

A MISSION FROM GOD

The dozing was complete, and I looked on the crushed expanse with an inner satisfaction my father'd told me about. It was a fine job, a work of art, but before planting I had one last private affair to attend to. I set off for the summit of Mauna Kea, the great white volcano, towing my dune buggy with Limpy by my side. I had an appointment up there, and fiddled with the pill bottle that contained my final LSD trip.

I'd been through so much with this chemical, it was with mixed emotions that I drove toward my peace conference with the "force" to see if a blessing could be succored from it at last. This may not make sense except to the acid generation, but there was always that promised trip that could make everything fall in to place...or come totally unglued.

It swept through my mind with a tinge of fear. Limpy and I roared across black, purple, and red deserts, cutting up two-thousand foot cinder cones and around their colored interiors. The higher we climbed in that rarified atmosphere, the more reflected light seemed to rise from the mirrored sea spread far below, and we slid under inverted night rainbows of white and silver which prompted awe.

Across the channel loomed Haleakala on Maui...with a dark gash marking the Koolau Gap where we'd wrangled those noisy dirt bikes into the "House of the Sun." Seven-thousand feet below, a living strata of milk-soft clouds wrapped the twinkling island chain in clean, white folds. The moon came up, surrounded in halos of translucent rings...and faraway, anchored in the lee of Diamond Head, the lights of Waikiki sparkled like colored stars in the roadstead of Heaven.

Limpy barked at me, his bulging eyes scanning like radar beams. Ahead of us, flowing down a cinder slope like a moving blanket, was a great herd of feral sheep. We got alongside as they thundered with steaming breath and eyes glazed in panic. I saw babies freaking out, and we moved away, much to Limpy's dismay, to higher elevations where the terrain steadily regressed into a lunar landscape and no living creature observed our passage.

Here the force ruled, and I scanned an other-worldly panorama for power spots. Visions of Mordor seethed in my mind, and the molten landscape seemed the devil's inviolate sanctuary swathed as it was in colors of the underworld belched ignominiously from its bowels and splattered about as if by some pagan hand. "Mort mane," a hand from the grave, had painted here. We set off in third gear for a run to the top of a purple cone that shimmered with light and power.

This was no normal buggy, and colored streamers of fire poured from exhaust megaphones as two-hundred horsepower

churned great paddle tires across the desert, now fourteen thousand feet above the ocean. We flew off the lip of the cone's summit, airborne in a streak of color, and fell through space a hundred feet to land on its slope with a great swish of sparkling cinder and wave of avalanching stellar grit. Down we spiraled, a thousand feet, to a red beach at its heart, stopping in a silence too abrupt to be real.

The throbbing excitement eased as we sat wrapped in a stillness few ever know. The only sound was the occasional chink of hot metal contracting in the buggy's engine, and gazing at it made me laugh and tell Limpy he was the first space dog.

In the great circle formed above us by the volcano's yawning mouth, the universe stretched clear beyond, laced in lavender ribbons, where a deeper heaven rained stars and the Milky Way glowed in perfection. Their colors were so bright I reached for my dark glasses. My voice fell into the void like broken glass, and the overwhelming loneliness of my soul, in its infinite travels, came over me in a threshing swoon.

Limpy's eyes were blazing at visions around us, and he growled through curled lips as the mentors of my journey appeared. Men of action stood to be counted, and I nodded in deference to each for their stance in life. I wanted to ask them how they reflected their creator's love, how they'd chosen their paths without wavering, and whether they'd mind if I adopted some of their traits to form my own.

They chuckled as one, a thousand voices in a thrall which shook the earth. I held my hands and bowed my head to let the chaos pass. Horsemen of the apocalypse reined up just short of trampling us. Limpy was in full attack mode at all this. Quietly, I waited for an answer and the dawn.

It had not always been this way. In the early days coming down had been a carefree choice of fantasy players...hence the era of the hippies dressed like Knights of the Round Table, and the make-believe worlds of Haight-Ashbury and Woodstock. Now, on the eve of maturity and my wish to become someone stable, the seriousness of my life shocked me so, I could scarcely breathe. My mind went into overload, and I fell back on a soft cushion of canteloupe colored clouds.

Limpy was snuggled next to me urging for recognition when I opened my eyes. The first rays of a new and glorious day flared above us. That swirling mirage of visions had vanished...but in its passing some kind of message had been left. I was quite hopeful, for many of these mind warps had left me confused, without footing or direction.

This time I believed "the ancestors" had intervened, humanity's spirit bank tapped by my presence in such a power spot as this...and my choice seemed confirmed. I felt I'd been given a role in life at last...someone to be and believe

in. It had to do with the food chain and caring for the land. It dawned on me that the force wanted me to be a farmer. With this blessing from my mentors and the ancestors confirmation was mine. I formally bowed and accepted the job, and told Limpy I'd decided who I was...so off we went on my mission from God.

I drove back in the morning almost happy with myself, a mandate having formed up somewhere between Vietnam and the present, excited about planting the field and my work. The gang was busy putting tools away before lunch when I arrived to announce we should all go to the beach. I checked the soaking papaya seeds, swirling the water to see if any more would sink, and scraped the "floaters" off into the compost heap. We took lunch with us--a dozen happy faces bouncing along in the Army truck through narrow roads and coffee farms.

I was sitting near an ancient, Hawaiian "heiau," or temple at Napoopoo when she ran into the surf before us. I fumbled in my jeans for my wallet...then walked, fully dressed, straight into the water and handed her my business card. She laughed at my preposterous advance, and I invited her to our papaya-planting party that afternoon. It was all that simple. From that moment, Tessa and I worked non-stop in love with the farm, and possibly each other, but I'm unsure on that part.

We were married in the field as the trees began to bear fruit, and with our tiny band of workers, shared a communal existence similar to the tribes Leary'd preached about in the beginning. These were steady yet uneventful years, six or seven in a row without the sporadic violence and chaos of my former life, but I didn't grasp their value or take notice of their passing. My mission drove me on, keeping me too busy to continue testing its limits.

Things were getting better. The growth of the farm took my mind from its obsession with the mystery of existence, hard work filled my days, and some peace came to me at night. The orchard grew as we weeded four-thousand trees by hand and hauled tons of chicken manure, coffee bean pulp, and macadamia nut husks to make compost. We dismantled an old hotel nearby, and built "shanty town" for more young helpers to live in.

It was amazing. We were a real family farm growing tomatoes, cucumbers, and corn...at one point becoming the largest string bean producer in the state. Tessa and I steered a tight ship, working from sunrise to sunset, driving off all but the most dedicated. I know it's odd but I can't remember what our relationship was like back these many years. All I can dredge up is the progress of the farm and the fact I didn't drink, do drugs, or get in trouble.

It's odd I didn't note the correlation. I guess I'd only accepted the mission and not a share of happiness. If it went wrong, I was probably unsure of my reaction, and so

remained aloof. It's like Jack's formula to treat the two imposters, success and failure, the same.

The prophecy I'd experienced on the mountain came true, and I became a link in the food chain, supplying Canada and the Islands with the fruit of Kona's bounty. A festival in Vancouver turned into a Woodstock-like gathering, and we shipped sixteen-thousand pounds of ripe avocados, papayas, and bananas to the young people there. Reaction to our "Kona Gold" brand of fruit was immediate, and we became international produce wholesalers overnight.

The farm literally bloomed with good works. Gurus and mystics from the far tribes came and went, spreading word of our communal paradise, and hundreds of workers reached the thousand mark over the years. The magnificence of my creation overwhelmed me just about the time I wondered if it would last.