

PICCADILLY CIRCUS

I hoisted my backpack, adjusting its straps so they wouldn't cut into the shoulder holster, and got on the ferry for London with my kite in hand and Colt close to my heart. Terrorism hadn't come of age, and there being no weapons search, I arrived one fair morning searching for Dr. R. D. Laing, preeminent psychiatrist and drug counselor of the times. I was convinced he could help me with my ego problem. Searching high and low, I finally found his clinic and decided to check in as a resident loon.

At this point I could barely spread peanut butter on bread without my ego getting involved, but saw the "clear light" flickering everywhere, and figured this alone was worth it. Everything was composed of electric particles fluttering in this flux, and, sure enough, merry old England was made of it too. Sitting on a toilet at the docks, deep in meditation, I noticed patterns on the floor of that same star stuff I'd spotted in Hawaii, Singapore, the Himalayas, and across the world.

Even when I wasn't on LSD they were everywhere now...the answer must lay with acid because it had started there, so I continued to trip out even on my way to the good doctor's asylum. I buried the Colt in a box and entered, where Dr. Laing himself appeared in the dance of light and energy, waiting in silence to meet the young fellow who'd come halfway 'round the world to see him.

I listened to my voice like it was coming out of a mine shaft. "The Dalai Lama said I have a good soul, and I used to talk to eels and my pet octopus on the reefs where I grew up, and I didn't kill anybody in Vietnam who didn't shoot at me first, and..."

He laughed, "Now, now son, slow down. We have plenty of time to know each other, so let's get to the source if we can. What seems to have frightened you from being yourself?"

I tried to explain the plight of my generation with its mind-warping drugs and the "Catch Twenty-Two" clause built into our chemical research, the near psychosis of ego loss. At first it didn't come out right, but he came to my room a few times to chat and speculate that he'd have an answer soon. What a classic guy!

I told him about the questioner asking, "Who are you?" and the answering voice, "Who wants to know?" and asked if it could be the left and right hemispheres of my brain hasseling each other. I wanted to know if *deja vu* was just an infinitesimal lag between coactive nerve centers that normally functioned together, or reruns from other times. I had a lot of fresh insights into insanity, he noted, seeming to enjoy my company.

I was most concerned about being a double Gemini, begging confirmation that I was a born schizophrenic and could be cured with a pill. He just laughed and brought more books and smiled. I gobbled dots from my Bible and studied Carl Jung's thick tome on psychology...wiggled out by fantastic mandalas his lunatics had painted. They were similar to stuff on the Lamas' walls and at the Monkey Temple! The fine line between genius and madness wavered delicately. I'd been there about a week when he called me to his office.

"Kerry," he said professionally, "you're as sane as my staff, and I want you to go out and help the kids who are lost in this drug oblivion of yours. At least you know what it's like."

"Without an ego?" I blinked.

"You'll just have to be whoever you are at the time. It's quite obvious you can't be rid of yourself and still function, especially on a mission like this." He smiled and I grinned back, feeling more confident than in a long time. So I packed and set out, charged with a mandate to save the waylaid, maimed, and mutated in our psychedelic family.

I got a bed and breakfast flat over "me little mum," who called me her "dearie," and proceeded to explore the subways and buses to get a feel for the city. I loved Chelsea with its fancy "birds" in sexy outfits, and Penny Lane's musicians and street vendors. Always one with nature, I began hanging out in Hyde Park and landed a job there renting chairs to old folks for a shilling. It was fine work for a lad needing to gather his wits, and I rolled out my kite and went at it.

I was sitting there with my stack of chairs, watching the geese harass the ducks while young lovers rowed discreetly to the far shores and the "Red Baron" fluttered high above me in the morning sky. Deep in thought about other jobs I'd had like Captain of the Nez, I felt the little plane shudder at its string. I looked up and a blue one just like mine was diving in my air space.

"Hey, ya monkee! Can't ya see wees owns this chunk of sky! Surrender, or we'll blast ye out of the heavens!" came the shout from a grassy knoll.

There, slapping their knees and rolling in delight, was the wierdest dressed group I'd ever laid eyes on. These long haired dandies in fur coats and puffed shirts had met their match!

"Like hell, ya limey bahsturds," I cried out. "No one fooks with the Red Baron!" I let out and then pulled hard down and to the right, getting the 'ol Baron climbing and diving masterfully. These city fancy-pants and their blue bomber didn't have a chance, and I dove screaming from on high right into their fuselage, leaving its wings fluttering to earth while the Baron, suffering severe damage as well, nose-dived with it into a pile between us.

We ran to the wreckage, and in that moment life took on

a new dimension. I recognized the little band of gypsies. I'd crashed the Rolling Stones' plane! Mick, Keith, and Brian were in hysterics and their buddy, Nicky, politely asked if I was loaded yet this morning, offering some fine German acid from his snuff box. We set about repairing the planes while I told them stories of Asia, growing up in Hawaii, and let them see the Colt.

Mick wanted a place on Maui to hide in the winter, and Nicky didn't care as long as it was warm with lots of women and drugs. Brian was due to drown in his swimming pool soon, so he never got that far, but I shared an impish delight with this musical genius from that beginning, and we were always too absorbed in the now to think of the future. Oh, it was a far, far world I fell into...and I quit selling chairs right then to trip off with them, as if destiny had brought old friends together after a long separation.

I moved in with Nicky onto a houseboat in Chelsea. In the circuit of houses we dreamed and schemed in, I met Elfie, Trevor, Kelvin, and the flock of women who sewed clothes and dealt drugs for the inner core that made the music we lived by. Nicky and I were basically drug runners in a very private world of affluent and influential socialites, but I found myself doing everything from babysitting to modeling the latest fashions, as I prowled its perimeters, his pal and basic bodyguard.

He catered to Brian Epstein, the organizing brain behind the Beatles, and many an odd hour was spent at Epstein's beck and call. Circumstance once left me alone with this lonely mogul of the music empire, after which I let Nicky know my role as protector did not include hobnobbing as some intimate bon vivant at that queer level.

Although we crossed paths with the rich and famous, I preferred to remain the invisible observer on its periphery, carrying the money, sacraments, and my weapon. At least this role was familiar, and insulated me somewhat from a world of effeminate men in lacy clothes doing a lot of strange things I couldn't follow at all.

These were incredibly eye-opening times for me, having never known this side of life. Travelling with them was like slipping backwards in a time machine. Drug consumption was beyond belief, and reality warped from the future to the past, while we played in a fathomless night of fantasy and slept through sultry city days. This was not a hallucination. We were actually living in Arthurian times....rebirthing knighthood, dressed as kings, women as princesses, in gatherings of a Merlinesque clan around great tables heaped with splendor in old castles with moats and drawbridges, cold witness to our passing. I saw them, shining knights in all their regalia, princes of a cultural domain like the Three Musketeers, as they played parts in the miracle of an acid-laced vision...I, the Cosmic Yankee in their court, witness that it actually happened.

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The Stones' contribution from this period was "Their Satanic Majesty's Request," an album that tried to paint a psychedelic picture of the world as we found it in that chemically-warped period which so altered our followers everywhere. Haight-Ashbury had reached the apex of its evolution, American-styled, like a high-speed sequence from Nature's Half Acre set to bloom and fade in an artificially paced time frame.

It mattered not. We were in full flourish, and phantasmal roles were acted out by a gypsy generation of Welsh and Irish hippies who believed it real, and made it so. Flower children came of age, and it appeared even the very young were taking acid, their parents proven wrong and, by then, unable to reach them anyway. The Beatles went off with the Maharishi, justifying our existentialism, while their music poured over the world like sublime syrup, filling the gaps and smoothing it all over as if nothing was wrong.

I was swept up too, with simply no footing to stand on outside our dream world, something so fantastically real trying to disprove what you were seeing would drive you insane. It consumed us then...leaderless, without a plan, and no guarantees, we surged on as if no end would come. Time ceased to be a concern, and no one mentioned the future. It was all just now, happening, and unexplainable. We went to parties that were simply from other places and periods in history...there's no other medium to paint on.

We cruised the wee hours in our chauffeured cab through a crystalline mindscape, women piled in mink and chiffon, the drool of acid-soaked sighs and moans of a bliss we dared not question. These were standard fare on a voyage through an ecstasy we could see and share, in a secret world privy only to its believers. If you weren't there, don't expect a rerun...it'll never happen again.

Nicky and I did get stuff done somehow. We slipped through a string of houses where the endless line-up of sweet, young seamstresses who fashioned our social circle lived, as we watched them put the silk and satin pieces together. Trevor was in charge of this massive staging arena, where flourishes were choreographed for the next event. While they pandered and bandied with these juicy tarts, I'd slip under the sheets for a little of the old in-out meself, gathering names of promising hopefuls in my ledger, complete with their descriptions and wishes, to be sorted out later.

Brian Jones spent most afternoons getting dressed, thinking nothing of sending Elfie and Kelvin across town for special boots or a matching hat. The Stones' wardrobe was a full-time job, and colors to fit a light show or photo session had to be changed at a moment's notice, or some jewelry purchase had been forgotten, and off we'd go.

Nicky and I specialized in the field of alterations to consciousness more than clothing, and we took our work

seriously. Sampling every new batch in town, I scribbled more notes. He tested the drugs and I was in charge of the sacraments, still holding true to my formula and keeping the two separate. In a book on the Stones, I'm described as the American with the drugs...but we know better. I was more the filter and guard against evil potions. Someone out there was unscrupulously beginning to mix the chemicals and create designer drugs, and I found acid cut with speed and other strange combos, which scrambled my eggs but good.

We got pretty screwed up at times. I started to notice the first flaws in our mirrored image about then. When we weren't at private parties and clubs, the level of drug awareness was less, and in the public mainstream magic was becoming distorted. We'd go to the Round House, a converted railroad terminal, to see live concerts of the "Who," the "Move," or "Cream," and things would get so out of control I'd look for places to hide. Arthur Brown was screaming, "You're gonna burn, burn, burn," when his hair caught on fire.

People would overdose with no one to help or even take notice, and all manner of madness began to erupt a little bit at a time. Reality kept pace with it all...or was it a race? The music went within us and then went one more step...into the beyond. It was almost dangerous to be near the stage among the flailing throngs of groupies. Things got so wild that damage to equipment and onlookers became common. The limits were being reached. I watched warily as a lead guitarist electrocuted himself, thrashing his guitar into sparks and flames, beating on his giant amplifier, and spreading that familiar smell of charred flesh over the young audience as they cried for more in their chemical euphoria. Nobody thought it was real as sparks flashed from his lifeless body, dangling at the end of smoldering cords. I did, watching from that cold and all-seeing place within me while the bell tolled again.

Though time rolled by us, we lived in an insulated world slightly beyond the threshold of reality...princes in satin, suede, and velvet, with a mission to turn on the world through verse and song. It was a very demanding job. We were never straight anymore and hardly saw the sun. Using liquid pharmaceutical acid almost continuously, we were caught up in the untouchable realm of the music world. Nothing outside was capable of reaching us. The Beatles were bestowed with Knighthood, issuing a further mandate to our crusade.

My search for God was put on the back burner by present urgencies, such as the women in the clothing circuit who needed tending, and sampling the full gamut of London's social circles. From junkies' pads seething with raw sex, to the classy mansions of Rod Stewart, Jimmy Paige, and Roger Daltrey, I carried the gun, acid, and money while Nicky cut his drug deals. Overwhelmed by the spectrum of these states

of awareness, I seemed to forget the nemesis that had haunted my being before. In the stream of rock music, light shows, and group ecstasy I felt unencumbered by former beasts of burden. I was somebody, albeit a stranger in a strange land, and wished Kela could see me in such company as the Knights of King Arthur's court.

Rumors from the cosmic nation born in America passed like a fresh wave, sweeping the city with assurance we were not alone and that our directions were the same. I wanted to believe it was all true, like the rest on opposite sides of the Atlantic, but a part of me born in that war watched with a wary eye. The beginnings of an inbred caution told me drugs were not going to make all the world's ills go away, regardless if they could show humanity new directions.

Once thinly veiled, the doors of perception, through which poured our initial brilliant glimpse of a true living cosmos, were now blown off their hinges. Even in the elite crowd I traveled with, the cheapness of life could be seen...the fragile edge of excess and abandon not far from the truth and beauty that the chemicals delivered. It might've been called "the summer of love," but it looked more like some calm before a storm to me.

Like clockwork, Nicky and I pulled up at Piccadilly Circus, where his mules shuffled in long queues for their government allotment of heroin. Britain's socialized medicine provided the junkies' needs, and Nicky paid his drones and collected their apportioned doles. We were like ants tending aphids for their desired nectar. Jimi Hendrix was to be a guest soon, so Nicky had all his associates trading various favors, while his stash grew and grew.

I functioned in the midst of the downside too, through poverty and disease of the junkies' world where only cockroaches and landlords survived. Shrouded in the aristocratic immunity our status conferred, I'd shrug my shoulders, adjust my fur-lined cape over the Colt, and stroll through it all unaffected, but I took its pulse as it spread and waited for the sick side of the coin as it wobbled to land face up.

Overdose cases foamed on the floor of the Roundhouse, lost in patterns of color and music, junkies nodded from their stony void, drugs replaced sacraments, and once-fine cracks in the mirror of our times slowly widened. Although many of us noticed, like wayfarers in the land of Oz we trod the yellow brick road unphased, wanting to believe the promise lay ahead...for there was certainly no going back.

The Beatles were holding a gala bash for the opening of their new project in the recording world, Apple Studios, and we scurried to get everyones' clothing and drug preferences in order. We were constantly on the go, urging girls or moving necessities to various staging areas around town. Stopping at the East End to pick up the new leather boots for the Sergeant Pepper promo shots, I noticed a hospital across

from the Indian shoemaker's shop. While Nicky harangued the man about a blue pair for me, I drifted into the emergency exit, sniffing about for the nitrous oxide supply. When Nicky got into the car, there I was, grinning from ear to ear, arms draped around two tanks of laughing gas.

We went to Jone's apartment and launched ourselves into orbit, almost forgetting time amidst the hissing gas and cackling of madmen. Then, half-dressed and giggling all the way, we raced off to the Albert Hall for Frank Zappa's grand performance with the London Philharmonic. Sitting in the Stones' box not far from Paul, Ringo, and assorted other stars, I chuckled to myself that if all I accomplished during my tour of duty was turn the Stones on to nitrous, I'd definitely left a mark on jolly old England.