



This Yeast Has Flown

Usually, you have the dream; sometimes the dream has you.

I think of all the fantasizing I did in my young life, projecting the future that was waiting for me, just around the bend.

The cornerstone of hip thought was that heartbreak was avoidable, that community and good vibes could lift us up and transport us across this ragged crevasse - that peace and love would save us from sadness and even from death. No more tears. No more Vietnams. The freak farm would vibrate with the laughter of a thousand doobies.

It was a dream of being high, and seeing and hearing everything, the outline of every twig, the throb of every tremolo.

It was a dream of love, and generosity, and open-heartedness, and helpless stoned laughing at one another's humanness. Love was all we needed.

In my heart I wanted to take all my friends and stuff them in a bag, and live with them forever, and roll in their ecstasies, and never do dishes.

And no one had to get a job. And no one had to be gone all day at work. And no one had to come home grumpy or misunderstood or underappreciated, and start drinking.

Everyone would get it. Everyone would be glad.

All that was gone, wiped away, by a bunch of dumb kids with long hair and bells in a driveaway car, cruising on a borrowed credit card through the high desert night.

But the freak farm turned out to be hell. The pop-bead bracelet of friends came apart at the first tug. We cried and we lied and we died, just like the straights. The loves of my life popped into view and popped out again. The man I envisioned becoming never came to be. I remained the fellow I was. At the heart, at the core, at the bleeding center, unhip.

I came to Minnesota and for two months I lived in the same house with Clare and Clete. After being thrown out of my own parents' house, and after two stupid drop-in surprise visits from me, each of which ended in tears and silent drives to the bus station, the Reddings were so hospitable to me, so kind, taking me in as one takes in a wounded bird, and nursing me back to strength.

In the weeks that I lived there, Clare began seeing me with fresh eyes. One night I walked her home from her boyfriend's pad and she turned and buried herself in my arms and her tears soaked us both through, and she confided to me that I was the best friend she had ever had, and she was sorry to have hurt me.

I took this in stride, as if it was my due, as if it had been coming to me a long time, and now I collected it with no great satisfaction, a victory without celebration. I was less boyfriend to her now than godfather, and I stroked her long hair and told

her who she really was, what her true name was, and where her destiny lay, out on the star-lit plains of South Dakota, without a hint of me.

I remember our last kiss because I knew my life would never be the same.

I felt clear-headed for a moment. I began to think I could reverse all the losing I had done in the previous year, that it could all go away, all be a learning experience. But what was that lesson? In what way was I wiser?

On the last day of the sixties, December 31, 1969, Clare got engaged to marry a high school friend who had been shot up in Vietnam and needed her more than I did.

It never happened, she never married the guy. But it was enough to untie her from me. I heard the scrape as we parted. And I let her go, and she floated away.

I took a job in a motor parts warehouse, stacking tailpipes for a hundred dollars a week. One day a pipe way up on the highest shelf slid down and hit me in the forehead and knocked me cold.

Thirty years later, when I was diagnosed with a brain tumor in that same location, I could not help thinking of that as the moment the tumor formed inside me, like the touch of a magic wand on my brow. And the word for the instrument of my brain-waylaying became the sound effect of my undoing - *bong*.

I moved out of the Redding house and rented a room in Minneapolis for fourteen dollars a week. The other boarders were truckers and day laborers. The landlord spied on me when I would toast bread in the common kitchen. If I left so much as a crumb on the counter, he would write me a note ringing with exclamation points and pin it on my door. When I

gave notice after a single week, he refused to refund my deposit, and we had a shoving match on his porch, which he won, I left the place, brushing the dirt from my feet.

I rented a room in a houseful of college students, curiously all ex-seminarians, close to the university. My parents disenfranchised me at my request, so I could qualify for in-state tuition in Minnesota. (I made a \$45 down payment on a gravesite, so I could show the Board of Regents evidence I planned to reside permanently in the state.) I knew no one now, and my back ached, and my teeth ached, and the room was so hot and suffocating I could not sleep.

Since the house had a kitchen, I took up baking. It seemed to me that life could be empty but if you made a loaf of whole-grain bread every day with your own hands, you could stay centered and sane. Every day I rose at dawn and began a loaf. With the kneading and the rising and the punching and the kneading, a loaf of bread took about four hours, but when you pulled it from the oven the roasted smell filled the house and made everything seem possible.

But one day, the bread wouldn't rise. I don't know why, perhaps the yeast, which is a living thing, had died. I let the dough sit on the radiator for two hours, but it remained a brick. I punched at it and punched at it to get it going, but it was no good.

I took the dough in my hands and walked out the back steps, and it was snowing, the kind of big, conglomerate flakes when the weather is still warm, but the seasons have decided to change. And I whirled that loaf around and around until it elongated and flew up in the snowy air, like a bola from a gaucho, spinning end over end, and it landed on the roof of the garage, were birds would peck at it for the next six months.

And I went back inside the house and cried for two days for the dreams of hippiedom that had died, and for the people I

had let down, and for the love I was going to have to learn to live without.

Most of all I cried for myself, because just like in the words of the song, I knew I would be carrying the weight of this vain and feckless year for a long, long, long, long time.