a motherfucker.”

The veneers were coming up in a few places, but the aluminum paint seemed to have it pretty well sealed. “It doesn’t look too bad,” I said.

Near the entrance was a stump used as a chopping block, with an axe stuck into it, a wood pile nearby.

As we entered the kitchen, Jo and Frinki, or, rather, Drop Lady and Miss Margarine, gave me big hugs.

"I'm really glad you finally got here," Frinki said. "I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Curly told me."

Frinki introduced me to the others. We squeezed around a big round table piled with food, everybody talking at the same time. I was ravenously hungry.

I tried to get everybody straight. Larry Lard seemed quiet and sweet, very thin, with long wavy hair, sensitive features, almost pretty. Rabbit was well over six feet, with a bulbous nose, a big mouth that talked up a storm in an expressive face that took up most of his head, and a cowlick that stood straight up in back.

Poly Ester, Rabbit's wife, skinny as a noodle, kept twisting her hair around one finger, and trying to get her freckled, ten-year-old daughter Kaitlin to sit still. Poly seemed very nervous. She'd start a thought, veer off suddenly in different directions, contradict herself a few times, all in one sprawling sentence. She was smart in an off-center way.

Nani was striking, with smooth olive cheeks, a beautiful chiseled profile framed by straight black hair.

I got bits and pieces of where everybody was from, then after dinner I pulled out my joints and we all got stoned.

It had turned a little chilly, and Lard started a fire in the Franklin stove in the corner. I was surprised they had electricity and running water. I'd expected Drop City to be more rustic. In my grandpa's little house in New Jersey, where we used to go for the summer, we had kerosene lanterns, got water from an outside hand pump and used an outhouse. At least Drop City did use an outhouse. I hated it when I was a kid, but now I liked the idea, probably because it was so redolent of my childhood, like peeing outside.

There was a tub in the kitchen next to the sink. I asked about taking a bath.

Curly answered, "Too many baths are no good for you."

“Don’t pay any attention to him,” Drop Lady cut in. “He says that to everybody.”

“You’ve got to take a bath when Curly’s not around,” Poly Ester added, rolling her eyes and twirling a lock of hair. “He keeps records of how many baths you take a week. Which reminds me of something. Whoops, I forgot it again.”

Curly pushed up his sleeves. “Would you like to see our unpaid water bill?”

“What’s Kugo up to?” Frinki—Miss Margarine—asked.

“He keeps saying he misses you.”

“Has he got any new girlfriends?”

“I don’t keep track of what he does. How did Drop City get started?” I changed the subject.

“Well, Jo and Curly and Clard were all going to the University of Kansas...” Miss Margarine began.

“We always like to say,” Jo—Drop Lady—cut in, “that Drop City dropped out of a window in Kansas.”

“I was studying film,” Curly picked up. “Jo was into social work, and Clard was an art student. Jo went to San Francisco for a few months and I moved in with Clard. We got along partly because we were kind of into the same thing. We were both against history.”

Clard cut in, “He means that we both were trying to derive everything from inside ourselves. That’s where we got the idea of Droppings.”

“We got the name from bird droppings,” Curly said. “That’s where the name Drop City comes from.”

“Bird droppings? Drop City doesn’t come from *drop out* or *drop acid*?”

“I swear by my mother’s shoes it don’t. Those expressions wasn’t even current yet when we started. That was 1962.”

“Maybe it was subliminal. In the air,” I said.

“We started by painting rocks and dropping them from our roof onto the sidewalk, which was right downtown. There were always lots of people passing by. Just little rocks. The way we did it, the rocks couldn’t hit nobody. The whole idea was to see

how they'd react when they saw a painted rock bouncing on the sidewalk in front of them like it was falling from the sky. Their reactions were part of the whole thing, the *dropping*."

"They were events, ideas come true. Art out of galleries and into the world," Clard said. "We did all kinds of other droppings too. Like we put a plateful of breakfast on the sidewalk and swung a boot on a rope from the roof. Crazy stuff."

"Anyway that's where we got the idea for Drop City. Just drop it and see what happens. Originally we planned to start Drop City on a hundred acres of forest. Not six acres of goat pasture. Me and Jo worked, saved a few thousand clams and decided we were going to buy a plot of land at the headwaters of the Nile. Upper Egypt. Nubia. Sudan. This was 1964."

"Why the headwaters of the Nile?" I asked.

"To get as far away from here as possible. As far away from civilization. Or so we thought. Me and Jo were going to go there and start a whole new civilization."

"Actually there's already a whole civilization there," Drop Lady said, "but we didn't know that at the time. We thought there would be nobody there. We were really dumb."

"We thought that Western Civilization was totally worthless, going nowhere, and we didn't want to be part of it. We were going to start all over from scratch."

"It was crazy," Drop Lady said. "The idea was that everybody starts in the world new, like a little kid, before they get corrupted by this civilization."

"By history," Curly picked up. "We wanted to be outside of history. Or start history all over again. You got to understand, both of our families were really into Marxism and socialism, all those ideas about history and inevitability, etc, etc. And that was all an excuse, because they didn't build a decent society in the Soviet Union either, just like we didn't. The Soviets turned out fucked up in different ways from the Czarists, but still very fucked up. People were oppressing each other and ripping each other off there just like here, only in different ways. So anyway, Jo and me, we were very young and arrogant and thought we could do it better, just the two of us. Granted, we weren't thinking too clear at the time. Anyhow we never got past Morocco. Everything was so different there, it blew our

minds. We could barely communicate with anybody, and you couldn't even get materials. We realized how dependent we were on all this capitalistic junk. Two Jews from Brooklyn wouldn't stand a chance there."

"I'm from Queens," Jo put in. She opened her shirt a bit and began nursing the baby.

"We met these guys named Captain Hatch and Peewee in Casablanca, who told us that for two thousand bucks we could acquire a pound of Moroccan hash, which sells in London for a clear thirty thou. That made us greedy, it brought out our lower natures. Easy carrots dangling in front of our mouths. We figured that for thirty Big Ones we could buy the grandest plot of land you could imagine. So we forked over the dough and they gave us these big cakes of the best hash you ever smoked. One hit and you're in Neverland. We stuffed all the hash in our underpants. Man, we were bulging and sweating. Crazy paranoid all the way on the boat to London. Then when we finally opened up the bundles, they turned out to be camel shit. We were swindled! We had just barely enough bucks to limp on back to the States. So we made it back to Kansas from Africa with very little collateral. We realized we had to get together with other people and pool our resources to make something happen. You need other people to have a community and a new society anyway. Just then Clard came to visit us. He was living in Boulder, going to the University of Colorado. We saw that our ideas were moving in the same direction. This was early 1965. We saw that what we wanted to do was almost the same thing as what he wanted to do, and we developed the idea. Clard knew Lard in Boulder, but he wasn't involved with the project at that point."

"I'd been having ideas like this for a long time," Clard said. "When I was a kid my grandparents had this great farm, with a few buildings and barns. I thought I'd inherit it. I had this dream of turning it into an artists' community. The idea was that we'd also farm it and be self-sufficient. But then the land was sold. I didn't even get any of the money. While Curly and Jo were in Africa I actually tried to buy a piece of land near Boulder to do it on, but it didn't work out."

“None of us had many resources,” Drop Lady said, “but we had the sense that anything was possible, that the potential was unlimited.”

“There were already a lot of Sixties things in the air,” Clard said. “A lot of people were into great exciting things. But we had a sense that Drop City could lead the whole world into new ways of living, a sense of creativity and being on the cutting edge. It wasn’t just Drop City either. We thought of Drop City like kind of a seed of a crystal, the first of a chain of interconnected Drop Cities around the world.”

“We wanted a spiritual place, a big extended family. We still want that,” Drop Lady added.

“At that point we were still talking about building A-frames,” Curly cut in. “We’d buy some land where we could do our art and not have to work. I was already making films by that time. First we considered Montana, but you had to buy a thousand acres and we didn’t have those kind of clams. We went to Boulder and hooked up with Clard. We drove all around Colorado looking for land, but it was really hard to find a nice plot for a few hundred smackers anywhere. By the time we got to Trinidad and talked to the neighbors, this old goat pasture looked really good. He wanted five hundred bucks, but that was almost all we had in the world, so he let us talk him down to three-fifty. This was May, 1965. Clard joined us a couple months later, when he was finished with school. At first we lived in the car. It was raining almost every day. The neighbor let us stay in that abandoned house down the road. As soon as the rains let up, we moved into a tent. Right before we bought the land, Bucky Fuller was lecturing in Boulder, and Clard and Lard went.”

“Fuller blew our brains.” Lard scratched his chin with a fork. “Triangles. Fuller inspired us about triangles. A-frames are triangles. Domes are triangles a lot more advanced.”

“A couple weeks later Curly and I were driving around looking for land,” Clard picked up, “we saw a little dome in a farmer’s yard, climbed over the fence and measured it. That’s all we knew when we built the first dome here.”

“Even now we still barely know what we’re doing,” Curly jumped in, “but back then we didn’t have a clue. We were trying to build a geodesic dome, but we didn’t understand it at all,

and we built a dodecahedron instead. That's the dome on the hill. None of it fits right. We went to a lumberyard near Raton and got all these culls, two-by-fours that were so scruffy they couldn't sell them for more than a dime apiece. We scrounged some old telephone poles for the foundation posts. We only had one junky old skill saw then. Not that our tools are much better now, due to lack of better fortune. The dome wasn't even covered yet when we moved in. We just threw an old tarp over the frame for a while. Finally we tacked up some tar paper and chicken wire. We went to all the bars in town and got their old bottle caps. They couldn't figure out what we wanted them for. We punched two holes in each bottle cap, wired them on to make the chicken wire stick out a little, poured on stucco, painted it with tar and aluminum paint, used old car glass for windows, tires for door hinges. The original shitter was just a hole outside with a couple of boards over it."

Lard and I washed the dishes, then we all sat around talking until late into the night. Drop Lady showed me her watercolors, cartoons, and children's stories. She had a pretty good painter's hand. Curly seemed well balanced by her. She seemed steady, rooted, and straight forward, easily the most mature person there.

One by one people drifted off, Curly, Drop Lady, and the baby, Mae, to their dome; Rabbit, Poly, and Kaitlin to their tent; Lard to his bed in the back of a station wagon parked on top of the hill; Clard and Nani, who sometimes seemed to be a couple, to tents pitched near each other. Frinki—Miss Margarine now—and the girls were sleeping in the kitchen.

I rolled my sleeping bag out on the kitchen floor. Through the tiny windows at the hexagon hubs, I could see stars.

Then Miss Margarine crept over and whispered, "Move over."

"We shouldn't," I said. "Kugo's my friend."

"He fools around with other women, don't he?"

"That's none of my business."

"Damn it, I just want to know."

"You already know the way he is. You know him better than anybody."

“Yeah, I guess I do,” she said bitterly. “He balled your chick.”

“He did?”

“That’s what somebody told me. It means nothing to him. He don’t care. Anyway, when I get back I’m going to tell him I balled every guy at Drop City, and you too.”

“Don’t tell him that.”

“Why not?”

“It sounds like you just want to hurt him.”

“You don’t know how he’s hurt me.” She squeezed in with me.

Her warm body felt good but also made me nervous. “I’m not comfortable, Frinki. Kugo’s one of my best friends.”

“Look, hold me, will you? I’m lonely. Anyway I’m not Frinki any more. I’m Miss Margarine.”

“Miss Margarine, I didn’t think you were interested in me.”

“I don’t want to fuck you. I just need somebody to hold me tonight.”

A long time later, I whispered, “Frinki, are you sleeping?”

“No. Are you?”

“Is everybody here fucking everybody else?” I asked.

“Not really.” She said nothing for a long time. “It’s funny. I’m not supposed to talk about this. We call it the evil black snake. It just tears everybody apart. But anyway, Curly and Clard claim they’re trying to break down their egos, and part of that is not being possessive about women. I’m not going to tell you who did what with who, or who would barely talk to who for weeks. But I didn’t see too many egos broken down. Rabbit and Poly Ester haven’t been here long enough to get involved with the circus, at least not yet.”

“Are Nani and Clard a couple?”

“She started out as Clard’s woman; Clard wanted her to sleep with Curly, but she wouldn’t do it. He just wanted to control her. Instead, she dumped him and seemed to take up with Lard for a while, but Clard didn’t like that. Now she’s just

staying in a tent by herself. Whoops, I better shut my big mouth.”

“Have you really balled every guy here?”

“Of course not.”

“You just told me you did.”

“I said that’s what I’m going to tell Kugo.”

“So you’re a liar.”

“Would you rather I be a whore? The truth is, this whole so-called sexual revolution thing is really just something made up by guys and for guys. It tells women we’re supposed to feel liberated by having sex with all of you. It just doesn’t work like that, at least not for women.”

I couldn’t sleep, haunted by my thoughts. What Frinki said about Patt and Kugo really bothered me. I lay awake for hours, looking at the triangles on the ceiling, and the stars out of the tiny windows near the vertexes. It was making me dizzy. Because the panes were so small, I could actually see the stars moving very slowly across the sky. I remembered that Curly had said, when I first met him in New York, that sleeping in a dome “opens your fucking mind, frees up your inner harmonies. You wake up every morning feeling like a new man.” I wondered if my consciousness was being expanded right then.

I had to pee, got up, and staggered outside. An enormous orange moon leaped off the eastern horizon into a cloudless, star-showered sky. I tripped off the edge of the porch and tumbled sideways into the arms of a large cactus.

With some help from Miss Margarine, I spent most of the night pulling tiny needles from my hands and arms.

* * *

Chapter 5

That first morning I was exhausted from not sleeping, but also wired from finally being at Drop City. I helped Drop Lady collect the eggs, feed the chickens, rabbits, and goat, and spent a while with Curly weeding and watering the pathetically small lettuce, tomatoes, and carrots. After pancakes and coffee, Curly and Drop Lady drove Miss Margarine and the girls off to the bus station for their trip back to New York.

All the other guys went up to work on Rabbit's dome. It was hard labor, but a real group effort and gratifying, some of the most fun I'd ever had working. Everybody was figuring out things as we went along. When Curly got back he joined us. We finished sinking cut-off telephone poles in a circle in the ground, then leveled them off with string nailed between post tops, and poured concrete around the posts in the holes.

On a break I walked with Clard down to get a drink of water.

"Is it really true that nobody here ever has to go out and get a job?"

"I wish. At one point me and Curly reached rock bottom, so we shoveled manure at a chicken ranch for a few days, then got jobs as construction workers in New Mexico, building railroad trestles. Curly dropped a beam on his foot the first day and left. I worked a month before I couldn't take it anymore. Hope I never have to do that again. But to answer your question, soon nobody in the world's going to have to go out and get a job. Not just at Drop City, but everywhere. It's inevitable. Technology's creating a world where only a very few people will have to work. Soon everybody will get survival—at least survival—without working. Anything on top of that, maybe you'll have to work extra for. Then what are most people going to do with their time? Become artists. There's nothing else. Eventually most people will be paid to be artists.

Unfortunately the world isn't there yet. That's why it's absolutely essential that Drop City has the most advanced cutting-edge technology. We're the transition. As the old system collapses, people will switch over to us. We need to be a hundred years ahead of our time. Then when everybody takes their fair share, they won't be able to stop us."

"When everybody tries to take their fair share, we'll all wind up in jail," I replied.

"That way of thinking is obsolete. What I'm saying is inevitable. Advanced technology means social revolution."

"Advanced technology means social alienation. It means they don't need us. I'm for lower-tech, not higher-tech."

"Chairman Mao tried to do that in China and started a famine."

"It probably wasn't that simple."

"It's so clear, why can't you see it?"

"I guess I'm just an unreformable Luddite."

Clard chortled. "To tell the truth, I don't really know that much about technology. Or politics. I don't have those kind of brain cells. It's the general concept of technology that I like, particularly since it means I can just paint and not have to work at a day job."

We finished the foundation by mid-afternoon. Everybody felt a great sense of accomplishment.

Curly, Clard and Lard went off in an old red pickup to get supplies, while Rabbit and I continued working.

"I hear you write," I said.

"I'm a famous writer," he grinned. "Well, not yet, but gonna be. If you can't remember your own name, remember mine. Starting right now, I'm going to sign myself Rabbit."

"I write too."

"I'll show you mine if you show me yours," he guffawed. "That reminds me, I've got to take a leak."

He walked about twenty paces, pulled out his penis, peed a long parabola into the air against the roots of a cactus.

I'd been writing since I discovered as a kid that a pencil and paper were affordable even when not much else was. I'd thrown out most of my early stuff when I left New York, but carried a few manuscripts with me in my knapsack.

When Rabbit got back he said, "Man, that's the best part of being out in the country, pissing outside. Makes you feel like a real guy, huh?"

"I haven't gotten used to it yet."

"You city boys are weird."

"I'm not quite a city boy. We used to spend summers in the country when I was little. My grandpa had a place in Jersey. I used to pee outside all the time there, and it did feel more natural than in the city. But that was a long time ago."

"Jersey? What do they grow there?"

"Corn and chickens. Other stuff too."

"As for me, I'm from Oklahoma. Best trailer camp trash in Tulsa." He let loose a snort. "Piss right off the back porch into the Arkansas river swamp. I've never got used to pissing in a toilet. Feels perverted. Hey, how about you and me tour the local bars tonight and see if we can hustle up some blow jobs? You look hornier than a hop toad."

"I'm not into hookers."

"I don't mean hookers. Only a fool would pay for it. I mean faggots. You and me could go bar hopping, find the town fags, and have a little party."

"I like girls."

"I like girls too. But they're complicated. You can like girls and still let faggots suck you off. No contradiction. At least not where I come from. Ain't you never let a guy suck you off? Where I was growing up that's what we all did. As long as you were the one getting it, it just made you normal."

"What does Poly Ester think about it?"

"She's happy if I'm taken care of. I got a joke for you. How do you stop a beautiful woman from giving you a blow job?"

"I don't know."

“Marry her.” He guffawed then caught his breath. “What’s the matter with you? Never been married? Hey, are you a hunter? Do you hunt?”

“We used to go fishing when I was a kid, but I didn’t like to watch them die, so I stopped.”

“You got to blow over that hangup, boy. We need some meat on the table. After lunch I’m going rabbit hunting. I got an extra rifle. Want to come?”

“The only place I’ve ever shot is in amusement parks. I don’t really know how.”

“I’ll teach you. We got to get some meat in this place or I’ll start biting the girls.”

“What about those rabbits in the hutches?”

“They’re just Drop Lady’s pets. She don’t let us eat them.”

He brought out a couple of rifles from his tent, set up bottles on fence posts, and showed me how to shoot. It took me a long time to hit anything. When I finally hit a bottle, he said, “Great. Now let’s go kill us some rabbits.”

“Wait a minute,” I said, walked over to the cactus that Rabbit had peed on, stepped around the other side, and took a long piss. I wondered how the cactus liked it.

We got into a black truck parked on the hill, let it roll down to get it jump started, and began driving along the back gravel roads.

“Watch the bushes. They like to hide. The jacks are the ones with the long ears. The cottontails are smaller but better eating. As soon as you see one running, watch where he goes. Don’t lose him. Stay cool. Before we kill him we got to first apologize to him. If he’s ready to die, he’ll give himself to us for dinner. If not, we won’t be able to kill him, no matter what we do.”

“You mean, he won’t run away?”

“You bet your balls he’ll run away. That’s just part of his game. But if you play your part right, he won’t get away, not with a bullet between his ears.”

We drove a ways but didn’t see anything.

Just then a rabbit dashed across the road in front of the car. Rabbit screeched to a stop. "A jack! Let's get him!" He grabbed his rifle and jumped out, leaving the motor running.

I picked up my rifle, followed him under the barbed wire fence alongside the road.

"How do we apologize?" I panted. "Do we just say out loud, 'Rabbit, I'm sorry but will you please let me kill you?'"

"Just say it to yourself. There he is!"

The rabbit zipped from under a bush. Rabbit froze, aimed and fired. "Gotcha!"

It all happened too fast for me. We ran over, but couldn't find the rabbit anywhere.

"I hit him. I swear it. I saw it. You saw it, didn't you?"

"I'm not sure."

"Just like I said, when they're not ready to die, it don't matter if you hit him. The bullets don't hurt him, go right through."

We got back in the truck, drove some more. "There's another! See him?" Rabbit pointed out into the desert, stopped the car and jumped out.

We did this a half-dozen times, with no success. I fired a couple of shots, but just for effect. I aimed well above the rabbits.

Finally we gave up. On the drive back, Rabbit said, "You fit in real good with the menagerie here. Why don't you stay and become a Dropper?"

"Maybe I will."

"I already got a Dropper name for you."

"What?"

"You look like the happy wanderer type to me, so how about Ishmael?"

"That's too biblical."

"They won't know it. None of these jokers here read anything except comic books and jar labels."

"I saw some *Classic Comics* in the kitchen."

Back at Drop City, the dinner bell was just ringing.

As we entered the kitchen, Poly Ester asked, "How'd the hunt go? Or was that yesterday?" Kaitlin, one front tooth missing, was clinging to her skirt, as she often did.

Rabbit said, "We had amazing luck. This rabbit kept playing hide and seek with us, leading us on. I could tell he wanted to die right then and there. He ran into an arroyo. We followed him. He stuck his head up. He was daring us to kill him. Both of us took aim and pulled the triggers at exactly the same time. Both of his ears blew right off his head. You could see them flying up in the air, spurting blood. Then when we run over, he was gone. Ears gone too. Not even a trace of blood."

"What happened to his ears?" Kaitlin asked, wide-eyed.

"He grabbed them and took off."

"You expect us to believe that?" Poly Ester said.

"Swear by my mom's pants. Ishmael was right there with me." He turned to me. "Right?"

"I was there," I shrugged.

Curly made a sour face. "Tell me, Rabbit, why do you get off on killing rabbits?"

"I don't. I'd rather kill me a deer."

"Did those poor little guys attack you in a former life maybe?"

"Man is a hunter."

"I'm a man too, and I'm a vegetable."

"You be you and I'll be me."

Curly turned to Clard. "What do you think, man?"

"I think killing's sick, you know that. And it makes me sicker to think that somebody from Drop City is doing it. But if Rabbit sees it different, that's his right. I'll have to defend him. We can't force our morality on other people, not at Drop City."

"Man, that's rabid," Curly replied, shaking his head. "Killing rabbits is rabid. Yesterday I thought your Dropper name should be Ravenous, but now I think it's going to have to be Rabid."

Rabbit guffawed. "I like that!" He startled me by popping a set of false teeth out of the front of his mouth and chattering them.

Kaitlin jumped up and down, laughing, "Let's turn on the black light and watch your teeth glow in the dark, Daddy Rabbit."

* * *

At the end of the day I decided to call Patt. I borrowed one of the trucks and drove to the payphone by the motel, a few miles down the road, almost to town. No answer. Those were the days before answering machines and voice mail, so I couldn't leave a message. I'd already tried calling her a few times during my trip, but she was never home. I started to get annoyed. I was kind of glad I couldn't reach her, anyway. I was mad at her because of what Frinki had said. I wanted to let her stew over what was happening with me, maybe sweat a bit, if she cared. I didn't know what to believe. Really, why did it matter? I started to wonder if she was taking the opportunity to see other guys.

When I got back to Drop City the sun was approaching the western Sierras, refracting reds and purples in the cirrus clouds. I saw Nani sitting on the hill and went up to her. She was sketching the sunset with colored chalk. "Every evening here is beautiful. Join me if you want."

I stood there awkwardly.

"Why don't you sit down?" she said.

It was because she was so gorgeous. I sat next to her and said, "I've been an American all my life and you're the first Indian person I've ever met. There weren't any Indians in New York."

"There are lots of Puerto Ricans in New York."

"Puerto Ricans aren't Indians."

"Then what are they?"

"They're mixed."

"I'm mixed. I'm part Irish."

"I'm part Irish too."

"It's a common mix for my people, Choctaw and Irish. We even sent money to Ireland a hundred years ago to help during the potato famine."

"To Ireland? The Choctaws sent money to Ireland?"

"That's what they say. Right after our Trail of Tears. Do you know what I'm talking about? Do you know about the Trail of Tears?"

"Kind of."

"Our first generation in Oklahoma heard that Irish people were starving. So even though we were very poor, we collected money and sent it there to help."

"For my Irish grandmother, thank you."

She held up her wrist. "We've got a little of the same blood." She put her wrist next to mine. I could feel her pulse.

Nani added a few strokes to her sketch, suddenly put her chalk down and closed the pad. "The colors keep changing too fast."

I reached over and touched her hair.

"Don't try to hit on me. Anglo guys find it so easy to disrespect Indian women!"

I took my hand away. "How am I disrespecting you?"

"You don't even see it."

"Besides, I'm only part Anglo. Part Anglos aren't really Anglo. Irish aren't Anglo. Neither are Jews. I'm part Jewish too."

Suddenly she held a finger to her lips. "Did you hear that?"

"No."

"A wailing sound. I heard it last night too. It's a banshee. I have to go home and see if my family is all right."

"A banshee? I've never heard a banshee."

"Maybe there's too much noise back east. Out here on the plains you can hear things a long ways. When you hear a banshee, somebody in your family might be dying. There it is again!"

I could hear the wind. Then another sound that was riding on the wind.

"I think it's coming from the old camp," she said. "It's a couple of miles across the river. Do you want to see it?"

Nani drove the red truck down the gravel road, across a bridge, down a side track for a couple of miles, then off onto a one-lane rutted trail. All around were grazing cattle. Through a cattle crossing—a break in the barbed wire fence with a few old train rails laid across it into the ground, that the cattle perceive as too dangerous to step over—she drove into the herd.

"See those concrete slabs?" She said, driving slowly in. "What do you think they are?"

Out in the barren field were lines of concrete slabs, some with plumbing pipes sticking up, occasional threaded rods around the peripheries, a few brick chimneys. There must have been a couple of dozen slabs. Every other stitch of building material was gone. A storm was blowing in. Sporadic gusts of wind set the sand and tumbleweeds in motion. Mist hit the windshield. The cattle eyed us suspiciously as we drove slowly among them. They looked nervous. There was something eerie in the air.

"I bet this was a prison," I said. "The ghosts are still here. I can feel them."

She pulled up alongside a slab and shut off the engine. Twilight fell heavily over the field. Cattle were all around us, staring at us. "This was a Japanese internment camp during World War II. They relocated whole families here from California. Maybe a thousand people."

We sat there quietly for a while. I tried to imagine what it must have looked like then. Finally I said, "Let's get out of here."

A few days later Nani left for Oklahoma, saying she'd be back and admonishing me to keep my ear to the wind.

* * *

I liked Drop City a lot. I liked the people, the style of working, the constant ferment of ideas, the attitude that everybody should really be equal. I liked the way the guys got so involved with what we were building that we often only stopped when it got too dark to work. I got off on feeding the chickens and tending the rabbits. I grew paternally fond of the stunted carrots. I never bonded with the goat, who was a strange one. I liked the way the Droppers found room for diverse personalities and improvised ways to work out their differences. Curly and Rabbit kept each other at arm's length, but I thought they respected each other. They were both such characters. Sometimes Curly seemed to be seriously trying to deal with his ego; Rabbit just sprawled all over the place without thinking too much. As long as both backed off, they'd be okay.

Despite all the human activity, there was even some wildlife living on the land: ground squirrels, whose burrows were near the base of cacti and bushes. They came out mostly at night, but occasionally you'd see one make a mad dash across the sand from one entrance to another. Rabbits lived on the adjoining property, but they kept their distance from Drop City. Also the usual assortment of magpies, crows, hawks, and small birds. A few lizards. Strange desert bugs. Big black ants scurrying around anthills the size of hubcaps. Driving, I'd sometimes see antelope and deer. Coyotes and even pumas were said to be around; I saw what I thought were their tracks in arroyos when I went walking on the prairie, and heard the coyotes howl, but I never met any.

Curly was always going around filming everything that happened with his 16 mm camera, and taking stills too. He was documenting Drop City. He'd edited some of his footage into a short, humorous, rapid-cut film that he showed over and over again.

We were busy working on Rabbit's dome, with Curly sticking a camera into everybody's face, when Lard said, "Who the hell is that?"

Somebody was climbing up near the top of the theater dome.

"There's hardly anything holding it together up there," Clard said.

"If that lunatic falls and kills himself," Curly said, "the sheriff's going to be in our face."

We dropped our tools and hurried over.

"What are you doing?" Clard called up to him.

"This is great! Great!" the guy yelled. "What a dome! This thing is huge!" He spread his arms and shouted, "WAHOO!"

"Come on down."

"I'm too excited to come down. I need a few more minutes." He climbed to the very top, started to stand, then seemed to realize how shaky the whole thing was, and gingerly descended. He jumped to the ground and strode toward us, hand outstretched.

"Luke's the name." He had a crew cut, about an inch long that stood straight up. "Luke Bear. I can't tell you how glad I am to meet all you fellow spirits. Down where I live near Albuquerque, nobody understands domes. You need a better joint system. What are you going to cover it with?"

"Plywood, I guess," Clard said. "When we can afford it."

"Ever consider car tops? The junkyards are full of them. Nobody knows what to do with them. They're almost giving them away. Got to cut them out yourself. They're the perfect cover for domes. I build domes too. Well, they're not quite domes. I've only built one so far, but I've got lots of them designed. Not geodesics. Different shapes. Stretched and exploded. Want to see a picture?"

He ran to his car, came back with a portfolio of photos and drawings. They were funny-shaped elongated buildings, with long panels of different geometric shapes.

"They're beautiful," Lard said.

"That's made out of car tops?" I asked, incredulous.

"You better believe it! Do you want to build one here? I'll build you one! We can put it up right here."

"Why do you want to build one here?" Curly asked.

"So the world can see it. Nobody's interested down there."

"Fine with me," Clard said. "Me and Lard need a roof. We'll build it with you."

“The first one I’ll build down there and just drive it up. You got a deal.”

* * *

Chapter 6

I got a letter from Patt. She was behind schedule and wanted to meet me a week later than we'd planned. She sounded very distant, reserved.

The next day I drove into Trinidad with Curly, Drop Lady, and Poly Ester in an old Dodge that barely chugged along at thirty miles an hour. In addition to this classic, Drop City owned a couple of other dilapidated cars, a station wagon, two pickups, and a scooter, some of them working, some not. Legally they were all owned by individuals, but the group used them as if Drop City owned them.

Many of the little kids in town, particularly Chicano kids, flashed us V-signs as we drove by. We flashed them back. I was really surprised, even though Curly had already told me this would happen.

Drop Lady and Poly went into a store while Curly and I walked around. "This town's a lot less cowboy than I expected," I said.

"Yeah, Trinidad's a great place," Curly agreed. "Not too much bullshit."

"I can almost imagine living here."

"Well, why don't you become a Dropper? I'm serious. Forget about the Coast. Stay here. It's better out here. Build yourself a dome. Stay as long as you want."

"I really appreciate that. But I've got to go to San Francisco first. I want to see what it's like. I'm also meeting my girlfriend out there."

"The old puss call. Well, drag her back with you. Convince her to come. The more the merrier. Bring back a few of the ladies. The single guys have been having a hard time meeting chickadees here; the local beauties are into their own thing. But don't spend all your coin and come back broke. Plan for

being here a long time. That's what I'm doing. I'm planning on being here a long time."

"If I do come back, I'll bring some money. How much really does it cost to build a dome?"

"Two hundred, more or less. I ain't shitting you. Bring five big ones, if you can. The baby needs protein."

We stopped at the post office and picked up a package. Inside was a bundle of copies of the *East Village Other*, the New York underground paper, with a full-page spread on Drop City, from the interview Curly and Jo did when they were back visiting the City in the spring. The article declared Drop City to be one of the avatars of the new underground culture. The *Other* got distributed in underground enclaves all over the country. This was Drop City's first national publicity.

I tried calling Patt again, but there was still no answer.

When we got back to Drop City, there were visitors, an artist couple who were living in the hills above Trinidad, Denton and Leeda, and a woman who was staying with them. Denton was stocky, blonde, with a Roman nose and feet planted firmly on the ground. Leeda had searching green eyes and long carrot hair. Clard and Lard had known them in Boulder. They seemed to be a peaceful couple.

"This is our friend Marigold. She's a painter." A big-boned girl with a round face, straight brown hair. When she smiled the corners of her mouth drooped. She looked like a sunflower in the rain.

"I think a friend of mine back in New York knows you," I said. "Her name's Cori."

"We're like sisters."

Everybody chattered about the newspaper article for a while. Then Clard and Lard pulled out twenty paintings from a lean-to covered with tarps, and spread them out all over. I'd just seen a few of their paintings before. They were all abstract patterns and geometric shapes, molecular or crystalline, in brilliant acrylic colors. They seemed to deal in a mental physics with feelings, and seemed to extend beyond the canvases. Lard and Clard were both painting in a similar vein, but were noticeably different. Clard's were powerful, full of ideas, replete with dynamic harmonies and discords. Lard's were flatter and

more decorative, but also rich in color. They casually critiqued each other's work but didn't seem too competitive.

We straggled into the kitchen.

Denton and Leeda brought out their portfolios. I liked some outdoor pieces they had set up at different depths along the road outside their house so, as you drove past, elements came together into a composition then broke apart again.

"Why don't you two move down here and become Droppers?" Clard asked.

"Denton's too anti-social," Leeda replied.

"I'd like to live around more people," Denton remonstrated. "But this place is too exposed. I want a hideout on a beautiful mountain."

"I rather be here in the desert," Lard interjected. He was stretched out on the floor.

"I agree with Lard," Curly said. "It's too beautiful in the mountains. Just all that picture postcard stuff. It's trite."

"Why would you rather live in the desert?" Denton asked.

Lard sat up and pulled a little stub of a pencil out from his shirt pocket. "See this nib? People always borrow your pencil and don't give it back. But nobody ever takes your nib."

"We've been talking about raising money to start another community in the mountains near here," Leeda said.

"That would be great," Clard replied. "We need more places to visit."

"Tat ti tit," Curly exclaimed.

"What?"

"Tat ti tit."

"He's just being the Baron," Clard explained. "Haven't you seen *The Being Bag*? It's some kind of obscure allegory about Drop City."

Clard pulled out a pile of hand-made black-and-white silk-screened comic books, drawn mostly by himself and written by Curly.

"It's supposed to be the beginning of a series," Clard went on, handing out the comic. "But we've only been able to sell a couple of copies, so I don't know if we'll ever do another issue."

Curly wiggled his eyebrows at Denton. "Maybe you'd like to buy some."

"Does everybody know Alteresio Smith?" Lard interjected. "He did the screening. He's thinking of moving here."

Leeda crinkled her nose. "I know him. He's awfully moody."

"You say that about all the guys," Denton parried.

Everybody sat around reading *The Being Bag*. It was the adventures of three characters, the Baron, Cleveland Troothsearch, and Ratsy Eatsit, who looked suspiciously like Curly, Clard, and Lard, spiritual seekers journeying through a bizarre geometric landscape, an LSD multi-dimensional domed world, trying to liberate the world's consciousness. The Baron seemed halfway between a shyster and a guru, the only one with any possibility of answers or elucidations, offered in the mysterious phrase, "Tat ti tit," which in context seemed to mean something like, "That's it," and at the same time became a kind of mantra or magic spell.

"The problem with *The Being Bag*," Denton said, "is that it raises all these important questions but doesn't answer them."

"That's the way life is, ain't it?" Curly replied. "So why shouldn't a comic book be like that too? Anyway it's just the beginning of the story."

"What's going to happen in the next issue?" I asked.

"Look, the important part isn't what will happen next," Curly went on, "The real issue of *The Being Bag* is: why are these guys traveling together in the first place, since they don't even know where they're going? That's the real issue in Drop City too. We don't have a clue as to where we're going or what'll happen when we get there. All we know is that for some unknown reason we're all traveling together. A motley brigade of Quixotes. A fellowship without no ring. Psychedelic musketeers waiting for Godot. One for one and all for all! Ain't that right, me hearties?"

"That's not how it goes," Drop Lady said. "It's 'All for one and one for all!'"

"That sounds too much like a fraternity," Clard intoned. "I hate fraternities."

"Drop City is not a fellowship of just our little group," Curly went on. "Nobody's excluded from Drop City. We're just stand-ins for the whole humanship. The humanship on spaceship earth. But what do we owe each other? Can we trust each other? Will we do right by each other or will we do each other in?" Curly looked around and raised a glass of apple juice. "To the humanship of the Droppers. One on one and all in all!"

I touched my coffee cup to Curly's glass. Rabbit clinked a jelly jar against the others. Everybody stood, raising up some object, and cried, "One on one and all in all!"

"Tat ti tit," Curly exclaimed.

Denton pulled a pill jar out of his pocket. "Let's shake this up to a new level." He carefully shook out a half dozen small capsules onto the table. "The real thing. I guarantee it."

"Very smooth," Marigold said in a throaty tone.

"You've tried it?" I asked.

"For most of last week."

Curly carefully lifted one in two fingers and held it to the light. "Man, I got to work tomorrow."

"You're cautious as a possum," Rabbit cracked, sidling his elbow onto the table. "It's all work." He grabbed a capsule, flicked it into the air, tried to catch it in his mouth, but it bounced off his chin. He grabbed it in the air and triumphantly popped it in his mouth.

"You're going to be up all night," Leda said.

Drop Lady shot a disapproving glance at Curly, and turned away. Nani walked out.

Curly popped the cap into his mouth, grimaced, stuck his nose into the air like a heron, and scarfed it down. One by one Clard, Lard, and I followed.

Drop Lady and Frinki slunk off into a corner together and spoke in low tones.

Marigold licked the left corner of her lips, then the right corner, stuck out her tongue very far, placed a cap near the end, let it hover there a moment, then slowly pulled it into her

mouth and grinned. She glanced around and looked at me. "Anybody want to go swinging?" She gave a little shrug and disappeared out the door.

I waited a few minutes, then stood. Leeda grabbed my arm and whispered, "Don't be fooled by her bravado. She's really hurting."

I caught up with Marigold near the big cottonwood tree.

"How do you know Cori?" she asked me.

"Through friends."

"How's she doing?"

"Cori's a resilient girl. She always comes out on top."

"When we were little she was my best friend in all the world. We were in a play together in second grade, and now she's a New York actress. It must be the most exciting place in the world."

"New York is great if you've got money."

"Do you paint too?" she asked.

"I write. How about you?"

"Mostly watercolors. I don't take it too seriously."

She climbed onto the swing. "Come on. There's room."

We each held one rope and pushed off with our feet.

"You're staying with Denton and Leeda?"

"Just for a little while. I was sitting in on a class of Denton's in Boulder. My parents started calling the school looking for me, so I had to get away. That's why I came down here."

"You're hiding?"

"Kind of."

"You're not under age, are you?"

"I'm an escapee. From a mental hospital in Michigan. They took away all my rights. My parents sent me there for refusing to be like them. The nurses strapped me to my bed because I wouldn't take their drugs. You're from New York, aren't you?"

"Born there."

"I'd love to see The City. Are you going back soon?"

“I’m on my way to San Francisco.”

“I have an old friend there too. When you get to San Francisco, check out a place called the Greta Garbo Home For Girls. Kind of a rooming house. Another girl I was real close with in high school is staying there with her boyfriend. She says it’s really cool. Her real name is Sophie but she calls herself Dawnrider now. Me and her and Cori used to be a team. Remember the old joke about whenever three teenage girls are friends they take on roles? Well, Dawnrider was the smart one and Cori was the pretty one.”

“I never heard that joke. What’s the third one?”

“The slut.”

Just then the LSD hit me. I’d almost forgotten I’d dropped. The world was suddenly soft, everything made of clay. For an instant I was alarmed, then realized it was funny.

“Let’s go for a walk.” Marigold’s eyes were clouds at sunset. The colors and shapes in them kept changing in the most amazing ways. She spoke in a disembodied voice, and floated away like a wraith. My mouth was fuzzy and dry. I was very high. Dusk was falling. We strolled, mostly in silence, along the fence draped with art objects circling the land, and wound up in the theater dome. We sat on a mattress piled with a few sleeping bags where visitors sometimes slept. Through the open panels I could see Orion and the milky way.

“Cori gave me something for you,” she said. “If I give it to you, will you come up and visit me at Leeda’s?”

“Sure.” I could barely pronounce the word. “What is it?”

“A hug.”

“She gave me one for you too.”

We wrapped our arms around each other and sank into a sweet kiss.

When I woke it was morning. My head felt filled with sand. I wasn’t sure where I was. Everything was jumbled. I could still taste the LSD. Then I remembered Marigold. I was alone. I tried to piece together what happened. I thought about Patt and began to feel bad. I stumbled down to the kitchen. Marigold, Leeda and Denton were gone.

* * *

My time in Drop City passed before I knew it. I didn't see Marigold again; I didn't get up to Denton and Leeda's place and they didn't come down again. I never reached Patt by phone, although I tried. It was just as well, since I was wary of getting into a long distance fight with her. I wrote her a stiff letter instead, confirming that we'd meet in San Francisco.

I waited to catch a ride out to the Coast, but none showed up when I was ready to go. Everybody said it was better to start hitching in New Mexico, where the Highway Patrol left you more alone. Then Lard decided to ride the scooter to Albuquerque and invited me to ride with him.

"I got a notice from my Draft Board in Boulder. That's why I'm going to Albuquerque. I've got to change my registration to down there. In Boulder everybody's trying to get a 4F. Down in New Mexico they've got plenty of kids who don't know how to get out, or even want to go in. It's easier to get off there."

So I stayed another few days until he was ready to leave. We made our farewells. I told everybody that I planned to be back in a couple of months, hopefully with five hundred dollars and Patt. I felt like I'd finally found a home in this world.

Lard kicked the scooter starter a few times, the engine sputtered and finally roared. I hopped on.

"DON'T FORGET THE MONEY!" Rabbit shouted over the noise.

Curly pounded his fist. "We're counting on you, man. Bring home the bacon. This is your family. Vegetarian bacon."

Lard took off with a lurch. With my backpack and Lard's bags tied to the scooter, we barely chugged along, swaying dangerously off balance. I looked back and waved, thinking Drop City was the greatest place in the world.

The mountains between Colorado and New Mexico were spectacular, every gust of wind threatening to blow us over the edge. We finally reached the outskirts of Albuquerque after dark and crashed on a rug at Luke Bear's adobe, frozen and barely alive.

* * *

Chapter 7

I opened my eyes to huge logs, the sound of sawing, and the smells of cooking. It took me a moment to realize I was in Luke Bear's adobe. The logs were vigas stretching thirty feet across the high ceiling, and Lard was snoring curled up in his sleeping bag nearby. The room seemed vast, after a couple of weeks in a little dome. Sunbeams sliced through narrow windows set two feet deep into the thick adobe walls, and fell upon a huge fireplace centered in one side.

I staggered over to a window and looked out at the sun just clearing the crest of a distant mountain. There were a few trees in the yard, desert beyond. Tucked to one side was a curious red and white structure that I recognized from the photos Bear had shown at Drop City.

I followed savory odors into the kitchen, where Bear and his wife Melody, tall and willowy, were scattering spices into an oversized cast iron pan bubbling with eggs and potatoes.

"Sleep well?" Melody asked.

"Your rug is a lot softer than the Drop City floor, but my joints are still a little stiff. That dome in the yard looks really interesting."

Bear perked up. "It's not a dome. It's a zome. C'mon!" He dropped a head of garlic and ran out the back door. His enthusiasm was infectious. I forgot my hunger and followed him around the house to the strange looking structure, about nine feet high at one end and six at the other, the metal panels painted red and white, openings for a window and a door.

"Cartops, all cartops! This is the prototype! It can stretch and expand in any direction. You can cluster them. You can do anything with them. I've got a million ideas. Come into my studio. I'll show you my drawings." He ran off.

It was like a long crystal, beautiful in its own way. The panels had bent edges inside, screwed together. It had no internal stud structure like the Drop City domes.

He bombarded me with stacks of wild sketches. After a half hour I asked, "Do you make a living doing this?"

He laughed. "Melody and my mom are leaning on me real hard to get a job."

Later Lard gave me a tour of Albuquerque on the scooter. We wound up at the main gate to the university, where a rally was demanding that Army ROTC be kicked off campus. Though Lard claimed that student sentiment against the war here was pretty strong, most people ignored the demo and just lounged on the lawn, studying, eating, throwing frisbees, necking.

A few days later, on June 16, 1966, he rode me out to where Route 66 fed onto Interstate 40 West. I stood on the side of the road, desert all around me except for a few Indian jewelry shops, trying to hitch a ride.

* * *

Four days later my last ride let me off on Haight Street. The sidewalks were teeming with young people, the girls so beautiful, everybody dressed in colorful rags, smiling, greeting everybody else. I walked in and out of marijuana clouds. The community was much more concentrated and intense than the New York scene.

A long-haired guy leaning against a building grunted, "M? L? Marijuana? LSD?"

"Do you know where I can find a room?"

"Try the bulletin board at the Head Shop."

In the window was a big hookah surrounded by a variety of pipes and packs of Zig-Zag rolling papers. Inside on the bulletin board I saw a notice, "Rooms \$50-\$75 mo. Greta Garbo Home For Girls (Boys Also)." The same place that Marigold had mentioned.

The Greta Garbo was a big Victorian rooming house taken over by young people. The lobby was a grand place painted in

crazy psychedelic colors, filled with dope smoke and swarming with action. Promising to pay tomorrow, I took a little room near the end of a hallway, overlooking a side street. I'd left my sleeping bag in the trunk of one of my rides when I'd made a fast getaway at a gas station, deciding that the two drivers were in flight and had given me a ride because they thought they might need a hostage. My clothes were filthy. I had only a few dollars. After sitting on the bare floor for a while, I decided to try to borrow some clothes so I could wash the ones I had on. I knocked on the adjoining door.

"Who is it?"

"Your next door neighbor."

A red eye behind wire-framed glasses peeked out. "You're new?" Blond hair fell straight down from his thinning pate, meeting a long mustache curling around the sides of his lips down to his chin.

"I just got here. Do you have some clothes and maybe a sleeping bag I could borrow? Just for the night?"

"Come in." As he opened the door, a blast of dope smoke hit me in the face. A group sat on pillows around a tall hookah; some of them were naked. A pile of yellow hash was spread on a newspaper on the floor. Someone took a hit from one of the hoses. Bubbles streamed up through the water to the glass jar thick with smoke beneath the smoldering hash bowl.

"Sit down. Take off your clothes if you want. No modesty. We're all friends here." He was dressed in multi-colored striped trousers, almost clown's pants. "Have a hit. Afghani. They call me Winston Warlock."

"Warlock?"

"Right. That's Dawnrider. This is our room." She was wearing a sari.

"Dawnrider. You're Marigold's friend!"

"How do you know Marigold?" She had olive complexion, and looked a little East Indian, but not quite.

"I met her at Drop City."

She turned to Winston. "I told you it was real."

"Drop City?" he exclaimed. "The hippie commune? Great! Fantastic! It's a real place! I thought it was a myth. So you were really there!"

"Right."

"Marigold wrote me long letters about Drop City," Dawnrider cut in. "But Winston didn't believe it."

"Marigold's delusional. Too much LSD, etc, etc. So there really is a Drop City!"

"She's not crazy," Dawnrider chided. "Winston only met her once when she came to visit us last winter. She was depressed. She had a hard family life. She pretended to try to kill herself a couple of times, but only just to get away from them. She keeps getting involved with creepy guys. Acid just flips her out, but she won't stop dropping. It's a vicious cycle. We tried to get her into dream travel, but she was having awful nightmares and was too afraid."

"Dream travel?"

"We do dream traveling," Winston said. "Slip into your dream body when you fall asleep. It's really easy. If you know how to remember you're sleeping while you're dreaming, you can wake up in your dream. Go anywhere you want. Control your dreams."

"Make your fantasies come true," Dawnrider said.

"Dangerous if you don't know how. If you want to learn, join our group."

I picked up a hose to the hookah. "I'll think about it."

"Tell me about Drop City! Can anybody really go live there?"

The smoke rose from the pit of my lungs to behind my eyes, where it exploded in a million colored fragments. "Anybody. It's an open commune." I got excited and told them all about my trip.

"A lot of communal groups have been forming here in the Haight," Winston said, "taking over old houses. Lots of cheap apartments. But moving out of the city is the next step."

"You always say the farm you grew up on was asphyxiating," Dawnrider parried.

“That was different. Rural Idaho. Very uptight. Oppressive assholes. But an open commune! Everybody a head! Everybody tripping! Everybody conscious! Terrestrial Paradise!” Winston took a deep hit from the hookah, then lay his head in her lap.

Dawnrider stroked his hair. “We spent a couple of days last week at Wheeler Ranch, and he hasn’t recovered.”

“Over in Marin. Fantastic scene,” Winston muttered. “Also Morningstar. And Tolstoy Farm, up in Washington. Open land. Hundred acres or so each. Loose. Everybody helps each other, shares stuff. Or you can just go off by yourself. Very anarchistic. But a commune, a real open commune like Drop City, that’s advanced, staggering!”

* * *

The Greta Garbo Home for Girls was a party without beginning or end. I wheedled a job as a part-time janitor in exchange for the rent and a very little coin. Winston Warlock was a dealer, and there was a constant stream in and out of his room. I became a regular visitor.

I kept thinking about Patt, who was due to arrive in a few days. I went back and forth between longing to see her and wanting to never see her again. I wished that things weren’t so muddled between us. There wasn’t much difference between fuzzy limits and no limits at all.

Why was I getting so worked up about Patt anyway? If I thought about all the things that annoyed me about her, I just wanted to get away from her. But I also felt a crazy instinctive pull toward her, as if there was some unfinished business we had together, some drama that we had to play out. Almost in spite of myself I kept looking forward to seeing her.

Typically, her bus was late. Finally we hugged and kissed, made small talk about her trip and mine.

But when she saw the scene around the Haight, she said, “This is a lot crazier than two years ago.” And when I led her into the lobby of the Greta Garbo Home For Girls, she turned around and walked out. “I’m not staying here. We’ll get busted.”

"The cops leave it alone. They don't bother people for dope here, as long as you're cool."

"This isn't cool."

She didn't like the room either. I'd furnished it with stuff that had been left in a storage room, a table, couple of chairs, an old mattress, a paisley curtain on the window. I was proud of it; the room had begun to look homey to me.

Patt wrinkled her nose. "It's small, dark, and dirty."

I was upset, but wrenched myself together. "As soon as I find a real job and get some money, we can look for another place."

That appeased her. Afterward we lay on the bare mattress quietly side by side.

"Did you get together with any of the girls at Drop City?"

"I washed the dishes with them, if that's what you mean."

"Did you sleep in a big pile?"

"No. How about you? Go out with any guys?"

"Would you care if I did?"

"It depends. What about that guy Bob? Did you get together with him?"

"He's just an old friend. It was not a big deal."

"What did you do?"

"What did you do with the girls you met at Drop City?"

"Don't interrogate me. How about Kugo? Was there ever something between you and Kugo?"

"That's crazy. There's never been anything between him and me. And don't interrogate me." She touched my cheek. "I want it to work between us."

"I want it to too."

For a while it was as if our every contact was touching raw wounds. There were things she wasn't telling me, and I didn't tell her about Marigold. We were both not quite being truthful and not quite lying. The air never entirely cleared, but as the days passed we drew gradually closer again.

We decided to hitch to Berkeley. Patt had visited there when she was in the Bay Area a few years earlier with her student group. Almost as soon as we got to the highway entrance, a car pulled over. I could see blue tattoos on the driver's arm.

The passenger lifted her sunglasses. "Hi, strangers!" It was Odessa, in a red T-shirt with a black United Farmworkers eagle.

"What a surprise!" I exclaimed. "Is Ernesto here too?"

"No. We broke up. Get in."

Patt and I slid into the back.

The driver looked us over. "Didn't I meet you two in the Apple last winter?"

"Sure, I remember you." It was Jake, the Viet Nam veteran we'd met at Ernesto's party.

"Where are you going?" Odessa asked.

"To Berkeley."

"To the big demo?"

"We haven't heard about it."

Jake took off with a jolt and swerved onto the freeway. "It's in support of the blockade at Port Chicago. I'm surprised you haven't heard about it. Posters are up everywhere. We're on our way to the blockade."

"That's where all the munitions funnel through the Bay Area to Southeast Asia. Past Berkeley. Not far. Trains from munitions factories all over the country arrive there every day to transfer their cargo onto ships headed for 'Nam. I'm going to get arrested for civil disobedience."

"Come with us," Odessa said. "I'm driving back. You can keep me company. We'll stop in Berkeley afterwards."

We crossed the bay, followed the shoreline north past the Berkeley turnoff, up to the delta. Near Vallejo we left the freeway, cut down some back roads, and finally pulled off into a dirt field where dozens of cars were parked. People with signs

and banners were funneling down past a small cafe, following railroad tracks to the water, where a fleet of gray ships were docked. A crowd of several hundred people were marching in a large ellipse up and down the pier, singing and carrying anti-war signs. A high, wire fence capped with barbed wire separated us from the ships, and a squadron of naval police lined both sides of the fence. The railroad tracks continued through a large wire gate on metal wheels. The gate was open, but the passage was blocked by police. Beyond was a loading area where the ordnance was transferred from the rail cars to the ships.

We joined the marchers, chanted for an hour, while the crowd continued to swell. Finally everyone gathered at the gate, where they had set up a makeshift platform on some 55-gallon drums. The speeches were hard to hear, the only sound system being a megaphone, which distorted their voices.

Finally, we heard a train whistle. The crowd murmured.

“HERE IT COMES,” the speaker cried.

The long train inched down the hill toward us.

“Everyone who is planning on getting arrested for civil disobedience, step forward to this line.”

A white line was painted on the dock about six feet in front of the gate, naval police massed just beyond.

“I’m going to get arrested now,” Jake muttered.

Odessa grasped his arm. “I’m going to get arrested with you.”

“How will we get back?”

Odessa handed me the car key. “We’ll pick it up tomorrow or the day after.”

“They’ll bail us out in the morning,” Jake explained.

Odessa gave me a hug. “Next time come get arrested with us. Everyone should see what it’s like inside. It’s enlightening. The holding cells are quite social.”

They joined the group of about fifty people at the line, while the rest of the crowd backed away to give them room.

The train was almost upon us. Two by two, the demonstrators crossed the line, blocking the tracks, and were

dragged away, Odessa and Jake among them. The rest of us shouted and jeered as the naval police threw the last of them into vans and the train passed through the gate to the waiting ships.

People drifted back toward the cars. However, now lining the path back were about a hundred guys, a lot of dirty white undershirts and brimmed caps, rednecks, a few of them carrying baseball bats. We had to file past them. There were no police around. Patt grabbed my hand. They cursed at us, called us traitors and commies. One guy spit a big glob in my face. Behind us a scuffle broke out. It was getting chaotic. Patt dragged me hurriedly to the car.

On the drive back to San Francisco, we cut through Berkeley, up Ashby then along Telegraph Avenue to campus, where a large crowd was gathered on Sproul Plaza. A speaker who had been at Port Chicago was reporting on the blockade. Vans of campus police drove up, jumped out, ordered everybody to disperse, and began bulling their way through the crowd. We decided we'd seen enough action for the day, and slipped away.

* * *

They were hiring at the Post Office. They needed extra workers because all of the mail to Viet Nam went through San Francisco, and the war kept heating up. We both jumped at it. Patt got assigned to sorting letters at the main Post Office, where you really had to work. I was sent to the Army station, Rincon Annex, where everything passed through to Viet Nam. It was a lark there. Nobody did much. They'd leave a few of us all day on an upper floor filled with boxes, telling us to restack them. We just moved them around. If we got too productive, our supervisor, who was a head, told us to work slower. Sometimes we'd build a high fort of boxes around us and snooze inside. At lunch we'd go to somebody's car and smoke dope.

Patt got used to the Greta Garbo Home For Girls and stopped insisting that we move, though she always disliked it. Sometimes I hung out in the lobby and in various people's

rooms, but she stayed away from the scenes. Winston and Dawnrider kept inviting me to their dream workshops. I was intrigued, but I never went, although I regularly dropped in at their pad. Patt kept her distance from them because of all the dope and because they seemed to draw no line between fantasy and reality. I was just as glad, because I was wary that Dawnrider might say something to her about my connection with Marigold. Dawnrider and Marigold corresponded.

Odessa and Jake were a sometimes couple. They lived in a flat near the Haight with a group of anti-war activists and kept us informed of upcoming actions. We went to other demos with them.

Patt and I put our differences behind us and had a great time that summer. How could you not, with all that incredible music and dancing going on at the Fillmore and the Avalon Ballroom. Patt contacted people she knew from the last time she was in San Francisco, and I called my various contacts too. Over the weeks we made many friends.

The Haight community had started a few years previously and had grown rapidly. People poured in from all around the country, most of them under thirty, looking for a community based on values outside the dominant system. It was happening in Berkeley too. Communal households were widespread in both places. People went back and forth between the two communities. A new underground paper was everywhere, the *San Francisco Oracle*, the most beautiful newspaper I'd ever seen. Its split-font rainbow color backgrounds and picture overlays made the text hard to read sometimes, but it was like music that you had to listen to carefully in order to understand the lyrics. The very stretch made it all the more worthwhile. *The Berkeley Barb* was more conventional in format, but just as radical. A group calling themselves the Diggers began free food giveaways in Golden Gate Park. They said they were trying to organize a whole survival system outside of the old society, removing necessities from the money economy, trying to channel the enormous energy that was exploding into visionary revolutionary directions. The counterculture was being born. The basic idea was to withdraw energy from the old system and use it to reshape the world.

Large numbers of young people felt, like I did, that there was no place for them in American society. The communities where we grew up were too rigid and oppressive. And now the country was hurtling ever deeper into the war in Viet Nam, with kids as cannon fodder. We felt only condemnation and misunderstanding from most people our parents' age. With nowhere else to turn, we turned to each other. The mutual aid and support that we found there seemed like a new consciousness, an embryo of a new society where the promises of America might at last become reality.

I exchanged letters with both Curly and Rabbit, confirming that I'd be back in Drop City in the fall, with Patt. They both said that everything was going great out there. But I had to really sell Patt on going there. She agonized over it.

We were dancing crazy at the Fillmore. The huge room was packed and wild, the music screaming, the colored lights and drugs flashing, the music reverberating so loud the walls pulsed.

"I CAN'T HEAR YOU," I shouted.

Patt brought her lips to my ear and almost yelled, "I'M NOT GOING."

"WHERE?"

"TO DROP CITY," she yelled. "I'M GOING BACK TO SCHOOL."

My head felt about to explode. "I thought you wanted to be with me."

"There's nothing out there. There's no future in Drop City. Come back to New York with me."

"School's just a waste of time."

"You'll wind up a bum."

"I'm already a bum."

"I want a career. I want to sing."

"You can sing at Drop City."

"You can't solve anything by running away."

"Drop City isn't running away."

"For me it is."

"Then we might as well break up right now."

"I just want us to have a life we can feel good about."

"I don't feel good about New York."

"Well, I don't feel good about Drop City."

"Give it a try. If Drop City doesn't work out, we'll figure out something else."

"Together?"

"Yes. Together."

Reluctantly she agreed. However, Patt still wanted to return to New York first to visit her family and get some of her things. We made a plan that while she was doing that, I'd go to Drop City and build a dome for us to live in.

* * *

San Francisco was a great place that summer of 1966, but there were also bummers, mostly connected with drugs, that confirmed my wanting to get back to the country.

I dropped psychedelics a couple of times that summer.

My first trip in San Francisco was on some airy stuff that Winston laid on me. I stretched on his floor watching visions of ecstatic flowers for a long time, then went to see Patt. When I told her I was tripping she got disgusted and left. I started to feel bummed out, and descended to the lobby, where this huge four-hundred pound black guy known at the Garbo as Tiny, was snoring on his back in the middle of the floor while this loony white guy called Crusader, who always wore an old striped beach towel tied around his neck like a cape and horn-rimmed dark sunglasses held together between his eyes with duct tape, kept skipping in circles around the room and leaping over Tiny, towel flying behind him, until he tripped on Tiny's stomach and went sailing into a pillar, glasses breaking again, then sat there laughing for a half hour, muttering, "Far fucking out," while Tiny rolled over and puked.

The next time I tripped, I waited until I had a day off when Patt had to work, so I didn't have to deal with her disapproval. As soon as I dropped, I began to feel claustrophobic and

realized I had to get outside, to some natural place, the park. I walked through the Panhandle, but there were too many people. I decided to go deep into Golden Gate Park, where I wouldn't be bothered, but didn't have the energy to walk, so I hopped the Fell Street bus. It was crowded; I couldn't find a seat and hung on a bar, squeezed by two guys who smelled weird. As we continued along the park toward the ocean, I felt the acid coming on. Suddenly I realized I was not human but some kind of wild cat, trapped in this horrible machine of my enemies. My eyes began to roll, I felt panicky. No one around me seemed to realize what was wrong. I had to get out, and saw an open window. We were stopped at a long red light. It took all my will power to keep from breaking for the window and leaping to freedom. When we finally reached the stop I squeezed down the exit as casually as I could manage. As soon as I was outside I loosed a cry of joy, ran across the street through swerving traffic, leaped the stone wall and frolicked in the trees.

After that I decided I didn't want to take any more city trips; they were too metallic. As the summer wore on, there wasn't just grass and psychedelics around, but speed and other hard-edge stuff. Sometimes methamphetamines and whoknowswhat were sold as acid. You didn't know what it was until it was too late. I never got into the heavy drugs, and Patt wasn't into anything at all. We heard that Wheeler Ranch was busted.

One night toward the end of the summer, fire inspectors broke into our room while we were sleeping, unapologetically shined a flashlight in our eyes and told us they were looking for fire code violations.

We came home one day shortly after and found our door broken into. Nothing was touched, but the window was open. Someone had used our room to get into Winston Warlock's through the fire escape, and stole some of his dope. Winston soon knew who did it: our friend Crusader. We found him in his usual haunt, running around the lobby. Crusader explained that it was an emergency, so what else could he do? He'd pay as soon as he got the bread that somebody owed him.

Another day when we got home we were met with police cars, an ambulance and a fire truck in front of the Greta Garbo, lights flashing. We cautiously walked upstairs; our entire floor

was cordoned off by the police. The huge guy known as Tiny had OD'd and died in front of our door. It took six attendants to get his body downstairs. We split. When we came back late that night, the police were finally gone and Winston Warlock's apartment was empty. Someone told me that Winston and Dawnrider had hightailed it to Morningstar. Crusader disappeared that night too. I heard he'd gone out swinging from fire escapes and the psycho squad canned him.

Patt finally took off for New York, leaving me with a week alone to mull things over before I was due to return to Drop City. I kept trying to figure out how in the world I'd gotten to where I was, and where I'd go from here. To ease my mind, I tripped one last time at a Love Rally in the Panhandle, half-way between a party and a demonstration, with great bands.

* * *

Chapter 8

As we bumped up the rise in the gravel road over the irrigation ditch, the top of the Drop City theater dome appeared then disappeared behind a grove of cottonwood trees. My ride dropped me off near the big dome, which now had multicolored car tops covering the lowest circle. The metal zome that I'd seen at Bear's in New Mexico was now erected on a rise not far away. Curly, Lard and Clard were digging into the hill near the center of the land, with a guy I didn't recognize. Rabbit's dome was complete, and sunlight glinted off the aluminum paint. Several more tents were set up near the kitchen. Poly Ester's daughter Kaitlin was running around with a couple of small kids I didn't recognize.

I walked down to the new excavation, my pack bouncing on my back, past an armless sculpture that stood on the hill like a sentry, a faceless head over a plaster torso painted aluminum.

Curly threw a shovelful of broken black shale into a pile, pushed his black-rimmed sunglasses up to his forehead. "Welcome home."

I laid down my pack. "I'm really glad to be here."

Lard swung his pick into the wall of crumbling shale. "What did you think of the Haight?"

"Loved it, but it's still big city. I think I'm a country boy at heart. Bear's zome looks great. Who's staying there?"

"Me and Clard."

"We're turning the whole inside of the shell into a painting," Clard said.

The new guy, who had continued digging, said, "These bozos got no manners. I'm Alteresio." He was wiry, with deep black eyes and a big splash of black hair falling across his face. He cracked a smile. "I just arrived from Sicily."

"Alteresio was a friend of mine," Clard said. "He did the silk screens for that comic book we published. Rabbit knew him too."

Curly raised an eyebrow, dropped his sunglasses back to the bridge of his nose and began shoveling again.

I picked up a shovel and joined him. "What are we digging?"

"The Hole."

"A basement for Alteresio's dome," Lard said.

"Me and Crayola are going to be upstairs in a dome on top of the hill, and the kids will live down here in the bottom of the hole. They'll have their own entrance. I'll never have to see them, except at meals," he chortled.

I asked Lard, "How'd your draft board go?"

"No prob."

We dug straight into the hillside, into layers of wet rock covered by a thin inch of gravelly soil.

"Look at this." Curly held up a piece of shale. "Shell fossils."

In the layered, black sedimentary rock was the outline of a scallop.

"We're on the bottom of a damn ocean, a thousand miles from the coast."

After a while I asked, "Where's Rabbit?"

No one responded at first. Then Clard muttered, "In his dome, I guess."

There was a funny awkward silence. A half hour later I said, "I'm going to say hello to Rabbit. I'll be back."

As I knocked at the door I heard typing inside.

"Ishmael! Great to see ya! I'll be with you in a minute. Can't stop now." He typed away furiously.

It looked comfortable but a little cramped for a couple and a kid. I relaxed on some cushions on the floor.

He finally pulled the paper out of the carriage and read it, making notes in the margin.

"What you writing?"

"A novel."

"That's great. What about?"

"Drop City," he chuckled. "How much bread did you bring?"

"You're writing a novel about Drop City? Isn't that a little premature? Not that much has really happened here yet, has it?"

"That don't matter. I'm writing fiction, not history. Lies. I'm just making it up."

"Why lie about Drop City?"

"I'm going to make us media stars. I'm going to make us a cultural icon. I'm going to get Drop City in *Life* magazine." He let loose a huge guffaw.

"Maybe Drop City shouldn't be in *Life*," I said.

"You loco, boy? That California sinsemilla popped out your brain? I been in touch with people all over the country. We're hot!"

"Does everybody else want that?"

"What does it matter? When it comes to media, just between me and you, some of these folks got their ass confused with a wet hole in the ground. They don't understand what this society is about. They haven't paid enough dues. I've paid dues. I know. When you got a hot item, publicity is inevitable. Either you grab it or somebody else does. Either you're a winner or a loser."

"That's one of the things I came here to get away from."

"You'll all thank me for it someday. How much money you bring?"

"Just about enough to build my dome, I hope. Three hundred."

"I thought you were going to bring five hundred."

"I couldn't save that much."

He pulled out a cigar box, opened a plastic bag, rolled a joint, took a couple of hits, and passed it to me. "A visitor gave me this dope. Don't mention it to anybody, okay?"

“Don’t mention that we’re smoking dope?” I blew a couple of hits. “Is there some kind of conflict going on?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Everybody’s acting funny.”

“They didn’t tell you what happened?”

“No.”

“Alteresio picked a fight with me yesterday.”

“What about?”

“I brought the sucker here. He owes me. That pisses him off. That’s his whole problem. He’s hard-headed.”

“I hope you two can work it out.”

“Some of them just don’t get it. They’re going to have to open their fucking minds. I’m real glad you’re here now. Maybe you’ll help pound some sense into them.”

We passed the jay back and forth. As I got higher, it seemed increasingly unreal. Something was very wrong. “Aren’t we all in this together?”

“Sure.”

“Then why don’t you put this grass in the communal stash?”

“They’d smoke it all up in a few days. It’ll last me a month or two. I need it to write behind.”

“I thought we were sharing everything.”

“Almost everything. Look, Ish, it’s great to see you. You and me, we’re buddies. Now I got to go write my novel.”

When I got back to the hole, Curly and Lard were gone. I quietly joined Clard and Alteresio digging.

A little blond girl ran up. “Mommy wants to talk to you.”

“What about?” Alteresio grimaced.

“She didn’t say.”

He rolled his eyes. “Well tell Mommy if she wants to talk to me she should come here.” He glanced at Clard, forcing a chuckle out of the corner of his mouth. The little girl ran away.

Alteresio said, "Aw fuck it," threw down his shovel, and sulked after her.

Clard and I dug for a while.

"What have you been you up to?" I asked.

"The usual. Painting. Living the revolution. Looking for a girlfriend. How about you? Any new writing?"

"I just couldn't find the time while I was working at the Post Office."

"Rabbit's writing a novel. Did he tell you?"

"Yeah. About Drop City. What do you think about that?"

Clard rested his foot on his shovel. "Everybody should be free to do their own thing here. I don't have a problem with Rabbit writing a Drop City novel. It's all fiction. Drop City is fiction. It's happening but at the same time it's fiction. The only way anybody could possibly write the truth about this place is through fiction. Just don't tell me that you're writing a novel about Drop City now too."

"No, I'm not. I promise. At least not for another thirty years. We'll all be dead by then."

"I don't resent Rabbit's writing, just his doing it at other people's expense."

"How's that?"

"As soon as his dome was finished, he disappeared inside it. We only see him at meals now."

"You mean he's not doing his share of the work?"

"He thinks that sending out publicity is his share of the work. Nobody even wants him to do it."

"Is that what the fight was about?"

"It was about nothing. Egos. Alteresio got tired of Rabbit telling him what to do. Rabbit said, 'I'm going to have to take you out to the woodshed.' They started pushing and shoving. Rabbit lost his false teeth." Clard let loose a quick, pained smile. "It really wasn't funny. They broke the kitchen wall. Alteresio threw Rabbit into the sheetrock, and it broke. That really pissed me off. We put a lot of work into it."

"They broke the wall?"

"It felt like everything we were working for was being violated. The space was violated. Alteresio's only been here two weeks. I'm afraid he's not going to stay. I like him, even though he's got a temper. He's trying to control it. He says he believes in nonviolence. Rabbit pushed him over the edge. I'd rather have him here than Rabbit. So would Curly and Jo. That's who the fight was really between: Rabbit and Curly. Alteresio was just standing in for Curly."

The dinner gong rang. I saw Jo—Drop Lady—behind the screen of the A-frame porch, beating it with the hammer.

Clard tossed his shovel. "So far nobody's fixed the sheetrock. C'mon. If you want to see the damage look at the west wall."

Drop Lady greeted me with a big hug. Poly Ester smiled nervously. The air was thick with tension.

I felt shell-shocked. I had expected the same high spirits I'd found here, or thought I'd found here, only a few months before.

"Show him the plans," Curly said.

Clard unrolled a set of architect's plans on the table, a drawing of three intersecting domes, each about twelve yards across, built of large triangles, pentagons, and rectangles, one with an eight-foot square skylight.

"This is going to be our new kitchen complex. Designed and engineered by Luke Bear."

"It's a triple-fused rhombo-icosa-dodecahedron," Lard articulated. "We're going to cover it with cartops."

"You're really planning on building this? It looks huge. Where's it going to go?"

"Right in the middle of the land. Pretty near Alteresio's Hole. Bear's coming up next week to get it started."

We talked excitedly for a while. Then I said, "But Patt will be here next month, and I promised I'd have a place ready for her to stay. I'll find time to work on the new kitchen complex, but I'm also going to be pretty busy building our dome."

"You two can stay in the top of the hole," Alteresio said.

“That would be great, but how could your whole family squeeze into the bottom?”

“We’ve been squeezed before.”

Clard jumped in. “Bear’s paying for the shell: the car tops, bolts, glass, tar, everything on the outside. We’re paying for the foundation and all the inside stuff. It’s going to cost us almost nothing. We’ve scouted out an old abandoned bridge upriver on the Purgatoire, where we can scavenge posts and beams for the foundation. The bricks will come from the old coke ovens. But we’ve still got to buy two-by-fours for the struts and the floor. We need five hundred of them. Then there’s the wiring, plumbing, insulation, sheetrock.”

“What’s it all going to cost?”

“Almost nothing,” Curly said. “At a dime apiece for culls that’s just fifty little ones. But the other stuff adds up. All told, about five hundred bucks.”

“How much do we have in the kitty?” I asked.

“At this very moment?”

“Yeah.”

“How much bread did you bring?” Curly asked.

“Just about enough to build my dome. And a little more. I’d like to put it up on the hill, if that’s okay with everybody. About three hundred dollars.”

“We thought you were going to bring five.”

“I wanted to, but I couldn’t save that much. How much do we have in the kitty?”

“Well, including your three hundred, we have exactly...three hundred smackers.”

“So you want to spend all my money on a new kitchen.”

“When the complex is finished,” Clard said, “you and your girlfriend can move in here, into the old kitchen. It’s a great dome.”

I pulled out my wallet and laid all the money I had in the world on the table, three hundred twenty dollars and the change in my pocket. Everybody left the bills and coins sitting

there. We ate dinner, talking on and on about the new kitchen complex.

Finally Rabbit came in. Conversation dropped to muted tones. Poly Ester said "I saved you a plate."

Nobody else said anything to him.

"How'd the writing go?" I asked.

"Just great," he said with forced enthusiasm. Rabbit grabbed his beans and salad and leaned against the wall. He took a few bites, then said, "I know you all think the fight was my fault. But maybe if you opened your minds a little you'd see it wasn't just me. If any of you got a problem with me, deal with me straight. Don't play the pacifist while you get other Droppers to be the heavy for you. That goes for all of you. Anyway, I'm sorry it happened. I hope Alteresio is too."

"Everybody knows how I feel," Alteresio mumbled.

"Nobody knows it if you don't say it," Poly Ester snapped.

"I feel real bad that we got into a fight, especially here in the kitchen," Alteresio said. "Okay? Now let's move on."

"Okay," Poly Ester said.

Rabbit ate a few mouthfuls, then walked out carrying his plate.

Nobody said much after that. People straggled out one by one. I helped Crayola clean up. When I cleared the table I noticed my three hundred twenty dollars were gone. And the change. I finished the dishes, walked up to the new cartop dome.

Clard's and Lard's paintings were all over the place, and they had painted part of the ceiling with geometric patterns. Being surrounded by all these abstractions inside this oddly shaped room made me feel like I was in a world where colors took crystalline forms and hurtled in every direction through my mental space.

Clard and Lard were busily cutting out a circle about three feet in diameter from a sheet of three-quarter inch plywood with a sabre saw. "It's going to be the Ultimate Painting," Clard said. "Multidimensional. It's going to move. We're going to spin it with a motor."

Lard continued, "Run a strobe light on it. Each time it goes around the strobe'll hit it differently; there'll be different stop frames. I can't explain. You'll see."

"You can work on it," Clard said. "It's a group project. Everybody here can help paint it."

"I've never painted much."

"That doesn't matter. The less you've gone to art school the better off you are."

"Curly and Jo," Lard said out of nowhere, "are going to tell Rabbit to leave."

"That's worse than a drag," I said.

Clard put the sabre saw down. "They can ask him to leave but they can't throw him out," he enunciated slowly and firmly. "If they tell him he has to leave, then I'm leaving too."

"Don't," Lard grimaced.

"Why does everybody dislike him?" I asked.

"I don't dislike Rabbit," Clard said. "But I can see why Jo doesn't want to be around him. He's always lying. He's always telling stories. He makes things up and swears they're true."

"Well, so does Curly," Lard responded.

"Curly does it as a joke, or to cool everybody out. Rabbit does it to make himself a hero."

"To me it looks a little different," Lard sanded the edges of the big plywood circle. "I think Curly and Rabbit are too much alike."

The door opened and Curly poked his head in. "Am I missing the symposium?"

"I don't want Drop City to become some kind of elitist club," Clard blurted.

"This tension is destroying us," Curly replied. "Rabbit is making us just like the straight world. We're becoming like them. If Rabbit don't leave, the whole thing's gonna die."

"I can't stand it when a group gangs up on some poor little sucker."

“Rabbit ain’t no poor little sucker. He’s probably up in his dome right now writing to all the world what a paradise we have here, at the same minute that he’s killing it.”

“I’m not going to demonize him,” Clard said. “I don’t want enemies. When there was just you and me, Curly, we saw each other as the enemy sometimes. Remember? If we didn’t have Rabbit, we’d be at each other’s throats again, or at Lard’s or Ishmael’s. It’s just the low side of human nature. When I’m alone I’m my own enemy.”

“Would you rather Jo and me left?”

“No.”

“Good. I care a lot about this place. I plan on being here a long time. I’m even planning on bringing my old mom out here to live. And I don’t need no publicity lunatic turning it into an ego circus. That’s against everything Drop City stands for.”

“The group ganging up on Rabbit and telling him to leave would also be against everything Drop City stands for,” Clard replied.

Lard cut in, “What if Curly or Jo or me went up to him one by one as individuals?”

“I’ve got no objection to that,” Clard said. “As long as you’re just asking him, not telling him. I wouldn’t do it but I’ve got no objection to all of you doing it one by one, as long as you say you’re just speaking for yourself.”

Later that night I wrote a letter to Patt, not mentioning the conflict. I was afraid if she knew all was not well, she might not come.

* * *

I spent the next morning working on the hole with Alteresio. None of the other guys showed up. Alteresio and I just chatted about the work. We didn’t mention Rabbit at all.

I wanted to talk to Rabbit. I wasn’t sure what I planned to say to him. Maybe just that I was sad that it hadn’t worked out for him. I hoped to catch him outside rather than having to go to his dome. But the morning passed and he never came out.

Alteresio and I were the only guys at lunch too. It was just us, his wife Crayola, and their girls, Elizabeth and Toby, four and five, who were sweet kids and best friends. We sat around tensely and didn't say much.

Then Alteresio disappeared into his tent. I wasn't about to work alone, so I walked to the river, about a half mile away. It was beautiful down among the cottonwoods; I saw tracks that I guessed were raccoon and possum. I used to see similar tracks in the woods behind my grandpa's house in Jersey. I sat on the bank in the shade, took off my shoes and soaked my feet in the cool stream.

When I got back, I went to the cartop dome. Lard and Clard were building a stand for the Ultimate Painting and bolting the big plywood disk to a motor.

"They did it," Clard said. "Did you hear?"

"What?"

"Curly and Jo and Lard asked Rabbit to leave. I really didn't think they'd have the balls."

I turned to Lard. "What did he say?"

Lard grimaced sheepishly. "He just stared at me like he was smelling a pile of shit."

* * *

At the kitchen table everybody sat quiet and sullen, expecting Rabbit, Poly, and Kaitlin to appear any minute. They had to show soon, or go hungry. Finally Rabbit entered, very tense, letting the screen door slam. He sputtered, "Don't worry. We're leaving." He spun on his heels and disappeared.

One by one everybody vacated the room. I dropped my plate onto the pile in the sink and walked to Rabbit's dome. I found him as usual at his typewriter. Poly Ester was reading Kaitlin a book.

"I'll be sorry to see you leave."

"Me too. I was sure this place was going to work for us."

"It probably still could, if everybody would step back a little and bend some."

"I didn't come here just to have to eat more of the same old bullshit."

"You haven't been entirely blameless in this, you know."

"So you're taking their side too?"

We studied each other silently for a moment. Then I said, "Where will you go?"

"Dunno. Right now we can't go anywhere. We've got no bread. We'll find some place to go. It might take a while." He tied a blue bandanna around his head. "Do you want to beat down the sun with me?"

"What?"

"Beat down the sun. I started doing this a few weeks ago. Haven't done it for some days. Maybe that's why we had that problem."

He picked up two small drums and sticks, handing me a set. His cowlick stuck straight up out of the back of the headband. I followed him outside to a spot on the hill near the dome. We sat facing due west. It was still light out, but the sun was quickly approaching the snow-capped Sangre de Cristo peaks.

"Beating down the sun is what makes it come up again tomorrow," he said. "That's what the Indi'ns do."

It took me a moment to realize that 'Indi'ns' meant 'Indians.'

The sun was less than its own diameter above the jagged Sierras. He began beating on the drum in a slow, even cadence. I joined him. It was hypnotic, watching the sun slowly touch the mountain. It hurt my eyes; I just glanced briefly now and then. It half disappeared behind the mountain; just a sliver was visible. A last flash changed abruptly to darkness.

We gave one more strong drumbeat, then stopped and sat silently. I felt awed by the whole celestial drama.

* * *

Chapter 9

The next day I went into Trinidad shopping with Curly and Drop Lady. We bought some supplies, then went to the bank, deposited what was left of my three hundred and put my name on the bank account alongside the others. It was a communal account, with everybody's name on it. Any of the Droppers could deposit or withdraw money, and everybody was expected to put all their money into the common kitty.

For the next few days Rabbit didn't even come down to dinner. Poly Ester brought him his meals. Nobody saw much of him and everybody avoided talking about the problem with him. It was as if the community was holding its collective breath, hoping we could put this behind us soon and move on.

Everybody tried to get back to normal, or as normal as we could get. Alteresio and I worked long hours to get the hole finished before the fall rains, before Patt arrived, and before Bear showed up from New Mexico to start building the kitchen complex. Everybody except Rabbit helped too. We frantically schemed on how to raise the rest of the five hundred dollars that Drop City needed for the complex, but nobody came up with a great idea. My three hundred disappeared fast, although we didn't spend much money on survival. Our main monthly expense was utilities. We mostly heated with firewood in the Franklin stoves. Food was not a big expense. Our typical dinner was spaghetti or beans with some vegetables. Everybody was on food stamps; the women and children were also getting government commodities: flour, sugar, dry beans, peanut butter in big cans, lard and disgusting canned meat that nobody would eat.

We had a chicken pen attached to the hen house, next to the rabbit hutches, but a lot of the time the chickens ran wild all over Drop City eating grasshoppers. We had a big white rooster and a little bantam rooster. The bantam was king of the roost and had the big one terrified. Whenever he saw him, he'd

chase him. From our dozen hens we usually got six or eight eggs a day. Tinker the goat was a hermaphrodite, a gift from the goat cheese farm down the road. They just wanted to get rid of it. We never ate the rabbits or chickens. The goat gave no milk. They were really pets. Drop Lady had the job of taking care of the animals, or at least making sure that somebody was taking care of them.

Between the chicken coop and the kitchen was the big old stump we chopped firewood on. Lard in particular loved to work up a sweat chopping wood, and was very good at it. It was rare that he didn't split a piece in one or two chops. It really takes some skill, what with analyzing the grain, hitting it in exactly the right place with the right force, compensating for knots. Lard taught me how to do it without chopping my fingers, and I got pretty skilled at it too. It was good exercise and a pleasant daily ritual.

To speed the hole along, Alteresio bought some blasting powder and blew up the rock. It was exciting and scary. Alteresio got into it, and a devilish gleam would come into his eyes when he touched the wires. He and Curly filmed the blasts.

Curly liked to act out crazy ideas and film them. One day he bought an old cop's uniform in a junk store. He dressed up in it, walked around Drop City barking orders, then drove a bunch of us into town, pushed Lard and Clard up against a wall, and was frisking them while Alteresio filmed the whole thing. By chance a deputy sheriff saw us, stopped and questioned us. He took it all in good humor though.

Back at Drop City Curly made a dummy, dressed it up in the uniform, stuck it in the driver's seat of a junked car that we'd cut the roof out of, hooked up some blasting powder, and filmed the spectacle as he blew it up.

Although there was a craziness in Alteresio, there was also something endearing about him. He had a good self-contained spirit, and really loved his daughters. But his paintings were filled with exploding black pigments, guns, hurt, sad women, and body parts.

The flip side of Alteresio's craziness was his wife Crayola, the mother hen of Drop City, always nice, kind, and a good mom. But she didn't seem interested in much beyond her kids,

a Dropper with the imagination of a secretary. Her interaction with Alteresio was usually mild bickering. They'd constantly complain about each other. She would say what a big baby he was and he'd say that she didn't have a clue why they were at Drop City. She'd respond that she was there to keep her family together. Yet they also seemed very attached to each other. She kept him grounded and he sought that out. There was some of that grounding by the women in all the couple relationships at Drop City.

Alteresio wanted to line the hole with rocks, so we drove upstream on the Purgatoire, where feeder stream beds crossed the gravel roads, and filled the truck with the flattest river rocks we could find. We brought many truckloads down and cemented them up as walls. Alteresio left one stone loose with a hole behind it for a dope stash.

We finished the hole with a river stone floor, built a wooden second story floor above it with a trap door where Alteresio would put stairs eventually, and erected a dome on top. The dome was the easy part. Alteresio made a big compound window out of old car glass that we installed in a triangle with a great view of Fisher's Peak. Alteresio and his family moved into the bottom, and I hurriedly got the top ready for Patt.

I met her at the bus station. I was really glad to see her; I'd missed her a lot. She seemed nervous and wary.

"Our dome's pretty much ready. There's still some work to do on it."

"But we can move in, can't we?"

"Temporarily. Eventually Alteresio and Crayola are going to take it over and we'll move to a different dome." I lifted her two huge suitcases into the back of the old red pickup.

"They'll be our downstairs neighbors?"

"You'll like them. Crayola's very nice. Alteresio's okay, a little moody."

When we got there Patt looked stunned. "It's so barren. It's a desert."

"I told you what it was."

Jo took her right under her wing.

"Can I really just do anything I want all day?"

"Pretty much."

"It sounds like being a kid again. I'm so used to working or going to school I won't know what to do with myself."

"You'll probably go through culture shock for a week. We've all done it. Particularly if you're used to being in a city."

"What do you spend your time doing?"

"Water colors when I get a chance. I'm working on some children's stories. Right now the baby's taking most of my time."

"So I don't have any responsibilities at all?"

"Well, a few. You'll be in the cooking rotation, of course. All the women share the cooking. And helping clean the kitchen."

"So I have to cook for the whole group?"

"Didn't Ishmael tell you that?"

"Not really."

"He should have."

"I've never cooked for a big group."

"You won't have any trouble. I'll break you in."

Later, up in our new home on top of the hole, Patt said, "How come just the women have to cook? I thought Drop City was trying to be different."

"The men are out building all day."

"That's no different from anyplace else. Why don't you cook too?"

"Do you want to be swinging a hammer? It's hard work."

"No. But I don't want to be stuck in the kitchen either. I didn't come here for that. All the time I was growing up my mother was groaning about being stuck with the house chores. That's what she fought all her life to get away from, and now I'm supposed to think of it as advanced?"

"You won't be stuck in the kitchen. You'll just cook every couple days. I thought you liked to cook."

"I do like it. I don't like the idea that it's the women's job. You didn't tell me that."

"I thought I did. Can you just accept it for now? You can negotiate it later. I'll cook too. We'll cook together, okay?"

Lard gave her the Dropper name Patsy Pie. A little too cute, but she did look cute in overalls and hiking boots. Then whenever she cooked dinner was late, so she became known as Patsy Pie Quickly.

* * *

One day at dinner, Clard said, "I think it's time to sign over the land."

Everybody was there except Rabbit and Poly, who rarely ate with us now.

Curly almost choked on a piece of broccoli. "What's the rush?" He seemed defensive, which was unusual for Curly. They looked intensely at each other.

"We need to be what we say we are. We've been talking about it long enough."

"Talking about what?" I asked.

"The land is in Curly's and Jo's names. Legally that gives them control over the community. Even though Curly says that it doesn't matter..."

"It doesn't," Curly interjected.

"... in reality it does matter. We all know it matters. We always said that eventually Curly and Jo would sign the land over to the group. We'd all own it together or nobody would own it. We've got to do that now, before things get even more complicated."

"I'm not sure it's the right thing to do, man," Curly said, gesturing emphatically. "It's risky."

Lard jumped in, "We're the ones who've been taking the risks. Legally you've got all the power. Do you want us to pretend that you don't?"

“What’s the difference if one guy legally owns the land or a group owns it?” Curly went on. “A group can be just as abusive as one guy. Or worse. And what about newcomers? Do we just keep adding them to the deed? Where does it end? It’s what you do with the land that counts, not what’s on paper.”

“What’s on paper counts too,” Clard insisted.

“Okay, okay,” Curly said. “Let’s do it. What do you say, Jo?”

“Clard’s right. It’s time to do it. But how do we do it?”

Clard took a deep breath. “It’s easy. We file these papers, and presto, we’re Drop City, Inc., a non-profit corporation. Then you deed the land over to the corporation. We’re all on the Board of Directors.”

“I hate corporations,” I said. “Corporations are the enemy. Maybe we could become something else.”

“There’s nothing else they let you become, as far as I know.”

“Do we got to have a president?” Alteresio groaned.

“Maybe a board isn’t the way to go,” Curly said. “Nobody should own the land.”

“That’s great. That’s what Drop City is all about.”

“Legally they won’t let you do that,” Clard objected.

“Fuck legally. We don’t recognize their laws anyway.”

“Let’s write it into the deed,” Lard exclaimed.

“There we go!”

Curly pumped a fist. “I’ll write it up! From now on nobody can ever own this plot of land!”

“Nobody can exclude other people from it,” Clard added. “Write that too.”

“Okay! Everybody—or nobody—will own Drop City.”

The next day I went to town with Curly and Clard. We stopped in at the County Clerk and asked what papers were needed, then bought the forms at a stationery store. Curly drafted a set of by-laws. We, the Board of Directors, would elect outsiders as officers, friends who didn’t live at Drop City. We thought that would keep things cooler; we found some friends in Boulder to fit the bill.

That night Rabbit came into the kitchen and said, "Make sure you put Poly and me on that board of directors."

"Why, if you're leaving?"

"As long as we're here we're a full part of the group. We've as much right as anybody else."

We hesitantly wrote Rabbit and Poly onto the Board of Directors.

Curly drafted a new deed gifting the property to Drop City Inc., writing into it that the land was "to be forever free and open to all people." Hesitantly Curly and Drop Lady signed and filed it.

* * *

The artist couple living in the hills above Trinidad, Denton and Leeda, visited Drop City every once in a while. Marigold had gone back to Boulder. Patt and I visited them a few times and we all became pretty friendly. They also started to get tight with Rabbit and Poly. Denton and Leeda kept talking about raising money to start another community in the mountains.

I saw Marigold's watercolors at their house, some brilliant and airy, some gloomily forbidding. A lot of crimson and black. I could see something a little scary in her mind. I was relieved that she wasn't around. Since I had been on LSD that night with her, I wasn't sure what had really happened. I didn't want to shake up my relationship with Patt, which was already shaky. I had no reason to mention Marigold to Patt. It wasn't quite dishonest, and everybody was pretty discrete.

* * *

The Droppers knew everything available in all the junkyards in town and were on friendly bargaining terms with the dealers. The only factory in Trinidad, really just a woodshop, had an Army contract making plywood footlockers, and had piles and piles of scraps they couldn't use. They were glad to have us haul it away. We made occasional forays to the municipal dump, where people often threw away good junk. But most of our building materials came from scrounging the countryside. A couple of times a week we would scout through all the local back roads looking for abandoned houses, bridges, or any kind of building materials. There was a lot around.

We tore abandoned houses apart, places that were really crumbling. We did it on the sly, but most of the sneaking around was unnecessary. All the locals knew that we were scavenging, and if they cared, they never said so or reported us. People were mostly glad to see some of the firetraps disappear and the old materials being reused.

We got most of our big beams from abandoned railroad bridges along the road that followed the Purgatoire river up into the mountains. That's where the one last working coal mine in the area carried on. There had been thirty mines up there at one time, a railroad, a lot of little towns and a large population. When most of the mines closed, the rail line was abandoned and the towns became ghost towns. A lot of the old railroad bridges had already been scavenged.

Since I was in the southwest I had decided to get cowboy boots. All the guys except Curly wore them. New ones cost too much, but I found an old pair in a shoemaker shop for several bucks. The problem was that they were too narrow. I got the shoemaker to put stretchers in them for a few days, but they were still pretty snug. I thought if I wore them they'd stretch. They'd usually be okay in the morning, but as the day wore on, my feet would swell and they'd start to hurt. I was always pulling them off to give my feet a break, then squeezing back into them. Since I'd used Drop City money to pay for them, and we had none to waste, I wouldn't give up, even though I was limping all the time. I kept thinking that sooner or later they'd stretch and my feet would stop hurting, but they never did. I was in a state of denial over those boots. It was one of the many Drop City running jokes.

One day I drove with Lard and Alteresio along the opposite side of the river, looking for places to scrounge. We passed a big field lined with long earth mounds about six feet high. Through the tall grass I could see bricks and round openings in the mounds.

"We're not the first dome city around here. Those are coke ovens," Lard explained. "In the old days they trucked the coal here and made coke out of it."

"What's coke?" I asked.

"They use it to make steel," Alteresio said. "It burns hotter than coal. Stop. Maybe there's still some stuff left to scrounge."

Lard pulled onto the shoulder. "It's picked clean. We already pulled all the good timber out. There's just thousands of bricks. We've already got more than we can use."

We slipped through the barbed wire. There were rows and rows of brick ovens, at least a hundred of them, many crumbling, perfect brick domes about six feet in diameter with arched mouths, a little round opening at the top like a smoke hole. I climbed inside an oven. I could just squeeze through the opening and could barely sit up inside. My feet were aching and I took the opportunity to pull my boots off.

"There's some big beams." Alteresio pointed to a couple of six-by-eights lying in the deep grass.

"We must have missed them," Lard said.

I left my boots in the oven, and stumbled over in my socks.

"Cool it. We're being watched."

A guy sat in a car down the road.

"Let's skedaddle," Alteresio muttered.

"I've got to get my boots," I protested.

"We'll come back tonight."

We got out of there quick.

As we rolled into the Drop City driveway, Lard pointed out that the "Drop City Supports World War III" sign was gone. "I guess somebody got tired of looking at it," Lard said.

Later, as we listened to the radio news filled, as usual, with LBJ's threats and escalations of the war, Lard, Alteresio, and I painted a new sign: "BOMB HANOI, LONDON, MOSCOW, ROME, CHICAGO, CANADA, NEW JERSEY," and put it up by the road.

That night we went back to the coke ovens and appropriated the big timbers, and I retrieved my boots.

The next day a car pulled into the parking lot. The driver didn't get out, but just sat there. The same man as at the coke ovens. I was about to go over, when I saw Curly approaching the car. They talked for a while. Then the man drove off.

"That was a railroad guy. They know we been scrounging their stuff."

“Did he report us to the sheriff?”

“I don’t think so. He didn’t even say to give the stuff back. He just said to stop taking it. I think he digs us. He’s protecting us.”

* * *

The railroad guy wasn’t alone in protecting us. Local people often helped us out. The produce and dairy guys at the local Safeway saved old food for us. The manager was an Italian immigrant, and understood what it was like to be poor. He let us know which days there would be good pickings in their dumpsters by the back loading dock, boxes of moldy cheese and half rotten fruits and vegetables, and pretended to not notice us climbing in and getting them. They always put the scroungeable stuff on top. After a while they kept it all inside for us, in a corner of the walk-in refrigerator, and let us come in to pick it up.

Once a farmer came by with a half a pickup full of jerusalem artichokes. By chance, somebody else had just given us a big freezer. We filled it with the artichokes, and had them in every dinner for months. The electricity probably cost many times their worth.

Dr. Parks was Drop City’s physician. He worked out of the county health clinic, on the circuit of several towns. He was a very dedicated country doctor, the kind I thought didn’t really exist. He would come out to Drop City occasionally to make sure that we were all okay and that we were keeping the kitchen disinfected. He would set up a little clinic in the kitchen dome. Thanks in part to him, we never had an epidemic.

One day Curly and I were explaining our theories to him about how Drop City was part of a movement to change society. Dr. Parks responded, “I don’t see it quite like that. I think this place is really a retreat. People come here to decompress. You probably wouldn’t guess it by looking at me, but I burned out halfway through college. I was a dropout too. In a few years most of you will move back into society.”

Curly laughed. “I’m planning on being here a long time.”

We were blessed with good neighbors. The land south and east of us was owned by the aging Anglo couple that Curly and Jo bought the land from, really sweet and helpful. The land to

our east was once part of the goat farm that still operated down the road, run by a friendly Greek family. To our north beyond the junk yard were the barns of the Italian-American cattle rancher, who was skeptical but tolerant. To our west, across the gravel road, were fields of wheat and sorghum, and El Moro elementary school, where Kaitlin was enrolled. She had friends in her class, and occasionally got together with them after school, but they never came over to Drop City to play.

Our junkyard doubled as a kind of sculpture garden, filled with many prizes. It was also the repository for a lot of really useless junk. Among the prizes was a “solar cooker”: twentysome rear-view car mirrors welded to an armature, positioned to reflect sunlight to a central hot point and attached to a steering wheel to follow the sun. One day when I was cleaning up the junkyard, I pulled out some unusable wood scraps and old paper and decided to burn them. First I put them in the solar cooker, which I’d never actually tried. It didn’t even get the paper warm, since the car mirrors were glare-resistant and didn’t reflect much light. A lot of things at Drop City were like that. So I used some matches to build a little fire. A sudden gust of wind made it jump to a clump of grass. Before I could stomp it out, it jumped again. Grass was burning in two places now and approaching the neighbor’s barns. I yelled for help. By chance the neighbor was working nearby, heard me, leaped the fence, and together we stomped out the fire.

In a cold sweat I thanked him profusely. “I really owe you.”

“It were nothing special, really. Those are tricky winds. Neighbors got to work together.”

That was the attitude of a lot of people around Trinidad.

* * *

Chapter 10

One morning I was out chopping wood when Clard came up to me and said, "Have you seen the new saws?"

"What saws?"

"Look under the ground cloth in the tent."

Two new circular saws, a couple of electric drills, a nice carpenter's level, and a pile of other tools.

"Where did those come from?"

"Rabbit and Alteresio pulled a job last night. I'm really pissed off. They stole them."

"From where?"

"From the lumberyard in town."

"The one we go to all the time?"

"It took a long time for people around here to start accepting us, and now they go burgle them. If they find out who did it, they'll run us right out of town."

"I thought Rabbit and Alteresio were still barely on speaking terms."

"Not about this, apparently."

I saw Rabbit up near his dome.

He shrugged. "What's the big deal? We had to liberate those saws. We weren't getting anything done with those old pieces of shit. We needed some new ones. That guy who runs the lumberyard will just take it as a tax loss. I don't know why I'm getting all this shit about it from Curly and Clard and Lard and now you. This place is getting faggoty."

I never spoke to Alteresio about it. I assumed he felt about the same as Rabbit, so what was there to say?

Even though the rest of us were pissed about it, we used the tools anyway. I don't think the women ever knew it happened.

* * *

Luke Bear arrived, with a big nineteen-year-old kid named Ivan, his helper down in New Mexico. Bear hit the ground running. Within minutes he had us out there laying out the site for the new kitchen complex. He seemed to always be in a few places at the same time, or running between them, laughing and shouting orders. Everybody deferred to him because he was the only one who knew what he was doing, and he wasn't oppressive about it.

Bear was a maverick. He'd grown up with more money than any of us, but had contempt for that world. He respected people who thought for themselves and who took the initiative to make their ideas come alive. He had no tolerance for bullshit, no matter where it was coming from. He had a fertile mind and was always throwing out a lot of ideas. We started calling him Luke Cool.

Bear's helper Ivan was at least twice as strong as anybody else; when we were exhausted, he was just working up a sweat. He also ate as much as any three of us, and always polished off everything on the table. We gave Ivan the Dropper name Orval Teen.

We got the foundation posts set in and beams laid between them at floor level. It was over fifty feet from one end to the other.

Then Bear had to return home, but he said he'd be back in a couple of weeks, with a radial arm saw, so we could cut the struts accurately.

* * *

Patt was having a hard time adjusting; she still wasn't sure that this was the right thing for her to be doing.

"I can't stand not having any money. We have to answer to everybody for any little thing we want to buy. We can't even go to a restaurant."

"If everybody ate at restaurants, we wouldn't be able to survive."

"You'd have to get a job. Is that so terrible?"

"Yes."

"And I'm not going to share my clothes. I worked hard to buy them." She kept most of her clothes stored away and dressed in overalls and hiking boots.

"I think you just don't understand what we're trying to do here." I sounded like Alteresio arguing with Crayola.

"You're making yourself permanently poor. That's all you're doing. Don't you want to ever have kids?"

"Someday."

"How will you support them?"

"The same way the other guys are supporting their kids."

"By welfare? You're satisfied with that? You're proud of it?"

"I don't have any problem with it. There's plenty of food in this society. It's just being hoarded. Everybody should get a fair share."

"Luke Bear or somebody gives us twenty dollars charity so we can get through the next week, and you seem to feel that's an accomplishment."

"It's not charity. We give Bear a lot in exchange. We're building his zome."

"You go on Bear's trip because he has money. Is that so different from working at a job? Everything's so temporary here. It's just... like an empty jar that you let people with money pour whatever they want into."

"We're not building Bear's zome for the money. We're getting sweat equity."

"We're getting a huge place that will be impossible to keep clean, and you guys will expect the women to do it. Maybe they don't say it to you, but none of the women are happy with this."

You guys act like you want us to feed you and clean up after you, and none of you is even willing to go out and get a job.”

“If you’re so hot on somebody getting a job, why don’t you do it yourself?”

“I have.”

Patt had volunteered as a teacher’s aide in El Moro school and began working there a couple times a week. She wasn’t paid, but just enjoyed working with the kids and getting out into the larger community.

She and I continued to have a stormy relationship. Now it was mostly little things about each other that bugged us. She was such a pack rat! She was so slow! My clothes were so messy! I was so impatient! Patt didn’t drive, so she always tried to get me to take her places. Her attitude was that she had to get to some store and therefore I had to take her. She was persistent. That was a source of frequent conflict.

Yet we were becoming very attached to each other. I’d thought that being in a commune would loosen the bonds of primary relationships, but that didn’t seem to be happening. Everybody still maintained or wanted a special relationship with one other person, just like in the big outside world.

* * *

One day the women and Curly came back from town with the news that we’d been cut off food stamps. The regional program director in Pueblo had given the order, with the excuse that we were “poor by choice.”

“I’ll bet you a million bucks to a nickel there’s nothing about that in the law,” Curly sniggered. “We’re taking this up to the Supreme Court.”

“No, we’re not,” Drop Lady said firmly, nursing Mae. “I’m not going to be humiliated by them any more. We don’t need them.”

All the women stood beside her. So we ate a little worse for a while, but adjusted.

On a shopping expedition in town, a familiar looking Chicano guy came up to Curly and me on the street. "How have you been, my friends?" He shook my hand eagerly. "Don't you remember me? Me and my cousin gave you a ride last spring." He turned to Curly. "And I helped you jump start that red truck."

"I remember you," I said.

"Oh yeah, you saved my life. T'anks a million," Curly laughed. "You never came out to visit us, like you said you would."

"I'm still coming."

"Anytime, my friend," Curly said. "*Mi casa es tu casa.*"

A couple of days later, about eight o'clock at night, he appeared at the kitchen door with his cousin, two girls with red nails and blue eyeshadow, and a case of beer. They squeezed around the table with us and passed out beers.

"I don't drink," Clard said.

The cousin pulled out a lid of grass and began rolling joints.

We almost never had alcohol at Drop City, so after a couple of beers and some dope I was flying. We got into a long, rambling conversation. They showed us pictures of their kids and wives, whom the girlfriends said were fat. Curly showed them his seaman's papers and his union card, which he often displayed to guests, claiming to have been a merchant sailor, though he'd never been to sea. Curly was holding forth in good form and keeping everybody in stitches.

The visitor took a swig of beer. "All of North America should be like this camp."

"It's going to be someday."

"Is it true that anybody can come live here?"

"Of course! Give us your poor and your hungry!" Curly spouted. "Your huddled masses! However the fuck it goes."

"We're thinking of taking you up on that," the other said.

Curly backtracked quickly. "But we're just a little place. Only so many huddled masses can fit in here, as is obvious."

The visitor became maudlin. "I got canned from my job, kicked out of my house. Me and my wife and kids, we all had to move in with my cousin here, if not for him my family would be sleeping in a ditch. I love you, man. But we got him in trouble with his landlord too, and now they want to kick us all out. I been staying sometimes with this lovely lady and her sister here, but my wife she keeps threatening to scratch her face up, and her husband's a crazy man too."

"My ex-husband," the girlfriend corrected.

"Anyway, we can't keep on like this much longer. My cousin here, he's got four kids of his own in that tiny little place. I'll join you guys here. I'll build me a little round shack like this, for me, my wife, and kids. Then we'll build another shack for my cousin here and his wife and kids. We can be together again. This is all we need."

It was hard to follow his confused story. Early in the morning they finally left, saying they'd be back in a couple of days.

Curly rubbed his bleary eyes. "Between them they've got seven kids. With their wives that makes eleven, not counting their floozies. They probably got lots of other drunk cousins too. They'll all move in."

Clard shrugged. "Maybe they can take over Rabbit's dome, if he ever leaves. I can't relate to them any more than you can, but that's just a cultural gap. We need to get along with everybody. Those are the consequences of Drop City."

However, time went by and they didn't show up.

* * *

Months passed and we heard no more about Rabbit and Poly leaving. Nobody wanted to ask them about it, but it began to look like they were staying after all, though they never said so.

A lot of mail came almost every day for Rabbit, some of it from various news media around the country. We could tell by the return addresses, when we saw the envelopes. He often was the first one to the mailbox, and almost never showed anybody the letters. Every once in a while a letter would come just addressed to Drop City, but inside was a response to a letter from Rabbit. It became clear that Rabbit was not only staying, but sending off publicity about Drop City to anybody who would listen.

We kept getting underground papers from around the country in the mail with articles about us or mentioning us.

The underground publicity was pretty favorable, but we also got unfavorable publicity in the mainstream media. The Colorado Springs newspaper reported that a state senator had come by, seen us at dinner, and held a press conference. "They were eating spaghetti with their hands. It was the most disgusting thing I have ever seen."

We got letters from people in little towns in places like South Dakota and Florida, who read about us in local papers. Some were just funny, like the lady who sent us the children's cautionary tale, "The Little Red Hen." Other letters were antagonistic and weird. Some of the media were branding Drop City as a haven of drug-crazed hippies bent on corrupting America's youth.

"Rabbit's still spending all day in his dome writing letters to the newspapers and to every media person he can think of," Curly said.

"I'm against any more publicity," Drop Lady enunciated resolutely.

Curly went on, "He's still presenting himself as the leader of Drop City, our spokesman. The guy nobody even wants around any more."

"I'm not thrilled that he's still around, but I still kind of like Rabbit," Clard said. "Anyway, guys that nobody wants around have a right to live too."

"Yeah, but not sitting on my face."

"Let's tell him to stop writing to the papers," I put in.

“As long as he doesn’t actually say that he’s speaking for us, and he doesn’t say he’s our leader, he should write anything he wants,” Clard insisted.

I went up to Rabbit’s dome, socialized a bit, then broached the subject.

“Too much publicity is going to backfire. We don’t want tourist busses coming here, do we?”

He guffawed. “Wouldn’t that be a laugh.”

“Aren’t you still planning on leaving?”

“You bet your sweet ass, as soon as I get it together.”

“If you’re leaving, then why are you still doing this publicity?”

“It can’t be stopped. This is not just about Drop City. This thing is big.”

“You’ll leave and we’ll be stuck with the mess. Can’t we just have a moratorium on publicity for a while?”

“It’s too late to stop now.”

“Don’t throw gas on the fire. We need to try to control it.”

“I am trying to control it.”

“Why not show your letters to the group before you send them?”

“So you can tear them apart and tell me not to send them?”

“So we can change something if we want to.”

“I’ve got to write what I’ve got to write.”

“But it affects the whole community. We’ve got to act together, like a family.”

“We’re all individuals here. We all think for ourselves here. We shouldn’t pretend that we agree about everything. I always say that we’re a leaderless community and I’m writing as an individual.”

“The way you say it sounds like you’re just being modest.”

“I don’t buy this collective identity bullshit. I’m not going to submit to any group identity. In all the history of the world, writing by committee has never produced anything but bullshit.”

“This isn’t poetry. This is publicity.”

“I’m doing this for all of us. I’m trying to get the word out. Peace, love, joy, all blessings.”

“But in reality there’s conflict here. We need healing now, not publicity.”

He shook his head. “People here just don’t see it. They don’t appreciate me. They don’t know what’s good for them. It’s like having to force feed medicine to a baby. I’m the only person here who knows how to communicate with everybody out there. Ask me anything else you want, but don’t ask me to stop writing. Writing’s my life. I can’t stop. I won’t stop. Without publicity it’s like nothing never happened. Whether anybody here appreciates me or not, I’m going to keep on doing what I do. Publicity is what America is about.”

* * *

Chapter 11

Trinidad was a sleepy town of about six thousand. We didn't know much about municipal politics until a local candidate, a Chicano who was running for City Council, came out to Drop City and solicited our votes. He explained how Trinidad operated. For the last twenty years a certain barber and a certain realtor took turns alternating as mayor. Everybody ran unopposed. Local politics was managed from the back room of the barber shop. But he was trying to shake up the establishment; our votes would make a difference since most locals didn't vote, believing that voting never changed things they really cared about. We told him that's why none of us voted either. In the end he lost badly and our votes wouldn't have won him the election.

Trinidad was not exactly a cultural center, though it was a junior college town. There wasn't even a cowboy poetry bar in Trinidad, at least not in those days. But it did have a resident artist laureate, Arthur Roy Mitchell, born on a homestead west of Trinidad in 1889. He became renowned for dramatic western and cowboy paintings that decked the front covers of hundreds of western "pulp" magazines in the thirties and forties. Mitchell founded the Art Department at Trinidad State Junior College, and still taught there, although he was in his dotage. Clard and Lard invited him out to see the work of the Dropper painters but the ancient laureate never made the trek.

One day Clard mentioned the Trinidad War. "You never heard of it? The Trinidad War is famous!"

It hit me just how little I knew about Trinidad and the whole area. If this was to be my home I wanted to understand it more.

Drop City was so anti-historical. That was a strength to the degree that history can weigh you down. But not knowing history also prevents you from understanding a lot. I realized I

never heard Colorado Indians mentioned, as I'd expected in the west. I found out that there was only one reservation in Colorado, Ute, in the mountains southwest of Drop City near the Anasazi ruins at Mesa Verde. To the south the nearest Indians were in New Mexico, at Taos and the other Rio Grande Pueblos.

I asked the town librarian to point me to some local history.

The lower Purgatoire River Valley was once the hunting grounds of Comanches, Kiowas, Arapahoes, and Cheyennes, who followed the buffalo herds. The tribal boundaries shifted over time. The upper Purgatoire, feeding down from the Rockies near the Spanish Peaks, was Ute country, as were the hills to the south, Fisher's Peak and Raton Pass.

Beginning with Coronado in 1540, Spanish explorers pushed relentlessly north from New Mexico, and by the 1600s, expeditions crossed into Colorado, which they prepared to colonize. Early Spanish maps claimed the Trinidad area. Their first Colorado land grants were on the upper Rio Grande west of Trinidad. At first the Utes traded the Spaniards dried meat and hides for knives and horses, but eventually the Utes became raiders.

The French were also pushing into Colorado, claiming the Trinidad area as part of Louisiana, which wasn't just today's state, but a huge region. They moved west along the Arkansas river from the Mississippi, opening the area to fur trappers and traders, reaching the Purgatoire before 1700. Purgatoire was the French name, but sometimes people still called it the Purgatorio, its original Spanish name, which the river got because a group of Spaniards were killed there by Indians, and were considered condemned to Purgatory because they died without Last Rites. There were armed skirmishes between the French and the Spanish. This colonial dispute was mostly in their imagination, since southern Colorado was firmly Indian country during this entire period.

With their defeat by the British in 1763, the French relinquished their claim to the Trinidad area. They ceded it however not to Britain but to Spain. Napoleon grabbed it all back for France, then sold it to Thomas Jefferson. The French *oire* of Purgatoire took on the anglicized pronunciation of *ore*. Since the western boundary of French Louisiana had never

been fixed, the Trinidad area was then a no-man's land disputed between Spain and the United States. A treaty finally put it into New Spain, which became Mexico in 1821.

In that same year the Santa Fe Trail was opened, and American traders and settlers began pouring west. The trail swung south to meet the Goodnight Loving Trail coming down from Denver. It was at this crossroads that the first scratchings of Trinidad appeared, a supply center for the trails. However, Raton Pass was too rough for wagons, so for another half century the Trinidad area remained a backwater.

In 1843 the Mexican governor in Santa Fe issued a grant for the Trinidad area, along with over four million acres of land, to the justice of the peace of Taos and an American trading partner. The aftermath of the Mexican War left the entire northern half of Mexico—including Trinidad—in the hands of the United States. Although the treaty required that the United States honor Mexican land grants, in 1860 the US Congress sold off the Trinidad area, opening it to American settlement. Confusion reigned.

Soon after, the area became part of Colorado Territory. It was still just a few houses, a blacksmith shop, and a saloon. The question arose of a name. The only proposal was made by one Sr. Gabriel Gutiérrez, who suggested the name Trinidad in memory not of the Holy Trinity, but of a girlfriend he'd left behind in Santa Fe.

Meanwhile the Kiowa, Southern Arapaho, Southern Cheyenne, and Comanches were pushed out of the Colorado Plains toward Indian Territory (eventually Oklahoma). Much of the history wasn't pretty. In November, 1864, during a snowstorm, without warning, soldiers attacked a Cheyenne camp at Sand Creek, east of Trinidad, killing about 650 Cheyennes, most of them women, children, and elders.

Trinidad became a typical western frontier town, the scene of numerous bar-room brawls, cattle rustlers, horse thieves, lynch mobs, inter-racial strife, and skirmishes with neighboring Utes and plains tribes. An ethnically diverse place, an early Trinidad directory listed Mexicans, Blacks, Italians, Germans, Jews, and Indians among those living and working there. Professions listed included barbers, cooks, jewelers, porters, laborers, lawmen, artists, and musicians. The favorite

local lynching tree was in an arroyo still known as Hangman's Hollow. Kit Carson was a frequent visitor, and his statue still provided a popular bird perch in a park named after him.

One building from this era still stood opposite the Post Office on Main Street, Baca House, a two-story adobe built in 1865. The downtown Historical District of Trinidad still tried to retain the old flavors, with brick streets and some faux Spanish-Mexican architecture.

In 1867 the Denver & Santa Fe Stage Line made the first direct coach connection between Trinidad and Denver, carrying the first direct mail run. The express trip took thirty-six hours. In that same year the first commercial coal mine in the area opened.

Though there was a large Mexican population, Anglos controlled Trinidad and there was often friction. On New Year's Day, 1868, in a drunken brawl, an Anglo stage coach driver shot a Mexican. The Anglo was arrested but sixty of his friends stormed the jail and freed him. The Anglos barricaded themselves inside a hotel, while outside three hundred Mexicans laid siege. A gun battle raged into the night. The Army arrived and declared martial law. This was the Trinidad War. Tensions continued high but never erupted on that level again.

Many claimants to the old land grant around Trinidad stepped forward. A decade of confusion passed without it getting sorted out.

The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad began extending their narrow-gauge line to all the mining camps along the eastern foothills, and decided to build a terminal town at the future site of Drop City, where land was still almost free. In 1876 they named it El Moro, which remained the local designation for the barrio. The name comes from El Moro castle in Havana, Cuba, built in a Moorish style, which the silhouette of Fisher's Peak reminded somebody of. At Drop City we incorrectly believed *el moro* was Spanish for *moor* or *swamp*, which we thought was aptly funny. We didn't have a Spanish dictionary at Drop City.

El Moro sprang up at an incredible rate. Within months the depot and warehouses had been built, streets laid out, buildings constructed, businesses opened. By the end of the summer of 1876 El Moro was a town of two thousand people,

a hundred buildings, with its own newspaper and coke ovens producing for distant markets. At this very time Colorado became a US state. With the coming of the railroad, commercial coal mining in the area blossomed. But El Moro and Trinidad were too close; one of the towns had to die; when a broad-gauge railroad line finally arrived in Trinidad from the north, it sealed the fate of the narrow-gauge road and El Moro. In 1879 the broad-gauge Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe opened rail traffic over Raton pass into New Mexico. El Moro became a ghost town, dismantled, scavenged, and eventually reverting to prairie, leaving almost no trace. However, the site remained laid out into small parcels, which is why Curly and Jo had been able to buy the land.

Cattle ranching and agriculture were the main pursuits of settlers around Trinidad at first, but huge coal deposits lay beneath the hills and mountains. By 1900 John D. Rockefeller's Colorado Fuel and Iron Corporation, CF&I, had acquired mineral rights to much of the land and had many mines in operation.

With the coal boom came a flood of new immigrants, many almost directly off the boats onto trains headed to promised work in the mines. They were from all over Europe, particularly Greece, Italy, the Slavic countries, as well as Ireland and England; from the west coast came Chinese and other Asians.

Dozens of "company towns" and mining camps sprouted along the Purgatoire valley west of Trinidad, including Cokedale, Sopris, Segundo, Tercio, Valdez. Most of these belonged to CF&I or one of the smaller coal companies. Wages were very low and the work, primarily pick and shovel, was brutal. The miners were often paid in scrip, redeemable only at the company store. Workers were shortchanged and subjected to daily racist abuse.

The mine workers began to rebel. In 1913-1914, the coal field strikes in southern Colorado led to armed confrontation between striking miners and the Colorado militia. On Sept. 23, 1913 at Trinidad's West Theater, immigrant miners from twenty-six nations gathered and pledged to take no more abuse.

Governor Rockefeller's family owned the mines at Ludlow, where the strike culminated in one of the bloodiest skirmishes

in American labor history. The legendary Mother Jones was there, but was arrested and imprisoned for two months in the Mt. San Rafael hospital in Trinidad, and then again in the basement of the Walsenburg County jail. Rockefeller called out the state militia, under the command of veterans of the massacre of Lakota at Wounded Knee. The strikers and their families, mainly Greek and Italian immigrants, had moved into a tent colony near the mine. On April 20, 1914, the militia sprayed the tents with bullets and torched them. When she was finally released, Mother Jones traveled across the country, telling the story of the Ludlow Massacre.

The United Mine Workers of America finally succeeded in unionizing the Colorado coal fields in the 1930s. But by then mining in southeastern Colorado was in decline. The Trinidad area became very depressed, not only in mining but in farming and ranching. It was part of the Dust Bowl. The New Deal cooperative irrigation and electrification projects helped lift the region off its back. Then of course there was the Japanese internment camp. The decline in mining accelerated in the fifties and sixties. By 1966 only one mine on the upper Purgatoire was still in operation; all the other mining camps near Trinidad were ghost towns.

The descendants and ghosts of all those people and events still hovered over the whole area. I began to understand a little better who my neighbors were and where I was.

* * *

I drove with Clard and Alteresio up to Ludlow, about thirty miles north, scouting for good scavenging sites. We'd heard there was a ghost town there. We were in the old black pickup, which we always tried to park on a hill because you had to start it by pushing.

The Highway Patrol stopped us, as they usually did when they saw us on the freeway, always pretending to find something wrong with our vehicles. They never gave us tickets for our supposed violations, just warnings. We knew they were hoping to catch us smoking dope, but they never did.

Not far from the highway turnoff at Ludlow, right where the pavement stopped and the gravel began, was a plaque, set up by the United Mine Workers, AFL-CIO, commemorating the site of the Ludlow Massacre. I vaguely recalled a Woody Guthrie song about it, that Odessa used to sing at Ernesto's pad back in New York. Abandoned mining equipment was everywhere and rusting.

The plaque said that during the long and bitter strike of 1914, the miners moved into a tent colony. The state militia shot into the camp with a machine-gun and burned it down, killing twenty, mostly children and women. Looking across a field with a few cattle, I could see the grassy spot where, according to the plaque, the tent city had stood.

We continued on along the gravel road until we came to a small boarded-up town. The road went right through the main street. It was all fenced off with barbed wire and posted with No Trespassing signs. Alteresio parked the truck on a side street and he, Clard, and I began poking around, peeking in boarded windows. A sudden honking made us almost jump out of our pants.

We hurried back to the truck. A big new white pickup was parked next to ours, a white-haired guy in a white cowboy hat behind the wheel, a younger cowboy next to him, and behind them two rifles on a gun rack. He nailed us a look as we sheepishly sauntered over.

"Okay if we look around?" I called from about twenty feet away.

He waited to answer until we got a couple of yards from the cab. "Where you boys from?"

"We live over near Trinidad," Clard answered sheepishly.

"What you doing here?"

"Just looking around," Alteresio said. "Who are you?"

"I control this land."

"You own this town?"

"You have any business here?"

"We just wanted to see the ghost town."

"Well, you seen it."

As usual, the black pickup wouldn't start. Clard and I pushed it, Alteresio jumped the clutch, the engine sputtered, died. But on the next try it caught. We beat a hasty retreat back to Drop City.

* * *

Chapter 12

Lard and Clard stood in front of the Ultimate Painting, spinning the painting and wiggling their fingers in front of their eyes. When you did that, it was like a strobe, with individual frames standing out and coming alive.

“We’ve got to get this ready to debut at the show next month in Santa Fe.” Clard wiggled his fingers in front of his eyes until the painting slowed and stopped. The Ultimate Painting was becoming very intricate, like a hemisphere with spatial paradoxes everywhere. It was flat but looked spherical. Clard and Lard organized everybody to paint a small part of it. With some coaxing I painted a section about four inches across.

“What show is that?” I asked.

Clard mixed colors on a piece of plywood he used as a palette. “Didn’t Rabbit tell you? This gallery in Santa Fe asked us to do a show next month. You’re supposed to read some poetry.”

“This is the first I’ve heard about it.”

“Rabbit was supposed to tell you,” Lard said.

“Is this another light show?” I asked. We had begun doing light shows with two local garage rock bands at weekend dance gigs, and made a handful of cash at it. The Wishbone and Rangewar were mainly copy bands, playing somebody else’s latest hits, but were pretty good at it and also did a few of their own numbers. We made slides out of different pigments, crystals, and chemicals, using colored liquids that spread and mixed in interesting patterns when you moved them between two pieces of glass. I’d never done this before, but it was pretty easy. We rigged up a couple of overhead projectors, a reflecting multi-faceted sphere that we hung from the ceiling, two movie projectors, a couple of slide projectors, and a strobe. Our light

equipment was funky and old but we whipped it into working shape. It wasn't a bad show, by Trinidad standards.

"No. This is going to be in a fancy-shmancy gallery. The art crowd. Curly and Alteresio are going to show films. Rabbit and you are going to read some poetry, if you want to. The Ultimate Painting is going to be the climax of the show."

The door flew open and Curly burst in, arms filled with a big machine he couldn't quite see over and could barely carry.

"Look what fell from the sky!" He plopped it in the middle of the floor. "An old mimeo. One of those crazy Christian rabbis came up to me in town, said his church ladies got him a new improved model, and thought we might haul away this old baby."

"Did he show you how to work it?"

"A little. Have you ever used one?"

"No."

"He said it's easy."

"Don't let Rabbit see that," Clard said. "He's going to want it."

Rabbit had made a kind of standoff peace with Curly and Jo and the rest of us, but showed no sign of leaving, and had even come back into the family to some degree.

"The only reason that religious fanatic gave it to me, is to destroy us," Curly went on.

"You're paranoid," Lard said.

"He knew I couldn't control my packrat nature. The FBI must have told him."

"We used to want to do a newsletter," Clard said. "But now I'm not so sure."

"A newsletter," I put in, "would be all our voices, not just Rabbit's. That would counterbalance his act."

"Except that Rabbit would try to dominate it."

"How could we decide what to put in a newsletter?" Lard said. "We could never agree."

"Just let anybody put in anything they want," Clard responded.

“Let’s do a draft,” Curly said, “and if one person really hates it...” He drew his index finger across his throat and whistled.

Outside a half hour later I bumped into Rabbit leaving one of the tents carrying several portable lights.

“C’mon up to my dome,” he said. “There’s something I want to show you.”

I walked with him. “I hear we’ve got a gig in Santa Fe.”

“Yeah. I’m going to read some poetry.”

I waited for him to say more but he didn’t. “We just got a mimeo machine,” I said.

“Really? From where? Does it work?”

“From some minister. It looks like all the parts are there.”

“Great! I’m an expert at mimeos. Used to do a underground newsletter at my old high school. Now we can really get the word out!”

“Yeah,” I said half-heartedly. “What are the lights for?”

“I’m making a movie.”

“I didn’t know you had a camera.”

“Alteresio lent me his. This is my first flick.”

Though Rabbit and Alteresio were back on speaking terms, they kept at arms’ length.

“What’s it going to be about?”

He guffawed, “Poly giving me a blow job.”

He opened the door and we went inside.

Poly was sitting on the bed. There were lights everywhere. “I hope you’re not telling Ishmael about your movie idea.”

“Why not, Bones?” That was his pet name for her.

“If you tell everybody about it, I’m not going to do it.” She began twirling a lock of her hair with two fingers, as she often did when she was nervous.

“Aw, c’mon. I’m not telling everybody. Ishmael’s okay. I just told him. He won’t tell nobody.” He turned and winked at me. “Promise?”

“Mum’s the word,” I said.

“Well, you can just get somebody else to do it.”

“I’m only trying to make you a star,” Rabbit protested.

“You’re trying to make your dick a star. You’re not putting my face in that film. Get somebody else to do it.”

“I don’t want nobody else.” He winked at me again. “Hell, you’re my wife. All they’ll see is your hair.”

She shook her head. “I just don’t understand you guys.”

“Nobody’ll even know it’s you.”

“Everybody will know.”

“I promise, I won’t get your face in the picture.”

“I’m not going to do it.”

“The only reason I told Ishmael is that I might not be able to get a good enough angle trying to film it myself. I want this to be a quality production. We need a cameraman.”

“That’s Alteresio’s camera,” I cut in. “Get him to do it. I don’t even know how to use it.”

“It’s easy. Poly don’t want him involved. She thinks he tells Crayola everything, but I know he don’t tell Crayola nothing except what he wants her to hear.”

“So you want Ishmael to watch me giving you a blow job?”

“Not watching you. You can’t barely see nothing through that little camera hole. He’ll just be filming it. There’s nothing personal about it. This is art.”

“You’re sick.”

I moved toward the door. “See you later.”

“If it don’t work out like this, Ishmael, I’m counting on you.”

Later that day I was chopping firewood when Rabbit came over.

“Cut and print! In the can!”

“Sounds like it went well.”

He stuck out his tongue and wiggled it. “A great take! I’ll show you when it’s printed.”

* * *

In the casual way decisions were usually made in Drop City, we decided to do the newsletter.

The decision-making process at Drop City was haphazard. Ordinarily we didn't make decisions by voting. We usually just talked things through until either everybody was satisfied or we'd reached a stalemate. Nobody was ever forced to do anything; nobody had things shoved down their throat. There was rarely total agreement about anything; but nothing was considered decided until everybody was at least agreeable to it. That was easy to achieve when nobody was adamantly opposed to some proposal. But it usually took only one person resolutely against something to prevent it from happening. Unless somebody else was just as resolutely determined to do it anyway. Force of personality was often the deciding factor.

Decisions were always up for renegotiation. There really were no rules. At least no fixed rules. Well, maybe a few, like the rule that nobody could declare himself or herself boss. I took to this process immediately. To me when it functioned it was the way a good large family should function.

Patt had more reservations. To her it seemed that by never voting, we often wound up doing what only a few strong-willed people wanted. Drop City was that way too, when it dysfunctioned.

Anyway, although we never made a formal decision to publish the newsletter, everybody knew the decision had somehow been made. Almost everybody said they'd submit something. This was the first time we all worked together on a project since the fight between Rabbit and Alteresio.

Rabbit jumped right into production. To my surprise, he restrained himself from trying to dominate it. His assertive nature was constantly trying to jump out, but before it sprawled all over everybody, he'd rein it back in, leaving room for the other Droppers. I had thought he would not be capable of that. Maybe it was because we did production in the kitchen, right by the sheetrock wall that he and Alteresio had broken fighting. It was never fixed and remained a symbol and a reminder.

Bear came back to Drop City, bringing his radial arm saw as well as his helper Orval, and within a few days we were cutting two-by-six struts for the new complex.

Bear and Curly went around to the two local junked car lots and talked with the owners. They were full of old cars whose bodies had been stripped, but whose tops were in good shape. Nobody had ever asked to buy them before. The going price was fifty cents apiece.

We sharpened all our axes, filled the pickups with Droppers, and drove over to the first yard. The junkyard dogs growled and tugged at their chains; they didn't know what to make of us.

"Did everybody bring gloves?" Bear asked. "Careful. The edges get pretty sharp. It's easy to slip standing on top of the cars. Don't bring the axe up over your head. Just take little swings. Like this." He demonstrated. "Work away at it a little at a time."

The junkyard dealer had gone around and made a mark on every top we could take. We broke into teams.

I worked with Lard. The steel cut easier than I thought it would. With two of us chopping away in opposite directions, we had a top off in twenty minutes. I was surprised at how much variation there was in the gauge of the steel; some of the older car tops were twice as thick as the newer ones, and of course harder to chop.

"Orval's hurt," Lard exclaimed.

He was sitting on the ground. I could see blood. Bear was tying a bandanna around his hand while Clard, Curly, and Alteresio watched.

We jumped down and hurried over, just as Orval was standing back up.

"It ain't bad," he said. "Just slashed a little. I slipped and grabbed the side of the cut metal. Now my glove's fucked up. Let's get back to work."

By the end of three days we'd cleaned out both junk yards of over eighty tops. We had them in big stacks. Bear bought an electric shears, which made cutting the cartops to size later a comparative breeze.

One night Bear and Alteresio went out drinking in a bar. They came back late with a story that some drunken redneck had provoked them and Bear knocked him out. Bear didn't get a scratch. He seemed to alternate between being shocked and proud. "That's the first time I ever got into a fight like that," he grinned. "What's amazing to me is how really good it felt to punch out that guy. I've never punched anybody in the face like that. You should have seen the way he fell. It was just like in the movies." He didn't seem at all remorseful. I was surprised that Bear had this in him.

At night we worked on the newsletter. Everybody was writing or drawing something for it.

Rabbit announced, "I'm writing semi-official biographies of everybody for the newsletter."

"Am I going to be in there?" Orval asked.

"You bet your big fat butt you are, Orval Teen."

"What are you writing about me?"

"That you swallow messikins whole for appetizers." Rabbit used racial epithets casually, to the dismay of some of us.

"You ain't going to say that, are you?"

"Sure. Our editorial policy is I can say anything I want." He picked up a sheet of paper and read, "No selectivity is exercised by the editors. The Drop City Newsletter is an expression of the individual viewpoints of the residents of Drop City and/or non-resident contributors. Nothing contained in this newsletter is necessarily the viewpoint of Drop City or its residents. The content of the Drop City Newsletter is in no way limited. We welcome contributions of any kind: news, lies, truths, drawings, literature, pornography, nonsense, ultimate realities, ads, MONEY, MONEY, MONEY."

"Who wrote that?"

"I did. Like it?"

"The money part sounds grubby," Lard said.

“That’s the best part,” Rabbit responded. “You got to lay it on the fucking line.”

“How about me?” Bear asked. “Are you writing a phony bio about me?”

Rabbit chortled. “I was going to write that your head is shaped like a quartz crystal, but after that fight, I’m going to write that you got the quickest six-gun in the west, with eleven notches on your iron, not counting injuns, messikins and niggers.”

“Don’t talk like that, man. Racist shit like that’s not funny. I don’t like it.”

Bear had to go back to New Mexico again, while we worked on the panels, but planned to be back in a few weeks to start to erect them.

We trimmed the cartops to fit the panels and nailed them down, with two-by-six dividers where they were needed at the joints, shingling all the tops in the same direction with tar in the seams.

* * *

Drop City had become almost entirely vegetarian, partly by choice, partly by necessity. Except periodically Rabbit would show up with a rabbit or two he’d shot, skin them with a few deft slices of his knife, then cook them. We never ate the rabbits we raised. Every time we turned around there were more of them; they were just an expensive hobby. Occasionally Rabbit would go up into the mountains to try to poach a deer. He’d often invite me to come with him, but I always refused. Alteresio was the only one ever willing to go. Though they didn’t seem to like each other, always wary and never chummy, Alteresio and Rabbit bonded over guns. They seemed to find in each other’s perverse side a kindred spirit. I was always afraid that one day they’d disagree out in the woods and wind up having a hunting accident.

With or without Alteresio, Rabbit would leave for the mountains with great fanfare, headband always tied in place around his forehead. He’d always spout the same story he told

when I first met him, claiming to hunt by asking permission of the animal; that is, when the deer was ready to be killed and eaten by Rabbit, it would come out of hiding and let him shoot it. This was his version of a Native American custom.

That entire fall he never came back with a deer. Rabbit bemoaned his string of bad luck. No deer seemed ready to die for him.

One day his luck finally broke. He had gone out hunting alone before dawn. Toward dusk he drove back in, honking, yelling "Cacahuatl!" out the window, a large animal draped over his fender. It turned out to be a horse another truck had hit down the road a few minutes before he passed by.

In moments of triumph he always yelled, "Cacahuatl," which he claimed was a warrior's cry that a Taos pueblo man had taught him. I never had the heart to tell him that it means "Peanut" in Spanish.

He rigged up some four-by-fours, hung the horse upside down, slit its throat, bled it, cut off the head, skinned and dressed it, carved it up and stacked it in the freezer. Rabbit never tired of telling the story about the horse who decided to die for him.

* * *

I took the job of helping Jo keep the chickens, rabbits, and goat.

We decided that maybe the rabbits were unhappy in their little hutches, but we couldn't just let them run wild like the chickens, so we built a big outdoor corral for them, burying the wire fence a foot into the ground. They still had a couple of hutches to hide in, if they wanted to. We worried that dogs, coyotes, or hawks might get them, but they never did.

Our hermaphrodite goat, Tinker, had all kinds of sexual organs, a crazed look in his eye, and used to follow the little kids around and scare them. We decided that maybe his problem was that he needed a friend, and we wanted milk, so we drove to the goat farm down the road and bought a pregnant nanny. Having her around did cool out Tinker.

Our hens usually laid enough eggs for pancakes, but we really feasted only when the egg man dropped by with a big wire basket full of jumbo brown and white corn-fed eggs, which he'd give us as a gift. The egg man ran a chicken farm on the other side of Trinidad, and he regularly had more eggs than he knew what to do with. We'd chat about raising chickens and eggs, and he'd always gave us good pointers. The egg man was about sixty, always wore overalls and a cap, was very proud of his eggs, and had utter contempt for the mass-produced variety. His eggs really were tasty. He would complain that it costs more today to raise a chicken than the price of the eggs. I knew he was right. Yet somehow he continued to muddle along, out of love for his work. His wife had passed on a few years before. He reminded me of my Grandpa, particularly after Grandma died, when he began to feel very alone. Everybody knew the egg man really came over to flirt with the Dropper women, and they led him on a bit and teased him. It seemed harmless enough. He invited them to come over and get eggs any time. At first none of them wanted to go; they were wary of him. One day I drove Patt, Jo, and Crayola over there, and he showed us around his farm. When he and I were alone for a minute, he asked me if I thought any of the women might be interested in him. I felt too sorry for him to tell him the truth. Then he said he had money, which I took as a lead to see if I would pimp for him. I just let it pass. I told the women, who couldn't decide whether to be insulted or flattered or both. After that, they were never willing to go back to his place. But they didn't seem to hold it against him, and still joked with him casually at Drop City, on safe ground. When we were low on cash, I'd cheerfully suggest to the women that they make an egg run.

We bought four baby turkeys, with the idea of raising them for the upcoming holiday feasts. A couple of them dropped dead right away; another got killed by a dog. Only one survived. The turkey, Gerald, and I became fast friends. He used to hop on the toe of my boot and refused to get off, so I would walk around like that. Gerald became a pet. However, when he reached puberty he began to terrify the little kids with his fluffed up feathers, puffed out chest and bluff pecking charges. He and Tinker the goat were quite a macho pair. By the time the holidays approached, nobody thought Gerald was cute anymore, but almost everybody felt squeamish about killing

and eating him. All our families had always had turkey, and never thought much about it. But now that we actually had to kill the turkey it seemed very different. I decided to try to gather everybody in Drop City to take collective responsibility for his death. Curly, Jo, Crayola and Patt would have nothing to do with it.

The rest of the Droppers gathered around the chopping block.

Gerald, who usually wandered fearlessly around Drop City, sensed something and ran. With some effort, Lard caught him and carried him back upside down, flapping and sweating. "What now?"

"Why are you asking me?" I was trying to wiggle out of the responsibility.

"You organized this."

Orval Teen grabbed the axe. "I said I wouldn't before, but now I'm inspired. I'll do it."

Gerald was fighting to get away. Lard had difficulty holding onto him, but managed to maneuver his head down on the chopping block. Orval raised the axe, brought it slowly down over Gerald's neck to take aim, raised it again high above his head. A brief moment of silence.

Orval blurted, "I'm sorry about this, Gerald," and swung with all his strength. But, just as he swung, Lard lost his nerve and pulled Gerald away. The axe chopped off the end feathers of one wing; Gerald broke loose and flapped away. Lard, Orval, and I chased after him.

Orval finally caught him and brought him back to the block. Rabbit grunted disgustedly, "Gimme that bird."

He grabbed Gerald's legs in one hand, stuck his head on the block, stomped between his wings with his boot to hold him down, and with a deft swing, cried, "Cacahuatl!" and chopped off his head. Rabbit then let him loose. Gerald's body scampered headless down toward his old pen, and collapsed near the cottonwood tree. His head lay on the chopping block, twitching and bleeding, his eyes staring blankly into space.

"That's the way it's done in Texas." Rabbit stuck out his false teeth and chattered them.

Alteresio seemed a little more crazed than usual. He asked Curly to help him shoot a film about hunting crows, which he was going to call, *A Sicilian's Revenge*. It was a strange idea because there was no reason to hunt a crow. But maybe that was the point; it was somehow allegorical to Alteresio. He wasn't much of a talker, and often couldn't explain why he did things. He had a perverse streak that he barely tried to keep in check. The whole thing was disturbing. I think he thought of himself as the crow and society as the killer. It was a way to purge some darkness out of himself. He also said it had something to do with a chess gambit. He and Curly were chess partners, and spent many hours sitting at the kitchen table staring at the board. Anyway, despite protests, Alteresio organized a group to go crow hunting while Curly filmed it. The only other guy Alteresio could find willing to shoot at crows was Rabbit. I went along, but without a gun.

Alteresio located a flock which hung out by the river. The flock had a lookout in a very high tree, who kept an eye on us and warned the others of our every move with caws. It was a complete bust. Curly filmed Alteresio and Rabbit running around the woods with guns, but they didn't get near a crow. However, Alteresio was persistent. He watched the crows' movements for a few days, then noticed that just before sunset the flock would fly to a nesting place, and to do so they had to pass over a certain spot where there was a mound obscuring their view until they were almost on top of it. He had us sneak to the spot from the opposite direction and lie in wait. Suddenly, the crows filled the sky over our heads. Alteresio and Rabbit shot, and a black form plummeted from the sky down to the bank of the Purgatoire. As they ran over to see it, I walked the other way. It was a sad, pathetic day for Drop City.

Curly wrote a song about it, based on an old Irish Republican anthem about political prisoners in an English jail. He played guitar, not too well, and walked around Drop City singing it mournfully:

And the old crow angle
goes jingle jangle
along the banks
of the Purgatoire.

* * *

Meanwhile the *Drop City Newsletter* was muddling along. Not everybody liked what was happening with it, but we hung with it.

We decided to give each issue a headline. We went around and around about what should be the first headline. The two most popular proposals were PEACE and SEND US ALL YOUR MONEY. The money business was supposed to be a joke, although in retrospect it doesn't sound very funny.

Curly submitted a humorous piece:

**A CHOICE SAMPLING OF CURLY BENSEN'S
LEXICON ULTIMATE**

PARANOID: A zany virus.

COSMIC FORCES: The total ultimate director of progress and survival.

MONEY: The obsolete system of survival and achievement.

BLOWN MIND: The condition of one's conscious facilities.

HOARDING: The attitude taken toward one's possessions.

PSYCHEDELIC: Clard Svensen's hair.

THE MIDDLE: In Infinity: the position of its parts.

WEIRD: The attitude in which reality is.

SCROUNGE: The manner in which progress is obtained.

CHOWTIME: The spiritual dilemma for daily attainment.

DISCRETION: The insidious form of deception.

OVERLAPPING FRAMEWORK: The immediate relationship of light and anti-light.

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL: The TAO at least.

DROP CITY: To sponsor and create the avant-garde of civilization, utilizing all the remnants, at least of art, science, technology, etc.

DROPPING: An elaborate put-on.

ZANY: Same as psychedelic: see it.

* * *

Always the moralist and social reformer, Clard contributed two pieces:

DON'TS TO ABIDE BY

Don't be uptight.

Don't put people on.

Don't try to make people tense.

Don't hurt others.

Don't hurt yourself.

Don't be afraid.

Don't make anybody afraid.

Don't try to be a super hero.

Don't try to make others into super heroes.

PROPOSAL TO AMERICAN LAWMAKERS

Scientific and technological progress is usually preceded by research & experimentation. Maybe social progress too.

Why not...write up a law that would allow research in experimental "test-tube" societies. As experimental structures they would be inconsistent with the structure of this country. Therefore they would have to exist exempt from the laws of this country. (With one provision, that they may not interfere in any way with the workings of the

country and must keep to themselves.) A lot of different structures could be tried to see how they stand up...and to see if any are of any worth.

* * *

Drop Lady drew a map of Drop City and an overhead sketch of the new kitchen complex. She also submitted an actual letter her grandmother had sent her:

dear dear grand sun I love you very much I always think of you I don't feel very good in my health I hope you are well take good care on your life I hope I will live to see you get married be to you good happy that is my wish please me since that makes very happy for me your grandmother wish all very dear and a good health and happy write me a letter since me too make love and kiss I wish will see you home soon you could come to see me some time a grandmother make me glad your letter will make me happy yours truly grandmother wish me family you regards kiss and love from all wish

Alteresio gave us something about a demon that a physicist named Maxwell used to explain certain subatomic movements:

IIIIII am Maxwell's demon.
IIIIII am AM MAXWELL
Watch out for me. Hee Hee Hee.

Poly Ester offered a hot and heavy excerpt from a novel she was writing:

CARLA

But you're not careless, Carla, he said pushing on the diaphragm with his finger, then two, I mean, nothing like that would ever happen to you in the course of normal events, you would allow only or maybe not even an uncontrolled comet to pass through your life, though

probably controlling it when it got into your sphere of influence, you would never let things get out of hand, go too far, he was sliding his dick into her a little at a time, she was very tight tonight, it's like a fart has to be smelled by three people before it dies, it lingers a long time waiting off in the distance, but not you, you rush on out there to get smelled by your three so you can turn to something else, he was in now, Carla moaned and gave three strong squirts.

* * *

I wrote a rant:

Pleasure/pain. Western civilization crumbles. The bum: beyond goal consciousness, social achievement. The artist: a bum, but with an added factor—"fucking off" takes the form of art.

The rest of society has stopped singing: money. They pay the artist to sing for them. With societal structure crumbled, everyone will be a bum.

We at Drop City have reconciled the Dionysian in us. We harbor no illusions. 100 years ahead of our time, we are BUMS NOW. The only spirituality left to western man is total sensuality, so we have constant orgasm.

We serve society. We permit it to harbor illusions. We sing its songs. We pick up its pennies. Their food equals our overflow. Our overflow equals their fantasies. Their fantasies permit the obsolete structure of society to overflow with materials. Their waste equals our sustenance. Our material sustenance equals our sensual creative overflow.

We are legs of the great american brontosaur. We are your friend. Uphold us. Or are you we? Cannot be both. Send us all your money or jump in.

Drop.

We also put in several requests for equipment and donations. One ad offered the Ultimate Painting for fifty thousand dollars. Clard inserted a request for an "Ultimate chick." Another ad was just a joke:

\$5 CHEAP \$5\$5\$5\$5\$5
10 NUDIE PICS OF CURLY BENSEN

The two most controversial submissions to the newsletter both came from Rabbit. One was a cartoon by a friend of his, of a man who was meant to look like President Lyndon B. Johnson, but his nose was a dick and his jowls balls. Some of the Droppers thought it was too explicit to go in, since they planned to send copies to their families.

The other item was Rabbit's satirical Dropper bios. Not everybody thought they were funny. Clard was pretty sensitive about the way he was depicted. And, true to his word, Rabbit roasted Luke Bear in language the rest of us found offensive.

SEMI-OFFICIAL DROPPER BIOGRAPHIES

CURLY BENSEN with a lust for the sea was born from the hawse hole of a Norwegian freighter. Her name was Ma Bensen.

DROP LADY was rescued and raised by the pigeons living under the Tri-Borough Bridge.

CLARD SVENSEN grins and shuffles his feet a lot. It has been opined that he is a moron or suffers from a congenital birth defect, but we know better. He sez that the above was written by Rabbit, who is obviously jealous.

LARRY LARD owes it all to his beauty. He often expresses concern over his impending crucifixion.

RABBIT often mutters about sneezes, flowerpots, Mr. Mac Gregor, Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail.

POLY ESTER is linear and elastic. Whoop - Whoop - Whoop.

ALTERESIO is a gangster from Naples who rubs garlic on his dum-dum.

CRAYOLA was rescued from living in the pasture and eating grass. I never dreamed, she has been known to say.

ISHMAEL has a vertically striped face, red purple and gold. He doesn't have \$500, do you have \$500?

PATSY PIE QUICKLY is fast, we think.

LUKE COOL has the quickest six-gun in Oklahoma. He's got eleven notches on his iron, not counting injuns, messikins and negroes.

ORVAL TEEN was dipped out of a slimy dishpan by Luke Cool. He's as strong as King Kong and carnivorous. "Eat," he says, "eat, eat."

* * *

When Luke Bear saw what Rabbit had written about him, he was pissed. "I told you not to spout that racist shit about me, man."

"Aw, you're too sensitive."

"I think it's racist too," I said.

"Where I come from everybody talks like that. At least us poor white trailer camp trash. It don't mean nothing. It ain't racist. I like everybody."

"Just don't publish that about me."

Bear had to return to New Mexico again, while we worked more on the panels, but he planned to be back in a few weeks to start erecting them. While he was gone we finished the newsletter. Rabbit poopooed the issues of the dick-nose cartoon, the depiction of Clard, and the racist epithets. He insisted that they all stay in. "If some sensitive soul's offended by my language, they'll blame me, not you. It's got my name on it. Here's our editorial policy, right here, that we all agreed on: *No selectivity is exercised by the editors. The content is in no*

way limited. That means no censorship. Don't I have free speech as much as anybody else?"

We reached a stalemate. No one wanted to be the one to trash the whole project over it, so, one by one, the rest of us finally relented. We printed several hundred copies and sent them out.

The next day the postman honked by the mailbox. Curly and I went over.

"That mail you sent yesterday, the postmaster's seized it. They're pressing charges."

"For what?"

"Sending obscenity through the mail."

"What obscenity?"

"That ad for naked pictures and that cartoon of the president with his nose like a dick." He never mentioned Rabbit's racial epithets, which must not have bothered the postmaster.

"What about freedom of the press?"

"Don't blame me, boys. Most everybody else just thought it was a riot. LBJ do have a dick nose, by the way."

We quickly planned to contact every lawyer we knew and defend our rights. We took the postmaster's reaction as a compliment, and started plotting the next newsletter as an exposé of the repressive system.

However, the next day the mailman honked again. "The postmaster decided to give you boys a break and not press charges. He sent your newsletters out after all. But he said to tell you to take this as a warning. Gonna seize everything from now on unless you clean it up."

* * *

Chapter 13

Clard and Lard worked on the Ultimate Painting right up to the night before the Santa Fe show. In the morning they carefully laid it in the packing box, still wet. All the Droppers decided to go except Drop Lady, Crayola and the kids. It was a two-hour drive.

As we squeezed into the cars and pickups, Rabbit waved a film can in my face and winked.

“What’s that?”

“Gonna debut my film.”

“You finished it?”

“Just got it back yesterday.”

“How’d it turn out?”

“Great!”

We were on our way.

Over the previous days I’d looked through all my old poetry and fiction but couldn’t find anything I liked enough to read. I often went through periods like that. In the stack of manuscripts I’d carried to Drop City, besides poetry were a half dozen stories and two novels that I no longer liked. The novels were unpublished, though most of the stories had been accepted by obscure little magazines. When I was packing for Drop City, I threw out a lot of my early writings, but brought these with me. It was upsetting scanning them now as I looked for something to read in Santa Fe. That world seemed so far away.

I decided to write something new, agonized over it for a while, then realized that I was inspired by the Ultimate Painting, so wrote a poem to read while it was spinning.

Tired in our many wanderings
suddenly restless
remembering our mother
and finding ourselves alone
searching wind and cloud for signs
then sensing the direction
we will head upstream
without looking back
and meet in the aspen meadows
that no man owns
in the final hours of night
watch Scorpio sink one last time
beyond the western peak
and listen to the sea,
one thousand miles away,
rise up to meet her lover
then crouch about the dying fire silent
sharing a last loaf of bread
while smoke spirals colors though
the shadows of our minds.
High in the mountains
as dawn rises in the north
and the axis finally shifts
we will look into our lovers' eyes
and see the forest
look into the forest and see our lovers' eyes
then look behind her eyes
and see the flames
look beyond the flames and see ourselves
we will take off our clothes
and forget what we were and who we were
forget where our bodies end and the universe begins
step out of our minds
through a secret cave we have always known
and drift into each other
together at last
home again
among the animals
washed in the first drops of the coming rain
we will join the dance

We arrived in Santa Fe and hurriedly prepared for the show. Clard, Lard, and Alteresio filled the walls with their acrylic paintings and Drop Lady's watercolors. Curly, Patt, and I set up the strobe, slide and movie projectors. Finally we assembled the triangulated two-by-four stand, hooked up the motor, and screwed the Ultimate Painting to its arbor. The gallery was to be open for a couple of hours before the show, so people could look at the paintings on the walls. We were barely ready as evening fell.

Shortly before the opening we all, except Patt, who didn't indulge, slipped into the back room and got stoned. When I came out, I saw that a handful of people had already arrived and others were coming in the door. Denton and Leeda, dressed in high costume instead of their usual overalls, were chatting with Patt and the gallery owner. With them was Marigold. I sank into the floor. This was the first time I'd seen her since I came back to Drop City.

Marigold planted a wet kiss on my lips. "How did you like San Francisco? When did you get back?"

"The Coast was great. I've been back at Drop City since September."

"Dawnrider wrote me that you had the pad next door to her and Winston at the Garbo. Wasn't that place wild?"

I quickly turned and introduced her to Patt, who bit her lip. "Where did you two meet?"

"At Drop City last spring," Marigold replied.

"Marigold was staying with Leeda and Denton," I added.

"I'm back with them again. Still lying low. My parents still have the psycho squad on my trail. I'll be around the Drop City area for a while."

"What have you been?" I asked hurriedly.

"Back and forth all over the place. Just in New York. Our mutual friend Cori says to tell you she misses you."

"You know Cori?" Patt perked up.

I cut in, "She's a friend of Dawnrider too. They all went to high school together in Wisconsin. Isn't that right?"

“Michigan, a little place outside of East Lansing. You’re the same Patt? I can’t believe this! Crazy, how it all comes together. Cori told me all about you.”

“What did she tell you?” Patt didn’t look too thrilled.

“Only good things, of course.”

“How’s Cori doing?” I put in.

“She has a great little part in this great off-off-off Broadway play. You know her friend Kugo, right?”

“Sure” I said.

“Did you meet Frinki, Kugo’s wife?” Patt asked.

“He has a wife?” She wrinkled her nose. “Cori likes complications. Kugo asked me to bring you some mescaline, but I don’t travel holding.”

Denton rescued me with an arm around my shoulder. “How’s the new kitchen complex progressing?” He was sporting a Stetson hat, dark sunglasses, green silk shirt, and leather pants.

“We’ve made a lot of progress. Going to erect it in a month or so. It’ll be a work party. You should swing by. We’ll need all the help we can get. Other than that, we’re working on another issue of the newsletter. How about you?”

“Still talking about starting a new community. I don’t know if Rabbit or Poly have mentioned this to you, but we’ve been discussing buying land together.”

“You and Rabbit?”

“We’ve already started driving around looking. Hopefully we’ll find something in some beautiful isolated place in the mountains near Drop City. We all want to stay in the area.”

“Where’s the money coming from?”

“The financing’s not in place yet. Leeda and I have lots of contacts in the art world. We know the money’s there. It’s just a matter of approaching them in the right way. We’ve got some feelers out. No firm commitments yet. How about you and Patt? Would you two be interested in coming in with us?”

That took me aback. Patt was still chatting with Marigold. I thought for a moment. “I’m really committed to Drop City.”

Denton slid his sunglasses down his nose. "We'll need committed people to make the new community work too. Think it over. Anyway, just before you came in Leeda and I were telling Patt about our idea of repainting the Drop City domes. We did some sketches I want you to see. Leeda has them. Come on. Patt, you too."

He dragged us across the room to a table where Leeda was showing some of the other Droppers drawings of all the domes. Instead of aluminum, each dome was now painted a different matt color highlighted by a contrasting color along the interstices of the panels. They looked pretty subtle. Curly's dome was now turquoise with black-outlined white stripes around the triangles. Rabbit's dome was red with black trim; the top of the hole was green, with darker green trim; the old kitchen a yellow background with deep blue stripes.

"Wow, that would really change the flavor of Drop City."

"They look great!" Rabbit exclaimed.

"I always like stripes," Polly drawled Texas style. "And dots."

Curly squished his lips to one side. "Instead of looking like a spaceport, you want us to look like an Easter egg hunt."

"Droppers," the gallery owner announced loudly, "Can I corral you all together for a conference?" There was a tone in his voice that reminded me of Otis' and Giovanni's gay friends back in New York.

As we moved toward a corner of the room, Patt whispered, "What's between you and that girl?"

"I barely know her. I only met her at Drop City for a few hours last spring."

We crowded into a tight circle in one corner, near the buffet covered with white towels, and the unopened wine and glasses for the party that was planned to continue into the night after the show. It looked like there was going to be a good turnout, for what it was. A hundred people would have packed the room, and a crowd was there already.

"Now, you can do the show any way you want. It's your show. But you've got to pull your act together and decide." He wore a Hawaii shirt with big flowers.

"Is there some problem?" Clard asked.

"Yes and no. You tell me one thing and other people tell me something else."

"What are you talking about?"

"You said that Curly was going to do the introduction. Rabbit said that he was going to do it."

"I didn't say that," Rabbit jumped in. "I said I was going to introduce Curly. Where's the problem? I don't see any problem."

"Neither do I," Curly said, a little glum.

"The other thing is, a friend just warned me that the police might visit us tonight. I don't want any trouble."

"Not to worry," Curly said. "There won't be."

By the time we began the show, people were barely able to squeeze in the door. The gallery owner introduced Rabbit, who proceeded to tell humorous stories about Drop City, how it came to be, and what we were going to be showing them tonight. He was really entertaining. He gave Curly a big build up, with a few goodnatured jibes.

Curly finally stood and mumbled, "I think Rabbit already said it all. I got nothing to add. We're already running a little late. I got a flick to show you."

He waved for the gallery manager to cut the lights, sat down behind the projector, and proceeded to roll his twelve-minute Drop City silent movie. This was the first time I'd seen it outside of Drop City, and it looked totally different out here. It was really funny, and captured the feeling of the early place better than any words could have. The audience loved it.

A show of Drop City slides followed, with all the Droppers making running commentaries. Alteresio rolled his crow film, complex and disturbing, with existential undertones of sex and angst.

Rabbit read a poem about new rituals filling the world and souls finding recognition and direction in each other. This was the first time I'd heard him read. I suddenly saw him in a light I'd not seen him in for a long time, as I had when I first arrived in Drop City. He was very evocative. His poems seemed to come

out of a different place than his everyday personality did. He read a few more poems, which went over well, then said, "I also got a film to show you. My first movie. I got to warn you that anybody who's not ready to get their mind totally blown away, should split and not see it. Don't take the risk. But before I drive you away, I know a lot of you came for the debut of the first great group painting in the entire history of the entire world, the Ultimate Painting. Isn't that right, Clard?"

"Yeah," Clard said. "That's right."

"Anyway, this is a painting that all the Droppers did a little of. We're going to sell it to one of you tonight for sixty thousand US dollars. Right, Clard?"

"It was fifty thou a few minutes ago."

"The rest is my commission. Anyway I'm going to step aside, and save my movie for the grand finale of the show."

The lights dimmed again. Taped music began. Lard flicked on the motor. The Ultimate Painting started to spin. Clard manned the strobe, varying the speed of the flashes, making different vivid spatial and color effects jump out from the painting. The room was mesmerized. I read my poem.

They finally turned the lights back on.

Rabbit stood. "Now is the time, folks. Your last chance to escape before I destroy what's left of your mind with my new flick. But I warn you, if you do leave, you'll miss the night when a new star was born. Then we're going to break out the wine and food and really going to party. Peace, love, joy, all blessings."

The lights dimmed and Rabbit let her roll. It was jumpy, grainy and out of focus. You could barely make out what was happening.

Patt, who was sitting on the floor next to me whispered, "Is that a dick?"

"I guess so."

"That looks like Poly!"

"It sure does."

"TURN ON THE LIGHTS. THIS SHOW IS OVER!" someone shouted.

The lights flashed on. Three big cops in plainclothes stood and waved badges. A commotion.

Despite our protests, they shut us down, briefly confiscated Rabbit's film, but then returned it and sent us packing.

We stayed overnight at some friends, then drove back to Colorado the next day. Since the Dropper cars were so unreliable, we drove as a convoy. Patt and I rode in the old Pontiac with Curly and Alteresio. Nobody said much. Curly looked more depressed than I'd ever seen him. Every once in a while Alteresio, who was driving, shook his head, let loose a sardonic cackle, and muttered, "It don't take long to get hip, now, do it?"

We all got back to Drop City at the same time, starving, and unloaded quickly. As we walked through the kitchen door, Drop Lady said, "A letter came from Buckminster Fuller."

Curly perked up. "What does it say? Where is it?"

"On the table. It's addressed to you. I didn't open it."

He stared at the envelope. "I wrote him, told him what we were doing, how we were the first use of domes to house a community."

"Well, open it," Lard said impatiently.

Curly ripped it open. "Congratulations. Drop City is the recipient of the Dymaxion Award for 1966, for remarkable initiative, spirit, and poetically economic structural accomplishments. R. Buckminster Fuller." Curly waved a check. "Five hundred smackers. Just what we need to finish the complex. Trust the powers of the universe and they take care of you."

We were floored.

"We're really having an impact," Clard said in a small voice.

"Fantastic!" Rabbit shook a fist. "Let's dash off a newsletter and tell the world! Even more: I've got a great idea. Listen to this: let's have a festival, a big shindig, as soon as the kitchen complex is done, a whole weekend, maybe more—four or five days, a week—invite everybody, do it right, big time, music, films, poetry, multi-media, everything, the hugest cultural

bash ever seen in these parts. People will pour in from coast to coast!”

“No way.” Curly cut him off morosely.

Jo folded her arms. “I’m against it.”

Poly jumped in. “Why are you always immediately against anything Rabbit suggests, before you’ve even thought about it?”

Lard broke in, “I don’t think it’s a bad idea. Though it needs some refinement.”

“It wouldn’t work until the weather’s nicer,” Clard said. “If we want to have a festival, we’ll have to wait till spring.”

Crayola sighed. “Let’s take some time to talk about it.”

“We don’t have to decide anything now,” I put in.

“My momma’s coming,” Curly said. “She’s going to be living here. I’m not putting her through that.”

That silenced everyone for a minute.

Finally Lard asked, “When is she coming?”

“In three weeks.”

It was hard to imagine Curly’s mother as a Dropper, but they had always said they wanted it to be a family place.

Over the following week we tossed the idea of the festival back and forth. Curly and Drop Lady remained dead set against it. The rest of us went around in slow circles. We didn’t want Curly’s mother to determine what was going to happen.

Finally Rabbit pushed it to a head. “We been talking long enough. We got to make a decision. Either we’re going to have the Joy Festival—which will become legendary—or we decide to fade back into the woodwork.”

“Me and Jo are still totally against it,” Curly said firmly. “It would suck us dry. It would break our back.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

“I’m against it too,” Patt voiced as loudly as she could. She was often not very forthcoming, but made her opinion known about this one. “We already have too many visitors and too much publicity.”

Rabbit banged his fists together. "The festival will turn it to our advantage."

"We've gotten too serious," I said. "We need a good party."

"Let's vote," Poly interjected.

"No," Drop Lady said emphatically. "We can't decide that way."

"Voting is bourgeois," Curly chimed in. "We always been beyond voting."

Rabbit snapped back, "Voting is only bourgeois when it's the bourgeoisie who's voting."

"If you do this festival," Crayola said with a little whine, "I'm taking the girls to their grandmother."

"I know we've never voted before," Clard said. "But we've got to get this settled. Let's make this our one and only vote. A straw poll, just to see where we all stand."

Rabbit banged the table with a spoon. "Okay, everybody who's for the Joy Festival, raise your spoon." His own shot into the air.

One by one hands slowly went up, including mine. Only Curly, Jo, Crayola, and Patt remained opposed.

"Now I move," Rabbit followed, "that we schedule the Drop City Joy Festival for a four-day weekend early in June, 1967. Everybody in favor, wiggle your spoon."

* * *

Chapter 14

While the rest of us hemmed and hawed about Denton and Leeda repainting the aluminum Drop City domes, Rabbit and Poly decided to let them paint theirs. Leeda and Denton jumped right in. While the painting was in progress they were at Drop City every day. I worked with them some.

Rabbit was on a ladder, painting the skylight brick red.

"Denton tells me that you've been looking for land up toward the national forest," I called up to him.

"Yeah."

"In some gorgeous pine forest," Denton put in, dipping his roller in the tray of red paint. "Mountain paradise."

"I wish Drop City was in some beautiful isolated place like that."

"I seen some meadows up there," Rabbit said, "that would be perfect for growing dope."

"Wouldn't you be paranoid?"

"Not if it's off our land. That's why we got to border on the national forest."

"We need to talk more about that," Leeda cut in, rolling the red paint over an aluminum-colored panel. She and Denton were both wearing old straw hats and paint-splattered overalls.

"How's the fundraising coming?" I asked.

"Okay," Denton said.

"We're engaged in a serious redistribution of wealth," Rabbit chuckled. "Leeda and Denton got the keys to the kitchen doors of patrons with money up their wazoos."

"Great," I laughed, mostly at the way he phrased things.

"It might take some time," Denton grunted. "We've got to get it from a series of sources."

When Rabbit finished that side of the skylight, he climbed down and went for some water. As soon as he was gone, Denton asked me, "What do you think about Rabbit? How hard is he to live with?"

I shrugged.

"How hard are you, dear?" Leeda interjected.

"I kind of still like him," I replied. "There are parts of him I like, I mean. He's a character."

"What's the problem between him and Curly?" Denton growled laconically.

"Why don't you ask Curly?"

Curly had been across the way pulling nails out of a recycled two-by-four. As if he sensed we were talking about him, he set the board down and walked toward us, hammer swinging from his apron and crowbar over his shoulder. Curly examined the paint job up close. "I ain't no Big Apple art critic, but this snow job don't look half as bad as I expected." He stuck a fingertip into the wet paint.

"I got a question for you, Curly." Denton began.

"The answer's twenty-four."

"What do you think of Rabbit? What's the problem between you two?"

"I'm a painted mule." He dug the crowbar into the ground.

"What?"

"Did you ever see a trained zebra?"

"In a circus."

"That wasn't a zebra. You can't train a zebra. Rabbit's a zebra. And I'm a painted mule."

* * *

Curly's mother arrived from Brooklyn, with two huge suitcases and a salient Yiddish accent. A couple inches short of five feet, somewhat round, she was a true *knaydl*. He called

her *Mommeleh*. How Jo, the baby, Curly, and Mommeleh all managed to squeeze into that tiny dome was amazing.

Since social life revolved around the kitchen, she jumped right in. All of the Dropper women and Lard were pretty good cooks, but Curly's mommeleh raised our gourmet fare to an unforeseen level. Her presence seemed to smooth out the tension between the rest of us and Rabbit and Poly, so they began to join us in dinner more regularly. Lard became Mommeleh's cooking protégé and he would flash his eyes adoringly as he followed her instructions. She also brought out a bit of the mama's boy in Curly, something I had never noticed before. During the day she would walk up the hill to where the guys were working, bringing a plate of rugelach or some other snack. We were careful not to smoke dope around her and she pretended not to notice.

One day, while Rabbit and Poly had gone into town shopping for groceries, Mommeleh was cooking up a big noodle kugel with tsimmes, and realized that we were out of vanilla, which she needed for her blintzes. She sent Lard into town to fetch some.

He came back peeved. "I was walking by that steak restaurant on Commercial Street and who do you think I saw sitting there munching on big ones? Rabbit, Poly, and Kaitlin."

Curly punched his palm. "While we're eating moldy cheese in our blintzes, they're sneaking around living the high life!"

"They saw me too, and almost sank through the floor. Those steaks looked really good, with french fries. I should have gone in, sat down and ate my share."

Rabbit and Poly didn't get back by dinner time, so we were eating when they finally appeared, carrying bags of groceries. They set the bags down, put a few things away, made up plates for themselves, and joined us at the table.

As they sat down, Curly said, "You got to cut down on that red meat, man. Take years off your life."

"Don't worry about it," Rabbit snapped.

Clard jumped in. "I just don't appreciate you blowing our last few dollars on yourselves."

"We didn't spend Drop City money on that restaurant." Poly twirled a lock of hair on one finger.

"Not to get upset," Mommeleh cut in. "It's only money."

"My ex-husband sent Kaitlin a check."

"How come when anybody else gets a check it's Drop City money," Alteresio grumbled, his mouth full of noodles, "but when you get one it isn't?"

"Kaitlin has to have her protein."

"That means you're taking protein away from the other kids." Crayola intoned indignantly.

"Why don't you all just compromise," Curly's momma said.

"Stay out of this, Mommeleh," Curly muttered.

"How long have you been getting checks that you didn't share?" Alteresio grunted.

"Don't be so fucking insulting."

"How can we ever scrape together money to leave if we put every penny into the common pot?" Poly remonstrated.

"So when are you leaving?"

"We don't know."

"How do you expect us to trust you?" Alteresio said.

"How do you expect *us* to trust *you*?" Rabbit suddenly stood, knocking over his plate, noodles spilling on Alteresio's lap.

Alteresio took them in his hand, laughed sardonically and threw them back at Rabbit, also hitting Poly and Lard.

Rabbit grabbed a handful off my plate and hurled them at him, also splattering Curly, Clard, and me.

In an instant noodles and vegetables were flying all over the room.

Everybody stopped short.

"It's only money," Mommeleh said again.

Curly forced a laugh. "We got to see the humor in this." He pulled a noodle off his nose.

"Yeah, it's real funny." Rabbit tried to guffaw.

"Does anybody want some blintzes?" Mommeleh asked sheepishly.

Everybody calmed down, apologized, and cleaned up the mess.

Two days later Curly and Jo drove Mommeleh to the train station. They were pretty glum.

"No big deal. It just didn't work out. She's going to stay with my brother in Cincinnati."

* * *

I was working with Lard nailing in the two-by-four floor of the kitchen complex, when Patt hurried over, distressed. "There's an FBI agent here."

"Where?"

"Near the theater dome, talking to Curly."

Lard and I rushed over.

A guy in a tweedy suit, bow tie, and narrow-brimmed felt hat, holding a pencil and pad. We came up behind him. He must have seen us in the corner of his eye, because he side stepped to keep us all in view. There was something sleazy about him.

Curly was giving him the usual spiel about us just being an artist colony, putting on his thick Brooklyn accent for effect. "Man, I don't know what lies they told you about us, but we're just poor innocent struggling artists, clean like a arrow, straight like a summer day."

"Don't try that bull on me. I know a whole lot better. I got a file full of reports that say different. I know you better than your mother does." He was middle-aged, his suit was worn and shiny at the elbows, his blue tie dirty. I could see the alcoholic veins in his nose and cheeks. He turned to Lard and me. "What are your names?"

"What's yours?" I said.

"Don't play games with me. This is serious, boy."

"Okay. I'm Ishmael and he's Lard."

He took notes. "Your full names."

"Those are our names," Lard said.

"We don't bother nobody," Curly cut in. "We're good neighbors. Just folks. What do you want with us?"

"We got reports of minors having bad acid trips down here."

"That's crazy. We got no drugs. We got nothing to hide."

"I'm warning you, clean up!"

"We've got nothing to clean up."

"Anytime I want I can send down one of my beatnik finks and bust you. Anytime! Like that!" He snapped his fingers. "I don't want to have to. I don't want trouble. I want to help you. You're in my area, you're my responsibility. Get clean."

"We are clean," I said.

"This place is a known center for criminal activities."

"We're artists," Lard cut in. "Is art a crime?"

"I got reports of drugs, dealers, draft dodgers, deserters, tax evaders, communists, anarchists, troublemakers, and scofflaws of every stripe in this place. You're a blot on my record. If you keep on like this, we're going to shut you down so fast you won't know what hit you, and put you away for a long time." He pulled business cards out of his pocket and handed them to Curly, Lard, and me. "Selling Food Stamps is a federal offense. Harboring felons is a felony. You can call collect." He spun on his heel and stomped away.

"We better bury the stash," Curly said.

Within minutes we were surrounded by the other Droppers.

"Let's put out a newsletter quick," Clard said. "Let everybody know we're being attacked by the Feds."

After that we were wary of every car that drove past and suspicious of every stranger. We were on the lookout for the "beatnik fink." We smoked dope very surreptitiously.

Two days later Curly and I were rummaging around the junkyard when a little green coupe scooted into the driveway, a foreign sports car with a nose like a bullet, big round headlights, chrome grill and bumpers, Illinois plates. We

watched a young guy in a golf hat climb out, with longish hair and a mustache below a pointy nose. He pulled off leather driving gloves, threw them into the front seat and stood looking around. Then he saw us and started over.

I mumbled, "He looks like a fed."

"He sure do."

When the guy was still twenty feet away, he called out, "This place is smaller than I expected. But the domes are great." He stuck out his hand. "I'm from Chicago. I read about you. Name's Ed."

Curly took his hand. "Ed the Fed?"

"What?"

He said he was a designer, had become disenchanted with the whole corporate scene, had read about Drop City in an underground paper, quit his job, and was driving around the country looking for something better. Very warily we gave him the tour.

The word spread around Drop City quickly, and everybody checked him out. He seemed a lot straighter than anybody else, at least straighter than any of the guys. Everybody had an opinion about whether or not he was the "beatnik fink" that the agent had threatened us with.

The conversation over lunch was pretty awkward. Everybody hoped he'd just leave, but he said, "Is it okay if I stay a few days? I've got a sleeping bag. I can sleep on the floor. I can help with the work. I've got a little money."

Everybody glanced at each other.

"Sure," Clard finally said. "Anybody can stay. You can stay."

Almost instantly he got the moniker Ed the Fed.

That night Clard, Lard, Patt and I were sitting around reading *Doctor Strange* comics and watching "Star Dreck" (as Curly called it) on TV, when Ed the Fed said, "I've got a few joints with me. Anybody want to smoke?" He held several big jays in his open palm.

There was a dead silence.

Clard said, "We don't smoke dope here. If you're holding, you better take it off the property."

"Really? You've got to be kidding."

Patt stood abruptly. "Excuse me, I've got to go." She hurried off.

"He's not kidding," Lard said.

"It's true. We're totally straight," I confirmed.

"You're serious," Ed the Fed said.

"We never know," Clard replied, "when some beatnik fink might be coming down here to bust us."

"You guys are paranoid. I been waiting all the way from Chicago to share this stuff with you. Let's just smoke it, then it'll be gone, and there'll be nothing to bust. It's great stuff."

Rabbit came in and walked over.

"No," Clard said. "You better just take it off the property."

Fed slipped the joints back into his pocket. "Is it okay if I smoke some in my car?"

"As long as you park it off the property."

He shrugged. "Okay." He got up and started to the door.

"I'll walk you," Rabbit said. "There's something I want to talk to you about."

They disappeared out the door.

"Rabbit wants to get his dope," Lard said. "He's going to get us busted."

"He wouldn't do that," I said.

"I bet he's taking him up to his dome right now," Clard responded.

I got up and looked out the door. Sure enough, Rabbit and Ed the Fed were walking up to Rabbit's dome.

"You're right. But Rabbit wouldn't smoke with him. He wouldn't take a chance like that."

We sat around for a while watching "Star Dreck." I kept thinking about that dope and wondering how good it really was. During a commercial Lard walked out. Then a little while

later, so did Clard. I was there watching alone for a while, then realized I was bored and decided to step outside.

I looked at the lights in Rabbit's dome for a few minutes, then ambled up. I heard music and knocked.

A blast of smoke. Rabbit, Poly Ester, Lard, and Clard were all sitting on pillows with Ed the Fed, smiling sheepishly and red-eyed.

Fed held out a joint to me. I took a big hit and sat down.

Ed the Fed settled into the community. After a while we stopped suspecting him of being a Fed, but the Dropper name stuck. He turned out to be a nice guy with the best sense of cynical humor in the place, never hesitant about telling anybody they're full of shit. He loved the intricacies of the kitchen design and took the job of angle man, running the radial arm saw. Ed the Fed's Karmann Ghia, kind of a stretched out VW bug, a little car with a friendly face of headlights, long hood nose, mustache radiator grills, and smiley bumper mouth, became a Dropper car, and we felt really cool zipping around Trinidad in it.

* * *

Little by little the panels for the kitchen complex took shape. Bear got back and took charge of the erection process.

Bear brought his friend Stewart, who lived in California and was just planning to start the *Whole Earth Catalog*. He was also suing the Pentagon for not publishing the first satellite photos of the earth. He thought that the photos were being withheld for political reasons. If people could actually see the earth was one, how could they continue acting as if everything was not connected? Stewart became a regular visitor.

While we were finishing the structure for the complex, we were also laying electrical wires and plumbing underground. We blasted out a big hole for a cesspool. We'd decided that we'd had enough of outhouses and were going to come into the twentieth century with flush toilets.

At Drop City we never got building permits or inspections, we just did it. Nobody from Trinidad ever bothered or

questioned us. We were lucky. Later we heard about other communities having all kinds of problems with zoning and building code restrictions. Rural Colorado was just getting zoned, so maybe we were slipping in under the wire. As I understood it, there was a federal order that all America had to be zoned. States not in compliance would lose moneys, so the states in turn required it of every county. It was a big boom for city planners, who ran around like traveling salesmen foisting plans like funny money on credulous small town councils.

We wound up with big stacks of triangles and squares for the kitchen complex zone, with all the sides four feet long, covered with cartops. Finally the big day arrived to raise the structure. Denton and Leeda came (not bringing Marigold, who had returned to Boulder). Several other people arrived: a few folks from around Taos, whom I'd met at the gallery gig; a couple of sensitive mountainmen who worked with Bear in the Albuquerque area, Hickson and Karanga, the latter a Viet Nam vet; and Stewart. They were all talking excitedly about starting new communes and communities.

Above the first ring of cartops we used ropes and pulleys to hoist the big heavy panels into place, but mainly we just got everybody together and relied on humanpower. Even Rabbit came out for this one.

Everything went well and fit perfectly until the last panel at the top of the last dome of the complex. We shook it and banged it, but to no effect. After dark we gave up with the panel half in and half out. We felt gratified that the complex was finally up. Except for that last panel it looked great. The structure kept groaning and creaking.

I came out of my dome early the next morning. It had snowed during the night and there was a thin layer of flakes blowing on the desert sand.

Bear and a few others were standing on the hill looking at the complex. They seemed in awe.

During the night something had popped. The complex was no longer creaking. The last panel had somehow slipped into place all by itself and the structure was perfect.

We got a lot of responses from our first newsletter. One was a request from a magazine called *Inner Space, The Magazine of the Psychedelic Community*, to write an article on Drop City. We weren't sure if this was the kind of underground publicity we wanted, because we had to tiptoe around getting labeled as a drug community. Nonetheless we decided to go ahead, stressing that we were an artist colony. I didn't have any problem with the group editing my writing, so I wound up writing it. It came out in the same issue as a report on the First Human Be-In in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, a prelude to the upcoming Summer of Love.

In response to Clard's ad in the newsletter, a letter arrived from a woman in Cincinnati, an artist named Jal, looking for a new home. I assumed that Clard would pick up on her, since he had advertised, but either he got cold feet or something put him off, probably her kid. It was Lard who responded. After exchanging a few letters, she arrived with her ten-year-old son Snoop and they squeezed into the cartop dome.

To everybody's surprise Lard actually hit it off with his mail-order bride. Jal was smart and nice. She was heavily into the Ba'ha'i religion, a little ham-fisted at times, but managed to restrain herself from pushing it over the top. With her son we were developing a big crew of kids. We had some degree of communal responsibility for them, but there really was not a lot to do, except spend some time with them. The kids were very autonomous, coming and going by themselves.

Jal became the Drop City hairdresser, at least for the guys. Before Jal, some of the dudes seemed to go for days without dragging a comb across their heads. She'd set us down one by one and fuss over our wild locks. The way she did it was very sensual, and made you feel like you were a very important person getting a very important haircut. All the guys became stylishly coifed, if only for a few hours.

Other than Jal, Clard didn't receive any replies to his ad, but one day he came to breakfast with a pretty girl hanging tightly onto his arm, with long blond braids and a couple of crooked teeth that gave her character. She was a local kid, a young sweet thing, a girl-next-door type right out of Trinidad

High School, from a poor uneducated family living in the trailer camp on the other side of town. There wasn't much extraordinary about Suzie Spotless except her sunny disposition. Before I knew it, she moved in. Clard, Suzie, Lard, Jal, and Snoop were all squeezed into the small one-room cartop dome.

Our second Drop City Newsletter broadcast how we were being threatened by the FBI and attacked by the postal authorities. We announced the Dymaxion Award and the Joy Festival. Although we really planned the Festival for four days, we only put the first three days on the flier, considering that the fourth, Monday, would be a day of winding down.

* * *

Chapter 15

Just like people do anywhere, we discussed news and politics at Drop City. But it was hard to get information out there, except the pabulum offered in the mass media, and sometimes we didn't listen to that at all. Mainstream news reporting was lame in New York and San Francisco, where you had to search to find alternative views and ideas, but compared with rural Colorado, the coast media were paragons of openness and scholarship. Here the media were almost air tight. The main radio stations we got at Drop City were broadcast nationally from Denver, Chicago, or Kansas City, and were very straight. Public policy debate was the right vs. the far right. I relied for news more on talking to people who passed through.

Much to my relief, local people were more open than the media. Their thoughts were much broader, although they often couldn't express it, since the media had defined the acceptable limits of debate in a very narrow way.

Curly and I were in the back room of the Trinidad Safeway, picking up moldy cheese, when the dairy guy asked me, "Is it true that you kids out there are all communists?"

Curly and I exchanged a silent glance. "We're not communists," Curly replied. "We're commuunists. Communalists."

"The produce man says you're something like one of them kibbutzes in Israel."

"Yeah, a little. We're always kibbitzing."

"Did you see those pictures on TV of all those Chinese school kids parading their principal through the street wearing a dunce cap?"

"Yeah."

"What do you kids out there think about stuff like that?"

“Everybody has different opinions.”

“How about you?”

“It’s hard to know what’s really happening from what they show on TV,” I said.

“Those pictures could mean anything,” Curly jumped in. “Before you believe what those TV guys say about China, listen to what the Chinese say about themselves.”

“How can I?” the dairy guy said. “They never let them speak for themselves.”

“Exactly.”

The dairy guy shook his head. “Man, when I was in high school, we’d have given anything to do that to our principal. That dumb sucker dedicated his whole life to breaking kids’ spirits.”

Curly and I looked at each other and laughed.

When we saw pictures like that on TV at Drop City we all cheered. Aspects of the Cultural Revolution at first looked like a Chinese form of our own cultural revolution. But we all became disturbed when the pictures got increasingly violent.

Through the underground press we began to hear more and more about the “liberated zones” of Viet Nam, the areas controlled by the National Liberation Front, where the old regime and the US Army had been expelled. These zones were supposedly organized by the peasants themselves for their own survival. We had an image of self-organized communalism, which may or may not have had any truth, but it resonated with the self-organized “liberated zone” that we were trying to eke out in the belly of the beast.

* * *

By the time we moved the kitchen over to the new complex, there were a number of new people sleeping on various floors around Drop City. With such a space crunch, Alteresio and Crayola didn’t feel that they could spread out into the upstairs dome. So Patt and I decided to stay in the top of the hole, and we passed on the old kitchen to a new family.

Fletcher Oak and Nancy Maple moved into the old kitchen with their two young boys, Beech and Juniper, and their dog Ransom. Oak, whose hair stuck out like a bristlecone pine, was a photographer and, like Curly, ran around poking his cameras in everybody's face. Nancy was another fine artist. Ransom was the best dog at Drop City, with a lot of character and smarts, though he kept coming home with porcupine quills sticking out of his nose and mouth, howling pitifully. Fletcher became buddies with Jim Quim, another new guy, on the diminutive side, who seriously liked his dope, studied horticulture, and always wore a red XL tee shirt swimming around his knees.

Fletcher's friend Diggy Meg arrived with her young son and daughter, Lupine and Gloria, and jammed into the old kitchen with the others. She had known Fletcher in Chicago, where she'd been a piano teacher until her marriage fell apart. She jumped right in, sewing and crafting beautiful objects out of junk.

Our kid population was now up to nine and they were quite a pack. Drop City was starting to feel like a big family place. Lupine and Beech, eight and nine years old, hung out together, and so did Gloria and Juniper, both almost two and usually naked. Kaitlin was somewhat a loner, as was Snoop. Alteresio and Crayola's girls, Elizabeth and Toby, four and five, played mainly with each other. But sometimes the whole gang would run like a pack around Drop City together, into some wild mischief or fantasy.

As the Joy Festival approached, the trickle of visitors became a stream, then a flood. Large numbers poured in every day, many on their way to San Francisco for the Summer of Love. Most just passed through or stayed the night, but many stuck around for the Festival, and some moved in. Drop City became truly chaotic. The hippie explosion was about to hit the national mass media.

Crayola announced she and the girls were going to stay with her parents near Boulder until after the Festival; it was getting too crazy for her. She said they'd be back when things calmed down. Alteresio and she stuffed the station wagon with their things and took off. We were sad to see her go, Jo most of all.

When Alteresio got back he said that Crayola and the girls were not going to return. As soon as she was gone, it had become clear to her that Drop City was not where she wanted to settle down. Alteresio mulled around at loose ends for a couple of days, then announced he was leaving to join them and start a “destruction company” in Boulder, tearing down structures, which he considered himself good at. He threw his paintings, rifle, clothes, and junk in a pickup. His last words, out the truck window, shiny black hair in his eyes, sardonic smile twisting his lips, was, “It sure don’t take long to get hip.”

Curly and Drop Lady were affected and saddened by Alteresio and Crayola’s leaving, although the rest of us took it in stride. I think it meant to them that Drop City was never going to become the quiet family place they wanted, although Alteresio’s crazy side wasn’t exactly quiet. They had already been saddened by the rapid departure of Curly’s mommeleh. Now Curly and Jo seemed more serious and subdued. They talked and joked less.

The previous fall I would never have guessed that Rabbit and Poly would still be in Drop City at this point, and Alteresio and Crayola would be the ones to go.

As we made plans and preparations for the Joy Festival, Curly and Drop Lady seemed to be bracing themselves for an onslaught. “Now it’s too late,” Curly kept repeating. “It’s too late.” They grew increasingly wary and distant.

As soon as Alteresio was gone, Ed the Fed, Jim Quim, and Diggy Meg and her kids moved into the bottom of the hole, partitioning it off.

* * *

One day I walked into the complex and there was Marigold cutting carrots with Patt at the table between the two stoves. I bit my lip and went over.

“How’ve you been?”

“Going through too many changes, as always.” The corners of Marigold’s mouth rose and sank like a comic and tragic mask. “This jerk I was in love with couldn’t make up his mind.

Same old story. Just more of the same. My life is a broken record. I've been boring Patt with all the details."

"I don't mind listening," Patt said.

Marigold set down her knife and began a fragmented account of how some guy in Boulder she'd been staying with kicked her out. Meanwhile, Ed the Fed stole up behind her and dug a finger into each of her love handles. She almost jumped out of her skin and sent pieces of carrot flying.

"That's in return for what you did to me this morning," he laughed.

"You are mean! Aren't I paranoid enough already?"

"What did you do to him?"

"I just put my cold feet on his stomach."

"While I was asleep."

"Okay, now we're even. But you should sweep up the carrots."

"You dropped them."

"You made me."

Marigold had arrived late the night before and had already found a space in the hole.

I really liked her, but she made me uncomfortable. Patt and I had become very attached, and neither of us wanted to complicate things at this point. Our relationship was complicated enough by itself. Being in such close quarters made things touchy.

* * *

With all the new people arriving, we had to face the over-population problem. The kitchen became a shambles and there was always a line for the bathrooms. We finally held a meeting and decided that there had to be a population limit, which we set at thirty-five, even though there were already over fifty people at Drop City. Beyond that limit, there would be a three-day maximum for guests sleeping in the complex (that wouldn't apply to the Festival). If anybody was going to stay longer than

that, they had to be asked to do it, at least by one person. The loophole was that the population limit wouldn't apply to anyone who came in as a lover of a Dropper. We didn't really believe that any rule could prevent love. Since that was the way most new people connected, it meant that almost everybody was excluded from the so-called rule. Most everybody would briefly couple, then break up and each would take a new partner. The rule made for a lot more brief, casual fucking.

Feather Tom, Silly Michelle, Little Joe, Gypsy David, Baby Michael Bippl, Moron Normal, the Hebe Sisters, Jasper Button, John the Hair, Mother, Danu, Riceman Bill, Trees, Boston John, Bernadette, Brenda, Aurora, Zowie, Meher Charlie, Big Bill, Mantis, Kentucky Jeethro, Pabla and her multicultural rainbow of children. The list went on and on. Each had a story, each was coming from somewhere and going somewhere.

Silly Michelle had sparkling dark eyes, a sweet smile and a talent for cooking; she made tasty meals out of nothing. She always seemed to be agreeable but then went off and did whatever she wanted. Like Marigold, Silly Michelle was an escapee from a family who attacked her for refusing to be just like them.

John the Hair had crazy, kinky locks that stuck out the sides like two big halos, and laughed a lot. Jasper Button always seemed to be fighting depression, except when he was with John the Hair telling visitors that they were from another planet. People always professed disbelief. They'd say they could prove it, because they had no belly buttons. They'd both lift their shirts and show their smooth stomachs. Many visitors ran. Both of their navels had been ruptured at birth then sewn so there was almost no visible scar. Each was the only person the other had ever met without a navel; it bound them together as brothers of a sort.

Feather Tom had trouble speaking. He couldn't get things out. He didn't expect anybody to be listening or understanding. He stammered and stuttered. He cut his hair in a spiral and wore a little Robin Hood hat with a feather. He sewed a foxtail onto the back of his pants. He stood on one foot for hours, the other foot against his thigh, knee stuck out, whittling or playing a wooden flute and smiling a lot. If you didn't know him

you might think he was an idiot, but Feather Tom was really very sharp. He just kept his thoughts to himself.

Ed the Fed, Marigold, Silly Michelle, Diggy Meg, Jasper Button, John the Hair, and Feather Tom became a little circle. One day they seemed to couple off in a certain way, but the next day they seemed to be coupled differently. Nobody asked too many questions.

Soon the hole was subdivided with so many partitions that it looked like a catacomb.

Feather Tom, Diggy Meg, and Marigold organized a crafts brigade to make stuff to sell at the Festival. Tom taught others how to carve flutes and make drums and jew's harps; Diggy Meg and Marigold organized a group making earrings and tie-dying tee shirts. Our resident artists busily prepared their works for display in the theater dome.

* * *

Ed the Fed was somewhat a loner at first; he didn't connect for very long with Marigold or any of the other women who floated in and out of Drop City. I understood why one day when I drove with him and Patt in the red Chevy truck to Trinidad. On the way back Patt and I began bickering because I'd refused to stop at some store. I finally pulled over to the side of the road and walked into the desert.

When I got back, Fed was standing outside the truck, fuming at having been drawn into our fight. "Damn it, man, why do you get so mad at her?"

"She's driving me crazy."

"Don't take her seriously! She's a girl!"

Ed the Fed however, got his own comeuppance when he became involved with a woman named Mother, who forced him to take her very seriously.

Mother acted tough and wild, at least in public. She didn't have any middle gears, so was always running around bumping into things. She was from Connecticut but had just spent a couple of years in New York City, until she got blown

out. We called her Mother because she told stories about her affiliation on the Lower East Side with the group known as the Mother Fuckers, somewhere between a social club and a street gang. Fed and Mother made a very unlikely couple, but so did Patt and I. When they first got together Fed walked around for a week with a big smile on his face. Then they spent a week fighting. One day when Mother, Patt, and Marigold were all hopelessly beating him in scrabble, Fed cried, "Wipe those obnoxious smirks off your faces," threw the board into the air, and drove off. A few days later we got a card from him from New Mexico. Ed the Fed had decided to cool out and work with Bear there for a while. While he was gone, Mother picked up with a dude in leather and rode off on the back of a Harley hog, shouting, "I'll be back for the Joy Festival!"

* * *

Baby Michael Bippl was about twice the size of Moron Normal. Bippl, with wild curly black hair, appeared one day in the kitchen complex, made himself comfortable on the worn red velvet couch and tuned his guitar for an hour. By the time he was done a half dozen Droppers had started banging on drums and pots, blowing recorders and flutes. Finally Bippl began to strum chords, in the midst of the Dropper Band cacophony, and started to sing, loud and flat.

After the craziness died down, I asked him, "Would you play that song again, so I can hear the words."

"Can't take the chance. I wrote that song. You might steal it."

Next thing I knew, Bippl was staying in the hole. Away from his guitar Bippl was a badly coordinated guy, always hitting his thumb with a hammer and tripping over his shoelaces. He had the biggest infantile streak in Drop City, which was saying a lot, so he also became known as Baby Michael.

Moron Normal, a little guy who spoke like a speed freak, his jaw so frozen he could barely pop the words out, set up a lean-to in the middle of the kitchen complex. I told him to take it down and about our three-day maximum policy for visitors in the complex. "Has anybody asked you to stay?"

He stammered, "I don't remember."

"Then you have to leave."

"If you don't like it maybe you're the one who has to leave."

Soon both Bippl and Moron were sleeping in the hole, and became the gatekeepers.

The Hebe sisters, one obese and the other a skeleton, were zinged-out basket cases too dazed to do any work. All the Dropper guys ran away when they saw them coming, except Moron and Bippl. For a couple of days Moron had a Hebe on each arm. The next day Bippl had them both and looked drowning, while Moron stammered how glad he was to be rid of them.

Then Cloudy arrived, Diggy Meg's sister, quite a few notches classier than the Hebes. Before nightfall, Bippl had kicked both Hebes out of his bed. They were fuming, but found a place in the pile sleeping in the TV room in the complex. Bippl floated around after Cloudy like a hungry shadow, grinning.

Danu was the oldest guy at Drop City, in his fifties, with tie-dyed rainbow shirts, horizontally striped baggy pants, long locks on the sides but a little thin on top, a lot of jewelry and amulets. He spent most of his time reading Eastern mystical texts, taking drugs, and having sex with the youngest girls he could find. He didn't shake hands but poured his palm into yours like molten rubber. A year before he had been a US Navy lieutenant, a career officer with a wife and two kids.

Gypsy David, from a Pittsburgh ghetto, liked a lot of dope and loud music, and yelled when anybody annoyed him. He blasted rock and blues records continuously in the complex, night and day, with the volume as high as it would go. Gypsy David couldn't understand why anybody would want quiet. After a while this started a turf war. When somebody from the quiet faction, like myself, couldn't stand it, we'd walk over and pull the plug. Then Gypsy David or another Dropper from the loud music faction would blast it on again.

Riceman Bill, ascetically macrobiotic, constantly chatted about nutrition, consciousness, brown rice, and vegetables. His concern with food stemmed in part from health problems, and in part from his being hungry all the time. A few days after he and his wife arrived, she split, leaving him in Drop City with

their little son Doodle. Riceman was very sad for a while, then one day I heard him singing as he was digging a hole, “Every little breeze seems to whisper Tureeze...” He had hooked up with a girl named Trees, a new arrival. Trees had a sweet tooth and a taste for luxuries, and constantly tattled about New York French restaurants. Opposites do attract.

Meher Charlie, another Chicagoan, a jazz guitarist, got his name because he always carried around a picture of Meher Baba, the old Indian sage-saint who had taken a vow of silence twenty years earlier. Under the picture was written, “I was that one, I was this one, and now I am Meher Baba. Don’t Worry, Be Happy: I love you more than you love yourself.” Baba’s followers claimed that before he died he would break his silence and utter just one word, which would either enlighten the world or end it. In Meher Charlie’s picture, Meher Baba was cross-eyed and wore a bushy handlebar mustache. Meher Charlie loved the idea of a world savior looking so goofy.

Meher Charlie sawed a mean guitar, often plugged into an amplifier, and became the defacto leader of the Dropper band. Anybody could be in the band. You didn’t have to know the slightest thing about music. All you had to do was grab a flute, drum, harmonica, ocarina, kazoo, or whatever noisemaker was handy and start blowing or banging away. It was the most amazing freeform cacophony. Everybody had a good time except people listening with sensitive musicians’ ears, like Patt. Coming from a musical family she was appalled by the noise.

But Meher Charlie led the group in actually playing familiar songs. Baby Michael Bippl, our other guitarist, rarely sat in with the Dropper Band when Meher Charlie was holding court because Bippl was too perfectionist and critical to play well with others.

Meher Charlie wrote a song that kind of became the Drop City anthem. He called it the Drop City Blues. It had no fixed verses and wasn’t really a blues. It was only a refrain which the Dropper Band played over and over again, interspersed with freeform craziness:

Ooo-eee baby / Ooo-ooo-eee / Doo-bop-shabam / Drop Ci-tee

The Dropper band never got tired of playing it, though it passed beyond wearisome to most listeners. The musicians

always seemed to be enjoying themselves but there was something mournful in the sound that made me think of regret for a lost paradise. Here at Drop City we were trying for Paradise Regained, but in reality it was still Paradise Lost, by the beautiful banks of the Purgatoire. We finally heard that Meher Baba had died without speaking.

* * *

Usually the only time I saw Rabbit now was at meals and beating down the sun, which he did every evening with a group of the new people. He mostly hung out with new people. I kept expecting Rabbit to spout some epithet in front of Gypsy David and get creamed, but Gypsy and Rabbit actually became kind of buds, and would beat down the sun together. Anyway, Gypsy was loose with epithets too, and called him Honkey Rabbit.

Clard painted crystals on his boots. Lard was reading a *Dr. Strange* comic. We were in the cartop dome. "Rabbit still says he's leaving," Clard intoned, "but meanwhile he's made himself into a second center. A lot of the new people revolve around him."

"He sure goes through them awfully fast," I said.

Lard looked up from his comic. "Rabbit just doesn't get it. He doesn't understand what Drop City is all about."

Clard's eyes narrowed. "What it's all about to us. He gets it, but Drop City is just about something different to him. And to a lot of the new people, who'll still be here after he leaves."

* * *

The news media in Denver, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Boulder, and Trinidad had all done pieces on Drop City, some pro, some con, which had been picked up by various papers around the country, but until now our reputation as an underground cultural center was still not that widespread.

A couple of weeks before the Festival a reporter and photographer from *Time* magazine appeared. Rabbit, ecstatic

and triumphant, led them around like a drum major. Curly and Drop Lady hid out. The people from *Time* said they were planning a cover story on hippies, and we would be a feature.

A few days later, the mayor of Trinidad, the guy who ran the barber shop, came out to Drop City. The news about *Time* magazine had flashed around Trinidad, and we were suddenly important local celebrities. The mayor turned out to be a pretty regular guy, and invited us to build a float and participate in the upcoming annual Independence Day parade, of which he was to be the grand marshal.

* * *

Chapter 16

A week before the Festival, Giovanni, my old friend from New York, showed up at Drop City. In a letter he'd said he might come out, but I hadn't really expected him. He rarely traveled since it took him away from his beloved piano. A sensitive guy with long beautiful fingers, he supported himself accompanying and teaching, and spent most of his time practicing classical pieces.

We were standing outside the back door of the complex. "Have you seen Ernesto or Kugo?" I asked.

"In the street a few times. I was never really that close with either one, you know. Kugo's just the same. He's back with his wife. I think she's supporting him. Ernesto's involved with some radical group. I met him in Thompkins Square park. He tried to sell me this political newspaper, then just gave it to me. I couldn't figure out what he was talking about. It was all in this Marxist jargon."

"I thought he went off to medical school."

He shrugged. "He said he was working in some hospital as an orderly."

"Ernesto? You must have got it wrong."

"I don't think so. He said he'd dropped out."

"There's got to be more to the story. How's Otis?"

Giovanni grimaced. "I didn't see much of him all last summer and fall. He had hepatitis B. He was pissed off at me. We kept having this off and on relationship, breaking up and getting back together again. It was terrible. We'd fight, so I'd feel bad and go cruising, and that would make it worse. I kept picking up tricks who knew him and then went and told him. He did the same thing of course but he considered that what he did was different. At the time I thought it was black and white power games, but now I don't know. I got really

depressed. I was burned out on that world. Anonymous sex is like water there. I wanted to settle down. But at that point Otis got involved with this Chinese bodybuilder. Anyway, Otis went over to his apartment one day and he'd been murdered."

"Murdered?"

"You don't want to know how. It was ugly. They never found out who did it. It looked like a trick. It shook Otis to the core. And me too. Really sobered us up. We're close again now. Not as lovers. That's over. Look, do me a favor, don't tell anybody here about any of this, okay?"

"Don't worry, I won't."

"I mean, don't even mention that I'm gay. If I want somebody to know I'll tell them myself."

"Most people here don't gossip. At least not much."

He had been openly gay in New York, at least among my old circle of friends.

"Ishmael!" Marigold stood in the complex doorway. "Could you help me dump a tub of water?"

"Sure." I followed her inside, and Giovanni came with me. Marigold often asked me to do things for her, a little coquettishly. We had an unspoken bond, a little secret. "Marigold, this is an old friend of mine, Giovanni. He's a pianist."

"I used to play too," she said.

"Really? What do you like?"

"Chopin. Mozart."

The next thing I knew, Giovanni was sharing her cubby in the hole. She was the first woman I'd ever seen him with. They seemed to glow, like young couples do when they're first exploring each other. I'd have thought Giovanni an unlikely candidate for a Dropper, inasmuch as he had a solitary disposition, we didn't have a piano, and he had never worked with his hands, except to tune pianos. Now to my surprise, he joined in our work crews and seemed to be getting into the community swing. He fit in as someone who was a spiritual seeker, with few worldly attachments beyond his piano. He had been a divinity student and had taken up with Subud, a form

of Sufi which, in a group meeting called a *latihan*, practiced a kind of direct spiritual experience. One of his few prized possessions at Drop City was a book by the medieval Sufi Ibn Arabi, which Meher Charlie immediately borrowed. The two of them hit it off over their shared Eastern spiritual interests, although Giovanni detested the noise of the Dropper band.

* * *

Marigold told me that one of the new guys in the hole, Kentucky Jeethro, had a rifle and a pistol. That really bothered me. First Rabbit's and Alteresio's hunting rifles, and now this.

At first I thought Kentucky Jeethro was gay, because his hair and beard were bleached and dark at the roots, but he quickly hooked up with a girl named Mantis.

I asked him about the guns.

"Where I come from," he said, in his thick Southern accent, "everybody carries arms. Don't worry. I don't keep 'em loaded."

Jeethro and Rabbit went hunting together once or twice, but soon Jeethro was going hunting alone, almost every day. He also had traps, and did trapping. The next thing I knew he was cooking up a raccoon in the kitchen. Over the next week, all kinds of critters appeared in the kitchen: possums, porcupines, squirrels, even lizards. Even Rabbit was disturbed.

Drop Lady opened the freezer. Her jaw dropped at the sight of the line-up of small birds. She shook her finger at Jeethro. "This has got to stop."

"If I can't trap and hunt," Jeethro complained. "I might as well leave."

But, like Rabbit before him, Jeethro stayed.

One day a vehicle roared past my dome. I hurried out and saw him and Mantis riding in circles about the property on a new little motor scooter. Everybody was taking rides on it, whizzing around, falling off.

"Who does it belong to?"

"Us."

“Great. Where did it come from?”

“I bought it.” Jeethro skidded off down the road.

Clard was standing there, looking glum. “The money to buy that scooter came from our bank account. He cleaned us out.”

Jeethro had been put on the account only days before. The communal bank account instantly became defunct. Nobody was willing to put any more money into it.

A couple of days later a sheriff’s car pulled into the driveway. Out of the window, the deputy, a Chicano, said, “We got a call from those FBI up in Denver. They’re sending down one of their guys to check you out again. Now we don’t want no trouble out here.”

Later that day Lard came up to me and said, “Jeethro’s gone. He and Mantis took off on the scooter. He’s a deserter from the Marines. I gave him the name of my underground contact in Albuquerque, the one who helped me get my 4F. They’ll slip him into Canada.”

I was stunned. Then I understood his bleached hair.

At dawn the next morning Ed the Fed banged on my door. “The FBI’s here.”

I jumped into my pants. Outside the complex door near the hole, stood the same FBI agent in the same tweedy suit, bow tie, and narrow-brimmed felt hat, holding his pencil and pad, talking to Curly and Clard. A few Droppers were walking toward them, while others stood watching from around the property.

The FBI agent spun to meet me. “Don’t ever come up behind me! You might get hurt!” He backed to the complex wall and watched Droppers converging in front of him. He waved his arms. “Freeze! That’s close enough! All of you, go about your business. Nobody leaves the property.” He glanced up to the parking lot, where the deputy sheriff stood near his car, arms folded, shaking his head.

The Droppers mostly sat down on the ground and watched.

“I’m here looking for felons. I’ve got descriptions. I need to get a good look at everybody here. Have them file down here four at a time.”

Curly walked away. "I don't want no part of this."

The complex back door opened, and out poured Giovanni, Fletcher Oak with his camera up to his eye, Jim Quim, Riceman, and Marigold.

"Don't point that thing at me! You're going to get it confiscated!"

"Afraid it'll steal your soul?"

He stuck a finger in Giovanni's face. "Let's see your ID!"

"I don't carry ID." Giovanni didn't drive.

"Who are you?"

"I was that one, I was this one, and now I'm Giovanni."

"Come here."

"No."

The FBI man lunged at Giovanni. "You're going with me!" He twisted his arm behind his back and began marching him up to the cars, while Giovanni yelled, "YOU'RE HURTING ME," and a group of us followed, all talking at the same time.

"Leave him alone!"

"He hasn't done anything!"

Marigold nipped at the agent's heels, yapping, "Take me too. Take me too."

Gypsy David peeked out of the hole then quickly ducked back in.

I realized that Giovanni was about the same height as Kentucky Jeethro, and both had wavy hair and dark eyes.

We got to the parking lot, where the deputy was still shaking his head. The FBI man handcuffed Giovanni, pushed him into the back of his car, shut the door, and turned to us.

"Is he under arrest?" I asked.

"First we'll find out who he is." He nodded to the deputy, and drove away.

The deputy sheriff said, "Sorry, boys. I'm real sorry this is happening."

"Where's he bringing him?" Clard asked.

“To the county jail. A couple of you can come down and wait, if that suits you.”

About ten of us squeezed into the Karmann Ghia and the red pickup, and followed the deputy into town.

At the jail Giovanni was tucked away in a holding cell in back. After a half hour the FBI agent came out. “I need to see all of your IDs.” We each showed him something and, with a sour expression, he took notes on his little pad.

“Why did you arrest Giovanni?”

“He’s detained,” He corrected. “He wouldn’t identify himself.”

“We could have told you who he is. He’s Giovanni.”

“Your telling me is not enough. If he doesn’t carry ID, how do I know if he’s this Giovanni or some other Giovanni or he’s just making up that name?”

“All names are just made up. He’s not some other Giovanni, he’s our Giovanni. You’ll just have to take our word for it.”

“Maybe he’s got you fooled.”

“How do we know you’re an FBI agent? Maybe you’ve got us fooled.”

“I’ll show you my badge.” He pulled out his wallet and held up the badge pinned on top of a plastic encased card. “Signed by J. Edgar Hoover.”

“I can buy something just like that in the Five and Ten.” I bent forward to peruse it.

He pulled it away and stuck it back in his pocket. “I assure you it’s real.”

“What if I don’t believe you?”

“You’ll just have to take my word for it.”

The sheriff called him aside, they disappeared into the back room, then returned with Giovanni, in a foul mood.

“If you walk around without ID, you’re just asking for trouble.”

“I was that one, I was this one. Now I’m a Sufi and Sufis don’t carry ID.”

We all took a deep breath and jumped back into final preparations for the Festival, now worrying about whether the FBI would stage a bust. We weren't so worried about the sheriff, as he obviously didn't like the FBI either. We decided to tell everybody that our policy was no dope on the property.

* * *

Chapter 17

On the first day of the Festival, the Dropper band played perpetual cacophony; the air throbbed with drumming; the theater dome was a continuous exhibition and light show, with the Ultimate Painting spinning and flashing; people were meeting people, everybody talking at once. By noon most people were too stoned to think. At the south end was the crafts fair, with Feather Tom, Diggy Meg, Marigold, and the others in booths. The kitchen was endlessly cooking and serving up food. At one o'clock the Amarillo Dukes, a Texas motorcycle club, roared into the parking lot, heavy in leather, silver studs and dirty hair, smelling like old beer. Mother, Ed the Fed's old girlfriend, was with them, a new dragon tattooed on her back. The Hog Farm, a traveling commune led by the clown later known as Wavy Gravy, appeared in three psychedelic painted busses and parked in the line of tie-dye paisley vehicles on the shoulder of the road.

Karanga and Hickson, the friends of Bear who had come up with him from around Albuquerque to help erect the complex, announced they had just founded Drop South, a new commune near Placitas, along with their girlfriends and a few other people. Another group, who had been at the Santa Fe gallery event, said they'd purchased land in Arroyo Hondo, near Taos, and were forming another commune there named New Buffalo.

"Remember me? Nani. I met you here last year."

"Of course." She was as vivacious as ever. "Where have you been?"

"Oklahoma, mostly. This is my husband Barrigon."

He was tall and striking.

"Now we're back in Colorado," she went on, "living on the Ute rez, over on the western slope near Ignacio. Have you been at Drop City all this time?"

"Spent last summer in San Francisco, but since then I've been here. Have you been drawing?"

"A little. And Barrigon's a poet."

"Do you have anything with you? There's going to be reading on the hill after dinner. Everybody's invited to read."

"We can't stay," he replied. "We can't be around drugs."

Nani said, "Barrigon's a sundancer. If you're ever in Ignacio, stop by."

Later Rabbit, Max F. from the New Buffalo group, myself, and a few others read poetry on the hill. At dusk Rabbit led a group with drums beating down the sun; at the final instant of sunset, he yelled, "Cacahuatl!" In the evening we watched films by Curly, Fletcher and Alteresio.

Marigold ran into the complex. "Tim's here!"

Behind her flooded a troupe of Droppers and guests surrounding an unmistakable face. Everybody was talking at the same time. It really was Timothy Leary. He and a younger man and woman had just flown into Trinidad from Boston in a little plane.

The others were Billy Hitch, patron of the psychedelic revolution, and his wife. Hitch was owner of Millbrook, a large house on some Northeastern land, site of Leary's and Alpert's early LSD experiments. Hitch had piloted the one-engine plane and landed in the cow field Trinidad called an airport. Millbrook was a legend in the earliest days of psychedelia, before Drop City.

As the evening wore on, Leary suggested that a few of us go off alone. I hadn't seen much of Curly or Jo all day. I found them in their dome, with the curtains drawn, and invited them to join us. Leary and his companions came up to my dome along with Rabbit, Poly, Clard, Lard, and some others. We smoked Leary's weed, some of the most excellent I had ever tasted, as we discussed the communal and psychedelic movements and revolution. Neither Curly nor Jo ever appeared.

Inevitably, we got around to comparing Millbrook and Drop City. I had heard that Millbrook was semi-communal, a little like an ashram and a little like a crash pad; they let people stay there as long as they were cool.

Leary said, "The big difference is the mass movement hadn't started back then. We certainly never shared all our money in Millbrook." Leary and Hitch exchanged a little smile.

"Also," I said, "Drop City is leaderless."

"If was Drop City was really leaderless, it wouldn't have happened," Rabbit interjected.

"Leaderless," Poly added, "is just a way of talking."

"What I mean is, nobody's boss here," I clarified.

"Millbrook couldn't have happened without Tim and Dick," Hitch cut in.

"And without you, Billy," Leary said, red-eyed and a little slurry. "We were the leaders, not because we forced ourselves on anybody, but because we were making it happen."

"That's right," Rabbit snapped. "Groups just dumb things down to the lowest common denominator. What have the so-called masses ever contributed to civilization except mediocrity?"

I shrugged. "They *are* civilization."

Clard intoned, "The people who run the world love to claim that everything is accomplished by the Great Man. But they're just the ones who push themselves up to the head of the parade."

"The Ultimate Painting," Lard jumped in, "is a collective work, and it's not mediocre."

"Let's not fool ourselves," Rabbit threw back. "You and Clard were behind it."

Leary shook his head. "Individual creative genius makes things happen in this world. All those cults of socialist leaders are just Plato's old Philosopher Kings in disguise. What could be more individualistic than that? And in the name of collectivism! I don't have any tolerance for all this glorification of the masses. Propaganda. Without leaders, without this little group here tonight, none of this would have happened."

“Don’t you think that the psychedelic revolution would have happened without you, Tim?” Clard replied.

“We didn’t invent psychedelics,” Leary said. “We struck the match at the right moment. Somebody else might have done it, but they didn’t. This is the cusp of a great transition, a raising of human consciousness. What we see out there is a reflection of our minds and brains. Society is a collective illusion. We’re only at the beginning of the revolution, many people have roles to play. I’m in contact with numerous revolutionary groups around the country. The war’s bringing down the old system. It doesn’t work any more. But what are we going to replace it with? I’m not talking just about society providing people with food and a place to live and medical care. The real goal is liberating the human spirit. And all the socialist doctrines in the world are worth nothing unless they do that. Here you’re living as if the real revolution—the revolution of the spirit—has already been won. If enough people do this, in numerous Drop Cities, all helping during the transition, it’ll really happen.”

After a couple of more hours they took their leave, spent the night in Rabbit’s dome, and flew off the next morning.

* * *

On the second day of the Festival the Dropper band played perpetual cacophony. The air throbbed with drumming. The theater dome was a continuous exhibition and light show, with the Ultimate Painting spinning and flashing. People were meeting people, everybody talking at once; most were too stoned to think. The kitchen was continuously cooking and serving up food. A rumor flashed around that Bob Dylan had come and left, but nobody I spoke to claimed to have actually seen him. A lot of locals showed up, including our elderly neighbors, the reform candidate, the egg man, the two Chicano cousins who had visited with their girlfriends, but with their wives and kids this time. Ed the Fed and Mother got into a fight.

I was in the complex, playing flute with the Dropper band, when I heard a familiar voice.

“Windowpane?” Winston Warlock was walking around handing out hits. At his side was Dawnrider, her arm around Marigold.

I was totally blown away, “Where’d you disappear to that night at the Garbo?”

“When Tiny—you remember that four hundred pound black dude—when he OD’d in the hall in front of our place, we couldn’t even open our door to get past him, we knew the pigs would be in our faces, so we grabbed all our shit and took off down the fire escape. Wound up in Morningstar.”

“Bountiful Eden,” Dawnrider added. “Just what we needed, to bliss out in the woods for a few months.”

Marigold pulled my sleeve. “Cori is here too. Have you seen her?”

“Cori?” I gasped.

“This is the first time the three of us are together since high school in East Lansing,” Dawnrider said. “I’m sure I told you: Marigold, Cori, and I were inseparable back then. I’m so excited.”

Giovanni, Meher Charlie, Gypsy David, Moron Normal, Carlos, and Jim Quim burst in, laughing hysterically, and set a big metal bell almost three feet high in the middle of the floor.

“Where’d that come from?”

“The school across the street,” Giovanni laughed. “Isn’t it beautiful?”

Gypsy David stretched his arms. “We climbed up into that tower over the entranceway, unbolted that sucker, and hauled it down. It is made of some heavy shit; must weigh two hundred pounds; almost dropped it.”

“Are you all out of your minds?”

“Flying on some savage LSD. Want a hit?” Gypsy held out a tab.

“No. Do you want us all to get arrested?”

“Don’t get uptight, man,” Jim Quim said. “Nobody’s going to care.”

“You can’t steal the school bell.”

"We didn't steal it. We just took it."

"Explain that to the sheriff."

"I've never stolen anything before." Giovanni laughed. "We're so bad!"

"You've got to put it back."

"Why?"

"They're going to bust us!"

"You don't understand!" Meher Charlie explained. "Everything's one!"

I heard my name called. It was Cori, with my old New York friend Ernesto.

"This place is wild," he said.

We hugged. "Why didn't you write me that you were coming?"

"It was a last minute thing. Cori and I have both gone through a lot of changes since last year," Ernesto said. "We're on our way to San Francisco. I wish I could eat but I'm too wired. We haven't had a real meal since Kansas City. We've been driving straight."

"Patt, I love your hair," Cori said.

"This is so exciting," Marigold bubbled, "The three of us together. Oh, remember when they kicked us off boosters?"

"Recollect this one?" Dawnrider launched into a cheer. Marigold and Cori joined her, dancing a little routine that ended in a leaping shout. The three of them cracked up, arms around each other, all prattling at the same time.

"What are you going to do in San Francisco?" I asked Ernesto.

"Political stuff. If that doesn't work, maybe buy some land somewhere and start a commune."

"What happened to medical school?"

Marigold, Cori, and Dawnrider danced around the complex.

"Dropped out. I might go back someday. I couldn't relate to what was going on there. Some of those med students are so

oblivious. I'd rather be an orderly cleaning up somebody's shit right now instead of a brain surgeon. I've been working as a medic at demonstrations. Do you have a medical station here?"

"We've got some bandaids."

"I'll set one up. All we need is a sign."

"We met Odessa in San Francisco last summer," Patt said.

"Things are cool between us now," Ernesto went on. "She and Jake invited us to stay with them in San Francisco. But I'm kind of worried about her. He's a Guevarista, you know."

"A what?"

"You know, a follower of Che. He's into what they call *Bringing the war home*. Guerrilla warfare."

Marigold, Cori, and Dawnrider rejoined us, giggling and panting. Cori draped her arm limply across Ernesto's shoulder.

"Jake's into guerrilla warfare?" I gasped. "He seemed totally nonviolent to me. Aside from his being a Viet Nam vet, of course."

"Maybe he doesn't talk that way to you."

"We think some of his friends are police agents," Cori said.

Ernesto bit his lip. "Don't say that. This guerrilla business is just going to get people killed. It's not progressive in any way. Not here. In the Third World, in most of Latin America maybe it's correct, but here in the US things are different."

"Right," Cori said. "It's not progressive."

"When did you become so political, Cori?" Patt said.

"I was always political. But I used to think that meant fucking." She wrapped her long polished nails around Ernesto's ponytail and tugged it.

"By the way," Ernesto said to me, "I was pissed at first when Odessa told me about her and you, but then I realized I was being hypocritical since Mandy and I got together too."

"You what?"

"When you two broke up temporarily a couple of years ago. Then last spring when Odessa started seeing Jake, we got together a few times again. I'm not mad at you any more about

Odessa. Or about Cori." He glanced at her. "I hope you're not mad at me."

Cori smiled sheepishly. "You're not upset that I told Ernesto, are you?"

Patt glared at us all and walked away.

Cori looked bewildered. "I just wanted to clear the air."

I caught up with Patt and said, "All that was before I met you."

She bit her lip. "You're not honest."

Just then the Dropper Band started to play a wild cacophony.

"I'm trying to be. Let's put it aside until after the Festival. Please. Let's have a good time."

Jack C, Max F, Rabbit, I and a half dozen others read poetry on the hill. At dusk a group with drums beat down the sun. In the evening we gathered and watched films by DiJulio, Curly, Fletcher, and Rabbit's suck flick. The Conqueroo blues band played some real hot licks, alternating sets with the Wishbone; the theater dome throbbed with crazy dancing. The Amarillo Dukes got into a bar fight in Trinidad and the sheriff ran them out of town.

In the dark, Giovanni, Meher Charlie, Gypsy David, Moron Normal, Carlos, and Jim Quim stealthily climbed into the tower over the El Moro school entranceway and bolted the bell back in place.

* * *

On the third day of the Festival, the Dropper band played perpetual cacophony; the air throbbed with drumming; the Theater dome was a continuous exhibition and light show, with the Ultimate Painting spinning and flashing. People were meeting people, everybody talking at once; Luke Cool gave a great talk on zomes and domes. By noon most people were too stoned to think. The kitchen served up huge amounts of food. "General Wastemoreland," a satirist in a crazy army suit with missiles bristling off his hat, spat a staccato monologue. A lot

more locals wandered around, including the Italian rancher next door, the librarian, his honor the barber-mayor, the mailman and the Safeway dairy guy. A guy in an Uncle Sam outfit who claimed to be running for president walked about making preposterous speeches, accompanied by his brother Bardo, who rolled his glassy eyes and wandered around mumbling, "Get rid of the guys, fuck the girls."

"I hit the wall with Marigold." Giovanni pulled me away, a pained expression on his face, down toward the cottonwood tree.

"What do you mean?"

"She's the first woman in a very long time who's moved me. I told her things about myself." He had trouble getting it out. "I thought she opened her soul to me too. I feel like I've been in a car crash. I have to leave. I feel so humiliated. "

"Try to cool it out. If you two want to be together, you'll find a way."

"You can't understand. You're not gay."

A while later I saw Marigold holding hands with Feather Tom.

I was standing near the center of the complex when Patt came up to me, eyes burning. "I hope you're satisfied."

"With what?"

"Look around you! It's a disaster. We'll never get this mess cleaned up." She rarely showed anger like this.

"We'll clean it up."

"We were barely holding on by a thread before. Now we're over the top. You don't know who's going to walk into your own kitchen. This is a disaster. Drop City will never recover."

"Why are you being so negative? Relax. Have a good time. This is just a party."

"This is not just a party. I'm not having a good time. I hate this. It's insane. These are our lives. I can't live like this."

"Like what?"

"It's directionless. Exposed. Always in the center of some craziness, always on some brink. Always worrying that some

maniac is going to walk in and attack us, always worrying about our next meal."

"That's just the human condition."

"Most people don't seek it out! Most people don't glamorize it!"

"I don't glamorize it!"

Clard grabbed my elbow. "Have you seen Uncle Sam? Do you know where he is?"

"Yeah, he's a hoot. I saw him a while ago with Rabbit."

"Well, his brother's running around molesting all the women. They just released him from the nuthouse. Curly's got him cornered in the TV room. We're trying to find Uncle Sam."

I'd seen almost none of Curly and Drop Lady during the entire Festival. The curtains had remained drawn in their dome.

Clard and I hurried over to Rabbit's dome. The door opened a crack and Rabbit's eye peered out.

"Is Uncle Sam in there?"

Rabbit reached into his shit and flashed a crumpled brown paper bag. "Take a gander at these babies! A hundred hits of psilocybin. High class stuff. Peace and joy." He opened the bag and poured little oval tablets into his palm, but some fell to the floor, bouncing in every direction. "Flying fuck!" Rabbit hunkered down. People were sprawled all over the floor laughing and chattering while Uncle Sam stood in the middle of the dome, gesticulating and spouting campaign promises.

Clard grabbed Uncle Sam's arm. "Your brother's bothering the women."

"What's the little rascal up to now?"

"You've got to get him out of here."

"He's just being friendly. He's harmless. The poor guy's been locked away for nine months. This is a big thing for him."

"What did they lock him up for?" I asked.

"He doesn't mean it. If he can't fit in here, where can he fit in? He just needs practice interacting. He's going to be my attorney general."

"Move your foot," Rabbit said. "You're stepping on a tab."

I decided to go help Curly while Clard tried to reason with Uncle Sam.

Curly and Bardo were on the sofa in the TV room, Curly talking in a low voice and Bardo ranting, while Lard and Denton stood nearby watching. It went on for a long time. After a while Denton and Lard quietly cut. I kept expecting Clard to pop in with Uncle Sam, but time passed and they didn't appear. Curly and Bardo had their heads close together, so I didn't grasp most of what they were saying. Through the thin wall of the room I could hear the Festival raging.

At least an hour passed, maybe two. Curly kept listening as Bardo rambled on. I could see Bardo warming to him. Bardo would get agitated at times and raise his voice, but then Curly would slip in a few words, Bardo would look surprised and smile, then be calmer for a while. I was amazed at Curly's patience and composure.

Curly turned to me and whispered, "Take over man. I got to go take a leak."

"What should I do?"

"Just listen. Every once in a while, remind him about flowers. We got to be sponges."

"What?"

"That's how the Russians beat Napoleon." He stood.

"Where you going?" Bardo exclaimed tensely.

"Relax, man. I'll be right back."

I slid over to Curly's place on the couch. I was alone with him.

Bardo stared intensely at me. "They really stick it to me. They keep sticking it to me. They don't know who they're messing with."

"What's your favorite color?" I asked.

"Fuck the girls," he said. "Get rid of the guys. Right? Right?"

"I mostly used to like green. Now I like blue too. And yellow."

"I like yellow. I like red too."

Curly finally got back, with Uncle Sam in tow.

"How you feeling, baby bro?"

"We're here talking. I like talking."

"We've got to go."

"We only just got here. Have I done something wrong?"

"You haven't done anything wrong. We just got to go."

As we watched them drive off, Curly said, "We all got to learn to be sponges."

At dusk, Jack C, Max F, Rabbit, Diane Di, myself, and a big group of others read poetry on the hill. A crowd beat down the sun. We watched films by Les B and Charlie Di and Curly and Fletcher, as well as Rabbit's suck flick again, and a bunch of other films. The Conqueroo blues band got even hotter, alternating with Rangewar. The theater dome throbbed with crazy dancing all night.

At a late hour, Patt and I were finally alone. She made some comment about me and Odessa and Cori.

I touched her hand. "Let's not fight."

"I can't stand this. I'm moving back to New York and finishing school." She reached under the bed, pulled out her bag, and began throwing things into it.

"Do you really want to do this?" I said.

She continued packing.

"Don't do this," I said.

"I've got to get on with my life."

"I thought you wanted to be with me."

"I don't have time to vegetate. I want to have a good job. I want a family. I want kids."

"Give it one more chance. Let's try to have a baby together."

"When? Someday?"

"Now."

"Are you serious?" She suddenly stopped.

I didn't know if I was, but said, "Yes."

Patt sat down on the bed. "I don't know if I'm ready for that. I'll have to think about it."

She didn't unpack her bag, but pushed it partially packed under the bed.

* * *

By noon on the final day of the Festival most people were too stoned to think; the kitchen served huge amounts of food; the crafts fair was sold out.

As dusk neared, most of the Droppers gathered in the complex. We didn't say much. The Dropper band had stopped playing. It was finally quiet. The place was a total shambles, but everybody was too tuckered out to even try to clean up. If the FBI agent planted finks at the Joy Festival, they never surfaced.

I stood outside, enjoying the quiet of the fading light. Curly came up to me, carrying Mae naked. "Me and Jo are leaving. We're splitting Drop City. We've had it. It hasn't worked out for us. Do you want our dome?"

"Are you serious?"

"This has been coming on for a long time."

Maybe I should have expected it, but I was shocked. "Where will you go?"

"Right now, back to Lawrence. Later, I don't know."

"Why?"

Curly shrugged. "These four days were the last nails in our coffin. The last kick in our butt."

"Was the Festival that terrible for you? It was just a stupid party."

"To us it symbolized all the evil things we didn't want Drop City to become. It was Rabbit's going away present to us."

"Most of the rest of us wanted the Festival too. Rabbit will be gone soon. We can regroup."

"I been hearing that for a long time. And it's probably true. Rabbit will leave now that he's got us all wrung out. But now this is a real different place. It's not the right situation for Mae

to grow up in now. It's never going to be that. Not the way it's turned out. Jo saw that a long time ago."

"What happened to the great Drop City experiment?"

"Well, I haven't talked about it for quite a while, if you've noticed."

"You mean, for you it's failed? Or was it doomed from the beginning?"

"The experiment's not over yet. Keep it going. You and Clard and Lard can take it over. Don't let our leaving get you discouraged, man. It doesn't need me. It's better off without me. You and Patt can be me and Jo as good as we can."

"No thanks. Denton and Leeda are the ones who are going to wind up being you two, if they go ahead and start a new community with Rabbit and Poly."

"This is all part of the experiment anyway. If it needed me and Jo to work, it would have been a failure right from the start." He held the baby up in the air and bounced her, giggling and drooling. Pee gushed out of her and onto Curly's shirt. He laughed and stood there dripping with pee. "I wish we were half as advanced as her. Ain't she a miracle?"

I felt kicked in the stomach. Curly and Jo, along with Clard, had dreamed so many of the ideas that the early Drop City stood for. Yet Curly was right: the ideas behind Drop City, and the place itself, had to stand or fall separately from them.

I heard Rabbit beginning to beat down the sun. I joined him and the others on the hill. As the sun's last rays passed beyond the peaks, Rabbit yelled, "CACAHUATE!" The clouds glowed then slowly darkened. We sat silently in the starlight.

* * *

Chapter 18

Curly and Jo didn't prolong their leaving. A week after the Festival, they were gone. It took a while for it to hit us. We were all a little shell-shocked.

Patt and I took over their old dome and tried to make ourselves cozy, remodeled the inside a bit. Neither one of us brought up having a kid again at that point, and our relationship quickly slipped back, on the surface, to almost what it had been before. Patt didn't unpack her bag, though.

Several of the newer people—Danu, Silly Michelle, Boston John, Bernadette, Brenda, Aurora, Zowie—moved into the top of the hole. I took on Jo's old job as keeper of the chickens, rabbits, and goats. Leeda and Denton asked Pat and I if we wanted them to go ahead and repaint the outside of the dome, which was still covered with aluminum paint. We gave them the go-ahead, and in a few days our dome was turquoise, black, and white.

Many people who'd come for the Joy Festival hung around a while longer, despite the three-night limit to sleeping in the complex. People also slept outside and in their vehicles. Little by little they straggled off and thinned out. Many people left things behind. The Hog Farm bequeathed us a washing machine and a big pile of great clothes. Meanwhile other people still kept arriving.

After the Festival, Rabbit retreated back to his dome, except for meals and beating down the sun, which he still did every evening with a group of mostly newer people. Occasionally Lard or I would join them.

Giovanni was depressed. He moved out of the hole and began sleeping in the TV room in the complex. Marigold and he avoided each other.

"I'm going to leave. I'm too lost to be much good here."

“Are you sure that’s what you want to do?”

“I have to be alone and find myself.”

“Where?”

“I don’t want to go back to New York. Not yet at least. It would be too much of a defeat. I’m going to San Francisco. There’s a Subud group there. I want to get back into my spiritual practice, my *ladihan*. I can’t do that here. Now I know why I was having so much trouble with my *ladihan*. I was trying to break through into a higher knowledge, when I don’t know my own feelings. I don’t know how to love.” He pulled out his book of Ibn Arabi, the medieval Sufi mystic. “*There are three forms of knowledge: intellectual, emotional, and knowledge of what is beyond the boundaries of thought and sense and sight, of reality, of the special love beyond description. A purpose of human love is to demonstrate this ultimate real love, the love which is conscious.*”

“Can I see that?”

He handed me the book. “Keep it.”

“But it’s important to you.”

“I want you to have it. When you’re through with it, pass it on.”

A few days later Giovanni left for San Francisco.

* * *

Meanwhile we got ready to participate in the Independence Day parade in Trinidad, and went about building a float. We painted this big old bread delivery van that somebody had given us, with a roof rack on top, in crazy colors and designs, built a wooden geodesic sphere that we painted aluminum and hung out in front from a pole like a carrot dangling in front of a mule, painted “Peace is our Profession” on the sides, and got dressed to kill.

It was quite a festive occasion, parading up Main Street and down Commercial, with the Trinidad High School and JayCee’s marching bands, cheer leaders and twirlers in red cowboy hats, football teams, boosters, homecoming queen and

king, Chamber of Commerce, Masonic and Elks Lodges, American Legion and VFW, various churches, 4-H Clubs, horses, steers and us on top of the van in our gladdest rags waving to the crowd. At City Hall park, once the site of the Trinidad War, near the statue of Kit Carson, the high school principal was delighted to introduce the grand marshal mayor, who made a stirring speech, alluding with pride to the newest addition to make a mark in Trinidad's great history, which we took to mean Drop City since he seemed to glance at us. The prize for the best float was awarded to the Presbyterian Church Quilting Circle, everybody ate a lot of barbecued hot dogs, and at dusk a few sky rockets were shot off.

Several days later *Time* magazine came out with their cover story on the hippie movement, including a big color photo of Drop City. This really set off an avalanche of publicity. In the weeks after the Festival numerous news media came to Drop City, from as far afield as the *London Times*. Hippies and the Summer of Love had become a hot story, and all the major outlets decided to do a piece on us. We were visited by the three major American TV networks, as well as the BBC. Time-Life Books published *The Hippies*, a trade paperback with an illustrated article on Drop City. Some of the TV footage later became part of the classic documentary *The Sixties*. That girl picking the wildflower is Patt. By media standards it was only a minor feeding frenzy, but nothing like it had been seen in Trinidad. At Drop City things got even weirder. Being barraged by the media made some Droppers suddenly think of themselves as Very Important People.

Encouraged by the new close relations with the town fathers, a few of us went to a City Council meeting, where Clard formally proposed his idea of building a climate-control dome over Trinidad. His proposal was met with a brief silence punctuated by meaningful glances among the Council members, a few cleared throats, followed by the mayor's assurance that the idea, which they all deeply appreciated, would be taken under due consideration.

Soon tourist busses were driving by the land, looking at us through binoculars and taking pictures. Some of us flipped and began throwing rocks.

Yet in the middle of all the craziness the publicity brought, day-to-day life at Drop City went on, in a new dynamic because of the many new Droppers.

* * *

Clard was designing posters, and hooked up with a company in New York that printed several of them, and a couple of Lard's too. Though at this point Droppers were no longer expected to throw all their worldly resources into the common pool, both Clard and Lard contributed most of the royalty money to the commune. Suzie Spotless wasn't too happy with that. She saw Clard's success as the route to some of her dreams, as far away as possible from the trailer camp she grew up in, and that dream did not include a communal kitchen and a tiny zome they shared with another couple and a kid.

The bottom of the hole became subdivided infinitely, so each person had a tiny niche. When all the Droppers poured out in answer to the dinner bell, it looked like the circus act where twenty big clowns exit a tiny car.

The top of the hole was left undivided, but everybody there had their own little area. Danu, the oldest guy at Drop City, became ringmaster. In his fifties, Danu—"Daynew"—hadn't been a long-haired archetypal hippie for very long, but a career Navy officer, with a wife and two kids. A couple of hits of windowpane had turned his life inside out. For quite a while the young Dropper girls, of which there was always a new crop passing through, loved him a little. He was old enough to be Daddy, but so unlike Daddy. Danu was rarely known to hold a hammer in his hand or do manual work of any other sort. He spent most of his time busily studying and expounding on Eastern mystical texts. Danu's wife and kids showed up one day and stayed for a while. In their van, not joining the pile in the top of the hole. They were very straight and pretty nice. His wife was baffled by the whole thing. This wasn't what she'd signed up for fourteen years before. The kids, a pubescent girl and a boy of eleven, pleaded with Daddy to reemerge from this new crazy person and come home. A few of Danu's women associates seemed not that much older than his daughter. We

tried to be careful about not letting underage runaways stay, but nobody looked too close. In reality, most of the girls lost interest in Danu about as fast as he lost interest in them. In the end Danu's wife and kids left, and Danu stayed, forever on the lookout for the next sweet young thing to roll into the driveway. I had to admit he seemed good at what he did.

After Giovanni split, Marigold rejoined the revolving circus in the bottom of the hole. Diggy Meg coupled with Jasper Button for a while and Silly Michelle with John the Hair. Marigold and Feather Tom both seemed to spin out and become loners, with an occasional connection.

Fletcher Oak, Nancy Maple, and Jim Quim kept talking about how they wanted to live in a beautiful forest, left for New England, bought some wild land in Vermont, and started a successful community called Mullein Hill.

When Fletcher, Nancy, and Jim left the old kitchen, Diggy Meg, her two kids, and Jasper Button moved in. But it was a short-lived nest. Soon Jasper was out and Feather Tom moved in. They made a well-balanced couple. Diggy talked all the time while Feather usually said nothing.

Jasper sank into a funk and soon started telling everybody about his hemorrhoids. He seemed to be obsessed with them; that's all he could talk about. When nobody would listen anymore, he decided to get away for a while and jumped a ride for the Coast. A few weeks later we got a letter from a jail in Nebraska. He had been picked up and held for possession without being charged because there was no evidence. When he got back to Drop City, he shuddered, "The sheriff just arrested guys to bugger them. What saved me was my hemorrhoids. He couldn't take my screaming."

Feather Tom's parents showed up and stayed for a week. They were a little strange, but much less than I would have expected. His father was a chiropractor from Kansas City, always in need of a shave. He re-aligned everybody's back on a table in the kitchen complex or outdoors, doing an especially thorough job on the girls, to Tom's mother's frowns. One day a ceramic urn with a lid appeared in the complex, on the floor near the couches. Inside was sand. It looked like a big ashtray like in hotel lobbies. The smokers began using it. After a few days Tom's parents were flabbergasted to notice the pile of

cigarette butts stuck into the ashes of Tom's elder brother. It had never occurred to them to let anybody know what it was, or to ask if we wanted it. They considered it improper to talk about anything important. I guess that's why Tom said so little.

Boston John and Beatrice were star-crossed lovers, runaways, very young, inseparable. She had an Ophelia-like innocence about her. They had escaped her disapproving parents, and were always worrying that the authorities would find them, tear them apart, drag her back. While many others at Drop City were a bit loose in their romantic attachments, Boston John's and Beatrice's world seemed defined and limited by each other. But after a while at Drop City, Beatrice became homesick and wanted to see her family. Finally they joined a car heading east, leaving their meager belongings, planning to be back in a few weeks. When Boston John reappeared, he was with a different girl.

"What happened to Beatrice?" I asked.

He shrugged. "I fell in love."

Three California valley girls arrived one day, fresh out of a middle-class suburban high school, an interesting trio. Brenda was black, the pretty one; Aurora was Chicana, the smart one; and Zowie was a Jewish Princess who ran around stoned all the time exclaiming, "Wowie Zowie!" Brenda and Aurora were really pretty conservative under their hippie veneers, wary of being abused by the guys.

Although I expected that Brenda might get chummy with Gypsy David since they were both black, they really just kept their distance. Brenda considered Gypsy David vulgar. One day Gypsy drove Brenda and Zowie into town and, on the way back, missed a turn, spun off the road, and crashed into a farmer's field. Brenda got a few cuts and spent a day in Mt. San Rafael hospital. The others were just shaken up.

Gypsy David brooded all day, in a dry funk, not at all his usual shouting stomping self.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"You couldn't understand it. It's a black thing."

"Try me."

“I’m the only brother here,” Gypsy yelled, “and I go mess up the only sister.”

When Brenda got out, Aurora took her home to California, while Zowie stayed at Drop City and kept on partying.

* * *

Patt and I decided to take a trip to New Mexico, where friends and visitors of Drop City had begun starting other communities.

We stopped first at New Buffalo in Arroyo Hondo, not far from Taos Pueblo. The group was deeply influenced by the Indian pueblo, and was busy building an extraordinary round central structure of adobes and vigas. I was impressed with their multi-seat group outhouse, although I admit to feeling squeamish about everybody walking in and out. Buffalo had some good farmland, where they grew corn, squash, beans, and other crops. They were also involved with the Neo-American Church, an offshoot of the Native American Church, and held regular sweats and peyote meetings. At Buffalo someone gave me a handful of psilocybin mushrooms. I stashed them away, waiting until I got back to Drop City to eat them.

Another community, Lama, was just being founded in the hills near New Buffalo. Unlike the others, it was not a commune, but an ashram, a spiritual retreat, a foundation set up by a young “trust fund” couple. We helped them build a large main building, working with a crew from Taos Pueblo and a few hippies. We liked Lama in a lot of ways, although many at New Buffalo were contemptuous because Lama was so centrally controlled.

We stayed at Bear’s in Corrales, and got to know his wife Melody and two kids a little. On the surface they seemed pretty conventional, but it didn’t feel forced. They just knew who they were, and that seemed to free Bear’s imagination. Besides designing zonahedra for housing, he was experimenting with solar energy for heating.

From there we went to Placitas, a little Chicano *ejido* land grant town in the hills north of Albuquerque, where Karanga

and Hickson, Bear's associates, had started Drop South. They built adobes similar to the *ejido* houses, as well as earth and stone structures influenced by hogans and kivas. Drop South went through changes almost immediately, with some people moving out and others moving in.

* * *

When we got back to Drop City, the latest excitement was that we had been invited to submit a work to the Biennale Art competition in Paris, France. Everybody was putting final touches to the Ultimate Painting. The person who nominated us, a friend of Clard's, told him that the winners had already really been selected, knowing the politics of the judges, and Drop City was being chosen as an also-ran. Which wasn't bad. Clard and Lard packed the Ultimate Painting, while I translated my poem for it, with the help of a French woman from Albuquerque, and recorded it on a tape, to be played repeatedly as background while strobe lights flashed on the spinning painting. As expected, the Ultimate Painting didn't win.

* * *

Through the summer of 1967 almost everybody went traveling.

Ed the Fed drove down to New Mexico and started a zome business together with Bear and Hickson from Drop South. Bear was the mastermind, so it remained his baby.

Gypsy needed to get away from Drop City for a while, and left for the Coast.

Lard decided to take a vacation from domesticity with Jal and Snoop, so hopped in a van bound for San Francisco. At the last second, Moron Normal squeezed in next to him among the piles of gear and junk in the back. Feeling abandoned, Jal and Snoop headed back East to visit her family too. Jal and Lard had a knotty relationship and always seemed to be on the verge of breaking up.

Meher Charlie was left without a girlfriend in the hole, so he decided to go out to the Coast too, to visit a former lover in L.A. and feel out the idea of moving there to pursue his old dream of making a music career. Shortly before he left, we got a letter from Lard. Moron Normal had flipped out on acid in San Francisco, been arrested wandering the streets naked, and was in jail. Lard was trying to raise bail, and expected Moron to get out soon, but if we had any extra bread they could use it. He was hopping between several crash pads, but people at the Psychedelic Shop would know where to reach him. Meher Charlie decided he would swing up to San Francisco on his way to L.A. and make sure Moron was out of jail. He borrowed the Ibn Arabi book that Giovanni had left with me. "I love this stuff. I can read it over and over again and still not understand it. Beyond the boundaries of thought! Makes me high, makes me fly, makes me lose the Drop City Blues! Ooo-eee baby, ooo-ooo-eee! Doo-bop-shabam! Let me take it with me, okay?"

We got a touristy Hollywood post card from Meher Charlie from L.A., saying he couldn't find Moron or Lard in San Francisco, but had heard through friends that they were okay. He himself was having a great time and would be back soon.

Patt decided to bus to New York to visit her family and friends. I decided to jump a ride to San Francisco and try to find Lard and Moron Normal.

* * *

Chapter 19

I arrived in San Francisco in the early fall of 1967, the tail end of the Summer of Love. I called the number where Lard and Moron had been staying in the Haight. It was disconnected. I tried Odessa and Jake, but that phone was no longer in service either. I had Ernesto and Cori's number too, but they were in a far part of town. I also had an address for Giovanni, but it too was in a neighborhood I didn't know, and he had been pretty depressed when he left Drop City; I was wary of getting hung up if he were on a downer. I went to the Greta Garbo Home for Girls. Now a wire fence surrounded some foundations and rubble on the large corner where it had stood.

I walked down Haight Street. It didn't look too different from a year ago, except dirtier and more crowded. An air of fatigue hung over the street, and people didn't have the same aura of innocence and excitement. I went over to the Psychedelic Shop, to look at the bulletin board for a room. In the window was a hand-written sign, "Nebraska needs you more." It was empty and locked.

A passerby told me, "They shut down a couple of days ago. The best bulletin board now is over at the Free Store."

The Free Store had not existed the summer before but I already knew of it from visitors to Drop City. It was run by the Diggers, a group who also organized free food in the park, the solstice and equinox celebrations, the Human Be-In, and had a hand in the free clinic.

Trip Without A Ticket: A Free Store, the sign read. The store was piled with clothes, kitchen stuff, furniture, a motley assortment of almost anything, some of it in pretty good shape. People were rummaging through things, trying stuff on. I perused the crowded bulletin board, which was filled with good leads.

“Ishmael!”

“Dawnrider!” She was as lovely as ever, in her strangely distant way. We exchanged a hug.

“Winston’s traveling in India. We get together on the dream plane.” She hadn’t changed a bit. “Have you come for the parade?”

“What parade?”

“The Death of Hippie/Birth of Free. On Sunday. It’ll pass right by here. It should be a great event.”

“I didn’t know about it but I won’t miss it. Is everything in this store really free?”

“Take whatever you want. I’m manager here today. Or, rather, you are.” She braided three strands of her long hair.

“All I need today is a place to stay.”

“You can stay at my pad. Is Patt with you? How is Marigold, is she with anybody?”

“Patt’s on her way to New York. Marigold is okay, she’s with two people, at least.”

“Is she happy?”

“Hard to tell.”

Dawnrider shook her head. “She’s really a romantic, she just needs to be with one person. That’s my opinion. Anyway, there’s been all kinds of people from Drop City passing through here. A guy about your height, very slim, dark hair, kind of a sensitive face, almost pretty.”

“That’s Larry Lard. Do you know where he’s staying?”

“No. I haven’t seen him for a while. I just work here play here one day a week.”

“How about Moron Normal? A little guy who talks in halts and spurts.”

“With long pauses in inappropriate places? There’s a note from him on the bulletin board. Did you see it?”

“No.”

She rummaged around the board. “It was to anybody from Drop City. It seems to be gone now. It was here for a long time.”

“What did it say?”

“He was asking for a ride back to Drop City. Another Dropper’s been around too, a black guy, kind of husky.”

“Gypsy David.”

“That’s him. The last time I saw him he was selling Panther papers.”

“What?”

“You know, the Black Panthers. They scared all the politicians last spring when they went into the capitol with shotguns. Didn’t you hear about it out there?”

“Some. I can’t believe Gypsy is involved in that.”

“The Panthers are okay. The guns are mostly symbolic. They’ve just got some bad press. They’re not racists. The Diggers and the Panthers are working together. Some of our people help put together the Panther paper. There’s a pile of old issues over there next to the *Oracles*. Check them out.” She brought her lips to my ear. “We also work with the anti-war groups. They send deserters over here for street clothes. We’ve got lots of blank draft cards for phony IDs. Do you need one?”

Later, sitting on the sofa in the living room of Dawnrider’s large communal flat, I read the “Inter-Communist” Ten-Point Program of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense.

“It sounds pretty reasonable to me,” I said. “What did you mean when you said that the Diggers and the Panthers are working together?”

“You know, the Haight and the Fillmore, the black neighborhood, are right next to each other. The Haight used to be kind of a depressed white working class neighborhood before the hippies poured in. Anyway, at first the hippies and the black neighborhood people got along fine. Everybody mingled.”

“That’s the way it was last year when I was here.”

“Toward the end of the Summer of Love everything started to change. Right around the time of those riots in Newark. All of a sudden these gangs of black kids appeared, attacking hippies, mostly girls. A whole rash of rapes and robberies. The

Hells Angels fought back. There were stabbings, even a shooting.”

“What are the Angels doing in the Haight?”

“Just hanging. Blowing grass and doing acid like everybody else. They started out very redneck, even attacking antiwar activists, but they cooled out. Most of them are pretty righteous. A little paranoid. But they hate authority as much as anybody.”

“The Amarillo Jokers came to Drop City. They turned out to be okay too.”

“Anyway, for a while it almost looked like there was going to be a race war here. It turned out that the black kids were being led on by some older guys who were calling themselves Panthers. The real Panthers were across the Bay in Oakland; they knew these guys but considered them jokers and called them the Paper Panthers. Anyway things were getting out of hand fast in the Haight. The Diggers went and talked with the real Black Panthers in Oakland. When the real Panthers heard about what was happening here they were furious. They printed a statement in the Panther paper. It went something like, *‘Warning to so-called Paper Panthers—stop vamping on the hippies. They are not your enemy, black brothers. Leave them alone or the Black Panther Party will deal with you!’* The trouble stopped overnight. That was how the Diggers and the Panthers started working together.”

“Who are the Diggers anyway?”

“They started out as actors in the Mime Troupe, you know, they always put on shows in the parks.”

So the Diggers were actors. The Droppers were painters and poets. The emerging new underground was most widely expressed by its musicians. The counterculture was a cultural and a political movement at the same time. Political art of the counterculture took many forms: Clard’s and Lard’s geometric fantasies aimed to open peoples’ minds to another reality, and in the Sixties that was political. I knew then that no one would ever be able to write a political history of the Sixties without including America’s artists.

The next day I called the San Francisco City Jail. They said Moron had been released two weeks before.

I went to dinner at Ernesto and Cori's place the next night.

As I walked in, Ernesto said, "Did you hear? Che's been murdered."

"Che Guevara?"

"In the mountains of Bolivia, organizing the Aymara Indians. The pigs executed him."

"That's a shocker."

"The saddest part is, only a handful of guerrillas were with him. He'd hardly organized anybody there at all."

"That proves," Cori said, "that the New Party's line is correct."

"We're working with the New Party now," Ernesto explained.

The apartment was a lot straighter than their pads back in the East Village.

"What are you studying at State?" I asked Cori.

"It doesn't matter. Come the revolution, a degree's not going to be worth anything."

"You've been following TSU and Jackson State, haven't you?" Ernesto said. "The black students are in motion. They've been fighting the pigs at all the Southern black colleges. They're the front line. The white students are lagging behind. Cori's getting them active. With me an orderly in the psych ward at the city hospital and Cori enrolled at State, we're organizing a worker-student alliance."

"For what?"

He looked at me like an idiot. "To get the people mobilized. To stop the war. That's why I quit medical school. We can't lead normal lives."

"And once they are mobilized," Cori said, "we're going all the way. This is revolution."

We sat down to an elegant meal of baked salmon and fine wine. After dinner Ernesto lit a nice joint.

"If you meet other New Party people, for goodness sake don't offer them dope. Nobody in the Party knows we smoke."

"You're kidding."

"We've got to look straight. And don't tell them we're not married."

Cori jumped in, "We can't look like hippies. We've got to start from where the people are."

Ernesto refilled my wine glass. "Stop the Draft Week is coming up. We've been building for this all summer. There are going to be actions downtown, at State, and over in Berkeley they're marching down Telegraph avenue to the Oakland Induction Center."

"I'd like to go."

"This time we'll be ready to fight back if the pigs attack," he said.

"How come Che was wrong to take up guns, but it's okay to fight cops?"

"That's adventurism. This is mass struggle."

* * *

When I got back to the pad where I was staying later that night, Dawnrider was still up.

"So what is this Death of Hippie parade all about?"

"The mass media created Hippie. It started out as rebellious and liberating, but the media made it into a new set of chains. So tomorrow everybody's going to take off their beads and cut their hair and be free again. For a while at least. We'll throw our old hippie paraphernalia into a coffin, then march to the Panhandle and burn it."

The next day we joined the crowd just as the parade was turning the corner onto Haight Street. Traffic was stalled and snarled. They hadn't bothered with a parade permit. Pallbearers with black hoods marched down the street carrying

an open coffin, decked with black crepe paper. Painted on the side was, "Death of Hippie-Son of Media." Following were black-veiled mourners, blowing penny whistles and holding mirrors up to the faces of the spectators. Sunlight flashed off the mirrors. Others chanted, "The streets belong to the people," and handed out posters printed with the word NOW, which some held above their heads, and others taped to their shirts. Into the casket people were throwing items symbolic of the Summer of Love: flowers, beads, tie-dyes, sandals, hair, buttons, posters.

Down the middle of the white line, between the rows of cars, rolled a Hell's Angel on a motorcycle, a veiled woman in a black robe standing on the back of the seat.

Cops in riot gear suddenly ran out of a side street and blocked their way. The woman climbed down. The biker revved up. The cops jumped him. The bike was on the ground, back wheel spinning. The parade stopped short. The cops dragged him off. Another biker jumped in, punching wildly. They threw both bikers into a paddy wagon, and drove off, siren wailing.

The parade seemed stunned for a moment. Then several more Angels on Harleys roared up and led the parade off Haight street, following the paddy wagon. A half dozen blocks away, we massed in front of the police station, chanting, "Free Hairy Henry! Free Chocolate George!" People threw money into the casket for bail.

Dawnrider and I stayed for a while, then split as the parade continued to the park for the funeral pyre.

* * *

The next day I called Giovanni.

We were sitting on his couch. "I like this neighborhood. It's full of gay men. We give each other a lot of support. Did I tell you that Otis is here? I invited him over later. He wasn't sure if he could make it. He said to give you his number. He wants to see you."

"How is he?"

“He puts up a good face, like always. I think he’s been touring the bathhouses regularly.”

“And how have you been doing?”

“I learned a lot at Drop City, but I still can’t tell you how relieved I am to be here. Marigold was a nice girl, but it was ridiculous. Things still crazy out there?”

“Same old. Do you have a piano here?”

“I’m doing some accompanying at a ballet school. Kids. I love it. They let me practice some there, but I really need my own piano. I don’t know if I’ll ever really try to be a soloist again. I went to this Subud group once. I’m still not quite ready for it. I plan to go back. I’ve been depressed.”

“About what?”

“Everything. I wish I were involved with somebody, but when I’m depressed I don’t want to inflict myself on anybody I might really like. I go around in circles. I feel overwhelmed. I take everything out on myself. That’s what my whole family did.”

The doorbell rang and in trotted a groomed silvery white borzoi, tail up, followed by a familiar face.

“Otis!”

“Well, I haven’t seen you in ten months of Sundays! You’re looking healthy. Been working out?”

“In a gym? No. But we do a lot of construction out in Drop City. You’re looking pretty good yourself.”

“Now I wasn’t fishing for a compliment, but I can’t afford to toss it.”

I scratched the dog’s muzzle. “I never expected to see you here, Bubbles.”

“Wherever he goes, I go. A lot more sugar in these streets than back in that nasty Apple, don’t you think?”

“I guess.”

He turned to Giovanni. “What’s so funny? Feather up your sweet butt?”

“Otis, you don’t always have to be so outrageous. I like you better when you’re not.”

“Well, I like you better when you’re not depressed and moralizing.” He turned to me. “Has this grown man been crying on your shoulder?”

“Not really.”

He shook a finger at Giovanni. “That ain’t going to get you nowhere. You got to cut that out! The trouble with you is that you don’t appreciate yourself. You got to be proud of what you are! Whatever you are! Don’t let nobody tell you it’s wrong! Don’t let nobody tell you different. You got to fight back! You never learned that, that’s your problem. I learned that back when I went down to Birmingham with the SCLC.”

“I’d almost forgotten you did that,” I interjected. “I remember being really surprised. Before that you always seemed so unpolitical.”

“I *was* unpolitical. I was drawn into it. Man, those crackers were vicious! But under those white robes they were just punks. And that’s where things still are in the gay community today. You can’t imagine all the shit we’re expected to take every day. But I for one am not taking it any more! I’m standing up! You got to learn how to fight back, Giovanni-boy. Everybody out! Be what you are! If they don’t like it, too fucking bad! When faggots support each other, they got no power over us.”

“I know you’re right,” Giovanni said. “No more closet. I’m through with that. I’m out.”

* * *

I decided to go to the Stop the Draft Week march of UC Berkeley students to the Oakland Induction Center, but I got side-tracked in the Haight and didn’t make it. That night Ernesto told me about it. “They arrested a hundred twenty-four students. It was all non-violent. We’re going back tomorrow. You know, tomorrow’s the March on the Pentagon in Washington too. Come with us. Bring a wet handkerchief just in case things get hot and the blue meanies start shooting tear gas.”

In the morning I heard a radio report that almost 100,000 had shown up in Washington to “Levitate the Pentagon.” Several hundred had tried to get inside and some were beaten by the military police. Thousands sat down in front of the Pentagon doors. There were mass draft card burnings and numerous arrests.

By the time Ernesto, Cori, and I arrived in Oakland, about a thousand people had already gathered. Ernesto and Cori wore red armbands. Ernesto slung his black medic bag over his back. A few people were on top of a sound truck exhorting the crowd. We joined a chanting picket line for a while. Then I noticed Odessa in the crowd.

“I thought I might see you here. Is Jake here too?”

“Somewhere. Good turnout, huh? We were both arrested yesterday. It was pretty low-key. I think things are going to be different today. A lot of people aren’t going to just let themselves be arrested.”

“What are they going to do?”

“That depends on what the police do.”

“Hey brother!” Jake and I grasped hands in the underground way.

“Looks like the war is really coming home,” I said.

“They ain’t seen nothing yet. We’re riding this baby all the way. Say, are you going to be in the Bay Area for a while?”

“Not really. I’m going back to Colorado.”

“Too bad. We’re part of a study group. I was going to invite you to join.”

“What are you studying?”

“What else? Revolution.”

On the sidelines I saw a few black guys in leather jackets and black berets, selling newspapers. One of them was Gypsy David.

“I’ll take one of those Panther Papers,” I said.

“Ishmael! What you doing here? How you been, brother?”

“Just visiting. Okay. How about you?”

“Everything’s right on. How’s the scene back in Drop City?”

“Getting along I guess. Pretty much the same. You’ve made quite a transformation. So the Panthers are involved in the anti-war movement too?”

“It’s black men who are being thrown into the front lines, and for what? To defend a racist government that doesn’t protect us? To kill other people of color who are being victimized like us? Black men should be exempt.”

“How’d you get involved with the Panthers?”

“You know me. I was minding my own business up in the Haight, getting stoned, doing my thing, know what I mean? When a lot of shit started coming down between the hippies and the local bloods. Everything had been cool until then. Anyway, I just got caught up in it, the Panthers stepped in, and before I knew it, I was out selling papers.”

“I came out here looking for Lard and Moron Normal.”

“A month or so ago I saw Lard hanging around the Free Store.”

“Did you know Moron got busted?”

“Get out of here! For what?”

“Running around the street with his pants off.”

“Oh, man!”

“He’s out now, but they’ve both disappeared.”

“Probably hightailed it back to Drop City. You better get back out there to Colorado too. Things are really getting hot around here. Chairman Bobby’s just gone to prison for six months. Everybody’s paranoid about police agents. The pigs are out gunning for Huey. Somebody’s going to get killed.”

Shouting from the other side of the crowd. People running. Hundreds of police attacked in formation, in flying wedges, wearing gas masks, wildly swinging batons. People were falling. Blood on the sidewalk. Canisters exploding with blinding smoke. Someone yelled, “Mace!”

“You got a wet handkerchief?” Gypsy yelled at me. “Tie it around your face like this!”

A demo leader shouted from the sound truck, “Fight back! Fight back!” Two pickups drove up, their beds piled with pieces of plywood about two feet square. Jake and Odessa handed out

the panels to demonstrators, who used them as shields to ward off the blows of police batons. Ernesto and Cori dashed around, his black medic bag flying behind him. Demonstrators were dragging trash cans into the street, pushing cars into the intersection and deflating their tires, snarling traffic. Downtown Oakland was in chaos.

The next day I hopped my ride for Colorado. I never did find Lard or Moron.

When I arrived back in Drop City, Patt was still in New York. Both Lard and Moron had gotten back a few days before. Moron shrugged off the whole naked arrest episode as no big deal.

A letter had arrived from Meher Charlie's sister, saying that he had jumped out of a third story window of a seedy L.A. hotel. Giovanni's copy of Ibn Arabi, which he took with him, was still kicking around somewhere beyond the boundaries of thought.

Ooo-eee baby / Ooo-ooo-eee / Doo-bop-shabam / Drop Citee

* * *

Chapter 20

"A couple of people from Boulder we were counting on have pulled out," Rabbit said to me. "We need more people. How about it? Come in with us. You'd fit in real well." I was surprised that Rabbit wanted me to join the new community.

"I'd like to start over. But I still love this place. It's home."

"Drop City's had it. Time to move on. If you're worried about Denton, don't. I can handle him."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

"What?"

"Nothing."

"You're going to miss out on a hot thing."

Weeks passed and Patt kept postponing her return. The reasons she gave over the phone seemed thinner and thinner. Finally she boarded a bus back.

The cold hug we exchanged at the station spoke volumes on the state of our relationship. We both knew we cared about each other, but were alienated, stalemated, drifting ever deeper into an impenetrable stasis.

With an early onset of wintry weather, visitors died down to a trickle. We got back to a vague semblance of normalcy at Drop City. The kitchen complex was a huge space to keep warm, but our two wood-burning Franklin stoves, with pipes stretching horizontally across the kitchen to radiate heat, usually kept it almost cozy.

"Suzie Spotless and I are getting married," Clard said. "Do you want to come?"

"Is she pregnant?"

"How did you know? Does everybody know?"

"Of course I want to come. Are you going to have a big hippie wedding?"

"Suzie says that people who make a big fuss over their weddings are divorced a year later. We're going to have a quiet little ceremony at the Trinidad Court House."

Clard and Suzie, sweating and grinning, stood before the judge, with Lard as best man and her sister as maid of honor. A small group of Droppers, in our best ill-fitting duds, and Suzie's family, in theirs, gathered around, the women and some of the men crying, as the judge read the plain, brief ceremony. Clard and Suzie exchanged a great movie kiss, one for the ages, and left looking truly happy.

* * *

I drove Patt to Trinidad on women's clinic day. She hadn't been feeling well. The room was packed and it was a long wait. After she'd been inside for about twenty minutes, the nurse asked me to step into the exam room. Patt was sitting on the exam table in a robe. She looked scared; I quickly took her hand. She breathed, "I need an operation."

"Don't worry," Dr. Parks explained. "It's not life threatening. This happens to many young women of childbearing age who have never been pregnant. It's the result of an imbalance. I can give her hormones to help, but the best thing is for her to have a baby. That usually gets a young woman right back in balance."

"If I don't get pregnant soon, I might never be able to."

Dr Parks took me aside. "Maybe it's time for you two to start planning about dropping back in."

Dr. Parks explained he was connected with a hospital in Albuquerque, where he could arrange for the operation to be done. Since we were destitute, it would be paid for by the state.

Patt was devastated. After the operation she would need a few weeks to recuperate in a clean, healing environment, and Drop City, with one bathtub among all those people, was not the place. We would also need money to live down there, and we had none.

“You can stay with us,” Luke Bear said.

A few days later we were in Albuquerque. Patt’s operation went well, and she was out of the hospital quickly. Bear and his wife Melody were wonderful to us. In my taking care of Patt we became much closer again.

While we were in New Mexico, I helped Bear with his work. He was experimenting with solar energy, which was just beginning to be developed. The problem was how to collect and store the inexhaustible supply. Bear devised a solar heating system with rocks for storage, and asked me if I’d build it with him and try it out. My dome would be a good location because it was on top of a small south-facing hill.

I also got a chance to visit Drop South more, and saw the larger counterculture community that had grown up in the Albuquerque area, with a lot of activity centered around a book store and a natural food store. A store selling only natural and organic foods was a new concept. I’d already seen a similar countercultural community formed around Boulder. Scenes like this were sprouting in every cultural center and college town.

The “Back to the Land” movement was in full swing across America, an integral part of the counterculture. Large numbers of people were trying to get back, and talk was everywhere in the media. It was one of the flip sides of the burgeoning anti-war movement, an affirmation born from the rejection of all the war stood for. The counterculture became a wild fire, ignited by the opposition to the war and fanned by the music, spreading out of control among young people everywhere in America, cutting across lines between city and country, across regional differences, across classes and races, the expression of a generation trying to relate to each other in new liberated ways, fueled by the optimism of knowing that the young people of the moment would inevitably someday take over the world.

Some of Drop South’s neighbors in Placitas, a sleepy little Chicano pueblo, weren’t too happy with being deluged by outsiders, but on the whole there were less neighbor problems at Drop South than at New Buffalo. Placitas had been a Spanish-Mexican land grant, but little by little the grant land had been, and was still being, subdivided and sold off. There was opposition, but the pressures of the money economy and

mass culture made subsistence farming a close to impossible career choice for most young people. Still, the Chicano people there continued to farm with a common irrigation system and tried to keep the community culturally together. Meanwhile not far away, in Tierra Amarilla, an armed insurrection strived to reinstate the land grants.

New Buffalo was supposed to be the site for the shooting of the commune scenes in the movie *Easy Rider*, but they had some very antagonistic neighbors and one night their main building caught fire, probably started by arson, and burned to the ground.

A number of spiritual leaders began holding seminars at Lama, including Ram Das, formerly known as Richard Alpert, the old partner of Tim Leary. Lama published the original boxed edition of his work, *Be Here Now*. What a mantra!

The early Drop City was tamer sexually than some of the other intentional communities, but as more people poured in, things had gotten wilder and more like the others. A lot of people had sex with a lot of other people in all the communities. But really that was no different from what was happening all over America at that time. There was a lot of sex, as well as dope, going on everywhere. Still, almost everybody at Drop City was pretty selective sexually. Not everybody wanted to have sex with everybody else. As a whole Drop City was never really into group sex.

The main difference between sex in and out of the communities at the time, was that sex was a lot more open in communities, because we were living too close for many secrets. Which is not to say that everybody knew everything about everybody else. Everybody did not gossip nor was very interested in who was doing what with whom. The very closeness and lack of anonymity made many people seek a certain internal distance, similar to the way many small town people crave the anonymity of a big city to get growing space. A small town sense of community can be nice, but also stifling.

Just like folks anywhere, people in the communes kept coupling off, falling in and out of love, breaking each other's hearts, looking for someone special to be with. Ironically, sometimes there was less sex inside the intentional communities. It could get too heavy and messy. If it didn't work

out, there was no place to get away, except by leaving. The communities were like little hothouses. People didn't change miraculously when they walked in the door, but brought everything with them.

Open sex in the communities was almost all hetero; gays and lesbians weren't very out. Besides Giovanni, there were other gay guys and lesbians at Drop City at different times, but they were quite closeted, compared to what I'd seen in the gay communities in New York and San Francisco.

* * *

After a while I missed Drop City, especially the constant excitement and activity there. I missed being part of its day-to-day development, and kept wondering what was happening while we were gone. Patt, on the other hand, had concluded more than ever that there wasn't much of a future there for her, and kept talking about our staying down in Albuquerque.

When we got back to Drop City, we found out that Rabbit, Poly, Denton, and Leeda had finally purchased their new land, a hundred acres of forest not far away in the mountains, adjoining the national forest. They planned to begin building and to move out onto it the coming spring. They called their new community Libertad. According to Rabbit, Libertad would correct the inherent flaws of Drop City. Membership would be by invitation only; each member would basically be on their own economically.

Both Denton and Rabbit invited me out to see it, but I didn't go.

I got a letter from Gypsy David. He'd left the Panther Party because there was too much paranoia. Police agents had infiltrated; accusations were flying in all directions. Everyone was suspicious of everybody. The Oakland police followed them everywhere. There had been a shootout and arrests. Gypsy wrote that after he left the Panthers, he took some crazy substance, went into a druggy haze. When he woke up he was standing in front of a teller's window in a bank with a plastic gun in his hand, wondering, *How the fuck did I get here and what the fuck am I doing?* His letter was sent from prison.

Little by little Patt healed and got back to normal. As Winter solstice 1967 approached, Drop City was quiet and peaceful. A welcome relief.

We wanted to have some celebration for the mid-winter holidays, but nobody was religious.

“My old public school,” Moron Normal recalled, “used to put on an annual Christmas pageant. Everybody got a part. They were a lot of fun. Let’s do that.”

“We don’t have a script.”

“You’re a writer. Write one.”

I did and, with us as both actors and audience, we put on the one and only performance of, *The Coming of Clitoris or Droppers Do It Too, A Christmas Play & Pageant Set to Musique & Mumming*. At first a few people said they didn’t want to be in it, but as soon as they saw us rehearsing, they changed their minds. My draft didn’t have speaking parts for everybody, so Danu added a few characters.

It was pretty dumb but a lot of fun. The Clitorians were space aliens. The play began in the control room of a Clitorian saucer, which was just about to land to plunder Drop City. The Clitorians sang their national anthem:

All for Clitoris our mother
Queen of the universe
May her splendor ever smother
Those who would come first.
Though others may sometimes neglect her,
With passion we will try
To respect her, resurrect her,
That great Clitoris up in the sky.

As the plot progressed, Feather Tom sang:

I once had a thought
ho ho ha ha
But it went for a walk
in my hair
tweedledee

So I danced about
ho ho ha ha
Till it tumbled out
into the air
tweedledee

Moron Normal sang:

“Zounds,” belched the piggie who swallowed his snout,
“If I swallow the rest I’ll be inside out.
If I shit myself out then I’ll be inside in
If I eat my own shit I’ll be out/in again.”

Eventually the Droppers stripped the aliens of everything they came with, including their space shirts. It wound up in a big musical production number:

D is for the Dung we eat for dinner,
R is Rotting brain cells in our heads,
O’s the Onanism of our single guys,
reading marvel comic books in bed;
P is Piles of cat shit in the rice bin,
P is tourists Peeking in the door
E’s the Extra-secret hole beneath the hole
where Moron sneaks to score;
R’s our Revolutionary life-style
that’s undermining, shattering and jolting
the foundations of uptight rigid straight society,
R: we’re Revolting
R: we’re Revolting.

* * *

In the spring of 1968, Clard and Suzie Spotless moved to Boulder, supposedly just to have the baby. They said they would be back.

Shortly after, Rabbit, Poly, Denton, and Leeda finally moved to their land. It was quite a relief, after Rabbit and Poly’s being half in and half out of Drop City for so long. Others were

joining them there, making it a real budding community. We were all envious of the hundred acres of forest, and wished them luck. With the addition of Libertad, there were now five southwestern intentional communities, each with a unique flavor. More than any of the others, Libertad seemed like a retreat into isolation.

Michael Bippl and a few others took over Rabbit's old dome.

Soon after the baby was born, Clard and Suzie Spotless moved to New York instead of coming back to Drop City. Clard had been offered a job there as art director for the company printing his posters. Clard drew Lard into the mix, so Lard followed him to New York. Since her son Snoop was in school, Lard's partner Jal stayed at Drop City.

Both Lard and Clard wrote that they would be back from New York soon. I already had my doubts that Clard would return, and he never did. Lard got back after a couple of months.

Clard arranged for the Ultimate Painting, now returned from Paris, to be exhibited in the Brooklyn Museum. After that show it wound up in a garage on the east coast, and somehow was lost, probably forever.

Drop City was a very different place now. With all the early Droppers departed except Lard, Patt and myself, this was almost a new Drop City again, a different mix of personalities, another changed dynamic.

Bear and I built a big plywood box on the south side of my dome about ten feet wide, five high and six deep, and filled it with river rocks. We dug out the hill a bit, built a long sloping box with sheets of corrugated tin between air spaces and a glass cover. The sun heated the air around the tin sheets, the hot air rose and circulated through the rocks, the rocks stored the heat, cooler air recirculated to the bottom of the collector, and the heat entered the dome when I opened a flap.

The solar collector would provide most of our heat the next fall and winter. However it worked only when there was enough sun out and saved only enough heat for one day. But it proved the viability of supplementary solar heating. Stewart published a description in one of the early *Whole Earth Catalogs*, and

Lama Foundation published a broadside called *Sol Shot* containing a drawing of the heater and letters exchanged between Bear and me.

Everybody was agitated and going through changes in the spring and summer of '68. It was just in the air. On April 4, Martin Luther King was assassinated; inner cities around the country were burning. The Viet Nam war and the anti-war movement were intense. Lyndon Johnson was challenged by Bobby Kennedy, and the Democratic national convention was looming at the end of summer.

* * *

SEIZE THE LAND

(Fisher's Peak, Trinidad, Colorado, 1968)

Late afternoon, summer,
a hot wind out of the west,
Drop City shimmers.

Mike Bippl stumbles out of his dome,
eyes veined, takes a long piss.
"Mike," I say, "they just killed Robert Kennedy."
Face screwed blinks & shakes his head
then nods in the distance, still pissing.
"See that mountain? Well it's still there."

The mountain, by the way,
is owned by the Rockefeller family.
There's a barbed wire fence around it.
When I mentioned that to a lady from town,
she replied,
"How nice of Mr. Rockefeller
to provide
such a beautiful view
for the people."

* * *

We kept hearing news about the big nonviolent disruption planned for the Democratic convention in Chicago in the fall. Droppers were split. We couldn't fool ourselves that it would just be a revolutionary hippie Mardi Gras, a big street party. Nobody really believed it would be nonviolent, as long as the Chicago police were involved, so we were torn about going. Almost all of us had totally given up on the Democrats. Some of us planned to support Eldridge Cleaver for President on the new Peace and Freedom Party.

Big Bill, delicate and soft-spoken, who loved to walk alone down by the wildlife-filled banks of the Purgatoire, was excited about Chicago, and organized a contingent of Droppers to go. I was afraid that another separation at that time would totally collapse my relationship with Patt, so I decided not to join them.

Hickson, one of the founders of Drop South, had gotten himself elected as a delegate to the convention, and a group from that area was going in a caravan. They stopped at Drop City on their way and picked up Big Bill, Jasper Button, John the Hair, Silly Michelle, Marigold, Little Joe, and Boston John. Hickson showed us a printed target area map and directory that the demonstration organizers were distributing. The meadow of the park set aside for everyone camping out was designated "Drop City." We had become the generic "Hooverville" of the decade.

The next day a black guy, a white guy, and a big curly-haired dog came trotting down the hill toward me from the parking lot. It was Otis, Giovanni, and Bubbles.

"On our way to Chicago, babe."

"We're going to Levitate the Democrats!"

Otis grabbed my arm. "Give me the royal tour. We only got an hour."

"I never knew street politics is so fun," Giovanni said. "I swear I'll never vote for a straight candidate again. Is Marigold here?"

"Maybe you'll see her at the convention."

"After Chicago," Otis said, "we're circling back to the Apple."

Two days later Stewart appeared with two friends. Stewart, with wavy red hair and bright eyes, was always on the move, networking for the *Whole Earth Catalog*.

"Don't tell me you're on your way to Chicago too!"

"It's my policy to never get caught in a riot. We just came from the mother of all demos. Not an anti-war demo. A computer conference."

"A what?"

"Put on by the Augmented Human Intelligence Research Center, in San Francisco and Stanford."

"That sounds like Tim Leary."

"Not at all. Doug Engelbart."

"Who?"

"The world's first public demonstration of an interactive system, networked computers, videoconferencing, on-screen cursors, split-screen live TV pictures. I was helping with the cameras."

"I'm not following you."

"Do you know what a mouse is?"

"A mouse?"

"You can get right inside the screen! You can communicate computer-to-computer over any distance. It's going to change the world. It's going to empower everybody."

"Technology only empowers the people who control the technology."

"This is different. Nobody will be able to control it."

"High-tech toys aren't going to change the world," I argued.

"A riot in Chicago is not going to change the world," he countered. "That's only going to get a lot of people hurt. This will make it possible for anybody in the world to communicate instantaneously with anybody else. This is the future; that's the past. You'll see."

On TV that night I sat with Stewart and his two friends watching TV pictures of peaceful demonstrators being beaten and arrested by the Chicago police. I searched the small flickering black-and white screen for faces of Droppers, and in a crowd running from a phalanx of police batons I thought I saw a black guy, a white guy, and a big silver borzoi.

* * *

Chapter 21

The winter of '68 and the spring of '69 were pretty uneventful. The most exciting episode was removing the flush toilets and going back to outhouses.

I realized I now had a different time sense in my mental clock than I had back in New York, a sense of endless duration. A sense of sameness. Despite the constant flow of visitors, everything was the same every day at Drop City. Every day was the same as the last. I both loved and hated it. Would it matter if it was yesterday or tomorrow? Would it matter if the day began or ended?

For the first time I felt bored and out of it at Drop City. The early Drop City had been a storm of ideas and actions; being at its center was exciting and stimulating. Now it felt directionless, marginal, out of the mainstream. The eye of the storm had passed and the survivors were left with the cleanup. The world had moved on.

Through the spring Patt kept at me to make some plans beyond Drop City, but I still couldn't see beyond it. I kept putting her off. I still believed in the concept of Drop City, and also didn't want to face the outside world.

But for the first time since I moved in, I began having fantasies of living somewhere else. If Drop City was not going to be my permanent home after all, where was it going to be? Would I ever have a permanent home? Living at Drop City meant, in a way, retiring from the work world. I realized now that I was not ready to really retire from the world. If so, the only thing to do was to jump back into it. I had no idea how I could support myself. I didn't want to think about it much. The momentum of the daily routine at Drop City kept me going day by day.

Marigold had settled down to being a loner, though she took up with an occasional guy briefly. She spent most of her

time by herself, usually working on gloomy watercolors, a lot of blacks and reds, and wasn't very talkative. She occasionally opened up about her paintings or about the abuse she had suffered as a child and in a mental hospital, but not about much else. In the early summer Marigold moved into the old kitchen dome with Feather Tom, Diggy Meg, and her two children. They became a threesome. Marigold seemed much happier, but Diggy Meg seemed unhappier. Tom seemed thrilled having all the attention, as he had been mostly avoided by girls as an adolescent. Now he stammered a lot less than ever before.

* * *

In early summer, 1969, Riceman brought a bunch of magic mushrooms back to Drop City from New Buffalo, and I ate some.

Lying on the floor face up, eyes closed, I saw a curious image in the back of my head. It looked like an ancient Mexican painting of a man in a red and black bird mask, dancing a strange jerky repetitive dance, with stop frames, like the strobe effects on the Ultimate Painting. I wondered where in the world he was coming from, since I hadn't seen any image like this, at least not recently. Maybe he was arising from some obscure corner of my mind, considering that it's all consciousness in one way or another. Or maybe he was coming from the mushrooms. The dancer's movements were soothing, calming. When I finally opened my eyes, I felt an overwhelming urge to somehow cleanse myself.

I'd carried the manuscripts of two novels to Drop City. I was not very happy with either one. I had put so much work into writing those novels, and they had been such disappointments. I fished them out. They looked strange now, particularly on mushrooms.

I realized I no longer cared. I built a little fire on the hill and fed my only copies into the flames, page by page. As I watched the pages darken and crackle, I rolled a cigarette. At Drop City we tobacco addicts used to roll our own. At my first drag, a cold sweat rolled down my body, leaving me nauseous, and with the strange idea that a second cigarette would fix the sickness. I rolled, lit and dragged on another, and felt worse.

I'd started smoking tobacco at sixteen, along with most of my high school friends. My mother's death from cancer had shocked me into trying to stop, but reaching for a cigarette had become engrained in my many daily rituals, so to break the addiction, I had to break it in each situation. I'd tried a few times but had always hit a moment of weakness and had been unable to. Smoking did nothing for me, except relieve the anxiety its addiction caused. At least marijuana got me high, wasn't physically addictive, and wasn't going to kill me, as far as I knew. I threw the cigarette into the fire along with the manuscripts and resolved to never smoke tobacco again.

When I came down from the mushrooms I felt a twinge in my jaw. A toothache came on quickly, within hours throbbing so badly it made me forget my feet still hurt in my tight boots. I went into denial for a couple of days then slunk to the dental clinic in Trinidad. The dentist said that an impacted wisdom tooth had to be extracted. The tooth was partially lodged under the back of my jawbone, so I needed to go to an oral surgeon. The closest one was eighty miles away in Pueblo.

Ed the Fed drove me. By the time of my appointment I was really hurting. I had tried to raise the money I needed, but was about fifty dollars short. I explained that to the receptionist and offered to pay the rest off. She brought out the oral surgeon, a young man with a stiff chin.

He said, "We don't work on credit."

"Are there any corners you could cut?" I asked.

"I could do it without Novocain. It's your choice."

As my dad used to like to say, the American medical system is the best in the world because we have choice. I thought of old western movies where the patient bit on a rag while the barber sawed off his leg. How much worse could it hurt than it was hurting already? I paid what I had up front and went into surgery. He positioned a chisel on the tooth and hit it with a hammer. This really happened.

I had not known the meaning of pain until then. There seemed to be no world left outside of my pain. My mind pulled away to a faraway place, distant from my body and I no longer experienced the pain in quite so immediate a way. I felt oddly removed from my own body, and could see the whole scene,

the whole horrible mess, as if I was watching from outside myself. I was both myself and a different person. The doctor hammered on the tooth until it broke, and pulled it out in several pieces. As soon as I opened my eyes I flew back into my body, and the pain returned with a vengeance. The doctor showed me the pieces of tooth, dripping with blood.

I moaned all the way back to Drop City, each bounce of the road punctuating the awful throbbing in my head. The next few days were a hellish blur, but gradually the pain faded, my head cleared and the world returned. The experience left me with new respect for my untapped mental resources.

As I got back to normal from the surgery, I started to have the urge to smoke tobacco again. But now I was determined to keep my body clearer and cleaner. My ordeal with oral surgery had left me feeling I had the strength to do anything. When I went crazy for a cigarette, I slipped off mentally into the distant place I'd discovered during oral surgery, where I could watch myself from outside my body. In that mental space I wasn't addicted at all. Like the pain in my jaw, the anxiety of nicotine withdrawal gradually subsided. Breaking that habit was the most difficult thing I had ever done.

Patt was very happy, she had been urging me to quit ever since we met. She couldn't stand to be around smoke. She was happy, that is, until she saw me light a joint.

"I never said I was quitting grass. Just tobacco."

"It's the same thing."

"Marijuana isn't a drug; it's medicine."

* * *

Jasper Button received a letter from a friend telling him the date and location of a Ute Sundance a half day's drive west. Jasper had attended the year before and now planned to go again. He said that visitors were welcome. I knew nothing about the Sundance, except the Hollywood version, and not much about the Utes. I once saw a movie where they sliced the skin of the dancers' chests and tied them with rawhide straps to a big pole. I asked Jasper if they really did that.

"The Utes don't do that. They just dance."

I decided to go, a little reluctantly because one of our goats was due to give birth any day, according to my calculations. Not that goats ordinarily need help, but I had gotten to know the animals pretty well and had become protective of them.

"Do you want to come?" I asked Patt.

"I don't know what a Sundance is all about."

"Neither do I. We'll find out."

"Do you think we'll be welcome?"

"That's what Jasper says."

"That's what they said about that wedding we went to in Taos Pueblo, which was a disaster."

"If the Utes don't want us, we'll just come back. Do you remember that native woman Nani and her husband who stopped by the Joy Festival very briefly? She was living at Drop City when I first got here. He's a Ute. She said he was a sundancer."

"I'm not going."

"Suit yourself."

"How long will you be gone?"

"The dance is for four days and nights, so I'll be gone six days, maybe a week."

"I'm not staying here by myself."

"Why not?"

"You know I can't relate to some of these new people. I'm going to New York."

"New York?"

"I haven't seen my family in a long time. You can come with me, if you want."

"I think I'll go to the Sundance."

"Come with me to New York instead."

"I'm going to the Sundance."

* * *

Chapter 22

A group of us crossed the Spanish peaks in the Karmann Ghia and the painted van, to the dance grounds near Ignacio. With me were Jasper, Lard, Jal and her son Snoop, Feather Tom, Diggy Meg, her two kids, Ed the Fed, and Marigold. We arrived in the late afternoon.

In the middle of an open field was a large lodge, perhaps sixty feet across. On the far side was a village of tipis and shade lodges. Visitors were to set up camp near the parking lot. There were a half dozen other guest vehicles, and about twenty-five visitors in all, mainly hippie types. The dance was to begin the next morning.

We pitched camp near our vehicles, dug a little fire pit, and gathered some wood. I walked cautiously around the field. Ute families looked involved with activities related to the dance, as well as cooking, eating, and socializing. They mostly ignored me. The lodge was built of a dozen hefty posts about twenty feet high, connected by long rafters, the sides filled in with saplings and brush. A doorway was left open, facing east. I peered inside. In the center a great forked tree had been erected, with different colored fabrics tied to each fork and stripes painted around the bottom of the trunk. Next to it several older men were performing a ceremony and praying. There were some objects in the tree's crotch, that looked like fur, feathers, a bundle of sticks; I assumed they were ritual objects. Long rafters attached the center pole to the posts at the four directions. Around the far side were leafy shades and beds of leaves, that people were working on. In the afternoon, drumming began.

"Ishmael?"

"Hi, Nani." She was in a dress now, with colorful fringes, instead of the jeans she always wore at Drop City. "Is your husband dancing?"

"No, Barrigon's not dancing this time, but some of his cousins are. Is anybody else of the old gang here?"

"Lard is here with me."

"How about Jo and Curly and Clard?"

"They left Drop City. They're gone."

That evening she appeared at our camp with Barrigon. We sat around the small fire.

"The Utes are much luckier than my people," Nani said "They've been on this land for a very long time."

"All the mountains of Colorado and Utah were Ute land," Barrigon said. "Now we only have a little. Sometimes the buffalos wandered up into these mountains in the summer, but mostly they were down in the plains. We only began to go down and hunt them after we had horses. But soon we were using the buffalos for everything. Our lives revolved around them. That's when we started to Sundance. The Sundance is for the tribes who hunted buffalo."

"Where did it come from?"

"The roaring thunder taught it to a medicine man a long time ago, they say, a Cheyenne, and the medicine men passed it from tribe to tribe."

"How do people feel about us being here?" I asked.

"Some of the people don't mind. Some don't like it."

"Tell him what happened last year," Nani said.

"That was the first time a group like you came to the Sundance. A group of hippies. Over the years there have been white people at Sundances, but they were almost always somebody's guests. This isn't a pow wow. We don't advertise in the papers. This is a community event. The hippies just showed up uninvited, like you did. They probably meant well but they didn't know the right things to do. Some of them tried to participate in the ceremony. Some Ute people thought the hippies were mocking them, and were offended."

"Should we leave?"

"You're our guests now. Just watch. Don't assume anything. Change your clothes as much as you can. Be clean.

If you see a feather fall on the ground, don't pick it up. Tell a Native person. Ask if you're not sure about something."

"You're not expected to know everything," Nani said. "I'd never been to a Sundance either until I met Barrigon. My people, the Choctaw, don't Sundance."

"Last year a white man chopped wood and put it in the pile that the fire tender uses to feed the sacred fire. He was trying to help but it was very inappropriate. Other bad things happened too. We don't want to repeat them. Some of the hippies seemed to think that the Sundance is a party. There are Indians who come to party too. Have nothing to do with them."

"There's a reason that you're here," Nani said, "even though we don't know it yet."

The drumming, which had been going on continuously, suddenly stopped.

"That means the dance will begin soon."

A little while later, the drumming started again. The moon was overhead, and by its light I could see dancers assembling in single file near the forked center pole, behind an elder who had been performing ceremonies during the day. They marched around the outside of the corral several times, blowing on whistles which someone said were made from eagle's bones, a large group following them. They disappeared inside.

Jasper stood. "Let's go inside."

"Do you think it's all right?"

"Sure."

"I'm going to stay with the kids," Diggy Meg said.

Jal echoed her. "Me too."

Lard, Feather Tom, and Marigold got up.

"Aren't you coming?" Marigold asked me.

At the far end of the Sundance lodge was a drum circle. Every once in a while the drumming and singing would be stopped by blasts of the whistles. An elder prayed at the center pole. The drummers began to beat and sing again. After four strong beats, the elder began to dance, followed by others one by one until a large group was dancing.

The dancers were all men, barefoot, wearing only a kind of skirt with designs and sketches of animals. They stood in a semi-circle before the center pole and began dancing toward it, then back, to the drumming and singing, back and forth, blowing eagle bone whistles tied with white feathers, always facing the center pole, each dancer in his own path. Many wore elaborately beaded belts with beaded bags hanging from them, which must have contained ritual objects. At times they all danced simultaneously, but some also rested while others danced. Family members attended each dancer while they rested. The dancers partook of no water or food during the entire ceremony. Barrigon occasionally brought fresh leaves and other items to the pallet where his cousin rested. As they danced, a man lit and tended a fire to the east of the pole just outside the dance space. Ceremonies were periodically led by elders with eagle feathers and various sacred objects.

The dancing continued deep into the night. Finally we stumbled back to our camp and crawled into our sleeping bags.

I felt like I'd only been sleeping a minute when someone shook me. It was Lard. "Come on. We're going to the sunrise ceremony."

The dancers, holding down feathers, were in four lines behind the center pole, blowing whistles as the drummers sang. With the sun's first rays, the dancers raised their arms, then began patting their bodies with the feathers. They filed over to the firepit and sat in a circle around the ashes, wrapping themselves in blankets. After a few songs, whistles, and prayers by the elder, the fire tender gathered up the ashes and carried them out of the corral. The dancers retreated to beds of leaves in arbors around the circumference of the lodge, where they rested, attended by their families.

We went back to our camp and made breakfast. A few hours later, loud drumbeats signaled that the dance was beginning again.

The day wore on and the sun bore down. It was a strenuous ordeal, dancing under the sun without water or food all day, with only a break at noon and another before dusk. In the evening another fire was lit and the dance began again.

That night a few of us were sitting at our campfire when a crazily painted VW van drove up. Through the windshield I saw Winston Warlock and Dawnrider.

"I know it's more than a coincidence," Dawnrider said, "meeting you here."

Winston seemed a little calmer and his speech was less cascading. "Now we're just touring around, etc, etc, until we find a place to settle down for a while, etc. Traveling on this plane is too strenuous. I just want to dream travel now."

They had psychedelics and grass that they were selling to finance their trip, but kept it all stashed away.

I missed the sunrise ceremony the next morning. My body was pretty creaky from sleeping on the ground. When I got to the Sundance corral, the dance had already begun. There was now a buffalo head sitting in the crotch of the center pole. Woven into the hair and draped around the necks of some dancers were white furs that looked like ermine. Some of the dancers had designs painted on their bodies and faces. Several elders, sick and frail, were helped in. One by one they stood barefoot at the Sundance pole, while the chief performed a blessing and curing ritual over them.

Later Feather Tom and I walked silently around the dance grounds. He almost never said much, and I liked him for that.

"I've been having trouble with Meg and Marigold," he spat out suddenly. "We just can't seem to work things out."

"What's the problem?" As if I didn't know.

"Meg's uptight, possessive. At first she liked us all together. Now she doesn't. The kids love Marigold. She's a second mother to them."

"Maybe Meg doesn't like that."

"She told Marigold to move out. I don't want her to. Marigold doesn't want to either."

On the third day of the Sundance, many dancers carried eagle feathers and one held an entire eagle wing. I watched for a long time, mesmerized by the power of the dance. A Native man came up to me, a strange look in his eyes. "Do you want to sit in on the drum?"

“What do you mean?”

“It’s good. I can fix it up for you.”

There had usually been five or six drummers. People alternated. But they looked like they had been drumming together for a long time. It was very precise. They would go faster or slower depending on the song, always changing cadence or stopping together at exactly the same instant.

I remembered that Nani had told me to just watch. “I couldn’t do that.”

“The drummers are all special friends of mine. Next time they sit down to play, go join them. It’s okay. It’s good.”

Later a few of us drove into Ignacio, about twelve miles away, to buy supplies. Patt was supposed to be arriving in New York that day, and staying with a woman who lived near her old apartment. I phoned but got no answer.

That night I fell in and out of sleep. I kept dreaming and waking, recalling fragments of dreams, falling off again. I woke feeling scared, couldn’t sleep for hours, then dozed off fitfully. That continued until dawn. I was very tired, shaky, in a funk.

“Are you all right?” Dawnrider asked. “You don’t look well”

“I was having strange dreams.”

“Tell me about them.”

I just remembered fragments. Patt was in the dream. She kept trying to tell me something, but I couldn’t hear her. Also in the dream was the same image that had come into my mind in Drop City under magic mushrooms the day I burned my novels, of a dancer in a bird’s beak mask, flat and stylized, like an ancient Mexican hieroglyphic painting. I couldn’t see his face under the mask. Also the Ute man who had asked me to drum. It was him and it wasn’t him at the same time. He was wearing some kind of ceremonial clothes. In place of one of his feet was a mirror. I couldn’t remember what he did in the dream, but it was something disturbing.

“You have to watch out for the man with the mirror foot,” Dawnrider said. “He’s a trickster. I grew up with him, or avoiding him. My grandmother was a *curandera*. A healer.”

“You’re Chicana?”

“Just half.”

I could see it in her now.

“They’re both helpers. In Mexico the one with the mirror foot is known as Lord of the Night,” she went on. “He can bring good, if that’s his whim, or he can bring evil. The one in the bird’s beak mask is known as Lord of the Day. Try to make friends with him. He’s much more reliable. He’s the bringer of arts and skills. The Lord of the Night and the Lord of the Day seem like opposites, but they’re really both part of each other.”

“Why would I have a dream like that here at the Sundance?”

“The Utes and the Mexicas are cousins. The Hopis are cousins too. We all spoke the same language a long time ago. This whole region is special for Mexicas. Have you ever heard of Aztlán? Our center, our place of origin. It is right here.” She placed her hands on the sides of my head. “That’s good. Your spirit used to cling too tightly to your body back in San Francisco. You used to say you were interested in dream walking. Have you tried it?”

“I don’t know how.”

“If you want to dream walk you’ll have to loosen that connection even more, to step out. But not here. This is not the right place.”

That night I couldn’t sleep. I kept getting hung up in the transition of falling asleep, the space between waking and sleep. I got very close to that instant of sleep, then backed off, afraid. Finally I lost consciousness. The next morning I took a long time to wake up.

I found Marigold and Feather Tom at the campfire, the kids chasing each other nearby and tumbling on the ground.

“Last night I had a dream about Patt,” Marigold said.

I waited for her to say more, but she didn’t. Finally I asked, “What happened in the dream?”

“She said she’s not coming back to Drop City.”

I drove into town and phoned the apartment where Patt was supposed to be staying, but there was no answer.

* * *

On the last day of the Sundance, many of the dancers were carrying freshly cut sticks. Several chiefs made orations, in the Ute language, and seemed to be exhorting the dancers.

"The Sundance chief," Barrigon explained, "is challenging them to take power from the center pole, from the buffalo. Do you see those willow wands the dancers are carrying? They are to pull water, to pull power to the dancers. The Sundance chiefs are also telling them how important and beautiful it is to live according to the old traditions, in the Ute way. They're dancing not just for themselves but for rejuvenation of all people."

As he spoke, one of the dancers fell over backward, or—it all was so fast—his feet suddenly rose into the air until they were almost even with his head. He looked like someone levitated by a magician for an instant. Then he fell flat on his back and lay there as if dead. The drums and dancing stopped. The other dancers watched him for a minute, then carried him over to one of the beds of leaves by the side of the lodge, his head facing the center pole, and covered him with a sheet. The drums began again and the others resumed dancing.

"His spirit has gone to receive counsel," Barrigon whispered. "When he returns he will dance with his thirst quenched."

About an hour later he rose, almost floated over to his dance path, and began to dance again, blowing his eagle whistle.

* * *

A buckskin was laid over the spot where the fires had been, and Indian people filed by, piling it with beautifully crafted objects, bolts of fabrics and money.

When the last dance was finally completed, all the dancers gave blessings to various elders. A bucket of water was brought in, a ceremony performed over it near the center pole. All the dancers went to their leafy beds, and the water chief gave each

a drink, one by one. The dancers stood and followed the Sundance chief out of the lodge. All the Indian spectators lined up, and the water chief gave each a drink of the water. Our group of non-Indians watched.

“Aren’t you thirsty?” The man who had suggested that I join the drum was standing beside me. “Get in line. It’s all right. That is sacred water they are drinking. You’ll receive a blessing.”

Suddenly I had a raging thirst. It felt like I would die if I didn’t have a drink. Somehow I controlled myself. “Thank you, but I think I’ll just watch.”

The man turned and walked away.

While the gifts on the buckskin were being distributed, Nani and Barrigon came over. “There’s going to be a feast in the Ute camp tomorrow. We’d like you to join us.”

* * *

At end of the feast, we said goodbye to Nani and Barrigon. “Next time you’re passing by Drop City, stop in and visit. Stay as long as you want.”

“It’ll be a while,” Nani said. “From here we’re going to California. To a meeting.”

“What about?”

Nani glanced at Barrigon, who said, “Tell him, it’s all right.”

“According to treaty rights,” she said, “Indians can reclaim land that the government has taken but no longer needs. They closed down the prison on Alcatraz island, and now they don’t use it for anything. It’s Indian land. We’re going out there and taking the island back in the name of all tribes. We’re bringing the media with us, so if they want to massacre us for the island, they’ll have to do it on television.”

* * *

Chapter 23

I finally reached Patt. We exchanged pleasantries, both of us tentative and cool.

"Why'd the trip there take so long?" I asked.

"We stopped off in a few places. I wanted to look at schools. We had to go out of our way a couple of times."

"When will you be coming back?"

"It might be longer than I said."

"How much longer?"

"I'm not sure. There are things I want to do here. People to see. Places to go. You know."

I finally asked her outright, "Are you coming back?"

She was suddenly silent, then whispered, "I don't know."

"Why don't you just say no, instead of leading me on?"

"I haven't been leading you on."

"It's cowardly"

"Don't start calling names."

It got worse, and ended with me slamming down the phone, more confused and upset than before. I called right back, but she had left it off the hook.

I called Patt again the next day, but just talked with the woman she was staying with. She didn't know where Patt was or when she would be back.

I licked my wounds. I told myself our relationship was finally over and I should be glad; it had dragged on too long, going nowhere.

* * *

Winston Warlock and Dawnrider followed our caravan across the mountains, down the eastern slope, and stayed at Drop City for a few days.

At first it felt good to be at Drop City without Patt. I kind of liked being alone. I smoked marijuana for the first time since before the Sundance trip, and laughed a lot. I caught up on the animals, all of whom had survived very well without me. The pregnant nanny still hadn't given birth. They say that goats are supposed to have very regular gestation periods, so I must have calculated wrong.

My high wore off pretty quickly and I started feeling depressed, out of it. A lot of the Droppers were traveling. Drop City was half empty.

I tried to get involved with construction. But it hit me how lethargic the atmosphere had become. Work on the place had pretty much stopped. Nobody knew where to go from here, or had energy to do it. The biggest unfinished project was the theater dome, which remained in the state that Clard had left it. It had been his baby. The dome was too big and open a space for living quarters, and nobody else had plans to start a theater. It was a white elephant. Why bother?

I was down in the goat corral, feeding and brushing our pregnant nanny, when Feather Tom wandered aimlessly by, looking upset.

"Is something wrong?"

"Meg told me I have to break up with Marigold or get out," he stammered. "I love them both."

Later that day I saw Marigold carrying some of her stuff out of the old kitchen up to the hole.

The Sundance had left me with a gnawing hunger inside. Seeing the sundancer levitate while receiving a vision, left me feeling that my own spiritual quest had bogged down. I hungered for the kind of revelation that so many spiritual disciplines seemed to promise, that left you permanently fulfilled inside and liberated.

From being around Winston Warlock and Dawnrider again, I'd come to feel that they had some knowledge that I wanted too. They would be leaving in two days. This was my chance.

"How do you control a dream?" I asked Winston. "It sounds impossible."

"It's really very easy, once you empower yourself," Winston replied.

"Tell me how. I'd like to try it."

"Do you really want to know? It can be dangerous, particularly if you're not in a group."

"What does a group do?"

"You help each other come out."

"Tell me anyway. I'm not afraid. I want to know. Would you help me?"

"In our group, we try to connect people with helpers of the opposite sex. The energy works out better, at least for your first time out. I'll talk to Dawnrider, and see if she thinks you're ready and if she's willing to be your helper."

I sat with Dawnrider on the hill above the complex. Violent clouds were moving quickly across the moon. Sheet lightning flashed across the sky, followed by distant rumbling thunder. The atmosphere was thick. It was trying to rain.

She said, "All the power anyone needs is already right inside. But you have to seek it with the right intentions, without attachment or ego. If you just go looking for personal power, you'll crash."

"I don't want power over other people. Just over myself. My life feels out of control, unbalanced, out of whack."

She moved her hands around a couple of inches from my face. "The connection between your spirit and your body really is looser."

"I think it started when an oral surgeon pulled out an impacted wisdom tooth without Novocain," I replied.

"For first time travelers trying to break through the obstacles of ego, acid often helps."

I looked at the little translucent square of windowpane LSD. As I placed it on my tongue I recalled a story Patt had told me a long time ago, back in New York, about a girlfriend of hers who did a lot of mescaline, and said that she had come to understand everything except death, then, few days later, she dropped again and walked out of a window. Why was I taking LSD? Was I trying to kill myself too?

It was the strangest acid trip I'd ever taken. I got very high, but nothing really happened. Everything looked the way it does on acid, only it also looked normal at the same time. I was having no revelations. I was learning nothing. Yet I felt cleansed of excess mental baggage. Thoughts just flowed through my mind.

I wondered if the place I was at was where Patt's friend been when she walked out the window. Though I certainly couldn't make the claim that she did, that I understood everything except death, I felt that the reality passing before my eyes was all there was.

I lay in bed, eyes shut, watching the changing colors and images on the inside of my eyelids. I did what Dawnrider told me, I "tied a string around my finger," meaning I would remember I was asleep when I saw my hands. I crept into the space between waking and sleep, the place of transition. I got a little closer to that instant of sleep, then backed off. There seemed to be a continuum of consciousness into and out of sleep, with no sharp breaks. I lolled in the space for a long time.

I wondered if I really was trying to commit suicide. Yet there was something I wanted to find out, and I could only do that by proceeding.

I looked down and saw my hands.

Then, to my surprise, I saw Marigold. "What are you doing here?"

"Dawnrider asked me to come."

"Where is she?"

"You know where."

"I don't."

"You do."

I realized, of course, she'd be in the kitchen complex. The next thing I knew I was walking in the kitchen door. I stood behind Dawnrider, who sat at the table, braiding her hair in a mirror.

"I thought you were going to meet me," I said.

She looked at me in the mirror. "We've met, haven't we?"

In the mirror I saw Winston behind me. I turned but he wasn't there. When I looked back, Dawnrider was gone. I was alone in the kitchen. I didn't want to be alone.

"Ishmael!" It was Marigold. "Come here." Her voice was melodious, and echoed, reminding me of the banshees wailing on the wind that Nani had pointed out to me when I first came to Drop City. Marigold was in a white bathrobe, as I'd seen her wear coming out of the Drop City bath numerous times, still dripping, barefoot, with wet hair. But now surrounding her was a pure white glow, the kind I'd seen around saints in medieval paintings. I was astounded at her beauty, and shocked at myself for never having noticed it before. I moved toward her. She opened her bathrobe. She had the same body as always, but now I saw it was not a little chunky, but absolutely perfect.

A tinkling. Danu, long, gray hair flowing, stood by the window smiling, ringing several small Tibetan bells, admiring Marigold's body. He turned to me, made a gesture with his hand, and I heard the words in my mind just as clearly as if he were saying, "If you don't have sex with that gorgeous woman, I will."

Ed the Fed burst in the door holding up his middle finger and yelling, "Fuck this shit about money, I'd rather starve than have money, I'd rather starve than talk to those creeps. You can go lick out their assholes if you want, but not me."

Danu made a face. "What's his problem?"

I tried to reply, "Don't you remember, those were his lines in the Christmas play?" But the words wouldn't come.

Ed the Fed danced and sang, to a rumba beat:

I don't agree

With any one of you

I don't even agree with myself
But I do do like to moo.

Something kept flashing in my eyes, distracting me: a mirror, attached to one of Danu's ankles. I suddenly realized he wasn't Danu, but the mirrorfoot man I'd met at the Sundance. He flashed a sardonic grin. I drew back, startled, transfixed by his mocking eyes. He did a little dance and turned around, but instead of the back of his head, it was Rabbit, holding the drum he always used to beat down the sun. "Peace, love, joy," he smiled, then ensconced himself in an arm chair, putting his feet up on the old octagonal kitchen table, where Curly and Clard were playing cards.

"Curly! Clard! Rabbit! What are you doing here? I thought you left Drop City."

"What do you mean?" Clard replied, in his Kansas whine. "We never left."

Rabbit waved two fingers. "All blessings."

Curly held up a teapot. "Want a cup?" I knew there was marijuana in the tea.

Lard was sitting crosslegged on the floor, painting the playing cards.

Curly, Clard, and Lard looked strangely flat, two-dimensional. I realized what it was: "You're all like your cartoons in *The Being Bag*." They were drawn and outlined, each exactly like his cartoon alter-ego in the comic book story that they had published in Drop City's first year.

Curly—or the Baron—raised an eyebrow and laughed, "Why is a crow like a mimeograph?"

"I'm glad you've begun asking riddles again," Drop Lady said, suddenly standing next to me, wearing one of the funny little homemade skull hats she often wore.

On my other side was Alteresio, and on his shoulder was a crow. "It don't take long to get hip."

The crow said, "It sure don't."

"Have you guessed the riddle yet?" Curly asked me.

"I give up. What's the answer?"

Curly turned to Clard, who was the cartoon character Cleveland Troothsearch.

"I don't have the slightest idea," Clard said.

"Neither do I," Lard, who was now the cartoon Ratsy Eatsit, added.

"Beats me too," Curly shrugged.

"Why do you ask me a riddle if you don't know the answer?" I asked, exacerbadated.

"I think I know," Lard put in.

"You mean, you know you think," Curly objected.

"It's the same thing."

"It's not the same thing," I said.

"It's the same opposite thing, and that makes it the same thing," Clard insisted.

"No it doesn't!" I argued.

Curly pulled Clard's elbow. "There's just no talking to him, is there?"

Drop Lady sighed wearily, "You might be doing something better with your time than asking riddles without answers."

"If you knew time as well as I do," Curly replied, "you wouldn't talk about wasting it."

"Stop arguing," I cried. "You're just cartoons. You're not even real."

"You really know how to hurt a guy," Alteresio said.

"Maybe you're the one who's not real," the crow said.

Lard combed his hair with a fork. "There's no reason to separate reality from fantasy any more." He laid his head on the table and instantly fell asleep.

"YES, THERE IS!" I yelled.

"Oh god," Clard exclaimed. "There he goes again."

Curly and Clard lifted Lard, carried him over to the bathtub, which was set in the middle of the kitchen, almost overflowing.

Rabbit, who had remained sitting with his feet on the table, now jumped up, his mirrorfoot flashing, beating his little drum, and crying, "Cacahuatl!"

Curly chuckled, "Tat ti tit."

Curly and Clard dumped Lard into the tub, water splashing all over me and pouring across the floor, while a strobe light flashed it all into stop frames from above.

I looked up. The ceiling had become the Ultimate Painting, filled with hurtling geometric objects and vast spatial contradictions, spinning hypnotically.

I flew through space, infinite in every direction, incredibly beautiful, filled with soaring crystals, stars, and planets. The earth, blue and bathed in clouds, got smaller every second.

Dawnrider, flying beside me, wearing a red bird beak mask, held my hand, smiling, "See, it's easy."

"You're right. It is easy. I feel like I've always known how to do this."

"Yes, you have." As she flew, Dawnrider danced, with movements that were soothing, calming. "Look, there she is," she whispered.

Marigold floated before me, hugging the glowing robe around her. As I approached, the robe seemed to vanish, as did my clothes; the world disappeared and we joined in an ecstatic embrace.

"What the fuck are you doing?"

It was Feather Tom, wild-eyed as I'd never seen him.

"I thought you broke up. Sorry."

He grimaced and plunged a knife into my stomach. I spurted blood. Tom pulled off his face. Underneath was a mirror. The flash blinded me.

I suddenly realized that we were standing on top of the kitchen complex, forty feet above the ground. In the moonlight I could see the circle of art work hanging on the fences surrounding Drop City, the protective circle around it, setting it off from the world.

"Go ahead, jump," the mirror-faced man urged in a soothing tone. "You won't get hurt. You can fly." He began to dance, with strange jerky movements.

I felt sick, vertiginous. My feet gave way beneath me. I was falling.

I awoke back in my dome, feeling torn apart, as if I no longer quite fit into my body. I burst out sobbing. I cried a long time, until I was cried out. I felt like I'd been in an auto accident, shell-shocked, disjointed, as if I were two bodies that didn't quite coincide. I was glad to be still alive. I loved the world, I loved being in my body. Why did I ever try to get out of it? What was I thinking of? I vowed to myself I would never take LSD or any other heavy drug again.

A knock on my door. It was Marigold.

"I'm depressed."

"Marigold, I'd like to talk with you, but this is a bad time."

"Are you going to reject me too?"

"It's just that I've dropped acid. I saw you earlier today carrying your stuff over to the hole."

"Meg kicked me out. Tom just let her. Why is this is the story of my life? The odd one out. Always the loser. I can't accept it."

"Maybe you set yourself up for it."

"I don't know how not to. Do you have any more acid? I'll drop with you."

"That's not a good idea if you're depressed."

"I'm fine. Where is it?"

"Winston gave me a couple hits of windowpane. They're around here somewhere." I rummaged around.

She put one on her tongue. "Dawnrider's the only one who understands me, and she's going away. I don't know what I'll do when she's gone."

"You'll be all right."

"Do you love Patt?"

"I think so. I don't know. I'm very angry at her."

"I'm very angry at Tom. I'm in love with him. I can't believe he'd do this to me. I hate him."

She put her hand on my knee. "Would you fuck me?"

"I can't do that."

She slipped out of her dress. "Aren't I attractive to you? Tom wouldn't care. I wish he would." She kissed my neck, shoulders, worked her way down my chest. She looked up. "I want to hurt him."

I held her face in my hands. "Marigold, this doesn't feel right. We've got to stop."

I was so deep inside her, I felt I was touching the center of her being.

"Tell me you love me," she said.

"I love you."

"Say it like you mean it."

I hesitated. "I'm sorry."

The pools of her eyes seemed filled with all the sorrow of the world. She quickly slipped into her clothes and, without another word, left. Lightning cracked, followed by a roar, and heavy rain suddenly hammered on the dome.

I didn't want to be alone. I dressed and staggered down to the complex.

Winston and Dawnrider were there.

"How's your trip going?" she asked.

"Did you help me out on the dream plane?"

"Don't you remember?"

"I'm not sure."

"Then maybe it happened and maybe it didn't. Don't take it too seriously. It was just a dream."

Outside thunder crashed. Rain poured over the skylight, and into the kitchen through leaks in the roof.

Feather Tom burst through the door, his face contorted in terror. "Marigold shot herself. She's dead."

We ran to the hole, but I could barely look. It was a horrible scene, engraved forever into my mind.

An hour later Drop City was swarming with police, the hole cordoned off. We were all beside ourselves sobbing. Marigold had put a rifle into her mouth and shot off the back of her head. The rifle had been left behind by Kentucky Jeethro over a year before, when he fled on the scooter from the FBI. How fragile our lives are. How careful we have to be with each other.

The thunderstorm blew violently against the domes. We all huddled in the kitchen, water pouring through the roof in many places. All of a sudden I remembered that in the insanity I'd forgotten to lock the animals up for the night. I went down to the corral, lightning crashing around me.

The pregnant nanny was giving birth in her stall. Soaking wet, I knelt on the straw and helped separate the kid from the afterbirth, dried it off in a towel. It staggered to its feet, took a few halting steps.

In my mind Marigold's death and the goat's birth are forever entwined.

* * *

Chapter 24

Ed the Fed and I arrived in New York City's Lower East Side near the middle of August, 1969. We cruised down Second Avenue, lined with Puerto Rican and Ukrainian Jewish storefronts, an occasional East Village art gallery or coffee shop. He double-parked his little Karmann Ghia on a sidestreet, in front of the building where Patt was staying with her friend. Fed ran upstairs with me to give Patt a hug. We stood in the open doorway talking.

"Why don't you two just drop everything and come with me. It'll be a blast."

"There'll be too many druggy people there," Patt replied. "And the tickets are expensive."

All the way across country Fed had tried to convince me to go with him to the generational gathering ritually closing the decade at Woodstock, which was about to begin a few hours drive north, but I didn't really want to go. I needed to commune alone with Patt.

Ed the Fed pushed back his red handkerchief headband. "I'm not buying a ticket. Fuck tickets. We don't need tickets."

"What are you going to tell them at the gate?"

"That I'm from Drop City. If they don't want to let me in, fuck them. There's going to be thousands of us without tickets. We'll tear down the fence." He took off down the stairs three steps at a time.

I glanced around the room. "You weren't kidding. This place is as jam as our dome."

"I wish you could stay here too, but, as you can see, three people in here is claustrophobic. I try to act invisible when Rhoda's here. I've been staying at my parents' too, so I don't overstay my welcome."

"But it's okay for me to sleep here tonight, isn't it?" I felt awkward and estranged.

"Tonight she's at her boyfriend's. But she'll be back tomorrow."

"Have you been in touch with Kugo and Frinki? Kugo said I can crash there tomorrow. Have you seen their new pad?"

"A couple of weeks ago. It's a big improvement on their old apartment. A lot roomier. They've fixed it up. They seem much happier. At least she does. It's much more of a family neighborhood."

"It's somewhere up in the Seventies, isn't it?"

"Upper west side, west of Broadway." Then she added, "That was awful about Marigold. What could she have been thinking? She was such a beautiful girl."

"I think she just hit a low and didn't know how to get out of it."

"She had her whole life ahead of her. It's so pointless. It didn't have to happen. Drop City must be in a terrible state."

"Everybody's walking around in a daze."

"Mourning. I knew something terrible would happen, with everybody always on the edge. We're all to blame. I'm not going back." Then without missing a beat, she asked, "Did you miss me?"

"I'm very attached to you," I said. "I spent a lot of time thinking about you."

"I thought about you a lot too."

In a few minutes we were under a sheet.

"Did you get together with any girls while you were alone?"

"Did you get together with any men?"

"I want to be with you. I want us to be together. I'd like to put all that behind us. I'm not interested in other men."

"Well, I'm not interested in other women."

"There's something between us that I can't quite touch or hold on to, but I know it's there. It sneaked up on me."

"It's taken me a while too, but I know now you're a part of my life."

"There are still things that really bother me about you, and I know you say the same about me, but I guess we just have to accept them and work on them together." We began making love. Suddenly she said, "But we can't go on living like we were."

"We can work things out. We can find a way. Let's start trying to make a baby," I said.

"Not so fast. We've got a lot to talk about. I have to be someplace where I can go to school. Maybe New York."

"I'm not ready to move back here."

"We could try Boulder."

"It gets too cold there."

"Or New Mexico, or California."

"We don't have to decide now. We've got to go back to Drop City anyway, to settle things and get our stuff."

She said, "I'll go back only if we agree to stay just long enough to figure things out."

* * *

"You like?" Kugo waved a hand, displaying a big toothy grin.

"This is quite a change from your old pad on the Lower East Side."

"How's that?"

"It feels so homey...lived in."

"We were never really living in that old apartment. We were just camping out there."

A little girl's voice called out, "Mommy, there's a man here." I caught a glimpse of her ducking into a back doorway.

"Kugo, you've become middle class."

"Man, you're putting me down. I've always been like this. You just never knew me when I had bread."

"To what do you attribute your affluence now?"

"I'm not dealing acid, if that's what you're thinking. I reached a dead end with that stuff. I know when I've seen enough. Too many bummers. I'm through with psychedelics. I'm never going to trip again."

"I hear you, man. I'm finished tripping too."

"Anyway, I'm working. I got a job. A straight job."

"Doing what?"

"I'm a salesman."

"Of what?"

"Vacuum cleaners."

"In a store?"

He made a face. "Door-to-door. I actually like it. I'm good at it. I couldn't survive all day in a store. We've got a good product. Would you like a demonstration?"

"Ishmael!" Frinki appeared in the doorway, in a flowered housedress, looking very pretty. I extended my hand.

"Don't I get a hug?"

"Of course." We wrapped our arms and bodies for an instant.

"So you and Lard the only ones left of the old gang back at Drop City. I never would have guessed that."

"I wouldn't have either. This is a great place. I'm glad for you. You two have really pulled yourselves together."

"We realized we needed each other," Kugo said.

* * *

Clard and Suzie Spotless were staying in a loft in Soho that was paid for by the poster company he was working for. They seemed happy, though Suzie didn't know what to do with herself besides going shopping.

"This is a great neighborhood. Cheap and full of artists. But the developers are moving in. Everything's getting ritzy and

phony fast. The real artists are being pushed out. I wish there was something we could do to stop it."

"Not in New York, you can't."

"If there was only some way to have Drop City here. Just one building is all we'd need."

"Drop City cost three hundred fifty dollars," I said. "Do you know how much a building here goes for?"

"It doesn't matter. The ideas behind Drop City are right, I know they are. They'll prove themselves somehow, in some way we haven't thought of yet. It's just a matter of time."

* * *

"Those Chicago police were wild!" Giovanni exclaimed, brushing Bubbles.

"I'm so proud of my Giovanni-boy." Otis drew his elbows in, his hands up and wide. "Threw those teargas canisters right back at those big bad storm troopers. He was brave."

After the Democratic National Convention, Giovanni and Otis had continued on to New York and taken a pretty little flat together near Washington Square. They seemed a happy enough couple. I didn't ask too many personal questions.

"Chicago was the first time I ever really fought back," Giovanni said. "It was empowering. Got me ready for Stonewall. It happened right near here. We were in the middle of it."

"What's Stonewall?"

"You've really been hiding in those bad old sticks," Otis intoned.

"Stonewall's a gay bar a few blocks away. The police raided and tried to arrest a few drag queens. Everybody had taken so much shit for so long, everybody just decided they'd had enough. It was spontaneous. A crowd gathered in the street. Trapped the police in their patrol car."

"We were here at home," Otis picked up. "We could hear the ruckus from here. We ran down. Everybody was throwing

bottles, beer cans, garbage, cobblestones, anything they could find. It was glorious." He sighed. "Carried on for two nights."

"I've never felt like this before," Giovanni said. "Those pigs think twice before they mess with us now. We are powerful! I'm so proud to be gay."

* * *

Patt and I spent many hours communing about our hearts and lives, walking along New York streets and parks, in cafes and in her friend's tiny apartment.

Ed the Fed appeared one day with a girl he'd picked up at the Woodstock Festival. We all squeezed into his little car and drove up to Vermont to visit our old Dropper friends Fletcher, Nancy, their kids, and Jim Quim at Mullein Hill commune in Vermont. It was very beautiful and we were glad they were doing so well.

Fed's girl decided to sojourn at Mullein Hill, while Patt, Fed, and I continued across Canada, through forests where moose grazed alongside the highway, and plains where billows of black flies clouded the road and smeared our windshield, to Calgary, where we stopped for the annual Stampede, part rodeo, part carnival and sideshow, then down the continental divide, through Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons.

In a little motel in the mountains of Wyoming, with Ed the Fed snoring in the other room, I whispered to Patt, "I think we're already married."

"No we're not."

"It feels like we are to me."

"Not to me."

"Why not?"

"Because we haven't had a wedding."

"What's the difference? It's a common-law marriage."

"We need a ceremony."

"Why?"

“A ceremony means you’re committed to each other. You’re sharing your commitment with your family and friends.”

“Okay, let’s have a wedding.”

“Don’t joke.”

“I’m serious.”

We arrived at Drop City on the fall equinox, took a deep breath while the dust settled and sorted things out in our minds.

We got married in a simple ceremony, with Lard, Jal, Diggy Meg, and Feather Tom as witnesses, all dressed in our Dropper finery. Feather Tom had even given himself a new spiral haircut and was wearing his foxtail sewn to the back of his pants.

We began trying to make a baby. To my surprise—stupid me—it was amazingly sexy, and bumped us up to an unforeseen erotic level.

Soon after, Feather Tom and Diggy Meg moved to Libertad.

We bought an old 1946 Chevy panel truck, which actually had a hand crank to start it when the battery was dead.

“I’m pregnant.”

We were both very happy and scared.

We packed our things and left for New Mexico. It was three and a half years from the time I first walked into Drop City. Of the early Droppers only Larry Lard was still there.

* * *

Chapter 25

We found a little house on the desert near the Rio Grande, outside the town of Bernalillo, just north of Albuquerque, not far from Placitas and Drop South. Bernalillo looked very ordinary but had the reputation of being a main stop in the drug trade from Mexico.

I found a job for the first time in three years, laying adobes for a dollar an hour, and Patt worked cleaning houses.

We became friends with a number of people connected with Drop South, which was still muddling along. Quite a few former Droppers and Drop Southerners were living in Placitas and vicinity, including Riceman Bill and Breeze Trees, who'd gotten married.

* * *

Months later, on a long weekend we drove to visit some friends in Boulder, and stopped by Drop City. It was strange and awkward being there, like seeing an old lover after the fire and smoke are gone. People we didn't know had moved into our old dome. We spent the night with Lard and Jal.

"We're thinking of moving to Libertad," Lard said.

Jal had been quietly fussing over a drawing, but that raised her hackles. "I thought we were keeping that to ourselves."

"Don't mention it to anybody here, okay?"

"How many people are up there now?" I asked.

"About twenty."

"It's filling up fast."

"Denton and Leeda's dome is really coming along, very creative. Have you seen it?"

"We've never been to Libertad."

“Really? Let’s all go up tomorrow,” Jal said.

“Tom and Meg are still kind of camping out there. Rabbit’s zome is incredible.”

“We saw the model and some photos at Bear’s,” Patt recalled.

“Looks more like a spaceship than a house,” Jal put in. “He calls it a launch pad.”

The next day we drove thirty miles north, then headed into the mountains, through a wooden gate onto a twisting gravel road, and stopped alongside some other vehicles in the middle of the pine forest.

“They’ve got a rule that you can’t build in sight of anybody else. If you look close you can see domes peeking out between the trees.”

We followed a hillside thick with brush and shrubs until we found Feather Tom in a little clearing, working on a shell built out of wire and cement, a miniature Hollywood Bowl with an incredible mountain view. Diggy Meg was nearby at a small fire. We all exchanged hugs. They whipped up some lunch for us, then led us along a trail through a beautiful meadow to Denton and Leeda’s dome.

We sat around their fire swapping stories, Leeda nestling her baby in a sling around her neck, moving him from breast to breast.

“Where’s Rabbit’s zome?”

“Over the ridge.” Denton glanced edgily at Leeda. “Did they get back from Denver?”

“I haven’t seen them since last week.”

“They’re not back yet,” Meg answered.

“Go see their zome,” Denton mumbled. “It’s an amazing palace. I mean place.”

“Too bad they’re gone.”

“You can just walk in. It’s open. Right down that path.”

Everybody stood except Denton and Leeda.

“Aren’t you coming with us?”

Denton said, “We’ve got to get some things done.”

As we passed back into the tall pines, Tom said, "They're on the outs."

"I could see that."

"You know Rabbit."

"Yeah. I guess I do," I said.

Meg shook her head. "It's ridiculous. Male egos. Power games."

"Everybody helped Rabbit build his launch pad, but as soon as it was finished, he was too busy to help other people build theirs. Shit like that."

* * *

Not long after, Lard and Jal got married and left Drop City. Instead of moving to Libertad, they found a house near us in Placitas, New Mexico. Ed the Fed married a woman he met in Albuquerque, and they and their new baby moved to Western Colorado, near where I had gone to the Sundance. It seemed like everybody was getting married, and many were having babies. I guess it was inevitable at that age. After you're a couple for a while, you reach a point where either you break up or it becomes a marriage.

One day Curly Bensen passed through on his way from Lawrence, Kansas, to the West Coast. This was the first time I'd seen him since he left Drop City after the Joy Festival. He'd stopped at Drop City on the way down. More new people had taken it over, and Drop City had become even more of a crash pad than it had been. We sat around talking about old times.

"I keep thinking that we blew it." Curly ran his hand through his wild, kinky hair. "If we'd have kicked Rabbit out that first fall, maybe things would have been different."

"I don't know. Maybe not really that different. Kicking him out would probably have changed us all for the worse. In the end I think we'd all have moved on anyway."

He shrugged. "Yeah, that's just the way things are. We were better off not kicking him out. Rabbit was just a poor slob like

the rest of us. If Rabbit wasn't the enemy, it would have been you or me."

"That's what Clard always used to say," I replied.

"Man, we were naïve back then," Curly went on. "We really believed we could change the world, or, even worse, start over from scratch, make a whole new world. You can't make an alternative world. There aren't two worlds. There's only one, with everything and its opposite in it. Now I can barely see how we ever could have fooled ourselves into thinking like that. It just sounds loony."

"There's only one world, I agree. But like you said to me once, every morning we start over from scratch. The world does change. And people do change it. A little."

He laughed and rolled his eyes. "Right, a little. And it's always loony naïve people who do it, who change the world. A little."

"Tat ti tit," I said.

"Tat ti tit," he replied.

* * *

Soon Patt and I had a beautiful daughter. I loved being a daddy, though it was more work than I'd ever dreamed, and Patt and I didn't see eye-to-eye about a number of things. I'd cut my hair and landed a straight job with the county on the local Navajo reservation. I loved being around the Dine people, but I hated working for the state and wanted to quit as soon as I got a little ahead. The idea of my quitting my job threw Patt into a panic. Nonetheless I quit and got a low-paying oppressive job in a sweat shop cabinet factory. I still thought that a different kind of family structure, extended or tribal, might be liberating for us as parents and better for kids. But the experience at Drop City and the other communes didn't prove that. The minuses were as long as the pluses. Our new family wasn't much different than the ones we'd grown up in.

Curly and Jo wound up in Montana, where they'd originally looked to build Drop City. I dropped out of touch with him, but heard that they had another couple of kids, Curly had become a postman, and Jo worked in a cooperative school.

Clard and Suzie finally left New York, sojourned in Boulder for a while, then settled in Denver. He got involved with the university again. They had two kids and, I heard, separated.

* * *

I was walking down Central Avenue in Albuquerque near the university when I saw Rabbit coming toward me, accompanied by an attractive African-American woman. He introduced us.

"How've you been?" I asked.

"Just great. How about you? Heard you have a baby. How's Patt?"

"Money problems as always. Hate my job. We still bicker. Other than that, everything's fine. How's Libertad?"

He pulled his red bandanna off his brow, unrolled it and shook it out. "That place got fucked up. Me and Poly decided to leave."

"I'm sorry to hear that. What about Denton and Leeda?"

He stuck his tongue in his cheek. "They're still there. They got weird. I thought I knew who they were, but I hardly knew them at all."

"What happened?"

"Nothing, really. It just didn't work out." He shook his hair.

"How's Poly doing?"

"Went back to Texas. We broke up. I'm up near Santa Fe now." His eyes were sad and piercing. "I think about Drop City a lot now. I'm sorry. We really fucked up. You know what I mean."

"Yeah, I'm sorry too. I know what you mean."

"I knew you would. You and me, we're a lot alike."

The next week I went to visit Riceman in Placitas, to see the floor he was redoing by pouring ox blood all over it. He'd been told by a Chicano neighbor that this was the traditional way to get a good adobe floor. It was bizarre, since he was a macrobiotic vegetarian. I think his neighbor had been putting

him on, but Riceman was a very literal guy. Lard, who was living nearby with Jal, was there helping him.

"Did you hear about Rabbit and Libertad?" Lard asked as I stepped inside.

"I met him in Albuquerque. Said he and Polly left Libertad, and they split up."

Riceman leaned on his mop. "Did he tell you how it happened?"

"Not really."

"This is the story I heard," Riceman said, pushing up his horn-rimmed glasses, which had slid down his nose, "from somebody who was there. The sheriff and FBI raided one of their pot fields in the national forest just outside of their land. A lot of Libertad people had plots, you know, but they only raided one of them. It belonged to these guys Nestor and Hank."

"I met them, I think."

"That night everybody runs off to the fields, stashes anything smokable, and destroys everything else. At dawn three sheriff's cars drive up. With them is that same sleazy FBI agent who harassed us at Drop City. Some of them head straight for Rabbit's launching pad, and the rest of them run up to Denton and Leeda's dome. After a while they all come out, confer, then head straight for Nestor and Hank, they know right where to go, and drag them away in handcuffs. The news flies around Libertad. As soon as the pigs are gone, everybody gathers in Rabbit's launching pad. All kinds of accusations start flying. Denton and Leeda swear they hadn't finked. Rabbit is dragged out onto the carpet. It must have been painful to watch. Finally he admits that he snitched. But he had to do it, he said, to save Libertad, for sake of the community, otherwise they would have busted everybody. Denton, who is always such a peaceful guy, flies across the room like a madman, and clobbers him. They had to pull them apart. Then they told him to leave."

"Who?"

"The whole group. The community threw Rabbit out of Libertad."

"Looks like he's already picked himself up and moved on," Lard put in.

"Rabbit's going to be okay. He's a survivor."

* * *

Numerous rural communes and intentional communities had sprouted around the country by this time, but dropping out had not become the mass social movement we had envisioned. For all the people who dropped out, others were only too happy to jump in and take their places.

The limitations of the communal movement had become clear. It wasn't just a question of what most people wanted, but what was possible within this economic system. Money and resources were key. Even with pooling resources, starting a rural community was out of most people's reach. Poor folk could join a group but not start one. Americans were not radicalized to the point of land seizures. Organizing a group project like this requires a lot of skill, dedication, and luck. Most people found that even when a community gets going, group living isn't easy. Just getting along with one other person is difficult, so group living in an equal and democratic situation requires a lot of energy. City people often don't have a clue about what country living is really like or how to survive out there. Dr. Parks, the old Drop City physician, had been right: communes were more a place of temporary retreat from society for most people, than a method to reform society. Because of these factors, getting back to the land became primarily a middle class movement, and there would never be enough rural communes to really change society. The land remained cut off from working class city people. Communes would not be a giant step to social revolution or a way to usher in a new form of social justice. Inspired as a radical movement to fundamentally change society, the back-to-the-land movement became a question of lifestyle.

Meanwhile the Viet Nam war kept getting hotter, and anti-war fever around the country kept building. The TV news showed almost daily footage of massive demonstrations and radical activities in various hot spots. However, there really wasn't much going on in Albuquerque. I went to a couple of rallies, but they were very small and spiritless. I was still

committed to working for social change, and still could not accept society as it was. I knew the Revolution wasn't dead. I just wasn't connected with it. I felt a constant longing to find it and connect with it again.

Growing with the antiwar movement was the counterculture. Numerous young people around the country were getting a taste of collective organization in anti-war groups and in the early women's movement. A collective group had taken over a natural food store where we often shopped. The idea of a collectively run business was a new and great concept to me, bringing an alternative style of democracy into the workplace, without adding the difficulties of living together. Work collectives seemed to me more suited than communes as a transitional form to a radically changed American society. They took off where the communal movement left off.

"Did you see that new billboard down near the Placitas turnoff?" Lard asked me.

"It's totally gross. I don't understand how they get away with polluting the landscape with that shit."

"They get away with it because people like us sit around complaining and don't just go there at night and saw them down."

Lard, Riceman, I, and a couple of former Drop South guys became a little collective action group.

* * *

A family means putting down roots, and Patt and I had to decide if New Mexico was going to be the right spot for us. Besides being very hard to make a living out there, the lines between cultural groups seemed in some ways as frozen as they'd been since the first Spaniards and Anglo-Americans arrived. We were part of a community of post-hippies spread out over the area. We felt if we had lived there for twenty years, we'd still be newcomers. We wanted to be in some place where the social lines were more fluid, where there were more options.

Ernesto wrote us from California. He and Cori had broken up; he'd married a woman he'd recently met. They and another couple had bought a tract of beautiful hills near Cazadero,

filled with live oaks, and were starting a community. They invited us to join them, and we decided to go and check it out.

We stayed there a week. They had many of the same problems we'd seen over and over again in intentional communities. We'd already been through that, and didn't want to repeat it. One of the guys there was a carpenter, who had a job remodeling a house in the East Bay. He asked me to help him. We drove down to Berkeley.

Berkeley had been rocked by anti-war rioting and the struggle around People's Park. Most of downtown was boarded up, the storefronts covered with plywood, because so many plate glass windows had been smashed. There was a radicalism in the air that I'd seen nowhere else.

We settled in the downstairs of a little two-story cottage, behind a communal house. There were many communal houses around, in various states of organization or disorganization. The Berkeley Tenants Union had a chain of cooperative-communal houses they had taken over in the late sixties, stemming from a rent strike.

I began hiring myself out to do simple carpentry. I knew a bit from Drop City and my work in New Mexico, though not much about standard construction.

Patt began taking classes and working hard toward her degree.

The Christmas 1971 bombing of Hanoi brought many hundreds of people out into the Berkeley streets. That night I learned the local rules of engagement of urban warfare. If you were running, the police chased you, but if you walked, they ran right past you. Everybody ducked around a corner, quickly changed shirts and walked away.

After the first People's Park riot two years earlier, while we were still in Drop City, the university had erected a high wire fence around People's Park. Now the news came that Nixon had escalated the war again with the mining of Haiphong harbor. Word spread throughout the underground community that hundreds of people had gathered around People's Park and were tearing down the fence. I hurried up there. Rioters were running in every direction. Tear gas filled the air. Like everybody else, I had a wet bandanna tied over my mouth.

Police and National Guardsmen tried to clear the streets, beating and dragging people away, but we just circled the block and were back. Soon there were more people filling the streets than the police could handle. Hundreds of us shook the fence out of its foundations until it fell to the ground. People's Park was liberated again.

Berkeley was a hotbed of collectivity. Anti-war groups, women's groups, and radical affinity groups seemed to be everywhere, organized by a system of direct democracy. A "Food Conspiracy" network extended around the Bay Area. The Haight-Ashbury Food Conspiracy began as a buying club in San Francisco in 1968, in the aftermath of the Diggers' free food giveaways. In 1970 the Organic Food Association opened in the East Bay and quickly became an umbrella for over twenty food conspiracies reaching hundreds of households. It was organized around member participation. You needed to take a turn putting in a little work, either going to the farmers' market once a week to buy produce and cheese or sorting it into boxes or delivering it to the member households. The Organic Food Association was set up so each neighborhood conspiracy was responsible for one job each month. It was cheap and good stuff. The main problem was that it was inconsistent and you never knew what you were getting or how much.

A popular cooperative supermarket was thriving in Berkeley that had been started in the 1930s, the Berkeley Co-op, then the largest consumer co-op in the continental US, with 100,000 members. It was a great place, though torn between factions, and with a conventional managerial structure.

A number of work collectives were scattered around Berkeley, all recently formed. A group of carpenters called Build; auto shops named Uncle Ho's Mechanix Rainbow and Movement Motors; a taxi company, Taxi Unlimited; stores selling natural foods, Alternative Food Store and Ma Revolution; a store specializing in cheese and bread, the Cheeseboard; and Uprisings Bakery. These all differed from the way the Berkeley Co-op was run in that the workers themselves were the members and had collective management of the operation.

A couple of miles away in Oakland the “Inter-Communist” Black Panther Party had organized a whole “survival program,” which included a health clinic, shoe factory, plumbing service, free food and clothing, cooperative housing, job-finding service, transportation for elders, breakfast program for children, busing to prisons for visitors, a prisoners’ commissary. The program was to run “pending revolution.” All goods and services were free.

I called the carpentry collective Build and told them I was interested in joining a group like theirs. They weren’t taking in new members, but had compiled a list of ten like-minded people. They called a meeting, explained how Build worked, and suggested we set up a new collective. That never happened but I met Vern there, and we did a few remodeling jobs together. When we needed a scaffold for repairing a tar and gravel roof, Vern knew where we might borrow one, at Bay High.

In the industrial zone of West Berkeley, Bay High had started out a couple of years earlier as an alternative high school, in which kids could study on their own and get an education in the trades. Bay had a print shop, an auto repair shop, wood shop, electronics shop, and pottery studio, all doing commercial work, as well as a resident theater troupe. The initial funding for Bay High had come in part from the *Whole Earth Catalog*. The shops were training students in skilled trades in a non-authoritarian environment, while doing actual commercial work and bringing in a sizable portion of the school’s income.

When I first walked into Bay High the school was in a crisis. The shops were all organized as democratic collectives. The school as a whole had been run by an administration made up mainly of the academic teachers. There had been regular advisory meetings of shop representatives, but the real power resided in the administration. A struggle had developed between the administrators and the shop workers over the administrators’ refusal to join in sweeping the floors and taking out the garbage. A few days before I arrived, the workers had staged an insurrection, and kicked out the administrators. They had taken over the means of production, and were now trying to figure out how to complete the revolution. The shops were struggling to function without anybody telling them what

to do. Daily emergency meetings were being held to decide whether to keep on fighting to stay afloat, or to fold the whole thing. There were about thirty core people, about twenty others around the fringes.

I saw an excitement that I had not experienced since Drop City, and joined the group. We dissolved the school and out of the wreckage started Bay Warehouse Collective, based on the shops. All income from the shops went into the central Collective, which paid the workers salaries according to need. Not much money was flowing, so “need” was defined as basic survival. Bay Warehouse Collective, like Drop City, used a consensus system for decision-making. As long as one person was adamantly opposed, a decision was not made. The women’s movement was rolling, and Bay Warehouse women really knew how to kick butt.

I joined Bay Woodshop, but soon gravitated over to Bay Printshop, which was doing work for the anti-war movement and radical groups. The first edition of the classic book *Prairie Fire: The Politics of Revolutionary Anti-Imperialism* was printed there. I learned how to do camera work and run an offset press. In Bay Autoshop I learned to fix my car and grind my valves. I did some work with the Bay Theater Company. We ran Bay Duck Food Conspiracy. Bay Warehouse people were active in anti-war, women’s movement, environmental, solidarity, and other radical groups.

There was also plenty of fun. I, however, had lost my taste for dope parties, and much preferred playing with my little daughter at home.

Bay Warehouse Collective almost seemed like Drop City all over again. The counterculture had resurfaced in a new and vital form.

Work collectives kept springing up all over the Bay Area and around the country. Toward the end of the decade there were over 150 collectives and cooperatives around San Francisco Bay, involving thousands of people.

The building that Bay Warehouse Collective rented was too large and costly for our needs and abilities, and when push came to shove we couldn’t pay our rent, so in 1974 we disbanded. But each of the three shops regrouped as an autonomous worker collective, and each moved into a smaller

space with the machinery it inherited. The print shop became Inkworks Printshop. The auto shop became CarWorld. The woodshop became Heartwood Cooperative Woodshop, where I continued to work and learned to do fine custom woodworking.

The collectives began networking through the loose organization we called the InterCollective. Many of the collectives were in food-related industries. The network of food collectives circling the Bay opened a common warehouse, and formed the People's Food System, to provide a large-scale alternative to the corporate food system, connecting collective groups up and down the west coast. The counterculture was actually making a frontal challenge to the dominant system, in one of its most vital spots. But many of the volatile forces of the era met in the Food System, and clashed. Internally, an ideological battle brewed over organization between anarchists and Marxists. External forces were also at work. A number of people began acting strangely disruptive. Rumors flew that Nixon's Cointelpro agents, who had destroyed many other progressive and radical groups, had infiltrated the Food System too.

A number of the food collectives were involved with the prisoners' rights movement. The California system at the time used "indeterminate sentencing": a prisoner with a promise of a job on the outside could get an early release. The collectives offered that promise. However, there were competing radical prisoner organizations, in violent conflict with each other, each accusing the other of being led by police agents.

In 1977 an all-worker Food System conference was called to discuss the crisis. Almost as soon as it started it was disrupted and shut down by a small group which included outsiders from radical groups. Hard on the heels of this, a gun battle broke out between former prisoners belonging to feuding prisoner organizations, at Ma Revolution natural food store on the south-east corner of Telegraph and Dwight in Berkeley. The Food System came crashing down and, as it did, a countercultural dream shattered and died.

* * *

Chapter 26

When the Viet Nam war was finally over, many people who had been active for years went back to simply living their lives. The war had fueled much of the radicalism that had been heating the air; the whole society seemed to take a deep breath and rethink where we wanted to go from there.

One day Patt and I received a letter from Clard Svensen, who had gotten into organizing artist cooperatives in the Denver area. Clard explained that at Drop City there had been a lot of fast turnover among transient groups for a few years, until finally Drop City had been abandoned. The buildings were deteriorating fast and something had to be done. He proposed selling the land and giving the money to an art group called CrissCross that he, Lard, and Alteresio had formed. He asked that Patt and I sign over our votes on the board of directors in proxy to him for that purpose.

We were sad that it had come to this, but glad that someone had taken the initiative. We didn't want to make money from selling Drop City, so signed the proxies.

That Drop City had to die I knew was no reason to mourn. All living things die. It's not the death that is important, but the day-by-day living, what we create in the world. The basic idea of Drop City and the counterculture, to withdraw energy from the old system and use it to reshape society and the world, is an undying process. Young people always have to find their own structures to express their collective energies. They always turn to each other. Where else can they turn?

I found out later that Curly and Jo had opposed selling Drop City. Curly had an idea of he and Jo moving back onto the land by themselves, and starting over again. Clard and the others wouldn't go along with it.

I also found out later that, in order to sell the land, they had to remove from the deed the clause that declared the land

“forever free and open to all people.” Forever doesn’t always last very long.

The cattle rancher next door bought the property. All the domes were eventually dismantled and scavenged. The theater dome was the last standing. A fitting end. I don’t know if all traces of Drop City have been wiped off the land, but even if they are, the memory of a small band of creative young people defying the world and conventional reason, naïvely striving to liberate themselves, each other and society, to live in peace to the fullest, will continue to echo in our cultural memory every time people try, as we used to say, to “live the Revolution.”

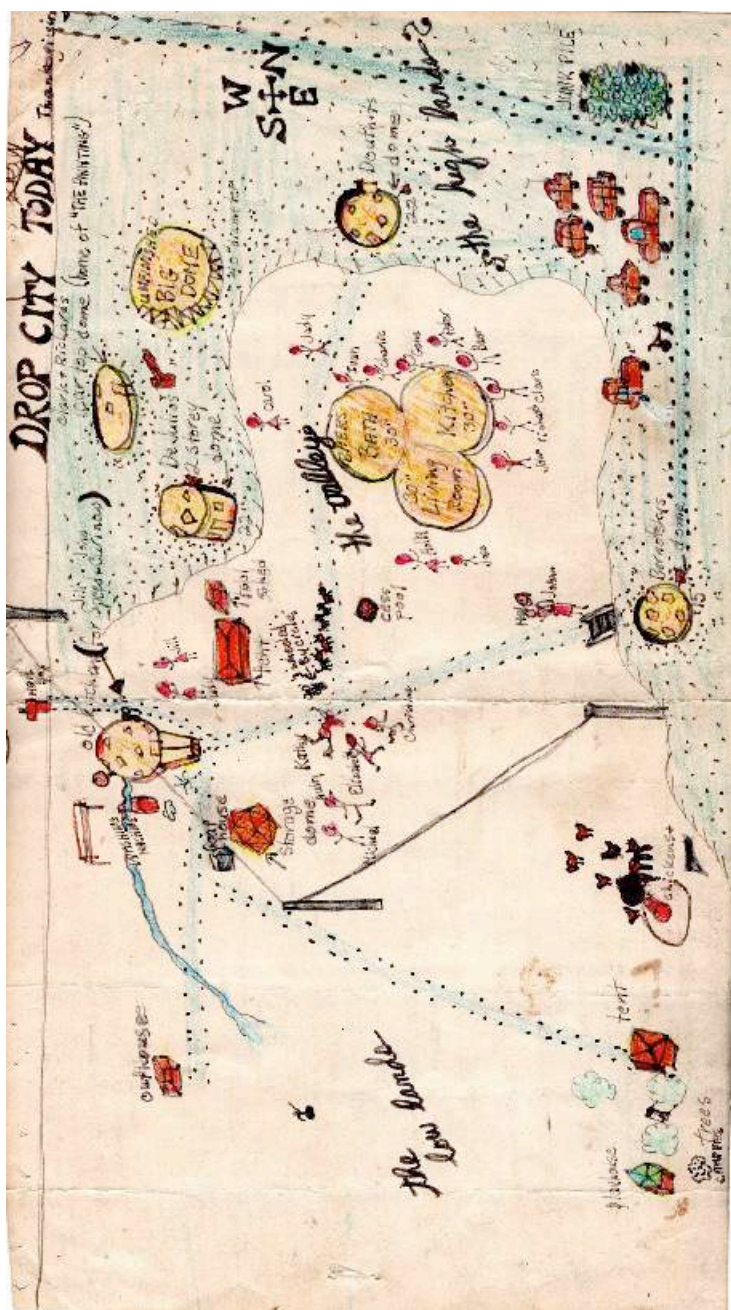
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A DROP CITY ALBUM

*Some of these image were restored
by Fletcher Oakes and Doug Rees*



Flier for the Drop City Joy Festival, 1967



Drop City Today, Thanksgiving 1966
map by Drop Lady



The Theater Dome
(photo credit: Unknown)



*Drop Lady, Lard, Curly, and Clard
around the table.*

(photo credit: Unknown)



Clard and Lard
(photo credit: Unknown)



Curly Benson

(photo credit: Unknown)



Drop Lady

(photo credit: Unknown)



*Clard Svensen (R) and friend.
(photo credit: From the collection of Clark Richert)*



*Droppers outside the Complex.
(photo credit: Unknown)*



Ed the Fed.

(photo credit: Unknown)



Rabbit at his desk.
(photo credit: Fletcher Oakes)



Ishmael the carpenter.
(photo credit: Unknown)



Dropper kids.
(photo credit: Unknown)



Tinker
(photo credit: Jill E.S. Curl)



Theater Dome
(Photo credit Unknown)



Sentry on the hill.
(photo credit: Jill E.S. Curl)



Drop Lady at the Hole.
(photo credit: Unknown)



*Clard climbing the theater structure.
(photo credit: Unknown)*



*Drop City in winter.
(photo credit: Fletcher Oakes)*

(photo credit: Kent Richert)

SEND US ALL YOUR MONEY

The DROPCITY Newsletter.

Vol. 1. NO. 1, Dec. 66

DROPCITY
RT. 1, BOX 125
TRINIDAD, COLO.

A CHOICE SAMPLING OF CURLY
BENSEN'S LEXICON ULTIMATE

DROPCITY NEWSLETTER
EDITORIAL POLICY

PARANOID: A zany virus.

COSMIC FORCES: The total-ultimate director of progress and survival.

MONEY: The obsolete system of survival and achievement.

STRAIGHT: Any commercial smoke.

BLOWN MIND: The condition of one's conscious faculties.

HOARDING: The attitude taken toward one's possessions.

PSYCHEDELIC: Clard Svensen's hair.

THE COMPLEX: A triple fused rhombo-icoso-dodecahedron.

THE MIDDLE: In Infinity: the position of its parts.

WIERD: The attitude in which reality is.

SYNCHRONIC: The manner in which progress is obtained.

CLOCKLINE: The spiritual dilemma for daily attainment.

DISCREETION: The insidious form of deception.

MAIL: Messenger of the cosmic forces.

CAR TOP DONE: Exploded, stretched, rhombik-dodecahedron.

THE HOLE: Charlie's home.

OVERLAPPING FRAYEYORK: The immediate relationship of light and anti-light.

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL: The TWO at least.

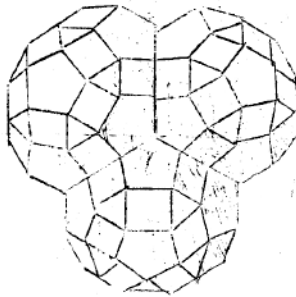
FUDGE: President of DropCity Inc.

DROPCITY: To sponsor and create the avant garde of civilization, utilizing all the remnants, at least of art, science, technology, etc.

DROPPING: An elaborate put-on.
ZANY: Same as psychedelic: see it.

No selectivity is exercised by the editors. The DropCity Newsletter is an expression of the individual viewpoints of the residents of DropCity and/or non-resident contributors. Nothing contained in this Newsletter is necessarily the viewpoint of DropCity or its residents.

The content of The DropCity Newsletter is in no way limited. We welcome contributions of any kind (accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope)—news, lies, truths, drawings, literature, pornography, nonsense, ultimate realities, ads, MONEY, MONEY, MONEY.



NON PROFIT

The Officers and Trustees of DropCity Inc., a non profit organization, are John Fudge, President; Joe Glover, Vice President; Burt Madman, Secretary-Treasurer.

A complex of three intersecting 34' diameter domes is nearing completion at DropCity. This kitchen-dining-utility-recreation complex is the first structure of its type ever to be built. The complex, with its skin of multi-colored car tops, was designed and engineered by Luke Cool.

first Drop City Newsletter

The



*Clard inside the first dome during construction.
(photo credit: Kent Richert)*



Patsy Pie

(photo credit: J.C.)



The author at work.

(photo credit: Unknown)



Luke Bear

(photo credit: Unknown)



*The cartop dome and the theater.
(photo credit: Clark Richert)*



*The kitchen complex under construction.
(photo credit: Unknown)*



The kitchen complex complete.
(photo credit: Fletcher Oakes)



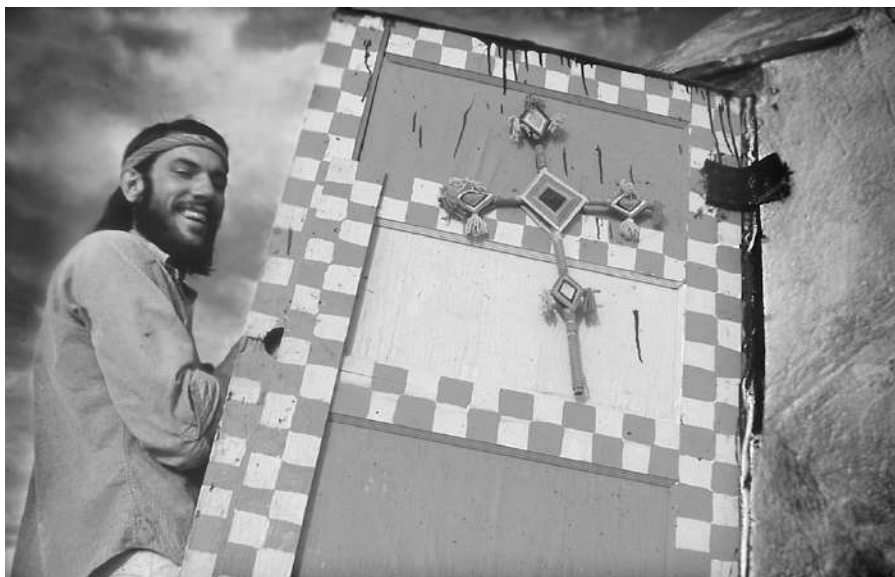
)The first kitchen.
(photo credit: Unknown)



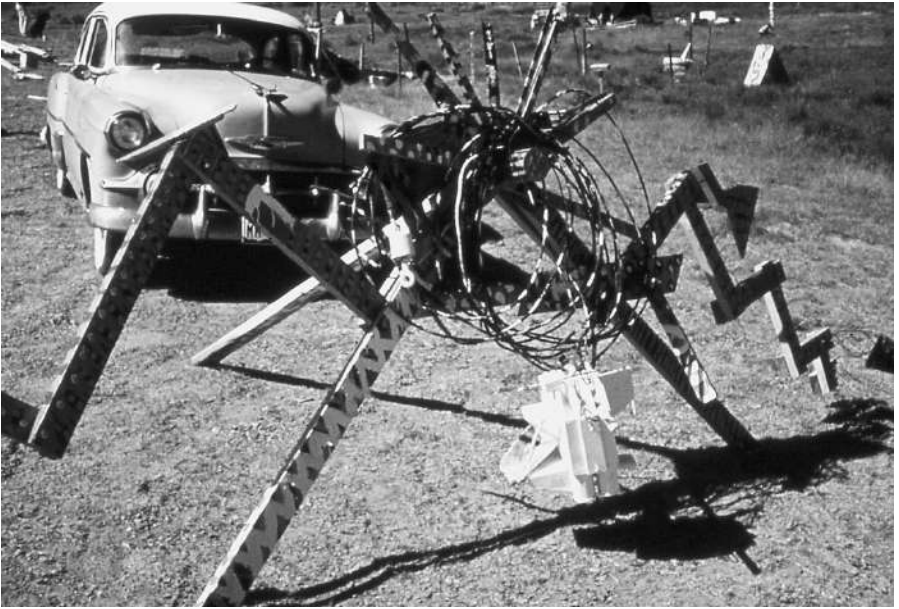
The solar heater.
(photo credit: Unknown)



*Paintings cover the inside of the Cartop Dome.
(photo credit: Clark Richert)*



*A Dropper enters the Top of the Hole.
(photo credit: Fletcher Oakes)*



Art guards the junkyard.
(photo credit: Unknown)



The prairie beyond.
(photo credit: Clark Richert)



Working

(photo credit: Unknown)



The First Dome
Painted by Dean and Linda Fleming
(photo credit: Jill E.S. Curl)



The Cartop Dome
(photo credit: Jill E.S. Curl)



The Kitchen Complex
(photo credit: Jill E.S. Curl)



(photo credit: Unknown)



The Ultimate Painting.
(photo credit: Jill E.S. Curl)

