

## SOMEWHERE IN TIME

We slipped through India's menagerie of millions like tightrope walkers, just beyond their reach, to our destination in the snowy ranges of divinity. On terraced steps of antiquity's gardens, young shepherds balanced their flocks three miles high in the rarified atmosphere above Katmandu.

Everest, and her sister Annapurna, shimmered in the sunlight of their heaven. Temples and gilt-domed stupas glistened like jewels on the valley floor far below as we perched, listening to echoes reverberate off sheer cliffs. From tufts of snowy meadows, bees and butterflies welcomed us to a place steeped in reverence and magic.

Step by step, we seemed to slide back in time...past ancient fortifications, shrines, and statuary, led by a unique *deja vu* to the Blue Tibetan Coffee House. Here, literature and drugs mingled with other-worldly sounds and mumbled pieces of our human puzzle. Conversations, low and ethereal, were of God and Buddha, Alpert and Leary, and turning on the world. Kela was enthralled with this new cornucopia of mystic saints.

I struck up a friendship with young Krishna, a thirteen year-old Sherpa orphan, mascot of the Blue Tibetan, and leader of an unkempt coven of urchins. These street-wise beggar boys thought LSD the greatest stuff since bubble gum. An open gaiety the waifs displayed reminded me of my own happy times as a novice to existence before I'd accumulated so much mental baggage. Krishna was ancient though, neither happy nor sad. Considerably the opposite of Lu Duc, his eyes sparkled with a knowing acceptance, like old monks I'd encountered.

He gleefully pointed out Buddhas carved in stone, taking me through the winding streets and incredible art upon which their faith rested...waiting patiently, as if I'd catch on to some cosmic joke it all meant. We went to meet the Chini Lama, the master salesman of artifacts from Tibetan refugees, near the great stupa. There I began what would become a booming business arrangement. Kela and I decided we'd open a shop in Hawaii with the great volume of ancient products he had. Krishna waited in the shade like a puppy, then scolded me for spending too much my first time. He'd show me how it was done...

About three each morning, he'd throw pebbles at my tiny window, which was thickened with the grime of centuries, and I'd rise in steamy silence to trudge ten miles into frozen mountain passes. Here, we intercepted runners smuggling priceless pieces of antiquity out of Lhasa before the shrewd, old lama raised their price by a thousand percent. Until he caught on to us, I stored away exquisite silver-lined bowls made of monks' skulls, and engraved flutes carved from their leg bones. Beautifully detailed



tonkas, some four feet by five feet, decorated my room, spelling in minute detail the Buddhist story of creation.

The hundreds of characters in these splendid paintings were so detailed you could see tiny blood vessels in their eyes. Over five-hundred years old, they were probably invaluable, yet Krishna would do his song and dance and we'd get them for a pittance from monks who'd eluded the Red Guards as China swallowed Tibet. He even tried to buy a freshly killed tiger swaying on a pole borne by a troupe of old men armed with flintlock rifles. On those icy trails, strange things might happen, and I always took the Colt.

I could tell the Chini Lama was on to us when I entered his inner sanctum, as his corrugated face darkened in wrath and his voice grew gruff with age and resonant with authority. By sheer force of his domineering visage and the peremptory wagging of a wrinkled finger, I promised to cease pirating caravans if he'd stop screwing me. Scratching scrawny thighs beneath his shapeless paunch, he heaved a sigh of poignant solicitude and appointed me "official agent to the Americas."

This ritual obviously having been performed before, he smiled benignly, and with a chirrup from his spatulate face, an orderly appeared with two bamboo mugs of bubbling Tibetan beer. It was steaming hot and covered with a head of hop berries. One sipped this concoction with a straw. Whether it was the altitude or his sly humor, after a few of these we were really messed up. Laughing about what I'd do with a Bengal tiger we proceeded to transact another thousand dollars in absolutely exquisite finery.

Back in the Blue Tibetan, we joined Kela with her new friend, Steve, in the acrid smoke of hashish, opium, and ganja. We conferred in conspiratorial tones on methods to get my treasures out, noting names and border checkpoints of the smugglers' routes. The old thrill of adventure was coming over me. I ordered food for us, and fed Krishna as well. Most interested in Leary, Kesey, and Alpert and what was happening in America, we listened eagerly to Steve's tales of the Merry Pranksters, magic bus, and his stay at Millbrook--Leary's base in upstate New York. He carried one of those acid-laced Bibles and I purchased a few pages, joking about finally digesting its message.

Conversation turned to a celestial circumstance coming that night...a lunar eclipse obviously signaling an expansion in world consciousness. Our cosmic crew would be atop the Monkey Temple to celebrate Heaven's handiwork in that most appropriate of settings. At nine, we tore a page of dots into strips and sank them in our tea. Steve donated a few to little Krishna, who stirred his cup and leaned back, sipping like a pro with a knowing smile on his face. I dumped half a page in mine, grinning as Kela surveyed her band of astral voyagers like a mother hen.

The eclipse was at midnight, but I had something to do alone. I really wasn't into company in the initial stages, and gazing at dilated pupils of the gathered mystics, dripping with gnostic beatitude, I scurried up to my room. There I fumbled with my



whippet popper, holding the little metal cylinder of nitrous oxide with my heels to make a tiny hole and get all the gas into my canvas pillow. I wondered why I was shaking. Was it fear, anticipation, or just the macro-hit of acid coming on? This had to be done just right for the final clemency I sought.

I hurried through dark streets and climbed the great stupa to lean against its cold sides. This was the spot where Buddha was born, and I was right on time, as the moon was just beginning to darken. I calmed myself, concentrating on my goal and reciting afterlife tutelage from the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

Nitrous put me into a state near death, and I felt the perfect combination, carefully manipulated, could launch me directly into enlightenment, like a well-vectorized rocket. I wanted this ego death...but planned on remaining myself at the same time. I expected to become a Buddha in classic American fashion, instantly, without any hidden payments.

The acid was coming on so strong I could barely find my mouth to put the rubber hose in. I waited for my heart to stop pounding and my mind to cease churning. Visions of the Buddha sitting under the Bodhi tree and Newton with his apple passed before me, and I gazed into the flickering luminescence at Sagarmatha wreathed in white, her glaciers laced in silver. My last thought was of Tom Sawyer in his romantic martyr's fantasy under Becky's window, gloating in satisfaction at her finding his body, belatedly realizing how much she'd cared for him. I smiled at that one. No way, this was for me alone.

That's how I reentered this life...so alone it's hard to even remember. When the stultifying neural whirring began to recede, my thoughts were everywhere! My body lay on the clammy side of the sloping stupa like an inert blob of protoplasm, but I was outside it! Maybe I was dead? I couldn't feel my body and it just lay there. Time had gone by...the moon was above Everest now. Oh no, I was dead! That was ridiculous, how could I be able to know it?

If this was the afterlife, I didn't recognize it even though I'd read exacting descriptions from ancient texts and knew this was the state I should expect. I was "there" for sure, but a ludicrous panic set in, robbing me of the bliss I should be experiencing. From some clear space, I watched my body lying there, and my mind began moaning a primal sound I'd heard before.

Far away on the edge of the universe, I sensed a faint throbbing...or was it deep in the center? I couldn't tell. I recognized the pulse at last! It was my heart, and the sound kept growing until it filled the entire cosmos. When my mouth moved and the rubber tube popped from saliva-stuck lips I sighed in relief to be back. My face passed through eternity, contorting into other lifetimes...a monk, king, soldier, infant, even a woman. It was the soul's endless voyage, with me a witness tagging along.

I hardly noticed the blackness, so full of colors was my vision, until the earth's shadow began to slide across the moon on the retreat phase of the eclipse. Two hours had passed! My mind



jerked but my body lay still. I sensed something move, and above me a slight, sepulchral figure roosted like a melancholy buzzard on the spire of the massive stupa. It watched me warily as I slipped into the chamber to find myself thousands of years back in time.

In the warm glow of many candles, giant wall hangings came alive, telling the history of human consciousness in precise detail. Hideous green and red Buddhas stood guard at the entrance, Amitabah scowling at me through acrimonious eyes as painted serpents slithered across the walls. All eyes were upon me, while streams of devotees slipped in endless lines over waves of strife to the Buddha's island sanctuary of inner peace. Swaying on cloth bridges above raging torrents, the faithful held on in perserverance and humble trust, each face in the multitude telling a part of my own story.

The cloying fragrance of incense, musk, and ripening offerings filled my nostrils...all of it so familiar I felt I recognized the story from either a past life, or it was built into my mind. The concepts were very simple, unlike those I'd been taught of the trinity and an all-powerful Father figure. God was simply consciousness itself! It was a far better explanation. I could be myself with this key! A great relief came over me, and I knew it was possible then...all my searching had found the answer here, with the history of mans' godlike nature, right on the walls of Buddha's birthplace!

Looking back, if I'd been a little older or better prepared, I would've known that good and bad, love and hate, and fright and freedom are sides of the same coin, each of these imposters to be treated equally. Instead, I cherished joy and avoided fear, finding myself in the next instant dumped unceremoniously into the doom of a celestially punctuated nightmare.

I ran through deserted streets looking for Kela, Steve, and Krishna, to tell them I'd found the secret. Suddenly I realized I didn't know where I was! The village had moved back in time somehow. I scurried through narrowed straits of existence scanning the void of oblivion for a sign. Breaking into a run, I fled both nirvana and hell, pursued by hounds of heaven. Packs of omniverous beasts picked up my scent and gathered in my wake. Every turn loomed in graven frescoes of death's imagery, the wheel of the Juggernaut never sated. Images in stone, wood, or painted on ancient walls came alive everywhere I looked.

Crisscrossing the town, still nothing remotely familiar appeared...not even a trace or person to confirm the time or date. A caravan of steaming camel-like creatures pawed the cobblestones tethered in a line to a familiar building. It looked like the Blue Tibetan, yet huge Mongol guards with crossed scimitars escorted me in. In the murky light of oil lamps, tavern roisterers rollicked in hedonistic orgy...their wicked, beery faces turning in scornful unity at my intrusion. Such a malign and cabalistic den of cutthroats and vagabonds never existed before! They pulled curved blades from animal skin wraps, and I almost fainted in a swoon.



An old man's barbaric laughter filled the room, and waving his golden cup, he beckoned me forward, his jeering toppers reverting to convivial company upon command. He toasted my struggle, introducing me to his gathered assassins as a paragon of youth seeking our common goal, and became familiar to me. He was obviously Omar Khayyam, which put me back a thousand years. No wonder I couldn't find my friends!

He shouted to his men as much to me, "So you search for the weft in life's warp, my son! Ah hah, you shall not find it! We talk of it on this side of the veil only...on the other side, the enigma!"

With a wink of ancient eyes, he passed me a pot of wine and toasted, "Let us celebrate now before the book of youth is shut, for no lily that withers shall ever bloom again. You won't arrive at solving this riddle...for not a mother's son has got the matter straight, where we come from or where we go! No one has taken one step beyond that decreed and returned to tell if immortality is true! We of the flesh, even Ozymandias and Alexander the Great can only return to dust whence we came."

I looked around the room. The assassins were at bay, listening in rapt attention to their prophet, blurred in the bluish smoke of hashish and opium. He laughed again, and gazing into Jamshid's magic cup read the inscriptions loudly, "Who tolls the tally of Hell's loss and Heaven's gain? No one, my son, paradise and purgatory are no more than rumors gossiped by old hags in waiting. Not a shard of evidence has returned to strengthen our convictions! From this globe of clay to Saturn's orbit, nothing's more certain than a cup of wine and a young girl's tresses! So let us hear the end of this, what befell us, and celebrate life's fleeting pleasures...for prostrate at the feet of doom many a searching heart lies broken. Disband the feeble enigma and toast the dream you've dreamed all your life! We came like water and went like the wind!"

At that, his hoary companions resumed their pagan rituals, such raucous jeering prompting my search for an exit. Drenched in wine, they began to tear at each other in malicious abandon. Hands and heads were loped off as that charnel house filled with chaos.

I scrambled under clashing scimitars and up the stairs to my room, heart and mind pounding with visions of the melee raging below. A buxom trollop spread juicy thighs on my bed, her pink labial lips exposed, a beckoning leer, and breasts thrust at me in provocation. Maddening manifestations of sexual intensity pierced the pandemonium, and floundering in a libidinous maze of nipples and navels, I choked for air in a forest of pubic hair, slipping in vaginal drool.

I was running in the street again toward a looming shadow which had to be the Monkey Temple. It must be there! A fire glowed and tents were bunched in a protective circle. I stumbled and was trampled by shaggy hooves amidst the bellowing of primeval beasts. A tiny clutch of humanity chuckled while I scrambled from



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hairy yaks who shook their stringy hides to be rid of me.

Gaunt and dissipated old men crouched on flaccid haunches cackling lasciviously, while thousand-year-old witches clucked like a bunch of chickens at my frenzy. Chalky cadavers smirked through aged blue lips, as mothers gazed with knowing eyes in the chill dawn, nursing infants from steaming nipples, oozing life from the warmth of animal udders.

I jumped a wall and landed in thick mud, which sucked at my heels trying to hold me prisoner, and faced a small herd of boars curling their lips to expose gleaming fangs. Scrambling on all fours through their smelly lair, I ran across open countryside toward the mountain, ending in a heap, shuddering in the last quivers of my moronic panic, prostrate at the feet of doom just as Omar had predicted.

I sobbed for a moment, and then laughed in equal intensity, knowing I was still able to observe both emotions anyway. I tortured my mind for failing to expiate sin, and plunged purposefully into despair, as if in penitent response. Why did I perpetuate such endless torment? Did I enjoy watching mutely while this hallucination raged on?

Peering up the ascending steps I saw shapes of tigers, serpents, and monkeys slithering in the shadows of my madness. Enough! I broke into a roar of fearless challenge and vaulted up the staircase two steps at a time.

Later, climbing them one-by-one avoiding cracks, snakes, and tigers, I found myself halfway whistling like a dunce and eating some fruit from an offering station. I was keeping my eye on a few tigers when, with a shriek and cracking of branches, a black baboon scooped up my mango. Then it scurried a few steps, jumping up and down, laughing at me, making profane gestures, and hopping on all fours in hysterics. It was that rascal, Krishna, my beggar savant! No two beings were ever happier to reunite than we. He'd been looking everywhere and come back down, scared himself, to wait for me in the trees.

The two of us now journeyed onward, and as we clambered up the steps, dawn's first light began to wake the monkeys and they came chattering about us, begging their breakfasts. The first rays of sun struck the Himalaya's white walls as we reached the temple. Giant trumpets droned while cymbals clanged, bells rang, and improbable notes from bone flutes pierced the staccatoed Holy racket once again.

I blinked at the enormity of it all...the brevity of joy and duration of loneliness spent in worship just didn't balance! I knew more than these lonely servants did! Life was not a brief ceremony once a day, nor some pious performance...it was forever, every day, and supposed to be full of fun! With no intention of disturbing their chosen life's work, I shuffled back down those timeworn stairs, trying not to step on the dust of Alexander and Ozymandias, avoiding cracks from habit, and mumbling about eternity to myself as I tried to keep from laughing out loud.



Krishna played with the monkeys, content with existence as it came to him, while I groped with the trip's peculiar teachings. My mind fairly overflowed with knowledge, and like the monks I headed for the sanctuary of my room to contemplate all that had occurred. I was grateful to be myself...more than I ever expected to be.

I awoke about twenty-four hours later to Krishna's shouts and pelting, although I could vaguely recall pebbles clattering halfway through my dream. We had hot soup, while Kela assured me it was all in my mind. That made perfect sense. She agreed to come with us to backtrack my odyssey of the night before. I knew there wouldn't be any, but searched around the Blue Tibetan for blood stains and camel turds, while Krishna sniffed the cobblestones and Kela snickered and shook her head. We found the canvas pillow on the stupa and proceeded to the refugee camp, which from my description Krishna guessed was where the yak herd and pig pen scene had gone down.

It was vaguely familiar, and the plight of the starving Tibetan refugees became a reality I'd not yet fathomed. I stood approximately where I fell the night before and watched children playing with some baby yaks and lambs. I think the women by the fire knew it was me, their nocturnal lunatic, and lowered their eyes in my presence. I noticed Krishna on his knees, head down, and sensed a solemn veneration around us. A thin monk with glasses and a crew cut approached, deftly swishing his robes to avoid contamination with the turds prevalent in the area, his angular, ascetic features and noble mien accentuated an aura of reverence I sensed from everyone's bowed heads.

I tried to move out of his way, as if he were headed somewhere else, but he came on directly and thanked me by name for helping his people. He explained that selling the art objects was all they could do presently to feed themselves, and I had contributed unselfishly towards easing their plight. I felt very awkward under his steady gaze, and mumbled only tokens of my thoughts. It was a most unusual meeting. When he placed his hand on my head, blessed me, and said I possessed a good soul, I felt a powerful surge of goodness flow through me. Then he turned and was gone.

I was trying to figure how this astute fellow knew me. I found Krishna still on his face in the dirt. It took some time to get him moving, and Kela and I sort of dragged him along for a bit. When he came out of his sanctimonious stupor, he called me "Master Kerry" and said I'd been blessed by the Dalai Lama himself...a moment he assured me would last for all eternity.

I felt a little better at that, walking in the sun a bit taller, and noticed Kela glancing at me with curious looks of hope. I pretended to investigate various clues as we continued, slight airs of Doctor Watson entertaining me now, but the High Priest of the Buddhist world's encouragement echoed on...I have a good soul. That was enough for me.