



The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test

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NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED.

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test

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Chapter

I

Black Shiny FBI Shoes

THAT'S GOOD THINKING THERE, COOL BREEZE, COOL BREEZE is a kid with three or four days' beard sitting next to me on the stamped metal bottom of the open back part of a pickup truck. Bouncing along. Dipping and rising and rolling on these rotten springs like a boat. Out the back of the truck the city of San Francisco is bouncing down the hill, all those endless staggers of bay windows, slums with a view, bouncing and streaming down the hill. One after another, electric signs with neon martini glasses lit up on them, the San Francisco symbol of "bar"—thousands of neon-magenta martini glasses bouncing and streaming down the hill, and beneath them hundreds, thousands of people wheeling around to look at this freaking crazed truck we're in, their white faces erupting from their lapels like marshmallows—streaming and bouncing down the hill—and God knows they've got plenty to look at.

That's why it strikes me as funny when Cool Breeze says very seriously over the whole roar of the thing, "I don't know—when Kesey gets out I don't know if I can come around the Warehouse."

"Why not?"

"Well, like the cops are going to be coming around like all feisty, and I'm on probation, so I don't know."

Well, that's good thinking there, Cool Breeze. Don't rouse the bastards. Lie low—like right now. Right now Cool Breeze is so terrified of the law he is sitting up in plain view of thousands of already startled citizens wearing some kind of Seven Dwarfs Black Forest gnome's hat covered in feathers and fluorescent colors. Kneeling in the truck, facing us, also in plain view, is a half-Ottawa Indian girl named Lois Jennings, with her head thrown back and a radiant look on her face. Also a blazing silver disk in the middle of her forehead alternately exploding with light when the sun hits it or sending off rainbows from the defraction lines in it. And, oh yeah, there's a long-barreled Colt .45 revolver in her hand, only nobody on the street can tell it's a cap pistol as she pegs away, kheew, kheew, at the erupting marshmallow faces like Debra Paget in ... in ...

—Kesey's coming out of jail!

Two more things they are looking at out there are a sign on the rear bumper reading "Custer Died for Your Sins" and, at the wheel, Lois's enamorado Stewart Brand, a thin blond guy with a blazing disk on his forehead too, and a whole necktie made of Indian beads. No shirt, however, just an Indian bead necktie on bare skin and a white butcher's coat with medals from the King of Sweden on it.

Here comes a beautiful one, attaché case and all, the day-is-done resentful look and the ... shoes—how they shine!—and what the hell are these beatnik ninnies—and Lois

plugs him in the old marshmallow and he goes streaming and bouncing down the hill...

And the truck heaves and billows, blazing silver red and Day-Glo, and I doubt seriously, Cool Breeze, that there is a single cop in all of San Francisco today who does not know that this crazed vehicle is a guerrilla patrol from the dread LSD.

The cops now know the whole scene, even the costumes, the jesuschrist strung-out hair, Indian beads, Indian headbands, donkey beads, temple bells, amulets, mandalas, god's-eyes, fluorescent vests, unicorn horns, Errol Flynn dueling shirts—but they still don't know about the shoes. The heads have a thing about shoes. The worst are shiny black shoes with shoelaces in them. The hierarchy ascends from there, although practically all lowcut shoes are unhip, from there on up to the boots the heads like, light, fanciful boots, English boots of the mod variety, if that is all they can get, but better something like hand-tooled Mexican boots with Caliente Dude Triple A toes on them. So see the FBI—black—shiny—laced up—FBI shoes—when the FBI finally grabbed Kesey—

There is another girl in the back of the truck, a dark little girl with thick black hair, called Black Maria. She looks Mexican, but she says to me in straight soft Californian:

"When is your birthday?"

"March 2."

"Pisces," she says. And then: "I would never take you for a Pisces."

"Why?"

"You seem too... *solid* for a Pisces."

But I know she means stolid. I am beginning to feel stolid. Back in New York City, Black Maria, I tell you, I am even known as something of a dude. But somehow a blue silk blazer and a big tie with clowns on it and ... a ... pair of shiny lowcut black shoes don't set them all to doing the Varsity Rag in the head world in San Francisco. Lois picks off the marshmallows one by one; Cool Breeze ascends into the innards of his gnome's hat; Black Maria, a Scorpio herself, rummages through the Zodiac; Stewart Brand winds it through the streets; paillettes explode—and this is nothing special, just the usual, the usual in the head world of San Francisco, just a little routine messing up the minds of the citizenry en route, nothing more than psyche food for beautiful people, while giving some guy from New York a lift to the Warehouse to wait for the Chief, Ken Kesey, who is getting out of jail.

ABOUT ALL I KNEW ABOUT KESEY AT THAT POINT WAS THAT HE was a highly regarded 31-year-old novelist and in a lot of trouble over drugs. He wrote *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), which was made into a play in 1963, and *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964). He was always included with Philip Roth and Joseph Heller and Bruce Jay Friedman and a couple of others as one of the young novelists who might go all the way. Then he was arrested twice for possession of marijuana, in April of 1965 and January of 1966, and fled to Mexico rather than risk a stiff sentence. It looked like as much as five years, as a second offender. One day I happened to get hold of some letters Kesey wrote from Mexico to his friend Larry McMurtry, who wrote *Horseman, Pass By*, from which the movie *Hud* was made. They were wild and ironic, written like a cross between William Burroughs and George Ade, telling of hideouts, disguises, paranoia, fleeing from cops, smoking joints and seeking satori in the Rat lands of Mexico. There was one passage written George Ade—fashion in the third person as a parody of what the straight world back there in the U.S.A. must think of him now:

"In short, this young, handsome, successful, happily-married-three-lovely-children father was a fear-crazed dope fiend in flight to avoid prosecution on three felonies and god knows how many misdemeanors and seeking at the same time to sculpt a new satori from an old surf—in even shorter, mad as a hatter.

"Once an athlete so valued he had been given the job of calling signals from the line and risen into contention for the nationwide amateur wrestling crown, now he didn't know if he could do a dozen pushups. Once possessor of a phenomenal bank account and money waving from every hand, now it was all his poor wife could do to scrape together eight dollars to send as getaway money to Mexico. But a few years previous he had been listed in *Who's Who* and asked to speak at such auspicious gatherings as the Wellesley Club in Dah-la and now they wouldn't even allow him to speak at a VDC [Vietnam Day Committee] gathering. What was it that had brought a man so high of promise to so low a state in so short a time? Well, the answer can be found in just one short word, my friends, in just one all-well-used syllable:

"Dope!

"And while it may be claimed by some of the addled advocates of these chemicals that our hero is known to have indulged in drugs before his literary success, we must point out that there was evidence of his literary prowess well before the advent of the so-called psychedelic into his life but no evidence at all of any of the lunatic thinking that we find thereafter ! "

To which he added:

"(oh yea, the wind hums
time ago—time ago—
the rafter drums and the walls see
... and there's a door to that bird
in the sa-a-a-pling sky
time ago by—
Oh yeah the surf giggles
time ago time ago
of under things killed when
bad was banished and all the
doors to the birds vanished
time ago then.)"

I got the idea of going to Mexico and trying to find him and do a story on Young Novelist Real-Life Fugitive. I started asking around about where he might be in Mexico. Everybody on the hip circuit in New York knew for certain. It seemed to be the thing to know this summer. He is in Puerto Vallarta. He is in Ajijic. He is in Oaxaca. He is in San Miguel de Allende. He is in Paraguay. He just took a steamboat from Mexico to Canada. And everyone knew for certain.

I was still asking around when Kesey sneaked back into the U.S. in October and the FBI caught up with him on the Bayshore freeway south of San Francisco. An agent chased him down an embankment and caught him and Kesey was in jail. So I flew to San Francisco. I went straight to the San Mateo County jail in Redwood City and the scene in the waiting room there was more like the stage door at the Music Box Theatre. It was full of cheerful anticipation. There was a young psychologist there, Jim Fadiman—Clifton Fadiman's nephew, it turned out—and Jim and his wife Dorothy were happily stuffing three I Ching coins into the spine of some interminable dense volume of Oriental mysticism and they asked me to get word to Kesey that the

coins were in there. There was also a little roundfaced brunette named Marilyn who told me she used to be a teenie grouper hanging out with a rock 'n' roll group called The Wild Flowers but now she was mainly with Bobby Petersen. Bobby Petersen was not a musician. He was a saint, as nearly as I could make out. He was in jail down in Santa Cruz trying to fight a marijuana charge on the grounds that marijuana was a religious sacrament for him. I didn't figure out exactly why she was up here in the San Mateo jail waiting room instead except that it was like a stage door, as I said, with Kesey as the star who was still inside.

There was a slight hassle with the jailers over whether I was to get in to see him or not. The cops had nothing particularly to gain by letting me in. A reporter from New York—that just meant more publicity for this glorified beatnik. That was the line on Kesey. He was a glorified beatnik up on two dope charges, and why make a hero out of him. I must say that California has smooth cops. They all seem to be young, tall, crewcut, blond, with bleached blue eyes, like they just stepped out of a cigarette ad. Their jailhouses don't look like jailhouses, at least not the

parts the public sees. They are all blond wood, fluorescent lights and filing-cabinet-tan metal, like the Civil Service exam room in a new Post Office building. The cops all speak soft Californian and are neat and correct as an ice cube. By the book; so they finally let me in to see Kesey during visiting hours. I had ten minutes. I waved goodbye to Marilyn and the Fadimans and the jolly scene downstairs and they took me up to the third floor in an elevator.

The elevator opened right onto a small visiting room. It was weird. Here was a lineup of four or five cubicles, like the isolation booths on the old TV quiz shows, each one with a thick plate-glass window and behind each window a prisoner in a prison blue workshirt. They were lined up like haddocks on ice. Outside each window ran a counter with a telephone on it. That's what you speak over in here. A couple of visitors are already hunched over the things. Then I pick out Kesey.

He is standing up with his arms folded over his chest and his eyes focused in the distance, i.e., the wall. He has thick wrists and big forearms, and the way he has them folded makes them look gigantic. He looks taller than he really is, maybe because of his neck. He has a big neck with a pair of sternocleido-mastoid muscles that rise up out of the prison workshirt like a couple of dock ropes. His jaw and chin are massive. He looks a little like Paul Newman, except that he is more muscular, has thicker skin, and he has tight blond curls boiling up around his head. His hair is almost gone on top, but somehow that goes all right with his big neck and general wrestler's build. Then he smiles slightly. It's curious, he doesn't have a line in his face. After all the chasing and hassling—he looks like the third week at the Sauna Spa; serene, as I say.

Then I pick up my telephone and he picks up his—and this is truly Modern Times. We are all of twenty-four inches apart, but there is a piece of plate glass as thick as a telephone directory between us. We might as well be in different continents, talking over Videophone. The telephones are very crackly and lo-fi, especially considering that they have a world of two feet to span. Naturally it was assumed that the police monitored every conversation. I wanted to ask him all about his fugitive days in Mexico. That was still the name of my story, Young Novelist Fugitive Eight Months in Mexico. But he could hardly go into that on this weird hookup, and besides, I had only ten minutes. I take out a notebook and start asking him—anything. There had been a piece in the paper about his saying it was time for the psychedelic movement to go "beyond acid," so I asked him about that. Then I started scribbling like mad, in shorthand, in the notebook. I could see his lips moving two feet away. His voice

crackled over the telephone like it was coming from Brisbane. The whole thing was crazy. It seemed like calisthenics we were going through.

"It's my idea," he said, "that it's time to graduate from what has been going on, to something else. The psychedelic wave was happening six or eight months ago when I went to Mexico. It's been growing since then, but it hasn't been moving. I saw the same stuff when I got back as when I left. It was just bigger, that was all—" He talks in a soft voice with a country accent, almost a pure country accent, only crackling and rasping and cheese-grated over the two-foot hookup, talking about—

"—there's been no creativity," he is saying, "and I think my value has been to help create the next step. I don't think there will be any movement off the drug scene until there is something else to move to—"

—all in a plain country accent about something—well, to be frank, I didn't know what in the hell it was all about. Sometimes he spoke cryptically, in aphorisms. I told him I had heard he didn't intend to do any more writing. Why? I said.

"I'd rather be a lightning rod than a seismograph," he said.

He talked about something called the Acid Test and forms of expression in which there would be no separation between himself and the audience. It would be all one experience, with all the senses opened wide, words, music, lights, sounds, touch—*lightning*.

"You mean on the order of what Andy Warhol is doing?" I said.

... pause. "No offense," says Kesey, "but New York is about two years behind."

He said it very patiently, with a kind of country politeness, as if... I don't want to be rude to you fellows from the City, but there's been things going on out here that you would never guess in your wildest million years, old buddy ...

THE TEN MINUTES WERE UP AND I WAS OUT OF THERE. I HAD gotten nothing, except my first brush with a strange phenomenon, that strange up-country charisma, the Kesey presence. I had nothing to do but kill time and hope Kesey would get out on bail somehow and I could talk to him and get the details on Novelist Fugitive in Mexico. This seemed like a very long shot at this time, because Kesey had two marijuana charges against him and had already jumped the country once.

So I rented a car and started making the rounds in San Francisco. Somehow my strongest memories of San Francisco are of me in a terrific rented sedan roaring up hills or down hills, sliding on and off the cable-car tracks. Slipping and sliding down to North Beach, the fabled North Beach, the old fatherland bohemia of the West Coast, always full of Big Daddy So-and-so and Costee Plusee and long-haired little Wasp and Jewish buds balling spade cats—and now North Beach was dying. North Beach was nothing but tit shows. In the famous Beat Generation HQ, the City Lights bookstore, Shig Murao, the Nipponese panjandrum of the place, sat glowering with his beard hanging down like those strands of furze and fern in an architect's drawing, drooping over the volumes of Kahlil Gibran by the cash register while Professional Budget Finance Dentists here for the convention browsed in search of the beatniks between tit shows. Everything was The Topless on North Beach, strippers with their breasts enlarged with injections of silicone emulsion.

The action—meaning the hip cliques that set the original tone—the action was all over in Haight-Ashbury. Pretty soon all the bellwethers of a successful bohemia would be there, too, the cars going through, bumper to bumper, with everybody rubber-necking, the tour buses going through "and here ... Home of the Hippies... there's one

there," and the queers and spade hookers and bookstores and boutiques. Everything was Haight-Ashbury and the acid heads.

But it was not just North Beach that was dying. The whole old-style hip life—jazz, coffee houses, civil rights, invite a spade for dinner, Vietnam—it was all suddenly dying, I found out, even among the students at Berkeley, across the bay from San Francisco, which had been the heart of the "student-rebellion" and so forth. It had even gotten to the point that Negroes were no longer in the hip scene, not even as totem figures. It was unbelievable. *Spades*, the very soul figures of Hip, of jazz, of the hip vocabulary itself, man and like and dig and baby and scarf and split and later and so fine, of civil rights and graduating from Reed College and living on North Beach, down Mason, and balling spade cats—all that good elaborate petting and patting and pouring soul all over the spades—all over, finished, incredibly.

So I was starting to get the trend of all this heaving and convulsing in the bohemian world of San Francisco. Meantime, miraculously, Kesey's three young lawyers, Pat Hallinan, Brian Rohan, and Paul Robertson, were about to get Kesey out on bail. They assured the judges, in San Mateo and San Francisco, that Mr. Kesey had a very public-spirited project in mind. He had returned from exile for the express purpose of calling a huge meeting of heads and hippies at Winterland Arena in San Francisco in order to tell The Youth to stop taking LSD because it was dangerous and might french fry their brains, etc. It was going to be an "acid graduation" ceremony. They should go "beyond acid." That was what Kesey had been talking to me about, I guess. At the same time, six of Kesey's close friends in the Palo Alto area had put their homes up as security for a total of \$35,000 bail with the San Mateo County court. I suppose the courts figured they had Kesey either way. If he jumped bail now, it would be such a dirty trick on his friends, costing them their homes, that Kesey would be discredited as a drug apostle or anything else. If he didn't, he would be obliged to give his talk to The Youth—and so much the better. In any case, Kesey was coming out.

This script was not very popular in Haight-Ashbury, however. I soon found out that the head life in San Francisco was already such a big thing that Kesey's return and his acid graduation plan were causing the heads' first big political crisis. All eyes were on Kesey and his group, known as the Merry Pranksters. Thousands of kids were moving into San Francisco for a life based on LSD and the psychedelic thing. *Thing* was the major abstract word in Haight-Ashbury. It could mean *anything*, isms, life styles, habits, leanings, causes, sexual organs; *thing* and *freak*; *freak* referred to styles and obsessions, as in "Stewart Brand is an Indian freak" or "the zodiac—that's her freak," or just to heads in costume. It wasn't a negative word. Anyway, just a couple of weeks before, the heads had held their first big "be-in" in Golden Gate Park, at the foot of the hill leading up into Haight-Ashbury, in mock observance of the day LSD became illegal in California. This was a gathering of all the tribes, all the communal groups. All the freaks came and did their thing. A head named Michael Bowen started it, and thousands of them piled in, in high costume, ringing bells, chanting, dancing ecstatically, blowing their minds one way and another and making their favorite satiric gestures to the cops, handing them flowers, burying the bastards in tender fruity petals of love. Oh christ, Tom, the thing was fantastic, a freaking mind-blower, thousands of high-loving heads out there messing up the minds of the cops and everybody else in a fiesta of love and euphoria. Even Kesey, who was still on the run then, had brazened on in and mingled with the crowd for a while, and they were all *one*, even Kesey—and now all of a sudden here he is, in the hands of the FBI and other supercops, the biggest name in The Life, Kesey, announcing that it is time to

"graduate from acid." And what the hell is this, a copout or what? The *Stop Kesey* movement was beginning even within the hip world.

We pull up to the Warehouse in the crazed truck and—well, for a start, I begin to see that people like Lois and Stewart and Black Maria are the restrained, reflective wing of the Merry Pranksters. The Warehouse is on Harriet Street, between Howard and Folsom. Like most of San Francisco, Harriet Street is a lot of wooden buildings with bay windows all painted white. But Harriet Street is in San Francisco's Skid Row area, and despite all the paint, it looks like about forty winos crawled off in the shadows and died and turned black and bloated and exploded, sending forth a stream of spirochetes that got into every board, every strip, every crack, every splinter, every flecking flake of paint. The Warehouse actually turns out to be the ground-floor garage of an abandoned hotel. Its last commercial use was as a pie factory. We pull up to the garage and there is a panel truck parked just outside, painted in blue, yellow, orange, red Day-Glo, with the word BAM in huge letters on the hood. From out the black hole of the garage comes the sound of a record by Bob Dylan with his raunchy harmonica and Ernest Tubb voice raunching and rheuming in the old jack-legged chants—

Inside is a huge chaotic space with what looks at first in the gloom like ten or fifteen American flags walking around. This turns out to be a bunch of men and women, most of them in their twenties, in white coveralls of the sort airport workers wear, only with sections of American flags sewn all over, mostly the stars against fields of blue but some with red stripes running down the legs. Around the side is a lot of theater scaffolding with blankets strewn across like curtains and whole rows of uprooted theater seats piled up against the walls and big cubes of metal debris and ropes and girders.

One of the blanket curtains edges back and a little figure vaults down from a platform about nine feet up. It glows. It is a guy about five feet tall with some sort of World War I aviator's helmet on ... glowing with curves and swirls of green and orange. His boots, too; he seems to be bouncing over on a pair of fluorescent globes. He stops. He has a small, fine, ascetic face with a big mustache and huge eyes. The eyes narrow and he breaks into a grin.

"I just had an eight-year-old boy up there," he says.

Then he goes into a sniffling giggle and bounds, glowing, over into a corner, in among the debris.

Everybody laughs. It is some kind of family joke, I guess. At least I am the only one who scans the scaffolding for the remains.

"That's the Hermit." Three days later I see he has built a cave in the corner.

A bigger glow in the center of the garage. I make out a school bus... glowing orange, green, magenta, lavender, chlorine blue, every fluorescent pastel imaginable in thousands of designs, both large and small, like a cross between Fernand Léger and Dr. Strange, roaring together and vibrating off each other as if somebody had given Hieronymous Bosch fifty buckets of Day-Glo paint and a 1939 International Harvester school bus and told him to go to it. On the floor by the bus is a 15-foot banner reading ACID TEST GRADUATION, and two or three of the Flag People are working on it. Bob Dylan's voice is raunching and rheuming and people are moving around, and babies are crying. I don't see them but they are somewhere in here, crying. Off to one side is a guy about 40 with a lot of muscles, as you can see because he has no shirt on—just a pair of khakis and some red leather boots on and his hell of a build—and he seems to be in a kinetic trance, flipping a small sledge hammer up in the air over and over, always managing to catch the handle on the way down with his

arms and legs kicking out the whole time and his shoulders rolling and his head bobbing, all in a jerky beat as if somewhere Joe Cuba is playing "Bang Bang" although in fact even Bob Dylan is no longer on and out of the speaker, wherever it is, comes some sort of tape with a spectral voice saying:

"... The Nowhere Mine ... we've got bubble-gum wrappers ..." some sort of weird electronic music behind it, with Oriental intervals, like Juan Carrillo's music: "... We're going to jerk it out from under the world ... working in the Nowhere Mine ... this day, every day ..."

One of the Flag People comes up.

"Hey, Mountain Girl! That's wild!"

Mountain Girl is a tall girl, big and beautiful with dark brown hair falling down to her shoulders except that the lower two-thirds of her falling hair looks like a paint brush dipped in cadmium yellow from where she dyed it blond in Mexico. She pivots and shows the circle of stars on the back of her coveralls.

"We got 'em at a uniform store," she says. "Aren't they great! There's this old guy in there, says, 'Now, you ain't gonna cut them flags up for costumes, are you?' And so I told him, 'Naw, we're gonna git some horns and have a parade.' But you see this? This is really why we got 'em."

She points to a button on the coveralls. Everybody leans in to look. A motto is engraved on the bottom in art nouveau curves: "Can't Bust 'Em."

Can't Bust 'Em!... and about time. After all the times the Pranksters have gotten busted, by the San Mateo County cops, the San Francisco cops, the Mexicale Federale cops, FBI cops, cops cops cops cops...

And still the babies cry. Mountain Girl turns to Lois Jennings.

"What do Indians do to stop a baby from crying?"

"They hold its nose."

"Yeah?"

"They learn."

"I'll try it... it sounds logical . . ." And Mountain Girl goes over and picks up her baby, a four-month-old girl named Sunshine, out of one of those tube-and-net portable cribs from behind the bus and sits down in one of the theater seats. But instead of the Indian treatment she unbuttons the Can't Bust 'Em coveralls and starts feeding her.

"... The Nowhere Mine ... Nothing felt and screamed and cried . . ." brang tweeeeeeng ". . . and I went back to the Nowhere Mine ..."

The sledge-hammer juggler rockets away—

"Who is that?"

"That's Cassady."

This strikes me as a marvelous fact. I remember Cassady. Cassady, Neal Cassady, was the hero, "Dean Moriarty," of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, the Denver Kid, a kid who was always racing back and forth across the U.S. by car, chasing, or outrunning, "life," and here is the same guy, now 40, in the garage, flipping a sledge hammer, rocketing about to his own Joe Cuba and—talking. Cassady never stops talking. But that is a bad way to put it. Cassady is a monologist, only he doesn't seem to care whether anyone is listening or not. He just goes off on the monologue, by himself if necessary, although anyone is welcome aboard. He will answer all questions, although not exactly in that order, because we can't stop here, next rest area 40 miles, you understand, spinning off memories, metaphors, literary, Oriental, hip allusions, all punctuated by the unlikely expression, "you understand—"

Chapter

II

The Bladder Totem

FOR TWO OR THREE DAYS IT WENT LIKE THAT FOR ME IN THE garage with the Merry Pranksters waiting for Kesey. The Pranksters took me pretty much for granted. One of the Flag People, a blonde who looked like Doris Day but was known as Doris Delay, told me I ought to put some more ... well, color... into my appearance. That hurt, Doris Delay, but I know you meant it as a kindly suggestion. She really did. So I kept my necktie on to show that I had pride. But nobody gave a damn about that. I just hung around and Cassady flipped his sledge hammer, spectral tapes played, babies cried, mihs got flipped out, bus glowed, Flag People walk, freaks loop in outta sunlight on old Harriet Street, and I only left to sleep for a few hours or go to the bathroom.

The bathroom; yes. There was no plumbing in the Warehouse, not even any cold water. You could go out into a little vacant lot next door, behind a board fence, and take a stance amid the great fluffy fumes of human piss that were already lifting up from the mud, or you could climb a ladder through a trap door that led up to the old hotel where there were dead flophouse halls lined with rooms of a kind of spongy scabid old wood that broke apart under your glance and started crawling, vermin, molting underlife. It was too rank even for the Pranksters. Most of them went up to the Shell station on the corner. So I went up to the Shell station on the corner, at Sixth and Howard. I asked where the bathroom is and the guy gives me The Look—the rotten look of O.K., you're not even buying gas but you want to use the bathroom—and finally he points inside the office to the tin can. The key to the bathroom is chained to a big empty Shell oil can. I pick it up and walk out of the office part, out onto the concrete apron, where the Credit Card elite are tanking up and stretching their legs and tweezing their undershorts out of the aging waxy folds of their scrota, and I am out there carrying a Shell oil can in both hands like a bladder totem, around the corner, to the toilet, and—all right, so what. But suddenly it hits me that for the Pranksters this is permanent. This is the way they live. Men, women, boys, girls, most from middle-class upbringings, men and women and boys and girls and children and babies, this is the way they have been living for months, for years, some of them, across America and back, on the bus, down to the Rat lands of Mexico and back, sailing like gypsies along the Servicenter fringes, copping urinations, fencing with rotten looks—it even turns out they have films and tapes of their duels with service-station managers in the American heartland trying to keep their concrete bathrooms and empty Dispensa-Towels safe from the Day-Glo crazies...

Back inside the Warehouse. Everything keeps up. Slowly I am getting more and more of a strange feeling about the whole thing. It is not just the costumes, the tapes, the bus and all that, however. I have been through some crewcut college fraternity weekends that have been weirder-looking and -sounding, insane on the beano. The ...

feeling begins when the Flag People start coming up to me and saying things like—well, when Cassady is flipping the sledge hammer, with his head down in the mull of the universe, just mulling the hell out of it, and blam, the sledge hammer, he misses it, and it slams onto the concrete floor of the garage and one of the Flag People says, "You know, the Chief says when Cassady misses it, it's never an accident—"

For a start, the term the "Chief." The Pranksters have two terms for referring to Kesey. If it is some mundane matter they're talking about, it's just Kesey, as in "Kesey got a tooth knocked out." But if they are talking about Kesey as the leader or teacher of the whole group, he becomes the Chief. At first this struck me as phony. But then it turned to... *mysto*, as the general *mysto* steam began rising in my head. This steam, I can actually hear it inside my head, a great sssssssss, like what you hear if you take too much quinine. I don't know if this happens to anybody else or not. But if there is something startling enough, fearful, awesome, strange, or just weird enough, something I sense I can't cope with, it is as if I go on Red Alert and the fogging steam starts . . .

"—when Cassady misses, it's never an accident. He's saying something. There's something going on in the room, something's getting up tight, there's bad vibrations and he wants to break it up.

They mean it. Everything in everybody's life is... significant. And everybody is alert, watching for the meanings. And the vibrations. There is no end of vibrations. Sometime after that I was up in Haight-Ashbury with some kid, not a Prankster, a kid from another communal group, and the kid was trying to open an old *secrétaire*, the kind that opens out into a desktop you can write on, and he pinches his finger in a hinge. Only instead of saying Aw shit or whatever, the whole thing becomes a parable of life, and he says:

"That's *typical*. You see that? Even the poor cat who designed this thing was playing the game they wanted him to play. You see how this thing is designed, to open *out*? It's always *out*, *into*, it's got to be *out*, into *your* life, the old bullshit *thrust*—you know?—they don't even *think* about it—you know?—this is just the way they design things and you're here and they're there and they're going to keep coming *at* you. You see that kitchen table?" There is an old enamel-top kitchen table you can see through a doorway in there. "Now that's actually *better design*, it actually is, than all this ornate shit, I mean, I truly dig that kitchen table, because the whole thing is right *there*—you know?—it's there to *receive*, that's what it's all about, it's passive, I mean what the hell is a table anyway? Freud said a table is a symbol of a woman, with her shanks open, balling it, in dreams—you know?—and what is this a symbol of?" He points to the *secrétaire*. "It's a symbol of fuck-you, Fuck *you*, right?" And so on, until I want to put my hand on his shoulder and say why don't you just kick it in the kneecaps and let it go at that.

But anyway this talk just flows. Everyone is picking up on the most minute incidents as if they are metaphors for life itself. Everybody's life becomes more fabulous, every minute, than the most fabulous book. It's phony, goddamn it. .. but *mysto* ... and after a while it starts to infect you, like an itch, the roseola.

There is also a lot about games. The straight world outside, it seems, is made up of millions of people involved, trapped, in games they aren't even aware of. A guy they call Hassler comes in out of the sunlight screen on Harriet Street and, zoom, he doesn't even wait for the metaphors. I never got into an abstract discussion with a total stranger so fast in my life. We began talking right away about the games. Hassler is a young guy, good-looking with a wide face and long hair with bangs just exactly like Prince Valiant in the comic strip and a turtleneck jersey on with metal stars on it, of

the sort generals wear on their shoulders, and he says, "Games so permeate our culture that..." rumble rumble ego games judge everything screwed up brainwashing tell ourselves "... keep on oppositioning"—here Hassler stiffens his hands and brings his fingertips together like a karate collision—

But my mind is wandering. I am having a hard time listening because I am fascinated by a little plastic case with a toothbrush and toothpaste in it that Hassler has tucked under one thumb. It is shuddering around in front of my eyes as Hassler's hands opposition ... What a curious bunch of bohos. This guy with the generals' stars on his jersey is giving a kind of vesper service lecture on the sins of man and—a toothbrush!—but of course!—he brushes after every meal!—he really does. He brushes after every meal despite the fact that they are living here in this garage, like gypsies, and there is no hot water, no toilet, no beds, except for a couple of mattresses in which the dirt, the dust, the damp, and the scuds are all one, melded, with the stuffing, and they stretch out on the scaffoldings, in the bus, in the back of a pickup truck, nostrils mildewing—

"—but you know what? People are beginning to see through the warf of the games. Not just the heads and everybody, but all sorts of people. You take in California. There's always been this pyramid—"

Here Hassler outlines a pyramid in the air with his hands and I watch, fascinated, as the plastic toothbrush case shiny shiny slides up one incline of the pyramid—

"—they're transcending the bullshit," says Hassler, only his voice is earnest and clear and sweet like a high-school valedictorian's, as if he just said *may next year's seniors remember our motto*—"transcending the bullshit—"

—a nice line of light there along the plastic, a straight rigid gleam from the past, from wherever Hassler came from. Now I'm doing it again, ah, that amiable itch, I just extracted a metaphor, a piece of transcendent bullshit, from this freaking toothbrush case—

"—transcending the bullshit—"

A TALL GUY COMES INTO THE WAREHOUSE WEARING SOME kind of blue and orange outfit like a mime harlequin's and with an orange Day-Glo mask painted on his face, so that he looks extraordinarily like The Spirit, if you remember that comic strip. This, I am told, is Ken Babbs, who used to be a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. I get to talking to him and I ask him what it was like in Vietnam and he says to me, very seriously:

"You really want to know what it was like?"

"Yeah."

"Come over here. I'll show you."

So he leads me back into the garage and he points to a cardboard box lying on the floor, just lying there amid all the general debris and madness.

"It's all in there."

"It's all in there?"

"Right, right, right."

I reach in there and lift out a typewritten manuscript, four or five hundred pages. I leaf through. It's a novel, about Vietnam. I look at Babbs. He gives me a smile of good fellowship with his Day-Glo mask glowing and crinkling up.

"It's all in there?" I say. "Then I guess it takes a while to get it."

"Yeah, yeah, right! right! right!" says Babbs, breaking into a laugh, as if I just said the funniest thing in the world. "Yeah! Yeah! Hah hah hah hah hah hah Right! Right!" with the mask glowing and bouncing around on his face. I lower the novel

back into the box, and for days I would notice Babbs's novel about Vietnam lying out there on the floor, out in the middle of everything, as if waiting for a twister to whip it up and scatter it over San Francisco County, and Babbs would be somewhere around saying to some other bemused soul: "Yeah, yeah, right! right! right!"

The Merry Pranksters were all rapidly assembling, waiting for Kesey. George Walker arrives. Walker has on no costume. He is just like some very clean-cut blond college kid wearing a T-shirt and corduroy pants, smiling and outgoing, just a good West Coast golden boy except for a few random notes like the Lotus racing car he has outside, painted with orange Day-Glo so that it lights up at dusk, skidding around the corners of the California suburbs in four-wheel drifts. And Paul Foster. Foster, I am told, is some kind of mad genius, a genius at computers, with all sorts of firms with names like Techniflex, Digitron, Solartex, Automaton, trying to hunt him down to lay money on him to do this or that for them . . . Whether he is a genius or not, I couldn't say. He certainly looks mad enough. He is hunched over in a corner, in a theater seat, an emaciated figure but with a vast accumulation of clothes. It looks like he has on about eight pairs of clown's pants, one on top of the other, each one filthier than the next one, all black, sooty, torn, mungey and fungous. His head is practically shaven and he is so thin that all the flesh seems to be gone off his head and when he contracts his jaw muscles it is as if some very clever anatomical diagram has been set in motion with little facial muscles, striations, sheathes, ligaments, tissues, nodules, integuments that nobody ever suspected before bunching up, popping out, springing into definition in a complex chain reaction. And he contracts his jaw muscles all the time, concentrating, with his head down and his eyes burning, concentrating on a drawing he is doing on a pad of paper, an extremely small but crucial drawing by the looks of his concentration . . .

Black Maria sits on a folding chair and smiles ineffably but says nothing. One of the Flag People, a thin guy, tells me about Mexicans strung out on huaraches. Doris Delay tells me—

"They're off on their own freak," Hassler continues, "and it may not look like much, but they're starting to transcend the bullshit. There's this old trinity, Power, Position, Authority, and why should they worship these old gods and these old forms of authority—"

"Fuck God ... ehrrrrr ... Fuck God ..."

This is a voice behind a blanket curtain to one side. Somebody is back there rapping off what Hassler just said.

"Fuck God. Up with the Devil."

It is a very sleepy, dreamy voice, however. The curtain pulls back and standing there is a wiry little guy who looks like a pirate. Behind him, back in there behind the curtain, all sorts of wires, instruments, panels, speakers are all piled up, a glistening heap of electronic equipment, and the tape is back there going ... "In the Nowhere Mine ..." The guy looks like a pirate, as I said, with long black hair combed back Tarzan-style, and a mustache, and a gold ring through his left earlobe. He stares out, sleepily. In fact, he is a Hell's Angel. His name is Freewheeling Frank. He has on the Hell's Angels' "colors," meaning a jacket with insignia, a jacket with the sleeves cut off and the skull with the helmet on it and the wings and a lot of other arcane symbols.

"Fuck God," says Freewheeling Frank. "Fuck all forms of... of. . ." and the words trail off in a kind of dreamy way, although his lips are still moving and he kind of puts his head down and trudges off into the gloom, toward the bus, with his hands flicking out, first this side, then the other, like Cassady, and he is off on his trip, like Cassady,

and, all right, a Hell's Angel—and the Hassler brushes his teeth after every meal, in the middle of a Shell station tin-can economy—

Just then Kesey arrives.

chapter

III

The Electric Suit

THROUGH THE SHEET OF SUNLIGHT AT THE DOORWAY AND down the incline into the crazy gloom comes a panel truck and in the front seat is Kesey. The Chief; out on bail. I half expect the whole random carnival to well up into a fluorescent yahoo of incalculably insane proportions. In fact, everybody is quiet. It is all cool.

Kesey gets out of the truck with his eyes down. He's wearing a sport shirt, an old pair of pants, and some Western boots. He seems to see me for an instant, but there is no hello, not a glimmer of recognition. This annoys me, but then I see that he doesn't say hello to anybody. Nobody says anything. They don't all rush up or anything. It's as if... Kesey is back and what is there to say about it.

Then Mountain Girl booms out: "How was jail, Kesey!"

Kesey just shrugs. "Where's my shirt?" he says.

Mountain Girl fishes around in the debris over beside a bunch of theater seats and gets the shirt, a brown buckskin shirt with an open neck and red leather lacings. Kesey takes off the shirt he has on. He has huge latissimi dorsi muscles making his upper back fan out like manta-ray wings. Then he puts on the buckskin shirt and turns around.

Instead of saying anything, however, he cocks his head to one side and walks across the garage to the mass of wires, speakers, and microphones over there and makes some minute adjustment. "... The Nowhere Mine ..." As if now everything is under control and the fine tuning begins.

From out of the recesses of the garage—I didn't even know they were there—here comes a woman and three children. Kesey's wife Faye, their daughter Shannon, who is six, and two boys, Zane, five, and Jed, three. Faye has long, sorrel-brown hair and is one of the prettiest, most beatific-looking women I ever saw. She looks radiant, saintly. Kesey goes over to her and picks up each of the kids, and then Mountain Girl brings over her baby, Sunshine, and he picks up Sunshine a moment. All right—

Then Kesey loosens up and smiles, as if he just thought of something. It is as if he just heard Mountain Girl's question about how was jail. "The only thing I was worried about was this tooth," he says. He pops a dental plate out of the roof of his mouth and pushes a false front tooth out of his mouth with his tongue. "I had the awfulest feeling," he says. "I was going to be in court or talking to reporters or something, and this thing was going to fall down like this and I was going to start gumming my words." He gums the words "start gumming my words," to illustrate.

Three weeks later he was to replace it with a tooth with an orange star and green stripes on it, an enameled dens incisus lateral bearing a Prankster flag. One day at a gas station the manager, a white guy, gets interested in the tooth and calls over his helper, a colored guy, and says, "Hey, Charlie, come over here and show this fellow your tooth." So Charlie grins and bares his upper teeth, revealing a gold tooth with a heart cut out in the gold so that a white enamel heart shows through. Kesey grins back and then bares *his* tooth—the colored guy stares a moment and doesn't say anything. He doesn't even smile. He just turns away. A little while later, down the road, Kesey says very seriously, very sorrowfully, "That was wrong of me. I shouldn't have done that." "Done what?" "I outniggered him," says Kesey.

Outniggered him! Kesey has kept these countryisms, like "the awfulest feeling," all through college, graduate school, days of literary celebration...

"How did it happen?" says Freewheeling Frank, meaning the tooth.

"He got in a fight with a Hell's Angel," says Mountain Girl.

"What!—" Freewheeling Frank is truly startled.

"Yeah!" says Mountain Girl. "The bastard hit him with a chain!"

"What!" says Frank. "Where? What was his name!"

Kesey gives Mountain Girl a look.

"Naw," she says.

"What was his name!" Frank says. "What did he look like!"

"Mountain Girl is shucking you," Kesey says. "I was in a wreck."

Mountain Girl looks repentant. Angels' duels are no joke with Frank. Kesey breaks up ... the vibrations. He sits down in one of the old theater seats. He is just talking in a soft, conversational tone, with his head down, just like he is having conversation with Mountain Girl or somebody.

"It's funny," he says. "There are guys in jail who have been in jail so much, that's their whole thing. They're jail freaks. They've picked up the whole jail language—"

—everybody starts gathering around, sitting in the old theater seats or on the floor. The mysto steam begins rising—

"—only it isn't their language, it's the guards', the cops', the D.A.'s, the judge's. It's all numbers. One of them says, 'What happened to so-and-so?' And the other one says, 'Oh, he's over in 34,' which is a cellblock. 'They got him on a 211'—they have numbers for different things, just like you hear on a police radio—'they got him on a 211, but he can cop to a 213 and get three to five, one and a half with good behavior.'

"The cops like that. It makes them feel better if you play their game. They'll chase some guy and run him down and pull guns on him and they're ready to blow his head off if he moves a muscle, but then as soon as they have him in jail, one of them will come around and ask him how his wife is and he's supposed to say she's O.K., thanks, and ask him about his kids, like now that we've played the cops-and-robbers part of the game, you can go ahead and like me. And a lot of them in there go along with that, because that's all they know.

"When you're running, you're playing their game, too. I was up in Haight-Ashbury and I heard something hit the sidewalk behind me and it was a kid had fallen out the window. A lot of people rushed up and a woman was there crying and trying to pick him up, and I knew what I should do is go up and tell her not to move him but I didn't. I was afraid I was going to be recognized. And then up the street I saw a cop writing out parking tickets and I was going to go up and tell him to call an ambulance. But I didn't. I just kept going. And that night I was listening to the news on television and they told about a child who fell out of a window and died in the hospital."

And that's what the cops-and-robbers game does to you. Only it is me thinking it. Figuring out parables, I look around at the faces and they are all watching Kesey and, I have not the slightest doubt, thinking: and that's what the cops-and-robbers game does to you. Despite the skepticism I brought here, I am suddenly experiencing their feeling. I am sure of it. I feel like I am in on something the outside world, the world I came from, could not possibly comprehend, and it is a metaphor, the whole scene, ancient and vast, vaster than ...

TWO GUYS COME IN OUT OF THE DAYLIGHT ON HARRIET Street, heads by the looks of them, and walk up to Kesey. One of them is young with a sweatshirt on and Indian beads with an amulet hanging from the beads—a routine acid-head look, in other words. The other one, the older one, is curiously neat, however. He has long black hair, but neat, and a slightly twirly mustache, like a cavalier, but neat, and a wildly flowered shirt, but neat and well-tailored and expensive, and a black leather jacket, only not a motorcycle jacket but tailored more like a coat, and a pair of English boots that must have set him back \$25 or \$30. At first he looks like something out of Late North Beach, the boho with the thousand-dollar wardrobe. But he has a completely sincere look. He has a thin face with sharp features and a couple of eyes burning with truth oil. He says his name is Gary Goldhill and he wants to interview Kesey for the Haight-Ashbury newspaper *The Oracle*, and when could he do that—but right away it is obvious that he has something to get off his chest that can't wait.

"The thing is, Ken"—he has an English accent, but it is a middle-class accent, a pleasant sort of Midlands accent—"the thing is, Ken, a lot of people are very concerned about what you've said, or what the newspapers say you've said, about graduating from acid. A lot of people look up to you, Ken, you're one of the heroes of the psychedelic movement"—he has a kind of Midlands England way of breaking up long words into syllables, psy-che-delic move-ment—"and they want to know what you mean. A very beautiful thing is happening in Haight-Ashbury, Ken. A lot of people are opening the doors in their minds for the first time, but people like you have to help them. There are only two directions we can go, Ken. We can isolate ourselves in a monastery or we can organize a religion, along the lines of the League for Spiritual Discovery"—the League for Spi-ri-tu-al Dis-cov-ery—"and have acid and grass legalized as sacraments, so everyone won't have to spend every day in fear waiting for the knock on the door."

"It can be worse to take it as a sacrament," Kesey says.

"You've been away for almost a year, Ken," Goldhill says. "You may not know what's been happening in Haight-Ashbury. It's growing, Ken, and thousands of people have found something very beautiful, and they're very open and loving, but the fear and the paranoia, Ken, the waiting for the knock on the door—it's causing some terrible things, Ken. It's re-spon-si-ble for a lot of bad trips. People are having bad trips, Ken, because they take acid and suddenly they feel that any moment there may be a knock on the door. We've got to band together. You've got to help us, Ken, and not work against us."

Kesey looks up, away from Goldhill, out across the gloom of the garage. Then he speaks in a soft, far-off voice, with his eyes in the distance:

"If you don't realize that I've been helping you with every fiber in my body ... if you don't realize that everything I've done, everything I've gone through ..."

—it is rising and rising—

"I know, Ken, but the repression—"

"We're in a period now like St. Paul and the early Christians," Kesey says. "St. Paul said, if they shit on you in one city, move on to another city, and if they shit on you in that city, move on to another city—"

"I know, Ken, but you're telling people to stop taking acid, and they're not going to stop. They've opened up doors in their minds they never knew existed, and a very beautiful thing, and then they read in the papers that somebody they've looked up to is suddenly telling them to stop."

"There's a lot of things I can't tell the newspapers," says Kesey. His eyes are still focused long-range, away from Goldhill. "One night in Mexico, in Manzanillo, I took some acid and I threw the I Ching. And the I Ching—the great thing about the I Ching is, it never sends you Valentines, it slaps you in the face when you need it—and it said we had reached the end of something, we weren't going anywhere any longer, it was time for a new direction—and I went outside and there was an electrical storm, and there was lightning everywhere and I pointed to the sky and lightning flashed and all of a sudden I had a second skin, of lightning, electricity, like a suit of electricity, and I knew it was in us to be superheroes and that we could become superheroes or nothing." He lowers his eyes. "I couldn't tell this to the newspapers. How could I? I wouldn't be put back in jail, I'd be put in Pescadero."

—rising—rising—

"But most people aren't ready for that, Ken," Goldhill says. "They're just beginning to open the doors in their minds—"

"But once you've been through that door, you can't just keep going through it over and over again—"

"—and somebody's got to help them through that door—"

"Don't say stop plunging into the forest," Kesey says. "Don't say stop being a pioneer and come back here and help these people through the door. If Leary wants to do that, that's good, it's a good thing and somebody should do it. But somebody has to be the pioneer and leave the marks for others to follow." Kesey looks up again, way out into the gloom. "You've got to have some faith in what you're trying to do. It's easy to have faith as long as it goes along with what you already know. But you've got to have faith in us all the way. Somebody like Gleason—Gleason was with us this far." Kesey spread his thumb and forefinger about two inches apart. "He was with us as long as our fantasy coincided with his. But as soon as we went on further, he didn't understand it, so he was going against us. He had ... no faith."

No faith!—bay fog turns steam, hissing in the old cranium—

Faith! Further! And it is an exceedingly strange feeling to be sitting here in the Day-Glo, on poor abscessed Harriet Street, and realize suddenly that in this improbably ex-pie factory Warehouse garage I am in the midst of Tsong-Isha-pa and the sangha communion, Mani and the wan persecuted at The Gate, Zoroaster, Maidhyoimaongha and the five faithful before Vish-tapu, Mohammed and Abu Bekr and the disciples amid the pharisaical Koreish of Mecca, Gautama and the brethren in the wilderness leaving the blood-and-kin families of their pasts for the one true family of the sangha inner circle—in short, true mystic brotherhood—only in poor old Formica polyethylene 1960s America without a grain of desert sand or a shred of palm leaf or a morsel of manna wilderness breadfruit overhead, picking up vibrations from Ampex tapes and a juggled Williams Lok-Hed sledge hammer, hooking down mathematical lab drugs, LSD-25, IT-290, DMT, instead of soma water, heading out in American flag airport coveralls and an International Harvester bus—yet for real!—amid the marshmallow shiny black shoe masses—

chapter

IV

**What Do You Think
of My Buddha?**

THE CURRENT FANTASY ... BY NOW, LATE EVENING, MOST of the Pranksters have cleared out of the Warehouse, off to take a shower at the apartment of Gut, an ex—Hell's Angel who has a psychedelic shop called Joint Ventures, off to here, off to there . . . Just Kesey and a couple of others left in the Warehouse. Kesey stands in the gloom of the Control Central, over to the side amid the tapes, and cans of movie film marked with adhesive strips, and notebooks and microphones and wires and coils, speakers, amplifiers. The Prankster Archives—and a tape drones on in a weird voice, full of Ouija-whammy:

"... the blissful counterstroke ... a considerable new message ..."

A considerable new message ... The current fantasy ... Fantasy is a word Kesey has taken to using more and more, for all sorts of plans, ventures, world views, ambitions. It is a good word. It is ironic and it isn't. It refers to everything from getting hold of a pickup truck—"that's our fantasy for this week-

end"—to some scary stuff out on the raggedy raggedy edge ... like the current fantasy, which is somehow to be told at the Acid Test Graduation. But how to tell it? Kesey rummages through the film cans and assorted . . . Archives ... It has never been possible, has it, truly, just to come out and announce the current fantasy, not even in days gone by, when it seemed so simple. Now, you take Goldhill, who was just in here with the truth in his eyes. He will come closer than most. Kesey could see it. Goldhill was open... and into the pudding. He had his own fantasy, the League for Spi-ri-tu-al Dis-cov-ery, and yet he is the rare kind who might even be willing to move with their fantasy, his and the Pranksters'. It takes a rare kind. Because always comes the moment when it's time to take the Prankster circus further on toward Edge City. And always at that point some good souls are startled: Hey, wait! Like Ralph Gleason with his column in the Chronicle and his own clump of hipness. Gleason is one of those people ... Kesey can remember them all, people who thought he was great so long as his fantasy coincided with theirs. But every time he pushed on further—and he always pushed on further—they became confused and resentful . . . The tape winds on:

"... the blissful counterstroke ... through workhorse and intercourse ... the blood that was available to him in intercourse ... made us believe he was in the apple sauce for twenty years . . ."

Only lucky dogs and Merry Pranksters can understand this supersonic warble! ... most likely . . .

". . . the blissful counterstroke . . ."

... the current fantasy ... Even back on Perry Lane, where everyone was young and intellectual and analytical, and the sky, supposedly, was the limit—there was no way he could just come right out and say: Come in a little closer, friends ... They had their

own fantasy for him: he was a "diamond in the rough." Wellllll, that was all right, being a diamond in the rough. He had gone to Stanford University in 1958 on a creative-writing fellowship, and they had taken him in on Perry Lane because he was such a swell diamond in the rough. Perry Lane was Stanford's bohemian quarter. As bohemia goes, Perry Lane was Arcadia, Arcadia just off the Stanford golf course. It was a cluster of two-room cottages with weathery wood shingles in an oak forest, only not just amid trees and greenery, but amid vines, honeysuckle tendrils, all buds and shoots and swooping tendrils and twitterings like the best of Arthur Rackham and *Honey Bear*. Not only that, it had true cultural cachet. Thorstein Veblen had lived there. So had two Nobel Prize winners everybody knew about though the names escaped them. The cottages rented for just \$60 a month. Getting into Perry Lane was like getting into a club. Everybody who lived there had known somebody else who lived there, or they would never have gotten in, and naturally they got to know each other very closely too, and there was always something of an atmosphere of communal living. Nobody's door was ever shut on Perry Lane, except when they were pissed off.

It was sweet. Perry Lane was a typical 1950s bohemia. Everybody sat around shaking their heads over America's tailfin, housing-development civilization, and Christ, in Europe, so what if the plumbing didn't work, they had mastered the art of living. Occasionally somebody would suggest an orgy or a three-day wine binge, but the model was always that old Zorba the Greek romanticism of sandals and simplicity and back to first principles. Periodically they would take pilgrimages 40 miles north to North Beach to see how it was actually done.

The main figures on Perry Lane were two novelists, Robin White, who had just written the Harper Prize novel, *Elephant Hill*, and Gwen Davis, a kind of West Coast Dawn Powell. In any case, all the established Perry Laners could see Kesey coming a mile away.

He had Jack London Martin Eden Searching Hick, the hick with intellectual yearnings, written all over him. He was from Oregon—who the hell was ever from Oregon?—and he had an Oregon country drawl and too many muscles and callouses on his hands and his brow furrowed when he was thinking hard, and it was perfect.

White took Kesey under his wing and got him and his wife Faye a cottage on Perry Lane. The Perry Lane set liked the idea at once. He could always be counted on to do *perfect* things. Like the time they were all having dinner—there was a lot of communal dining—and some visitor was going on about the ineffable delicacy of James Baldwin's work, and Kesey keeps eating but also trying to edge a word in saying, well, bub, I dunno, I can't exactly go along with you there, and the fellow puts down his knife and fork very carefully and turns to the others and says,

"I'll be delighted to listen to whatever Mr. Kesey has to say—as soon as he learns to eat from a plate without holding down his meat with his thumb."

Perfect! He had been voted "most likely to succeed" at his high school in Springfield, Oregon, and had graduated from the University of Oregon, where he was all involved in sports and fraternities, the All-American Boy bit. He had been a star wrestler in the 174-pound class and a star actor in college plays. He had even gone to Los Angeles after he finished college, and knocked around Hollywood for a while with the idea of becoming a movie star. But the urge to write, to create, had burst up through all this thick lumpy All-American crap somehow, like an unaccountable purslane blossom, and he had started writing, even completing a novel about college athletics, *End of Autumn*. It had never been published, and probably never would be, but he had the longing to do this thing. And his background—it was great, too.

Somehow the Perry Lane set got the idea that his family were Okies, coming out of the Dust Bowl during the Depression, and then up to Oregon, wild, sodden Oregon, where they had fought the land and shot bears and the rivers were swift and the salmon leaped silver in the spring big two-hearted rivers.

His wife Faye—she was from the same kind of background, only she came from Idaho, and they had been high-school sweethearts in Springfield, Oregon, and had run off and gotten married when they were both freshmen in college. They once made a bet as to which of them had been born in the most Low Rent, bottomdog shack, his old place in La Junta, or hers in Idaho. He was dead sure there was no beating La Junta for Rundown until they got to Idaho, and she sure as hell did win that one. Faye was even more soft-spoken than Kesey. She hardly spoke at all. She was pretty and extremely sweet, practically a madonna of the hill country. And their cottage on Perry Lane—well, everybody else's cottage was run-down in a careful bohemian way, *simplicity*, Japanese paper lamp globes and monk's cloth and blond straw rugs and Swedish stainless steel knives and forks and cornflowers sticking out of a hand-thrown pot. But theirs was just plain Low Rent. There was always something like a broken washing machine rusting on the back porch and pigweed, bladderpods, sokes and scurf peas growing ragged out back. Somehow it was. . . *perfect*... to have him and Faye on hand to *learn* as the Perry Lane sophisticates talked about life and the arts.

BEAUTIFUL! . . . THE CURRENT FANTASY . . . BUT HOW TO TELL them?—about such arcane little matters as Captain Marvel and The Flash ... and The Life—and the very Superkids—

"... a considerable new message . . . the blissful counter-stroke ..."

—when they had such a nice clear picture of him as the horny-nailed son of the Western sod, fresh from Springfield, Oregon. It was true that his father, Fred Kesey, had started him and his younger brother, Joe, known as Chuck, shooting and fishing and swimming as early as they could in any way manage it, also boxing, running, wrestling, plunging down the rapids of the Willamette and the McKenzie Rivers, on inner-tube rafts, with a lot of rocks and water and sartin' death foamin' down below. But it was not so they could tame animals, forests, rivers, wild upturned convulsed Oregon. It was more to condition them to do more of what his father had already done a pretty good job

of—claim whatever he can rightly get by being man enough to take it, and not on the frontier, either . . . Kesey Sr. had been part of the 1940s migration from the Southwest—not of "Okies" but of Protestant entrepreneurs who looked to the West Coast as a land of business opportunity. He started out in the Willamette Valley with next to nothing and founded a marketing cooperative for dairy farmers, the Eugene Farmers Cooperative, and built it into the biggest dairy operation in the area, retailing under the name of Darigold. He was one of the big postwar success stories in the Valley—and ended up not in an old homestead with wood sidings and lightning rods but in a modern home in the suburbs, lowslung and pastel, on a street called Debra Lane. The incredible postwar American electro-pastel surge into the suburbs!—it was sweeping the Valley, with superhighways, dream-boat cars, shopping centers, soaring thirty-foot Federal Sign & Signal Company electric supersculptures—Eight New Plexiglas Display Features!—a surge of freedom and mobility, of cars and the money to pay for them and the time to enjoy them and a home where you can laze in a rich pool of pale wall-to-wall or roar through the technological wonderworld in motor launches and, in the case of men like his father, private planes—

The things he would somehow suddenly remember about the old home town—over here, for example, is the old white clapboard house they used to live in, and behind it, back a ways, is the radio tower of station KORE with a red light blinking on top—and at night he used to get down on his knees to say his prayers and there would be the sky and the light blinking—and he always kind of thought he was praying to that red light. And the old highway used to take a bend right about here, and it seemed like there was always somebody driving through about three or four in the morning, half asleep, and they would see the lights over there in town where it was getting built up and they'd think the road headed straight for the lights and they'd run off the bend and Kesey and his dad would go out to see if they could help the guy draggle himself out of the muck—chasing street lights!—praying to the red beacon light of KORE!—and a little run-in at Gregg's Drive-in, as it used to be called, it is now Speck's, at Franklin Boulevard at the bridge over the river. That was the big high-school drive-in, with the huge streamlined sculpted pastel display sign with streaming streamlined super-slick A-22 italic script, floodlights, clamp-on trays, car-hop girls in floppy blue slacks, hamburgers in some kind of tissuey wax paper steaming with onions pressed down and fried on the grill and mustard and catsup to squirt all over it from out plastic squirt cylinders. Saturday nights when everybody is out cruising—some guy was in his car in the lot at Gregg's going the wrong way, so nobody could move. The more everybody blew the horns, the more determined the guy got. Like *this* was the test. He rolls up the windows and locks the doors so they can't get at him and keeps boring in. This guy vs. Kesey. So Kesey goes inside and gets a potato they make the french fries with and comes out and jams it over the guy's exhaust pipe, which causes the motor to conk out and you ain't going *any* which way now, bub. The guy brings charges against Kesey for ruining his engine and Kesey ends up in juvenile court before a judge and tries to tell him how it is at Gregg's Drive-In on a Saturday night: The Life—that *feeling*—The Life—the late 1940s early 1950s American Teenage Drive-in Life was *precisely* what it was all about—but how could you tell anyone about it?

But of course!—the *feeling*—out here at night, free, with the motor running and the adrenaline flowing, cruising in the neon glories of the new American night—it was very Heaven to be the first wave of the most extraordinary kids in the history of the world—only 15, 16, 17 years old, dressed in the *haute couture* of pink Oxford shirts, sharp pants, snaky half-inch belts, fast shoes—with all this Straight-6 and V-8 power underneath and all this neon glamour overhead, which somehow tied in with the technological superheroics of the jet, TV, atomic subs, ultrasonics—Postwar American suburbs—glorious world! and the hell with the intellectual bad-mouthers of America's tailfin civilization... They couldn't know what it was like or else they had it cultivated out of them—the feeling—to be very Superkids ! the world's first generation of the little devils—feeling immune, beyond calamity. One's parents remembered the sloughing common order, War & Depression—but Superkids knew only the emotional surge of the great payoff, when nothing was common any longer—The Life! A glorious place, a glorious age, I tell you! A very Neon Renaissance—And the myths that actually touched you at that time—not Hercules, Orpheus, Ulysses, and Aeneas—but Superman, Captain Marvel, Batman, The Human Torch, The Sub-Mariner, Captain America, Plastic Man, The Flash—but of course! On Perry Lane, what did they think it was—quaint?—when he talked about the comic-book Superheroes as the honest American myths? It was a fantasy world *already*, this electro-pastel world of Mom&Dad&Buddy&Sis in the suburbs. There they go, in the family car, a white Pontiac Bonneville sedan—the *family car!*—a huge crazy god-awful-powerful fantasy creature to begin with, 327 horsepower, shaped like twenty-seven

nights of lubricious luxury brougham seduction—you're already there, in *Fantasyland*, so why not move off your smug-harbor quilty-bed dead center and cut loose—go ahead and say it—Shazam!—juice it up to what it's already aching to be: 327,000 horsepower, a whole superhighway long and *soaring, screaming* on toward ... Edge City, and ultimate fantasies, current and future ... Billy Batson said *Shazam!* and turned into Captain Marvel. Jay Garrick inhaled an experimental gas in the research lab ...

... AND BEGAN TRAVELING AND THINKING AT THE SPEED OF light as... The Flash ... the current fantasy. Yes. The Kesey diamond-in-the-rough fantasy did not last very long. The most interesting person on Perry Lane as far as he was concerned was not any of the novelists or other literary intellectuals, but a young graduate student in psychology named Vic Lovell. Lovell was like a young Viennese analyst, or at least a California graduate-school version of one. He was slender with wild dark hair and very cool intellectually and wound-up at the same time. He introduced Kesey to Freudian psychology. Kesey had never run into a system of thought like this before. Lovell could point out in the most persuasive way how mundane character traits and minor hassles around Perry Lane fit into the richest, most complex metaphor of life ever devised, namely, Freud's... . And a little experimental gas Yes. Lovell told him about some experiments the Veterans Hospital in Menlo Park was running with "psychomimetic" drugs, drugs that brought on temporary states resembling psychoses. They were paying volunteers \$75 a day. Kesey volunteered. It was all nicely calcimined and clinical. They would put him on a bed in a white room and give him a series of capsules without saying what they were. One would be nothing, a placebo. One would be Ditran, which always brought on a terrible experience. Kesey could always tell that one coming on, because the hairs on the blanket he was under would suddenly look like a field of hideously diseased thorns and he would put his finger down his throat and retch. But one of them—the first thing he knew about it was a squirrel dropped an acorn from a tree outside, only it was tremendously loud and sounded like it was not outside but right in the room with him and not actually a sound, either, but a great suffusing presence, visual, almost tactile, a great impacting of... *blue*... all around him and suddenly he was in a realm of consciousness he had never dreamed of before and it was not a dream or a delirium but part of his awareness. He looks at the ceiling. It begins moving. Panic—and yet there is no panic. The ceiling is moving—not in a crazed swirl but along its own planes its own planes of light and shadow and surface not nearly so nice and smooth as plasterer Super Plaster Man intended with infallible carpenter level bubble sliding in dim honey Karo syrup tube not so foolproof as you thought, bub, little lumps and ridges up there, bub, and lines, lines like spines on crests of waves of white desert movie sand each one with MGM shadow longshot of the ominous A-rab coming up over the next crest for only the sinister Saracen can see the road and you didn't know how many subplots you left up there, Plaster Man, trying to smooth it *all* out, *all* of it, with your bubble in a honey tube carpenter's level, to make us all down here look up and see nothing but ceiling, because we all know ceiling, because it has a *name*, ceiling, therefore it is nothing but a ceiling—no room for A-rabs up there in Level Land, eh, Plaster Man. Suddenly he is like a ping-pong ball in a flood of sensory stimuli, heart beating, blood coursing, breath suspiring, teeth grating, hand moving over the percale sheet over those thousands of minute warfy woofings like a brush fire, sun glow and the highlight on a stainless-steel rod, quite a little movie you have going on in that highlight there, Hondo, Technicolors, pick each one out like fishing

for neon gumballs with a steam shovel in the Funtime Arcade, a ping-pong ball in a flood of sensory stimuli, all quite ordinary, but... *revealing* themselves for the first time and happening... *Now...* as if for the first time he has entered a moment in his life and known exactly what is happening to his senses now, at this moment, and with each new discovery it is as if he has entered into all of it himself, is *one* with it, the movie white desert of the ceiling becomes something rich, personal, his, beautiful beyond description, like an orgasm behind the eyeballs, and his A-rabs—A-rabs behind the eyelids, eyelid movies, room for them and a lot more in the five billion thoughts per second stroboscope synapses—his A-rab heroes, fine Daily Double horsehair mustaches wrapped about the Orbicularis Oris of their mouths—

Face! The doctor comes back in and, marvelous, poor tight cone ass, doc, Kesey can now see *into him*. For the first time he notices that the doctor's lower left lip is trembling, but he more than *sees* the tremor, he understands it, he can—almost seen!—see each muscle fiber decussate, pulling the poor jelly of his lip to the left and the fibers one by one leading back into infrared caverns of the body, through transistor-radio innards of nerve tangles, each one on Red Alert, the poor ninny's inner hooks desperately trying to make the little writhing bastards *keep still in there*, I am Doctor, this is a human specimen before me—the poor ninny has his own desert movie going on inside, only each horsehair A-rab is a threat—if only his lip, his face, would stay level, level like the honey bubble of the Official Plaster Man assured him it would—

Miraculous! He could truly *see into people* for the first time—

And yes, that little capsule sliding blissly down the gullet was LSD.

VERY SOON IT WAS ALREADY TIME TO PUSH ON BEYOND another fantasy, the fantasy of the Menlo Park clinicians. The clinicians' fantasy was that the volunteers were laboratory animals that had to be dealt with objectively, quantitatively. It was well known that people who volunteered for drug experiments tended to be unstable anyway. So the doctors would come in in white smocks, with the clipboards, taking blood pressures and heart rates and urine specimens and having them try to solve simple problems in logic and mathematics, such as adding up columns of figures, and having them judge time and distances, although they did have them talk into tape recorders, too. But the doctors were *so out of it*. They never took LSD themselves and they had absolutely no comprehension, and it couldn't be put into words anyway.

Sometimes you wanted to paint it huge—Lovell is under LSD in the clinic and he starts drawing a huge Buddha on the wall. It somehow encompasses the whole—White Smock comes in and doesn't even look at it, he just starts asking the old questions on the clipboard, so Lovell suddenly butts in:

"What do you think of my Buddha?"

White Smock looks at it a moment and says, "It looks very feminine. Now let's see how rapidly you can add up this column of figures here ..."

Very feminine. Deliver us from the clichés that have locked up even these so-called experimenters' brains like the accordion fences in the fur-store window—and Kesey was having the same problem with his boys. One of them was a young guy with a lie-down crewcut and the straightest face, the straightest, blandest, most lineless awfulest Plaster Man honey bubble levellest face ever made, and he would come in and open his eyes wide once as if to make sure this muscular hulk on the bed were still *rational* and then get this smug tone in his voice which poured out into the room like absorbent cotton choked in chalk dust from beaten erasers Springfield High School.

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