

Night Flight

This one's about the night of little jc's bad acid trip, or whatever it was—something he bought from a stranger on a downtown corner....

He'd been feeling his oats a couple of months, after a confessed first experience with a 'real Lady' twenty years his senior. He'd discovered that a sweet bean-cooking, bed-making, broom-shaking saint of a mother might be the Virgin and the Magdalene rolled into one; and, well, if that could be true, think of the possibilities! The past few weeks he had been in and out with one young lady after another, looking for his 'deliverer's' youthful counterpart. What *she* had done for his confidence had been attracting girls in droves.

I was packing to leave in the morning on business, when he broke through the front door shortly before midnight. Ordinarily the sound of wind on a night when there wasn't any would have told me something wasn't right; but I was preoccupied. It only was when he seriously asked me to sit with him at the kitchen table that I saw: he was trembling so tightly, only eyes that had held his image often would notice.

He sat with shoulders hunched over, hands clasped in his lap. I lifted his chin. Expanded pupils threatened to extinguish his crystal blue irises. "Did you take something?" I asked. "What was it?" Except, it didn't matter, now, *what* it had been. He was on that brink between living in identity and being no one--where mind, servant of the soul, is flooded with the enormity of existence.

The clock on the stove showed one a.m.. *Oh, s--t*, I thought. My flight was to leave before daybreak. "Would it help if we took a walk?" I suggested anyway. He jumped up and headed for the door. We walked east up three blocks, then north to the county road....

Crazy life...crazy life! I'm thinking. *This scenario's been prime-timed already in alcohol, but with the advent of psychotropics the teams are off and running again...*

Remember how the play goes? First Humankind finds the substance; then it's ingested; then too much is ingested. Then it gets banned, people are put in jail over it, and we go through

a long scare period of parents learning nothing useful, while the innocents overwhelmingly learn everything....

At the country road little jc turned west, skirting the edges of the last of the open fields on the north edge of town, where the sunset daily paints new pictures from old matter and can make you feel like a different god at every dusk. The stars' light was jumping down to us in perfect timing through the vaporless winter night, as he broke into a trot. There was nothing for it but to jog alongside of him.

"LSD?" I had asked him when we left the house—*Jesus! Left with lights blazing, door unlocked--!*

"That's what the guy said...."

Little jc had been a star runner in high school. Won a college sport scholarship—great! *if* you really were meant to go to the Olympics, *if* you wouldn't rather be a poet. His father couldn't understand. *Give up a four-year scholarship?—a chance to be a real pro--and major in literature?*

The boy did have it all, a perfect specimen with the ideal body: the taut abdomen, and legs that could make a mother forget she already had been one, no matter how many times over, for they led up to the narrow hips, the flaring shoulders and golden hair.

Father hated the long hair. Even where there was no light and no one else's breath he couldn't admit his confused great love for little jc, crowned as the son was by a nature that was neither girl nor boy-- a father confused, consciously or not, by his own feminine side no less than his son's.

Will we ever see little Freud, as well? I wondered, getting farther and farther away from my unfilled suitcase as little jc picked up speed. A pack of cigarettes a day and those underdeveloped legs checked any chance of my talking; soon there were at least 20 feet between us, but what a statically star-full night! The hills at the horizon were absorbed by the dark, and the valley oaks were laced laser etchings above palely reflecting grass.

Little jc's hair isn't long anymore. It's almost too short for the soft little curls to peek out under his ears, golden spun strands thumb and forefinger ache to smooth. He had it cut during

the time he was gone from home, living at a friend's house I learned on his return, which was not exactly as the standard prodigal son....

"For Christ's sake, grow up," father had shouted, meaning, *accept that illogicalness in the world is natural*. "Piss on it," predictably replied the son, who felt there had to be more to life than worrying about fall leaves clogging the filter of a swimming pool no one laughed in.

He was running now, burnished Mercury, pumping perfectly; it was ridiculous to pretend that I could catch up. *There are no small wings on his feet, are there?* I thought; yet they seemed not to touch the ground. He reached the county road junction two blocks ahead of me and sprinted across. By the time I arrived there, he was so far away all my eyes could grab were the back-thrusts of his heels, white ridges of Adidas ("tennis shoes," we called them, when his feet were small--lots of Stan Delaplane broken shoelaces and lost socks.) Now my little jc was off on a lone session of experimenting with what *is* through what was to be had....

Okay, I decided, giving up and backtracking. *Let's assume some chemical....*but not mixed in a lab with accurate devices, like the defense department's nuclear bombs—*no way!*. *We'll need to be a lot smarter before the day when knee-jerk reprehensings give way to intelligent management of mind-altering substances*. *No wonder Leary got weary*, I thought, kicking a pebble under the lamplight at the turn of the corner to the house.

Oh, I was worried, decidedly worried. Some typical considerations did hit me, watching the Adidas disappear--maybe I *would* never see him again.... *I could call the police...get a lot of people out looking...or, get my car...go looking, myself*. All the while I knew I wouldn't.

Two o'clock a.m.!--my back feeling as if it's been used for a weight stand. Although it's more tantalizing than it's worth to undress and get into bed, I do. I know it sounds callous in the extreme, leaving little jc to whatever fate he would encounter this night; but I was arrested by memory of a similar youthful time of my own, when one self died and another was born....

"Just put it under your tongue and let it dissolve," my companion said. Soon, all standard self-realization was gone--body a material object of time and place, but psyche a suspended passenger in a boundless state...

I left the light on for him in the hallway...

...being taken faster than 'white lightning'—

He'll be back soon!—

...the 'til-then-denied, would-be-writer, who had been fighting her own developmental strictures, freed from Ego—

He will! He will!—

...weaving sentences, writing in Mind! Of the mystical ring: ascetic circle or witches' coven, they brook the same backwash of hereticity. Who dares preaching transcendence to Humankind against the flickering wind of Eternity--thoughts the voice box is not hewn to process....

When little jc took off two months ago I was more worried about his sleeping wetted by fine rain than failing Life's fundamental test. He didn't believe enough yet, and needed to in his own will. I could be wrong, believing it's best to come face-to-face with Self in the twenties rather than in old age. A new word has been coined for Man's latest high-powered, mind-expanding drugs: *euthogens*--they take one close to 'God.' Treat a sacrament sacrilegiously, however, and incur the penance, as I learned that long-ago night....

Nausea swept over me; I needed someone to take me out into green pastures and make me lie down beside still waters. I locked myself in a bathroom and closed my eyes, but not to the customary gently pulsating backdrop of Consciousness—into a endlessly whirling pool of forms and colors, through which my bodiless being was dizzyingly jettied and sucked, jibed and eddied....

I wanted to yield to the mercy of unconsciousness but was kept hanging on by a small thread, for there was this horrid dread that if I let go I wouldn't return. Then, among objects swirling in the vortex, mind's eye found and fastened upon the familiar covered head and, rounded shoulders of the Virgin Mary!--that placid countenance!; that archtype center of my child-indoctrinated nature!

Swallow a little white pill without grace, and the die is cast quickly. Tonight, little jc's psyche--unwittingly like mine that distant Saturday night--was traveling a Keplerian psychedelic course to a permanent destination....

She wove toward and away from me as I strove to retain her in sight; for a millisecond I believed myself saved. But then she receded completely, swiftly, and I had no hands with which to reach out to hold her. Goodbye world! Goodbye lovers! The blue of her drape was only a line; the whiteness of her face, a dot; and my breath was being drawn down, down, down with her, irretrievably into infinity. Then, simultaneously with her disappearance it was as if I was punched full force by a heavyweight contender, and I heard a sound expelled by my solar plexus that was both a sigh and a scream.

But one cannot die, can one, and hear, still? I opened my eyes, looked into the bathroom mirror, and discovered that death was internal—

This time the front door banged against its neighboring wall. At about the same time that it crashed closed, his body fell across my bed. He smelled as if he'd fallen into a repository of the contents of every diaper he ever had soiled.

"Jesus Christ!" I exclaimed.

The Adidas were gone. So were his socks.

"What in the name of God *happened* to you?"

He was breathing too hard to talk. One leg of his trousers was shredded to the knees. The other knee was poking through a jagged hole. I was all sympathy now, knowing he was alive, as well as concerned about what those ominous stains, which appeared to be the source of the stench, were doing to my bedcovers. "Where in hell have you been?"

"Dixon," he gasped.

"*Dixon?* That's 12 miles from here! How'd you get *there?*"

He lifted his head from my torso and rubbed a muddied hand across his mouth. "I don't know."

I laughed. It was such a goddamned relief to have him back in one piece. "I think it's a good idea if you have a bath." Raising myself up, I noticed his feet bleeding on the rug. The outer layer of skin was gone from the soles, along with various parts of toenails. "My god. Did you run all the way?"

He sat upright and blew hard through his nostrils, opening his eyes full round. "I don't know. One minute I'm running. The next, *something picks me up and I'm sailing through the air*. Then I blacked out."

"Here." I tossed a towel from the bathroom door. "Walk on this."

He limped to the tub where I had hot water already running. The pain registered on the raw flesh when he stepped in. His hands were scraped, too, and shook as he held them up to let me soap his torso. "When I came to, I didn't know where I was. Then I saw that I was in a field. I crawled to the fence and found a road." His stare was unfocused, like he was thinking that if he concentrated hard enough he would remember. "Some guy came by in a truck, saw me and thought I'd been rolled. He gave me a ride back to town."

"Here's a fresh towel. I'm going to make some tea," I said over my shoulder.

I put the tea on to steep and got dressed, pretending not to check on him as he gingerly blotted himself off. Four a.m., we were sitting at the kitchen table again as if the intervening movie never happened, when the quiet knock came at the door--my sister, ready to drive me to the airport.

"Look," I said to him, smoothing his hair. "I've got to go."

"I know. I know!" He jumped up, wincing when the full weight reached his feet. He looked like he was 10 years old again. "I wish you didn't need to...."

He opened the door. I gave him a hug and picked up my bag. "You take it easy now, okay?" Looking back from the driveway my eyes snapped a last shot of his silhouetted archangel form. But I wasn't worried. He was one of the new generation, which will be measured by *its* epoch--the one that will take us a step nearer to living truth.

It wasn't until a few years later--after he'd finished college brilliantly his own way--that he told me about the giant raven that swooped down, carried him to Nowhere Mountain and placed him at the feet of the Keeper of the Fire, who showed him his future in molten time. After all, how much can one trust even his own mother to understand?