

THE GRIM REAPER COMES TO PSYCHEDELPHIA

Finding myself in this time-warped kingdom of majestic lords and ladies, I became one of them for a hundred-day tour so chemically enhanced it seems one long dream. It was dashed by a frantic ending that nearly cost me my freedom. Looking back, I should've recognized it as a clue that drugs had taken us as far as they were going to. The party at Apple Studios was the final celebration that wonderful era of Beatlemania ever knew.

I met Dee there, just in time, falling into a special kind of love with her as the euphoria of our times distorted like a record changing speed. I held her close the night of its mortal wounding, and ran with her from the crash of its reality.

She was older than me, and exquisite in all the ways a woman can be...full with compassion, unlimited in need, and capable of bearing truth with dignity. We knew what we were getting into from our first meeting, and that it didn't matter. We were destined to hold each other in the thrall of a priceless ecstasy, surrounded by closing danger as long as we could, at whatever cost.

She was so hauntingly in tune with me there was no caution great enough to hold back our fascination, and disregarding obvious portents for our tragic denouement, as well as the fear of being found, we melted into each other without regrets. I cannot place her face...for she represents something far deeper than the beauty of her flesh or raw animalism of her sex. We became some hunted creature licking it's wounds as one. The disfigurement of that Camelot we'd met in created us. We never came down, just simply refused, and kept taking LSD until time ran out on us.

The events following the highs of that unreal epoch were so low, and came in such a swooning gush, I've lost track of many. I know we fled the city on a train through a fear-filled night when the web of magic broke, to hide on the coast of Wales above her boutique. There, with hollow eyes, I watched her arch in naked splendor, her body silhouetted by raging seas and windswept cliffs outside her bedroom window. We made love to each other in some existential vacuum...for our make believe world had vaporized so suddenly it was hard to carry on in another.

My last recollection of London's once-magic world is one of lost friendships, confusion, and fear at being nabbed by Scotland Yard, close on my heels. I remember dressing with Dee, Nicky racing in to get something he'd forgotten for Epstein before the Hendrix concert, and his frantic search and glazed eyes. I'd never seen him like this...and never

saw him again. I guessed they were getting loaded before the show. We had no rules, but getting high on your own supply was not wise with his stuff. It caused serious mistakes.

Then it was nine, and we looked like a king and queen in the outfits Dee'd designed. The acid was rushing upon us when I realized we were late. Bits and pieces, premonitions of an ionized atmosphere, and a surreal sense of unrest ran through me. I remember this much without basis or calling.

Catching a cab to the concert hall, we were identified backstage, and slipped in as Hendrix was beginning. Nicky's seat next to us was vacant, which was unusual for him. Gazing through a divine aura, the cream of our secret society sat nodding in stoned reverence, as if in some great cathedral, awash in a purple haze pouring from the music that formed our religion.

Sparks flew from Jimi's guitar as he flagellated it like a scorned woman, or cajoled it into human moans and nearly unbearable shrieks and gasps. It was unbelievable! Waves of sound and light washed away all thought, filling our minds in transcendental atonement, and generating a message we all understood. It grew in intensity for what seemed like hours, and I wondered if we could stand any more, when suddenly it stopped.

Several people scurried from the curtained wings to Hendrix and the private boxes in front of us. Some began quietly filing out, as a ripple of anxiety rolled over the crowd. It was dark in the hall, and all just energy fields anyway, but something was surely amiss. A small, red spotlight fell on Jimi in his white silk cape. He bowed his head and said, "Brian Epstein has died...this is his requiem."

The hush was stunning, broken only by the crackle of loudspeakers informing eight-thousand stonies outside that the second show was canceled, and their money was waiting at the box office. Then Hendrix started...and what began as the Star-Spangled Banner never really ended. It just grew, and moaned, and wailed, and cried until we began filing out silently in solemn little clumps, while Jimi held his still-simpering guitar, weeping alone on stage in the dark.

We hurried through the crowds to find police surrounding Brian Jones's pad, so I had the cabbie head for the houseboat. We crouched below the windows as fear swirled around us in imaginary yet gathering waves. Peering through thick hallucinations, I sensed no one was aboard, and raced across the gangplank, grabbing my pack, passport, and all the drugs I could find. I always wore the Colt. Heaving three empty nitrous cylinders overboard out of habit, I fled just as police cars drove down to the edge of the river.

Dee's clothes were at Marrienne Faithful's, and calling there we learned Nicky was under arrest for manslaughter, as Epstein had died of an overdose injection Nicky had given him. They were looking for me as his accomplice, so Dee and

I tried to be invisible. About three in the morning, we were holding each other on a train, trekking like Lara and Dr. Zhivago through a cold and faceless nightscape, in flight down an endless corridor of paranoia.

Our colorful pageantry under Merlin's mystic spell lay a torn tapestry without a proper conclusion for that historic period of such great promise. It was all a daze. We were outcasts, refugees from the collapse of a once-upon-a-time musical fantasy. All we could do was cry together for what we knew the future held for us all.

Dee cared for me like no other woman. She knew how fragile love could be, or maybe her world had always been stripped of its treasures. More than anything it was the loss of each other so soon upcoming that crushed us. I learned the meaning of escaping into another with her, and wondered if it was the end to our storybook spell that kept us in such a clutching embrace.

We held each other to make it last while a Tim Hardin record moaned in bittersweet melancholy, "It'll never happen again." That's how life was then, we were desperately beaten, alone together in an aged, stone manor perched like a forlorn lighthouse at the edge of an angry, unyielding sea. We recognized our banishment to that station where we could momentarily hide, wait to be discovered, and finally be dealt with accordingly by an uncaring, yet certain, hand.

I'll never know that love and fateful surrender again. Such phenomena only occur once in a lifetime. I totally gave in to her, and she did the same, in realization of our fall from grace. I loved her loneliness from the moment I saw her and sensed in that initial emotion we'd suffer quietly all we cherished in each other, until fate tore us apart.

Trevor and Kelvin appeared some weeks later with Dee's belongings and a few things I'd missed. The news was bleak. The British Empire had declared war on drugs. Even Lennon was arraigned for possession, and Brian Jones and the rest of the Stones were being investigated. Nobody had been able to see Nicky. The houseboat was wrecked during the search, and most of our gang had moved and were in hiding. Apple Studios quickly became the nemesis that broke the Beatles, and everywhere the battering ram of change undercut the foundations of a dream-world we thought would last a thousand years.

The only humorous touch was the story of Trevor. Noticing a nitrous tank sticking out of the mud, he slipped off a plank trying to submerge it, nearly drowning in the slurried ooze of low tide. We had a good laugh about that. It was hard envisioning our prince charming coated in anything but velvet and lace.

With half-hearted resolve, we tried to rebirth our joyhood on the stony cliffs above the wrath of windswept waves, flying the Red Baron far into the melee before us as if to signal some Phoenix rising from lost innocence. The

world was cold and bleak then, and even mock aerial battles and little sky rockets we sent up could not redeem our onetime brotherhood. Kelvin, Trevor, and I trooped home like little boys when Dee called us to meals, sitting around her fireplace in silence like a tiny band of refugees in exile from a devastated warzone.

It was an impossible dilemma with no hope for resolve. My questions about the police met her accepting eyes. We knew each moment brought us closer to my escape from England. There was no way to tie me to the drugs that killed Epstein, we all agreed on that, but if a scapegoat could be found, he'd be tried and convicted in the newspapers not the courts. Public sentiment would've reached intense levels, aimed at an American drug dealer. I looked around my trusted friends, knowing our bond was real. Perhaps we could overcome the odds we faced. It was bigger than my problem. Deep in each of us the truth was we'd lived the best part of the dream, and knew not where to go from here.

Dee had known sorrow most of her life, and I wonder how I could not have hurt her. It was ghostwritten into our parts. Even beyond the constraints that bound us it seemed impossible to be involved with another without pain. Willing to pay the price, I'd gone with her to discover a depth of caring never known before. Life was dark and cold outside our embrace, and we held each other for our very survival.

I laid secret plans to cut and dye my hair, dress in a business suit and glasses, and meet Trevor and Kelvin at the train depot. There, we'd shuffle me on an early morning flight to New York. I gave them my trusty Colt, and we walked to the village along the coast where the first of two tearful partings marked the close of my sojourn through a period only those chosen to live it could ever believe was true. I blamed myself for setting aside my values to be a part of those times. I should've preached the sacraments, for I knew their garden was nourished by malign forces and would wither and die.

Reasoning I was selected to survive their coming apocalypse by virtue of holding sacraments above drugs of pleasure, I began to dream of Hawaii and return to paradise. I don't know what Dee dreamed of. We discussed premonitions we shared in having lived through this before. It was more than deja vu, the moments we shared, and seemed our whole lives were in bondage to some ageless sorrow and ecstasy combined.

Beyond a clear revival of Arthurian courtship, we'd become the primeval man and woman cloistered away in stony recesses from a hostile environment that sought to thrash our very souls. It was all we could do to hold each other in comfort against it's incessant beating and renewal. Like the ceaseless waves, an unclear fear of our waiting destinies lurched before us bigger than life itself.

Was this the first taste of a reckoning our generation

would have to meet before so many of us died from the very promise which had set us free? Should I have warned Brian and Jimi then? It was more than I could comprehend, and in the last days fairly screamed for my release from a desperation that soaked through the very stones of our shelter.

I wouldn't have run from her if not ordered by fate's hand. She was everything I loved and needed then. But our infatuation and imprisonment were marked off thousands of years ago in some immutable decree, without our knowledge or consent, an original mandate of misery issued to our kind. We tried to shake its grip, but it was framed beyond our reach by unfathomable powers. All we could do was huddle in its shadow, waiting while our allotted seconds slipped away...