

A photograph of three women in a forest setting. One woman is standing in the background wearing a colorful floral dress and a purple headband. Another woman is sitting on the left, playing an acoustic guitar, wearing a patterned top and a headband. The third woman is sitting cross-legged on the right, wearing a green top, a yellow shawl, and multiple necklaces. The background is a dense forest with sunlight filtering through the trees.

LINDA GOULD

Handmaidens of

ROCK

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Linda Gould



HANDMAIDENS OF ROCK

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Chapter 1

Candy

Candy went to high school in a turbulent era, the late 1960s. She often felt out of place, being timid and socially awkward. Then one day in her chorus class, as she was straining to reach a high note, she jumped at the sound of a raw, scratchy voice assailing her from behind. That voice seemed to collide with hers and achieve a weird harmony. She turned and saw a boy with long, red hair grinning at her. He slouched slightly in his seat with arms folded, as if the class itself were beneath his notice, except when it needed shaking up. She couldn't meet his eyes straight on because they were concealed by tinted glasses with glittering frames.

She glanced back at him several more times, whenever it seemed to her he'd sung the wrong note on purpose. He kept looking at her and tossing those flaming red locks. His prominent nose, which gave him a haughty look, flared at the nostrils like a bull's. That was the day Candy fell in love with a musician and began to immerse herself in the new rock music.

She learned from a classmate that his name was Preston Andrews. Every day she came to class wondering what innovative and disruptive thing he'd do next and how she might introduce herself to him. The trouble was, he only showed up about half the time, and after a while, he disappeared from class altogether.

Before becoming aware of Preston, Candy was excited by the daily news and bored with her daily life. She realized this made her a typical spoiled brat, but she couldn't help it. Her dad, an insurance agent in Washington, DC, and her mom, a homemaker, maintained a solid suburban existence for her and a younger brother, Bill Junior. They were comfortable and cherished—and throttled. Candy thought of herself as a bit of a powder keg, with the world pulsating just beyond her front yard. All she needed was a spark of inspiration, and she'd explode in some memorable way.

She chafed against her parents' strictures. She'd gotten her driver's license, but she was rarely allowed to drive the family Chevy Nova alone. Her mom and dad wouldn't even consider trading in that staid car for one of the increasingly popular compact vehicles, such as the Beetles that were filling the roads with their unusual colors, original horn sounds, and sometimes even political messages sprayed across them.

Once when Candy asked for the car to go to the movies and her parents said no, she stomped her foot like a petulant child. "What are you gonna do when I go away to college?" she demanded. "How are you gonna keep me tied down then?" Her parents insulted her further by rolling their eyes and chuckling at their quiet, nontroublemaking daughter.

Still, her parents couldn't protect her from the changing times. She realized something major was afoot whenever she turned on the radio. While still a child in junior high, she'd wondered exactly what Bob Dylan had meant by "everybody must get stoned." By 1968, a new form of rock and roll, driven more by electronic guitar riffs than by words, spoke to her. She'd followed the Beatles record by record as their music evolved from puppy love to peace anthems to drug hazes. Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd took her further in the direction of cerebral weirdness. Dylan himself was developing the individual folk-rock style that raised young people's political consciousness and made them want to march in the streets, demanding civil rights for everyone and an end to the Vietnam War. But all Candy had done so far was pour her most poetic thoughts into a notebook.

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Even after Preston disappeared, she continued to get a spark from her chorus class. Like most kids, she was taking the course in her senior year because the grades were based on behavior and attendance, not singing talent. It was an easy A that propped up her 3.5 grade point average, and it provided a midmorning break between Algebra II and advanced English.

It became the class she looked forward to most. Knowing that most of the real vocal talents at Nellie Bly High wouldn't stoop to taking chorus, the teacher made it fun by introducing a variety of songs, from medieval hymns to modern jazz to pop. The sight of the notes rising and falling on the sheet music gave Candy a rush, although she could only take a wild stab at hitting the notes with her mediocre voice. She believed anyone with the ability to string together notes in a meaningful way must be possessed of a rare creativity and power.

She couldn't hope to wield such power herself, but she dreamed of connecting with those who could. She struck up an acquaintance with another senior named Jamie Foster, a wiry, intense type with short, dark hair and thick glasses who had been brought in to serve as a teacher's assistant in the class. His main job was to operate the tape recorders and microphones that the instructor, Mr. Clark, was enamored with. Each student was required to submit to a brief recording session with Jamie to determine his or her voice type. Candy warbled through "My Country 'Tis of Thee," during which Jamie was kind enough not to grimace.

After he had determined that Candy was an alto, she asked, "What do you call that newfangled recorder? I've never seen anything like it. I just have a reel-to-reel machine at home that I use to tape songs off the radio."

"It's a high-fidelity cassette tape deck," Jamie explained proudly, "the most modern on the market. It plays things back accurately, doesn't it?"

"Too accurately," Candy agreed, cringing at the memory of her own voice.

Finding Jamie a nice guy and cute in a studious way, Candy tried to run into him before school and during lunch. She made a point of

asking him to elaborate on what he knew about recent technological advances in music and recording. Gradually, he opened up, describing the innovations he had heard of and the cool instruments he had seen. Everyone these days seemed to be strumming simple tunes on cheap six-string guitars, but a friend of his had mastered a new twelve-string brand with wide frets that required not only strong hands but also near-virtuosity to play. It was possible to hook the guitar to a small amplifier and enhance the sound quite a lot. Far more astounding than that was a keyboard called a Moog synthesizer, on which you could make all kinds of distended and otherworldly sounds by pressing buttons.

“How do you know about all this stuff?” Candy asked. “Could it be there’s a band forming at Bly High that nobody knows about?” She tried to look him straight in his bespectacled eyes as she added, “You’re holding out on me.”

He just shook his head.

Candy feared turning him off with her aggressiveness. Still, she couldn’t help pressing on. “That would be like a small revolution, if we could actually hear a band that could play those new instruments. The sounds would come out so different. All we ever seem to get for our dances right now are amateur outfits that can barely handle ‘Happy Birthday.’”

“Okay, yeah,” Jamie finally responded, with a slight stammer. “I do know of a band forming, or already formed. I can’t say much about them because they could be breaking up and reforming even as we speak.”

“Are you interested in playing in this band yourself?”

His eyes shone for a moment, and then he sighed. “I’m not talented musically,” he said, “although frankly, anybody can make sounds on a Moog synthesizer. Luckily, there are other ways of being involved in a band. Right now I’m equipment manager and head roadie, not that the band has ever been on the road or has any other roadies. My plan is to be named business manager one day, once the band makes enough money to need one. That’s why I changed my senior-year schedule to include courses I can use for that, like introductory economics and accounting.”

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Candy couldn't persuade him to name the musicians, although he took some credit for introducing them to each other. They were "rehearsing secretly," he said, and not ready to show their stuff, or even their faces.

"Anybody I would know?" Candy persisted. When he still held out, she demanded, "What is it, a cult?"

Jamie laughed. "Gotta be patient, Candy. They're practicing in garages now, but they'll be unveiling themselves publicly before the semester is over. I'm negotiating to get them the Christmas dance gig, as a backup band at least."

"I wonder if I'll be able to get a date for that," Candy said, thinking she had a month to find one.

Jamie eyed her for an awkward moment and then said, "That shouldn't be a problem for you."

His reluctance to identify the band members, he explained, wasn't mere coyness. The roster kept changing every week or so, according to the whims of the lead guitarist. Jamie didn't want to embarrass any rejects by publicizing their names.

"At least you can tell me who the lead guitarist is." Candy thought he was probably someone she'd be afraid even to approach. When Jamie finally revealed his name, a pleasant shock reverberated through her system.

"Preston Andrews?" she exclaimed. "I know him. Or I did know him. At least briefly."

She explained to Jamie that Preston had been in the chorus class for a month or so at the start of the school year. He had sat behind the alto section with the other baritones and had quickly established himself as a disciplinary problem, singing the wrong notes with arrogance and gusto. "It took me a while to realize those so-called mistakes of his were amazingly creative," Candy said. "He was harmonizing in his own way. I clicked with what he was doing. But if he hadn't been invited to leave the class, I guess he'd have been the first student in history who ever flunked chorus." Candy sighed. "Now I just see him in the hallway once in a while. He's always wearing oversized sunglasses like a movie star, or someone with something to hide."

Jamie laughed and said, “The same thing happened in orchestra class. Preston played a decent clarinet, but his creativity within the brass section wasn’t appreciated, at least by the teacher. He suggested strongly that everyone would be better off if Preston pursued his musical goals outside the classroom.”



One morning, shortly after Thanksgiving vacation, Candy caught up to Jamie on the way to chorus class and blurted, “I was wondering ... are you doing anything ... I mean, are you going to the Christmas dance?”

“I have to go,” Jamie said, looking uncomfortable. “I’m handling the band’s equipment.”

“Well, I was just wondering ... if you don’t have a date ...”

“I’m working that night,” he snapped. When he saw Candy recoil, he relented. “I won’t have time to dance or anything. But if you want to hang out with me while I’m working ... I guess it wouldn’t hurt anything.”

“That’d be great.” She grasped at the nondate or semi-date, or whatever it was. She assured herself that was really what she wanted—a chance to observe, not to dance.

“Yeah, I’ll show you what a roadie does,” Jamie continued, responding to her enthusiasm. She repeated how great that would be, although she was sure he realized that even shy girls like her harbored rock dreams, not roadie dreams.

Candy had never cared for school dances, suffering as she did from wallflower anxiety and a prolonged awkward stage. Her few friends were much the same, so they didn’t encourage her. But she was looking forward to this one, until her parents threw a monkey wrench into it. They wouldn’t let her go stag. When she explained that she had a sort of date who would be waiting for her there, they grew even more adamant. She was not going to date someone who didn’t pick her up at the front door and meet them.

Stomping her foot, Candy spat, “Do you think I’m too naïve and

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stupid to look after myself at a dance? What do you think I'm gonna do? End up in somebody's backseat?"

She realized that was exactly what they thought. She ranted and raved some more but settled for her father's offer to drop her off at eight and pick her up at eleven thirty.



On that Friday night, while listening to Jimi Hendrix on the radio, Candy put on her only real party dress. It was a burgundy color with long sleeves, a bit of a plunging neckline, and a hem just above the knee—becoming enough, but not particularly stylish for an event where most of the girls would be wearing miniskirts and showing cleavage. Her mother, cringing a little when Candy defiantly turned up the radio, lent her a necklace. She watched worriedly as Candy applied rouge and eye shadow, something only recently permitted. Seeing signs of zits, Candy redoubled the powder.

She sighed as she combed out her shoulder-length brown hair, already losing what little curl it had had after she'd washed and set it that afternoon. *Oh, to be Twiggy*, she thought, *with that short blond cut*. Her finishing touch was her pearl earrings, which made her wish for some long, sparkling, psychedelic ones like the hipper kids wore.

"You look lovely," her mother said determinedly as she left with her father.

Yeah, right, Candy thought, although she appreciated the compliment.

Her dad did his best not to embarrass her, going home as promised after seeing her to the gymnasium door. Controlling her nerves, she marched with purpose across the dance floor, which struck her as a zoo of color. Almost everyone seemed to have changed since last year's dance, with their long hair, eye-catching clothes, and shiny accessories. The handful of black students had Afro hairstyles that seem to explode off their skulls.

Candy approached the stage, where she could see that Jamie was involved in a preconcert discussion with another equipment manager.

"Where're you going, Candy?" a shrill voice cried out.

She stopped to talk to the trio of girls she ate lunch with every day. Even they were wearing miniskirts, although they didn't have the best figures for them. It seemed their parents had given them permission to come stag since they were together.

The loudest one persisted, "I thought you had a date."

"I do," Candy said, "but he's working." She gestured toward the stage. To her relief, Jamie saw her and beckoned. "He wants me to join him up there."

"Wow," said one of her friends.

"Looks like you have a backstage pass, sort of," another added. "Good for you."

"I'll tell you all about it at lunch on Monday, okay?" With that, Candy pressed on.

She got onto the stage, drawing some stares from less friendly classmates. Jamie introduced her to the "real" roadie, who ignored her once he realized she wasn't a singer or anyone important. He was setting up the center microphone for the star of the show, a fairly well-known solo act in local clubs named Joey Sherry. Mr. Roadie was throwing his weight around. He ordered Jamie to move the band's electronic equipment—microphones, amplifiers, and electric piano—as far back as possible, until they crowded the drums. Jamie positioned the equipment partway back, arguing that the backdrop wouldn't contain his band for long.

Just before the show started, Candy descended the stage and planted herself in front of it, determined to remain oblivious to all pushing and shoving. Jamie went backstage to be on call for any technical problems that might arise. Joey Sherry, a Bly alumnus who had starred in school musicals five years ago, got tumultuous applause when he appeared. He possessed an Elvis-like vocal range that enabled him to render all sorts of pop and rock classics. But it soon became obvious that he was uncomfortable with his freethinking backup band, which according to Jamie, had rehearsed with him only once.

Joey introduced the three musicians by reading their names from a note card: Preston Andrews on lead guitar, Neal McNab on electric piano, Brad Callahan on drums. He added, "I don't know what they call themselves, but I'm told they're a homegrown band."

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“Yeah, that’s what we call ourselves,” Preston said into his microphone. “The Homegrown Band. Make that just Homegrown.” The crowd tittered, realizing he had come up with the name on the spot. Somehow, it would stick, though.

Candy observed the first public performance of Homegrown in the closest position possible, not dancing but swaying as they played. The show turned sour for Joey, who glanced back frequently without hiding his irritation. The three backup musicians knew his repertoire and co-opted it. The crowd, confused at first, became divided in its reaction. Candy was sure the couples on the dance floor would have preferred unimpeded Sherry renditions of the popular songs. But the listeners, like her, found the band captivating.

It was safe to assume that Preston and his buddies would never again be hired to accompany a singer. Every time Joey tried one of his specialties, the three amateurs wrestled it from his control and changed its identity. “Heartbreak Hotel” acquired an inappropriate liveliness and joy from Preston’s guitar riffs. The same fate was visited on the even more heartfelt “Leaving on a Jet Plane.” Sherry tried to counter the band’s tactic with faster, humorous tunes, such as “Love Potion No. 9.” Preston slowed this one down and overdramatized it to the point of ridicule. When he gave the same treatment to “Tutti Frutti,” some of the rock purists in the crowd booed, but Candy loved it. Somehow, he injected romance into that raw sex tune.

Joey withstood this treatment for about ninety minutes. Then he shrugged and stalked off the stage, telling Preston, “It’s all yours.” Some of the crowd yelled for him to come back, and confusion reigned. But the band grabbed the moment. “No more warmed-over moldy oldies tonight,” Preston announced. “We’re gonna do our own thing.”

The band proceeded to play three original tunes. First was the sexy and outrageous “Hot Teacher in Tights,” followed by the upbeat “Grooving under the Desk.” The dancers on the floor seemed to embrace these songs. But they stumbled over “Revolution for Amateurs,” with its solemn beat and its command to “follow me” into a possibly turbulent future. Candy could tell that the song traced Preston’s political evolution from a wannabe anarchist to a total pacifist

to an activist. The way his voice soared, intense and scratchy on the high notes, gave her shivers. She tried to make eye contact with him to prove she got the message.

And then it happened: he saw her. For a few moments he seemed to be preaching to her alone. He tossed his red head, as if to get a better look at her. His eyes strayed and then returned. She held her own gaze bravely on him and felt rewarded when he winked. It was obviously not a rejection, but it was impossible to know what it did mean. She centered herself strategically before the stage and saw him nod. She would wait there for him, as long as it took to wrap up the show.

The wait became excruciating. After a quick “Good night, everybody!” the band came down from the stage to mingle with its instant devotees. Many got in between Preston and Candy. The girls were mostly empty-headed, giggly types. Failing to impress Preston, they moved on to Neal and Brad. A girl named Hope posed the biggest threat. Candy had been friends with her all through elementary school and junior high, when both had baby fat and braces on their teeth. Since then, she had grown slim, beautiful, and snotty. Candy knew she hadn’t advanced far enough in the same direction for Hope to continue acknowledging her existence.

To Candy’s joy, Preston shrugged off Hope and approached her. “Well, sweets,” he said with a grin, “you sure were listening intently all night. What did you think?”

Candy glanced at Jamie, who was busy clearing the stage and moving the instruments backstage. He nodded and smiled, as if giving her his blessing. She strolled toward the gym door with Preston, feeling the need to talk fast because of all the distractions around him. “I thought your performance was just amazing. It opened up a whole new world for me, and not just because you guys can really play. The songs seemed to be telling us that nothing is as sacred as we think it is.”

Candy had no idea whether she was making sense, but it hardly mattered because he didn’t let her finish. He grasped her by the shoulders, turned her toward him, and french-kissed her. It lasted for a good ten seconds, and Candy was sure people were watching—Hope included. She told herself this was a turning point in her life since she

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had merely lip-kissed the boys she had dated before. She hadn't even thought of going as far as second base, whatever that was. She was powerless to resist Preston as he turned her expertly toward the door. They might be headed for the backseat of his car, and she couldn't find the words to tell him how inexperienced she was. Neal and Brad passed them on their way out, each with a girl on his arm. "Good luck!" they all said to each other.

But the luck turned sour for Preston and Candy. She was ready to plunge into this new life that beckoned, but the old one rose up and tripped her when she glimpsed her father waiting outside the door. If he embarrassed her, how would she live it down?

"I'm sorry," Candy stammered, "but I have to go."

Preston looked surprised but not offended. "Can't I give you a ride home?"

"Thanks, but I've already got a ride."

He followed her gaze out the door and grinned with understanding. Humiliation washed over her. She couldn't bear the thought of losing him to Hope, who was still hanging around, just because her parents thought she was still a child.

"Don't sweat it," Preston said. "You sheltered types are lucky in a way."

"It's getting a little late for that," Candy protested. "I'm leaving for college next fall."

"Me too. I ain't no student, but I can't wait to get out of my house. You think you have problems? My mom died five years ago of cancer, and my dad got remarried to a real witch."

"Oh, that's so ... I mean, I'm sorry to hear it." Actually, she was more intrigued than ever. She thought his rebellious nature, and by extension his rock and roll music, must be rooted in tragedy. "My parents are really okay," she added, "but there are times I wish they'd disappear. Like right now."

"It's cool. We'll run into each other again."



It was a promise Candy planned to hold him to, someday. But in the meantime she was forbidden to date him. Her dad hadn't seen the french kiss, but he had heard gossip about it outside the gym that night. Someone had made sure he knew the gory details.

Candy went out with a few boys that winter, who were scrutinized at the door. Her parents assumed Jamie was her boyfriend since he appeared most often. Candy didn't set them straight; she was learning to dissemble. Whenever she saw Preston at school, he was talking to or walking with Hope.

Homegrown didn't seem to have any more gigs lined up. They were back to "private rehearsals," according to Jamie. Joey Sherry performed at the spring prom, backed up by a much more cooperative band. Candy didn't even try to get a date for that. On the cusp of graduation, she was losing interest in things that used to consume her. With little social life, she moped around the house a lot. Her parents grew worried and threatened to make her talk to the school counselor.

Her lunchtime girlfriends accused her of getting above herself. "You're pining for a rock star who isn't even a rock star," the shrill one said.

"He may not be yet," Candy said, "but look out."

She felt her best buddies growing cool toward her, unable or unwilling to understand her passion. She let them drift away, as Hope had done two years before. She went through the motions of sitting with them for an hour each school day, listening to their prattle about boys they liked who were nothing special at all. The truth was, these girls were ordinary too. They were on their way to community college, where they would pretend to study a little as they searched for marital prospects. If they didn't find anyone suitable, they might go on to secretarial school and make a stab at a "career." One of her friends actually claimed to be the product of a secretary who had married her boss after an adulterous affair. If her life goal was to recreate her parents' story, that struck Candy as sad.

When June rolled around, her lunchtime girlfriends wrote in her yearbook, wishing her luck at Central Maryland College, where she was headed in September. It was a small, academically challenging school

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about sixty miles north of DC, really her parents' choice. They expected her to study hard there and stay out of trouble. Candy's shrill friend, in a rare moment of reflection, wrote, "I hope you catch up to your dream someday. Even if he turns out to be the impossible dream."

Sometimes Candy thought she was right. Preston's image, in her mind, was wrapped up in the sounds that were moving the world into a new era. Sometimes she imagined him receding from her on an endless, timeless guitar riff. The only way she could catch up to him was to internalize his beat and march with the youth revolution that was gaining volume every day in the streets.

About two weeks before graduation, something finally perked Candy up. At lunch, she couldn't resist waving an invitation in front of her friends. "I've been invited to the cast party for the spring play," she announced. "Homegrown's gonna be performing."

"Good for you," the shrill one said, her usual sarcasm muted. The others just shrugged. It was clear none of them had been invited. Their sourness about her good fortune convinced Candy that she'd outgrown them.

Hope

School was mostly a drag for Hope, but it did have a few highlights. Toward the end of her senior year at Nellie Bly High, the dramatic arts club put on an original production that had been in the works all semester. *Our School* was supposed to be a take on a famous play called *Our Town*. It was done in the round at an all-school assembly, with the school's two most talented actors, Clive O'Dell and Theda Brooks, playing the leads. Everybody seemed to like it, mostly laughing when they were supposed to. Clive and Theda got standing ovations when they took their bows together at the end, and Theda received a bouquet of roses.

No one applauded Hope, of course. Hardly anyone knew she had been Theda's understudy and had even come up with a few lines of dialogue that were used in the play. She considered herself hip to school

society and felt free to offer ideas about what kids would talk about. Still, it felt like a consolation prize.

At least she had been invited to the cast party at Theda's house. Preston Andrews's band, Homegrown, was playing, and she was his date, for what that was worth. She'd been seeing him off and on since right after New Year's, when a romance of sorts had been kindled in detention hall. They'd both been caught in an administration roundup when the powers that be decided to get tough about drinking beer on school grounds. They'd noticed each other before, but once they started talking, they discovered they both suffered from lousy stepparents. For a while they got off on moaning together about their tragic backgrounds.

Hope liked dating the leader of a rock band because it gave her a new kind of status, different from hanging out with the football team as she used to do. But the night of the cast party, she could see Preston getting full of himself and his new star persona. Whenever the band took a break, he flirted with other girls. They all giggled and ate it up. It seemed that having pretty worshippers around them constantly was going to be part of this band's lifestyle, and the chicks were just arm jewelry. She walked up to Preston while he was sweet-talking one prospect and snapped, "Go ahead and collect as many groupies as you can. I'm better than that." Eyeing the girl, she added, "I want somebody who'll focus on me and not be distracted by every cheap floozy on the dance floor."

Candy was there, sulking because Preston wasn't paying her any attention. She and Hope had once been close friends, but after they'd gotten to high school, they'd drifted apart. While Hope joined the pom-pom squad and met a lot of boys, Candy mostly stayed home with her nose stuck in her books. She was never at parties where there was drinking or drugs. Her parents had their clamps on her, Hope supposed. Hope had tried to give her some helpful tips about grooming and ways of conducting herself, but Candy had taken them as insults. When Hope had suggested she grow her hair longer and maybe even dye it blond, Candy had demanded to know why she should try to look like Hope.

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They were really done once Hope got a weekend job modeling at a department store and made friends there. Her new best friend was Theda Brooks, the star actress from school, whose curvy shape and apple cheeks attracted a lot of attention on the runway. Hope had tried introducing Theda and a few others to Candy, but no dice; Candy found them snooty. The girl seemed to have no ambition other than getting straight As. How could she understand Hope's dream of someday walking down a big-time runway, with the eyes of the fashion world on her?

Hope knew that her relationship with Preston had to bum Candy out considerably. She had come to the cast party with a toady of a kid named Jamie, who'd helped with the lighting and sound for *Our School*. He seemed to be there to help the musicians set up their equipment and fetch them drinks or snacks or whatever they needed while they played. It was obvious to Hope that Candy was using this lowly assistant as a stepping-stone to her real goal.

At the cast party, after speaking her mind to Preston, Hope took Candy aside and said, "Look, you can have Preston as far as I'm concerned. Take him right now if you can. I don't care. I don't know what he's babbling about half the time anyway. If you want my opinion, he's kind of weird. But you're probably deep enough to understand him."

"Maybe I am," Candy said, walking away from Hope but not really walking toward Preston. Hope figured she was afraid to approach him.

Hope would have admitted, if Candy had asked, that she wouldn't have given away her date so willingly if she hadn't seen Neal, the guy on keyboards, looking at her all through the performance. He was cuter than Preston, with brown, soulful eyes and a reluctant smile, so different from the bandleader's grimaces and glares. Besides, Hope preferred Neal's dark hair to Preston's auburn. There was also Brad, the star football player with enormous, tattooed arms who was playing drums. He probably had the most girls swooning over him, but that brute look didn't appeal to Hope.

She wondered whether Neal was just trying to make Preston jealous by paying attention to her. She wouldn't play that game; she'd

remain cool and composed and wait to see if he approached her and only her. It was tough, though, because Neal's eye contact had gotten her excited. While sending her messages with that smile, he still had enough concentration to pound out chords on the electric piano. His sweet tenor voice made him the natural lead singer whenever the band played a ballad, like the slowed-down "Love Potion No. 9." Maybe Hope was deluding herself, but it was easy to pretend the romantic songs were about her.

Clive and Theda, the stars of *Our School*, grabbed the spotlight at the party as they had at school, although this time it was in the Brookses' huge rec room. They did the cool jerk to the fast songs and slow-danced to the ballads, with everyone following their moves as if they were the most perfect couple Bly High could ever hope to produce. The faculty advisor for the play, Mr. Clark, had a movie camera trained on them as they danced.

Meanwhile, the weirdest thing happened to Hope: she forgot to be jealous. She didn't mind sitting out most of the dances. Nor did she care that her so-called date was thrusting his shiny electric guitar in a sexual way toward lots of girls other than Candy and her, the two who were supposedly fighting over him. Hope saw right through Preston: he was the type who would always want what he didn't have. If Hope hadn't been on the outs with Candy, she would have advised her to play hard to get, instead of gazing at him all night with those ridiculous moony eyes.

When they finished playing, the three musicians just walked away, leaving Jamie to pack up their instruments and equipment. As they mingled with the thirty or so kids at the party, Hope saw Preston nudge Neal and motion in her direction. She might have felt insulted to be handed off from one musician to another, but she didn't really mind. Before Neal even came up to her and said hello, she had visions of being his muse, the one he always sang to. Maybe he'd just appreciate her beauty and not talk her ear off.

"I've been wanting to meet you," he said, "but it wouldn't have been good form to horn in on Preston."

"Oh, please, do horn in," Hope said. "I don't get half of what

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Preston says to me. I've been telling him that with his gift of gab, he should run for high office. Go debate Nixon or somebody."

Neal laughed and said, "That's sure not me. I'm not much for preliminary sweet nothings." And he wasn't. In no time he'd escorted Hope out of the party and into the backseat of his car. Hope surrendered herself to him without the slightest protest.

The lovemaking was great, but Hope had made amazing love before. This time she was looking for something more than a one-night stand. Whether he was a talker or not, Neal needed to start a conversation with her. As they pulled themselves together afterward, she thought he looked at her appreciatively.

"How would you like to be in a movie?" he asked. "In case you didn't realize it, that camera at the gig tonight was the start of something pretty cool." He explained that Clive O'Dell, Bly High's favorite leading man, had put his head together with Mr. Clark and cooked up an idea for a film. It would be based on a day, or several days, in the life of Homegrown.

"Like a documentary or something?" Hope asked.

"More like a romantic comedy," Neal said. "Definitely a musical. We're gonna write it as we go along."

"Wow," Hope said. "That's definitely intriguing." Her heart started beating faster. It was impossible for her to play it cool with this dark-eyed guy who sang ballads just for her. "Actually," she added, "I've thought for quite a while I could be an actress if I tried. I already have a modeling career going. I figure that's only one step away from real show business."

"You ought to be in show business, if you ask me."

Hope paused to take a deep breath and then asked, "So you think there's a part for me in this movie? Would I have to sing?"

"Not necessarily. The script is still fluid, as they say in showbiz. But it's definite there'll be several parts for pretty chicks ... excuse me, I mean talented young ladies."

"I was Theda's understudy in *Our School*," Hope told him. "Of course, I'm not the musician she is ... or thinks she is. I do sing a little for fun at parties. She does solos in the choir and plays piano. A real hotshot."

“You don’t need to be a real musician,” Neal replied, “not with your looks.”

Hope decided to take that as a compliment.



The movie was filmed during that summer of 1969. It was about the social lives of a group of kids just drifting between high school graduation and the start of college, much like their real lives. Apart from the musicians, Hope and her friends were working crappy daytime jobs for minimum wage to get some spending cash for fall. Their weekends revolved around the band, which was always playing at some party or other. Several cameras, borrowed from the Bly High drama department, followed them around.

At first, they just captured party atmospheres and the way the band members interacted with each other. Everyone who showed up and got out on the dance floor was allowed to be in the early shooting. There were dozens of girls at various times auditioning by dancing. Most of them, Hope thought, tried too hard to be flamboyant. That wasn’t her style; she had a sensual but natural way of moving. She knew Neal liked it because he kept pointing out to her which girls he thought were cheap or gaudy.

My acting career better take off, she was thinking by midsummer, *because the modeling’s sure going south*. With business in the doldrums, the store had cut down from six to three models. Hope hung on by taking a sales position, hoping she would get reinstated to the better job sooner or later. It was hard for her to watch Theda still strutting her stuff on the runway, knowing she was a thousand times better model. She could’ve told Theda it was supposed to be about the clothes, not the woman.

The movie, though, was great fun. When the cast was winnowed down to six girls, Hope and Theda were chosen, and Candy wasn’t. Hope was ecstatic, but she couldn’t help wondering what Candy was up to when she somehow got herself appointed to the writing staff. Who knew what a jealous girl with a pen could do behind the scenes? Would she try to cut Hope out of the story?

Whatever Candy might have tried, it didn’t work. Hope knew she

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showed up well in the film. For a long time afterward, she carried in her wallet a still picture of herself and Neal in one of their scenes together. None of the other “pretty chicks,” except Theda, was featured more. The story turned into a lighthearted murder mystery, if that was possible. In the opening scene, the band rehearsed a new song called “Hex,” which described the girls hanging around them as enchantresses who might turn out to be full-blown witches. As the band wrapped up its practice session, Brad toppled from his drummer’s perch and grasped his throat in agony. It turned out he’d been poisoned, no doubt by a deranged ex-girlfriend.

Each of the six girls got at least a few moments in the spotlight as the main suspect. It was up to the screenwriting team to decide which of them had the moxie to be a murderess, but Hope had no doubt they would choose Theda because of her long, distinguished career on the high school stage. Sure enough, a romance started up between Theda’s character and Clive’s after he replaced the murdered drummer as a supposedly bona fide member of the band. All the while, of course, Clive was an undercover detective investigating the murder. It was also pretty predictable that Theda would somehow give herself away while singing with the band. In fact, Clive arrested her for the crime just as she finished a song.

The cast and crew celebrated the wrap of their movie with a wild Labor Day weekend beach party at Ocean City, Maryland. Since most of the kids were leaving for college in the next two weeks, they partied harder, knowing their youth was coming to an end. Hope noticed that Candy did not appear all weekend; her parents had probably said no. Homegrown performed every night, all night, in the rented cottage. They played the six original songs that were featured in the film and several others they were working on, polishing them a little more each time. At this rate, they’d soon have enough material for an LP record.

That holiday would’ve been paradise if only it had lasted. Theda’s rich dad paid everybody’s way for the weekend and then agreed to keep the cottage for a few more days while some kids kept the party going. Neal and Hope made love several times in his car, the only private place they could find. That was getting a little old, but they figured things would improve once they got to college. Hopefully, there’d be

unoccupied dorm rooms at the University of Maryland available to needy couples, at least on weekends.

None of the Homegrown musicians were academic whizzes by a long shot, but they would take a crack at being college students that fall. Neal bragged that the band would have access to much snazzier facilities and equipment, which he and Preston had already checked out at College Park.

“God knows I’m not really college material either,” Hope confessed to Neal. “That’s what my wonderful stepfather says—although he’s generously offered to pay my way freshman year if I can somehow manage a B average.”

“We’ll all be on borrowed time,” Neal said. “It’s not like the university has offered us music scholarships. But one thing’s for damned sure: none of us are army material either. If we gotta act like serious students to avoid the draft ... well, didn’t we all just prove we could act by making a movie?”

“These are weird times,” Hope said. She probably should’ve been looking for a permanent job right now, as her stingy stepfather preferred, instead of pursuing higher education. But she wanted to be where Neal was, so she’d try to muddle through freshman biology and English composition and whatever else she had to.

More importantly, she’d do her best to support the band as it moved past its high school roots and into a more mature phase. No more puppy love and adolescent angst, Neal said. “We’ll be tackling more serious issues as we move ahead—social justice and the peace movement, stuff like that.”

“I hope you’re not gonna turn too political,” Hope said. “That’s more Preston’s thing than yours.” But she realized this would be hard to avoid. She’d heard that at any given time there were thousands of kids at the university ready to occupy buildings and lie down in the middle of Route 1 to protest the Vietnam War.

Theda

Theda knew the kids at school gossiped about her. A so-called friend had once told her, “Everyone says you’re kind of a spoiled brat. You have rich parents who buy you whatever you want and pay your

way into everything.” Theda had been so flabbergasted she didn’t know how to respond.

She knew she was lucky to have supportive parents, but she also knew she was responsible for her own success. Her mom and dad insisted on hard work and dedication from her and her older sister Dora. In fall 1969, Dora was about to start her junior year at Smith College after spending the summer interning at her dad’s law firm. She wasn’t just about following in his footsteps; she wanted to break new ground as a woman in the legal profession.

Theda had decided on a totally different path, which would start at the theater department at the University of Maryland. She had purposely decided to stay away from American University, where her mom was an associate professor of drama and a well-known theatrical producer, so that she could make her own way. She earned money during summer vacations by modeling at a department store and giving piano lessons. Just for fun, she and Dora also swam competitively. When they went head to head in their summer league, they usually finished first and second.

It was inevitable that kids would say her dad’s money and influence had bought her the starring role in *Hex*, the movie chronicling the Homegrown band. Unbelievably, they were talking that way while living it up at a holiday beach party that her father had paid for. After Labor Day the crowd wasn’t chaperoned as closely as before, and the booze really flowed. Hope, one of Theda’s modeling colleagues at the department store, got tanked up and screeched, “You stole the whole show, with Daddy’s help. That was your plan all along. Admit it!” Being a little drunk herself, Theda raised her hand to smack Hope but stopped herself just in time. Hope would probably accuse her of assault, and that wouldn’t help her future plans.

The next day, when they both had sobered up, Theda tried to explain a thing or two to Hope. “You’re being pretty dumb about this as well as mean,” she said. “Do you have any conception of what a big-time attorney with connections to the entertainment industry can do behind the scenes to get the band launched? Believe me, business deals like movie distribution and record contracts aren’t gonna drop in your

lap while you party all night at the beach. Someone has to be making calls to New York or LA, proposing and negotiating deals.”

“I guess so,” Hope conceded reluctantly.

“If the band should land the audition of its dreams,” Theda continued, “do you think its fans would still be harping about my role in the movie? Besides, I had to pull out some serious acting skills for that role. I had to portray a singer who seemed innocent and awkward at first, grappling with the lead microphone while the musicians leered at her from behind. I was supposed to sing like an amateur until I found my voice. I wasn’t supposed to sound like Carole King or Joan Baez right from the start, you know. But try telling that to my *critics*.”

“You win, Theda,” said Hope, tossing her blond head and moving away. “You’re the star you always wanted to be.”

Theda kept explaining to the other kids what *Hex* could accomplish if it were marketed skillfully. It was only a real movie, she pointed out, because it had real actors. She knew the musicians would’ve been perfectly happy to carouse their way through a free-form documentary without any kind of plot, just driving it along with their colorful personalities. That would’ve been a great time for everyone, with no hard feelings left behind—and would have been totally forgotten by autumn. To avoid that fate, Clive and Theda, the real actors, had stolen the most dramatic scenes from the musicians to make them look professional.

Theda could read people’s minds: she’s cute, with her bouncy brunette haircut and her apple cheeks, but she’s not as sexy as Hope. Hope was groupie-beautiful, with that long blond hair and those blue eyes, so what difference did it make if she couldn’t sing or act? Theda knew if it had been up for a vote, Hope probably would’ve gotten more mike time than she had.

Clive, despite his blond good looks, his compact muscularity, and his sexy squint, was in the same boat. His replacing Brad on drums, after Brad’s character was murdered in the first scene, had been a disappointment to some of the fans. Brad had been acclaimed the hunkiest guy in the band by virtue of also being a star football player at Bly. The most you could say about his drumming, though, was that

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he projected animal magnetism when he pounded out the few simple rhythms he was capable of. That quality became more “animal” than “magnetic” once he got boozed up. Clive turned himself into a better drummer just by acting the part than Brad could’ve become if he practiced for years.

Preston and Neal went to the law office of Mr. Theodore Brooks, Theda’s father, to see the first cut of *Hex*. Theda later heard from her dad that the idea had come up of replacing Brad with Clive on a permanent basis. It sounded coldhearted, but it was necessary if the band was ever going to be a professional outfit.

Sometime that September, the law firm signed Preston, Neal, and Clive to a management contract. Theda’s dad agreed to pursue a recording contract for the band and, if he succeeded, to manage their income and invest it if it exceeded a certain amount. Brad, who had already moved to College Park for early football practice, must have assumed the band was just on hiatus. But a few of his loyal fans sniffed something out and promised to make trouble.



Nothing happened at first as a good portion of the former senior class of Bly High transitioned into freshman life at the university. Theda knew the band would resurface sooner or later in this larger venue. Meanwhile, life became frantically busy on many other fronts. She was getting to know Clive better, which included going to church with him. Weekly mass was a new experience for an Episcopalian like her, but she liked the dramatic feel of it.

One of Clive’s rituals was praying for the soul of his dad, an army sergeant who had died during the Korean War without ever laying eyes on him. “It’s made me a pacifist,” Clive told Theda. “I feel like I could never kill anybody for any reason. I don’t even like to fight.”

The band played its first University of Maryland gig at a Halloween mixer, held in the huge South Campus dining hall, which was at least twice as big as the Bly High cafeteria. Their assistant Jamie, now acting as publicist as well as roadie, posted mimeographed advertisements

for the dance on every available bulletin board. The ad featured three musicians in monster costumes, posing with their instruments. That night the group strode onto the stage in those same costumes. When they removed their masks, they revealed themselves to be Preston, Neal, and—much to everyone’s surprise—Clive. Then all hell broke loose.

“Where’s your drummer?” someone yelled as the music started.

“Right here,” Preston said, pointing to Clive. “Wanna make something of it?”

As the band launched its opening song, “Hex,” someone did just that. The dance floor filled up quickly, and one couple edged close to the stage. The man, egged on by his girlfriend, tossed a plastic cup between Preston and Neal, aimed at Clive. It didn’t reach the drummer, but it splattered beer in every direction. As cool as you please, Preston stopped playing his guitar and swung the thick end of it at the assailant, clipping him. The guy went down on his knees, howling in rage as blood spurted from his nose, which actually suited his ax-murderer costume just fine. His partner squalled as if he’d been murdered, while Preston hoisted up his guitar and the band played on.

“Where’s Brad?” demanded a chorus of female voices. “We want Brad!”

Several couples on the floor answered this with “Shut up!” But the calls for Brad became rhythmic, and several guys who looked beefy enough to be his teammates approached the stage. The kids who tried to get in their way were no match for big-time athletes. Theda was afraid they might pull Preston off the stage and pummel him—not that he didn’t deserve it, but Clive and Neal were also in danger.

Two armed campus policemen appeared just in time and placed themselves in front of the stage, shoving Theda back from her close vantage point. They stayed there for the entire ninety-minute set, which kept things calm but also put a damper on the mood, or at least Theda’s mood. She hadn’t been prepared to see that sudden layer of security pop up between the musicians and the crowd, as if they were already too famous to touch. A surge of jealousy possessed her. She belonged on the other side of the cordon.

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Still, it turned into a pretty good party. Homegrown gradually captivated the crowd, emphasizing recognizable songs by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and other British Invasion bands. They mixed in a few original compositions that were already well known to the Bly High graduates. Neal's rendition of "Hot Teacher in Tights" got laughs when he directed it toward a lady chaperone who taught freshman composition to many of the kids. Clive got a mixed reaction when he attempted the seductive "Grooving under the Desk" in an understated way. Theda knew singing solos was not his forte, but nobody could say it was Brad's either.

Of course, Preston could never leave well enough alone. Toward the end of the set, he stirred things up again with "Revolution for Amateurs," improvising more colorful lyrics than the high school version. The sit-ins and antiwar marches he had once celebrated were blossoming into full-scale riots and blood in the streets. Instead of just "Follow me," he sang, "Follow me to anarchy," driving it with ear-shattering riffs and violent thrusts of his guitar. He even taunted the two policemen who were protecting him with "Emasculate the pigs!"

Just as the officers looked ready to take serious offense and maybe even stop the show, Preston segued into a gentle song that Theda hadn't heard before. He sang about the town of College Park as a dreamscape, transformed into something like San Francisco during the Summer of Love. In Preston's vision, flower power suddenly ruled the streets. The song pictured couples making love in the quad under a full moon as the campus police, totally won over, surrounded them protectively. "Peace conquers all!" was Preston's new refrain.

It was the first time Homegrown had tapped into the hippie movement that lately had been building on campus and spilling into the streets alongside the angry radicalism, sometimes getting the better of it, sometimes not. For the moment Homegrown had thrown itself behind pacifism and had even coaxed smiles from the policemen. Before the dance ended, the band had most of the crowd hypnotized, maybe enough to drift outside and *literally* make love, not war. Theda wondered how long that euphoric feeling would last.

For her, it ended on the walk home. She met Clive after the

show, and they strolled back to her dorm, enjoying the unseasonably warm evening, dodging trick-or-treaters, and savoring Homegrown's performance. Hearing footsteps behind her, Theda glanced over her shoulder. They were being followed by what looked like the Abominable Snowman, but that seemed perfectly normal on a night like this.

"Congratulations," he called out.

Clive and Theda turned around. "Thanks," they both said.

The snowman extended an enormous paw and grabbed Clive by the collar. He spoke in a low, exaggerated growl. "How about if I finish congratulating you by smashing your pretty face?"

Theda screamed as loudly as she could, attracting a crowd of ghosts and goblins who rushed to their defense. The monster released Clive and disappeared into the night.

"That was Brad," Clive declared, gasping for breath.

"Are you sure?" Theda asked.

"That was him," Clive insisted. "I think only God saved us." Theda didn't contradict Clive, although she thought her screams were what had saved them.



The pro-Brad contingent, consisting of his most rabid fans from Bly and a handful of Maryland football fans, soon petered out. Brad himself vanished from campus a week or so after his run-in with Clive. It was hard to believe the numbskull would walk away from a football scholarship, but he must have. Theda and Clive waited nervously for him to turn up again. Rumor had it he was in a loony bin somewhere, but no one seemed to know for sure. It was almost as if he had really died, as in the movie.

"I prayed the bastard would disappear, and God answered my prayer," Clive assured Theda. Maybe God had come through that time, but Theda doubted Clive's weekly prayers at mass would save him from the draft. If he didn't luck out in the lottery coming up next summer, being a pacifist wouldn't help him either. She doubted he was a good enough student to stay in college with a student deferment until the

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war was over. If he flunked out, the nearest draft board would grab him, and he'd wind up toting a rifle instead of drumsticks, facing the Vietcong instead of cheering audiences.

Those thoughts preyed on Theda's mind, but Homegrown prospered that fall. The band was allowed to rehearse on a sound stage in the drama department, and they started playing every weekend at fraternity and sorority parties. Theda attended as many rehearsals as she could, in between her own hectic class schedule, and went to all the performances. After the Thanksgiving break, things got even busier. She and Clive had small parts in a holiday musical that ran the first week of December.

Before exam week in mid-December, the band gave a concert in the basketball arena. They now had a dozen or so original tunes that were good enough to intersperse with the rock classics and ballads. Kids shook the rafters with their cheers and held up cigarette lighters and lit matches in the darkened hall to request encores as they would for a big-time band. The authorities were looking for trouble that night, and of course they found it. The campus police, backed up by a few of Prince George's County's finest, arrested at least twenty kids for drinking, drugs, and disorderly conduct. No doubt about it, the band had arrived.

Meanwhile, both Theda and Clive had adapted to university life. She was getting excellent grades, while he continued to muddle through.



The *Diamondback*, quite a respected newspaper not only on campus but also all through the Washington area, reviewed the holiday musical critically but noticed and praised both Clive and Theda. He was credited with "a distinctive squint that, topped off by his blond mop, should take him far as a romantic lead. He could be equally effective in detective or surfer roles." Theda was pegged as "a fresh, rosy-cheeked new face." She wasn't thrilled to be regarded as cute rather than beautiful, but it was a start.

Jealousy soon reared its head in the drama department. Theda's roommate, who considered herself a theatrical type but didn't have the

talent to carry it off, told her, “Everybody’s saying you have an unfair casting advantage because your boyfriend’s a rock star as well as an actor.”

Theda felt no urge to slap her, as she had once wanted to slap Hope. There was no need to respond at all. Things simmered between the roommates for several weeks and then got downright hostile when Theda was chosen for one of the leads in the spring play, a rare honor for a freshman. It was to be a student-written production with an antiwar theme and a couple of original songs, called *The Killing Campus*. Theda’s talentless roommate picked a fight with her and moved out, to Theda’s great relief.

The *Diamondback* was enraptured with the band by this time. “They’re not your typical exuberant but befuddled kids experimenting with musical instruments in a garage,” wrote the entertainment critic. “Some cosmic miracle brought together these unique talents and set them afire with passion and originality. They can deliver the gamut of tunes from sweet melody to hard rock. Their lyrical sensibilities are juvenile as yet but show signs of poetic development. If their powerful personalities continue to gel—that is, if they can keep playing nicely together—they’ll soon make the jump to professional venues.”

The paper itself got a surge by helping the band’s reputation grow. By spring, Homegrown was playing community centers in Silver Spring, Maryland, and Alexandria, Virginia. Then came “the jump,” a couple of professional paydays at downtown clubs. The band opened for blues outfits at the Cellar Door and the U Street Club in DC.

That spring, a skinny, bespectacled reporter named Katie started crossing Theda’s path in the dining hall and bumping into her on the walkways as she headed back to the dorm after class. Mousy-looking but aggressive types like Katie always raised Theda’s hackles. The reporter seemed determined to ferret out some nefarious business power working behind the scenes to propel the band into the big time. Thrusting her sharp jaw forward, she demanded, “Tell me, Theda, about the management contract your father’s firm signed with the Homegrown musicians.”

“That’s no big deal,” Theda said. “The band’s successes are totally due to its own efforts.”

“What about your father’s plans for the band’s future?”

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“Why’re you asking me?” Theda snapped. “If you’re so sure there’s a plan, call his office and interrogate the staff.” Of course, it turned out the pesky girl reporter had already tried that and gotten a bunch of “no comments.”

Since she couldn’t get anyone to talk, she resorted to printing secondhand speculation. An “anonymous source close to the band” hinted that Homegrown had attracted some interest from at least one New York–based record company, but the source denied the rumor that someone with influence was trying to “buy” favorable consideration or twist arms in the music industry. Theda figured the anonymous source was Jamie, who had proclaimed himself the band’s manager and was always trying to bolster his own importance. He had to be scared to death the musicians would leave him behind once they made it big.

But it did cross Theda’s mind: What if he was right? If the Homegrown phenomenon kept growing, would the band’s hangers-on be left in the dust? And would Theda be considered a hanger-on? She couldn’t stand the thought. She decided to branch out from piano, on which she’d taken lessons since elementary school and even given lessons to a few classmates in high school. She’d familiarize herself with guitar and drums, whenever she could find them not being used in Homegrown’s rehearsal space. With her natural flair for music, she was sure she could pick them up quickly.



Clive began to change in disturbing ways. He stopped going to church after Neal called him “altar boy” a few times. “What do you care what that jerk says?” Theda demanded. Clive agreed that Neal was a jerk, but he could neither free himself from the band’s influence nor get comfortable with his place in it.

“Preston and Neal are the songwriters, and I’m not,” he said. “They could boot me out for not contributing enough.”

“So what if they do?” Theda replied. “You have another career. You’re an actor.” But he kept brooding. He seemed to think playing the drums was his best shot at fame.

Theda tried to persuade Clive to go back to mass, not because she cared about Catholicism but to take a stand against Neal's hatefulness. She couldn't understand why Clive refused so vehemently.

"You really want to know why?" he finally responded one day in the noisy dining hall. The atmosphere, with its headache-inducing roar of conversation and clashing dishes on all sides, wasn't exactly conducive to a philosophical discussion. Nevertheless, he pulled an envelope out of his pocket and handed it across the table to Theda. It was addressed to him, and the return address was in Lark, Scotland.

"It's from my cousin, Flanagan," Clive explained. "He's a priest who runs a profitable fruit-producing commune in the northern orchard country. For all I know, he's an ex-priest by now, since he's broken all his vows. His congregation and workers call him Swami Flanny because he preaches pacifism and mysticism."

Theda glanced through the swami's letter. He seemed to be responding to a plea from Clive about his draft status and many other insecurities. "My dear cousin, it's been ten years since you last visited my home with your mother and sister," Flanny wrote, "but your heartfelt words bring us close together again. I feel for you in your struggle to navigate those turbulent waters in America. Please remember, my door is always open to you. Whenever you feel the need for support and protection, come to me."

"Wow," Theda said, handing the letter back. "Would you really run away to Scotland to avoid the draft?"

"I didn't say that," Clive said, "but I'm not getting any sympathy from the priest here, even in confession. He used to be an army chaplain. He tells me to do my duty if I'm called. Once I even told him about Flanny, and he said excommunication was too good for my cousin."

"That's outrageous," Theda said, "attacking a fellow priest just because he's different! Is that what religion is supposed to be about?"



As the spring weeks rushed by, Clive's rock and roll dream started to take precedence over everything. He denied it when Theda was alone

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with him, but those occasions were getting more and more scarce. There was no such thing as a Saturday night date for them anymore. There was just Theda hanging around wherever the band was playing, waiting for the dance to end in the early morning hours so that they could grab a few private moments. If she hadn't gotten a new Cutlass for her birthday, a car with a conveniently ample backseat, even that wouldn't have been possible.

The future Theda had envisioned for herself and Clive was growing cloudy. She'd always assumed Clive wanted to be an actor like her, and music was just a sideline. Or was it the other way around? He dropped out of the spring play, pleading scheduling conflicts. Worse, he came to see her performance only on opening night. When she took her final bows, her arms full of bouquets, she tried to make eye contact with him in the front row. But she couldn't because he was already rushing out to get to some gig. She stood there in the footlights, trying to keep her bright smile while watching his departing back. *Go to hell*, she thought.

"This isn't working out the way I thought it would," Theda told Clive one early Sunday morning in her car, forestalling any thought of lovemaking by pushing him away. "I thought we'd both spend our college years building up our theatrical resumes. Then after college, assuming the draft isn't still hanging over us, we'd try our luck on the New York stage. I'm sure we'd spend years struggling in the big city, as every newcomer does. But that would make our ultimate successes all the sweeter, wouldn't it?"

"I can't see you ever struggling like that," he replied. "Your folks won't allow it."

"Are you serious?" Theda shot back. "I'm totally about making it on my own. My parents want that too. In fact, they insist on it."

When he shook his head in disbelief, Theda spat, "I'm beginning to think you love my connections more than you ever loved me."



The *Diamondback's* theater critic praised Theda's performance in the spring play, anointing her the most promising new actress on campus.

She played an antiwar activist who ended up getting killed in a campus demonstration. She might've gotten a swelled head from her good reviews, except that there were times during the play when she wasn't really acting. She ad-libbed some of the political speeches as if she were running for office.

Despite her success on the stage, she was fighting sadness. Clive never belittled her in words, but she still got the impression that he considered her work small potatoes compared to what he was doing. She doubted they would make it through the spring semester as a couple.

On a Saturday night in late April 1970, Theda had plans to go to dinner with Steve, her leading man from the play, instead of hanging out as usual at a frat party just to see if the band could keep it going until three in the morning. She told Clive about her date in advance. "Just so you'll feel perfectly free to pluck some worshipping girl off the dance floor to take my place."

Clive's cool squint disappeared for a moment. He stalled for time by smoothing down his blond locks, which were starting to crawl down his neck. "I'm not looking for someone to replace you," he protested. Then he recovered his rock star persona and even unveiled a mean streak she hadn't seen before. "Well, go ahead and have fun with Steve. Or should I say Stephanie?"

"You're assuming he's a homosexual just because he's a talented actor?" Theda demanded. "That's a fucking lie."

Clive flinched at her language, which goaded Theda to add, "I really believe you're rejecting your own gift because your bandmates make you feel insecure about it. That's fucked up, but it's not really my problem. Steve will show me a good time."

Theda did go out with her new friend, and he was attentive and sweet, something she'd been missing lately. The romance part of it came along slowly, while she shifted her social gears to hang out with the theatrical crowd instead of the rockers.

By early May, *The Killing Campus* had turned out to be prophetic. In response to the real shootings at Kent State, demonstrators made a stab at taking over the Maryland campus. They actually succeeded in

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blocking Route 1 for twenty-four hours. Theda participated in some of the events, but she made impromptu speeches denouncing vandalism wherever she found it.

Since most classes were canceled for a few days, Theda's dad took the band to New York to audition for Unique Records East, an independent company that had shown interest in the soundtrack for the Homegrown movie, *Hex*. He told Theda on the phone, "Unique Records is an outfit that's receptive to fresh new talent. I have a feeling Homegrown is just the act for them, at just the right time." Theda reflected, as she hung up, that she had never seen her father so psyched about an artistic project. He'd forgotten to ask her how well she was getting along with Clive or whether the university was on the verge of imploding.

The musicians returned to campus with no contract imminent. Their lawyer-mentor kept sending copies of the movie to record companies but got no other bites.



On a mid-May evening after finals, Theda was in her dorm room, packing to go home for the summer, when the hall phone rang. There was no one around to answer it but her.

"Thank God it's you." It was Clive, and he sounded out of breath. Her heart began to race. "I'm downstairs in the lobby," he said. "I gotta talk to you. Right away."

"Nobody will stop you if you come up," Theda said, keeping her voice cool. "There's no resident official in the hall tonight."

A few minutes later, they faced each other, sitting on beds at opposite ends of the room. He trembled like a cork ready to pop off a bottle. What could be making him so hyper?

"I hear you haven't got a record contract yet," Theda said.

"No ... not yet."

"So what's the big news? Did you ace all your finals?"

He paused and smoothed his hair, as if his thoughts had drifted a thousand miles away from school. "Actually, I didn't take my exams. I took incompletes. All three of us did."

“Oh yeah? When do you plan on finishing the semester?” she asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe never, if our latest plan works out. That’s what I came to talk to you about.”

“What plan?” Theda’s pulse kept pounding.

“We’re going to England for a month starting in late June. It’s a university tour worth three hours of academic credit. We’re paying for it in advance, out of the band’s earnings, so our hotel rooms and meals will be taken care of. And there’ll be plenty of free time built in for us to ... do our own thing.”

“Wow,” Theda said. “You guys are resourceful. I’ll give you that.” Her heart began to sink, although she fought it. Would this be their final break?

“But here’s the thing ... I want you to come too.”

She gasped. “Are you serious?”

A grin spread across his face, a look she couldn’t resist.

“What brought this on?” Theda asked.

“Sometime last winter, Jamie sent the soundtrack of our movie to Apple Corps, the Beatles’ company in London. You’ve heard of Apple, right? It was set up specifically to help new artists. A couple of days ago, Jamie got a call from some American guy with a Boston accent who said he was an assistant press officer there. He raved about our music and said he’d gotten the go-ahead from a superior to tell us that if we were ever in London, we should stop by.”

“So?” Theda tried to exert some common sense. “That’s kind of vague, isn’t it? It’s not like you actually heard from one of the Beatles.”

“Of course not. That can’t happen, now that they’ve pretty much gone their separate ways. But the whole world’s still trying to beat down Apple’s doors. We’re already a step ahead ’cause we have a contact. And if that doesn’t pan out, there’s all kinds of clubs in London looking for new bands. It’s a really hot scene.”

“Sounds like you might be planning more than a month-long tour,” Theda said. “What about the draft lottery this summer?”

Clive frowned, shrugged off the draft, and breezed on about the wonders of Great Britain. His mother had emigrated from there, and as Theda already knew, he was still in touch with his cousin in Scotland,

whom he'd last visited when he was eight. "Maybe we'll get up there to check out the swami's commune. I hear it's really cool."

"That's all very nice," Theda said, "but I've got a summer job lined up—actually, more than one. Besides my modeling at Woodies, my mom got me an internship in the drama department at American University. And I have three piano students. With all that going on, I don't know if I can just take off for a month."

As Theda spoke, she realized none of this held water, since the three jobs together wouldn't add up to one full-time salary. What was her real problem?

"You hurt my feelings on my opening night last month," she exclaimed. "Would it have killed you to stick around for a minute or two after the performance? I mean, there I was standing in the spotlight, basking in the applause, watching you leave without so much as a ..."

She cried a little, which was mortifying but effective.

"Oh, Theda," said Clive, springing from his seat and moving across the room to embrace her. She sobbed on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry about your opening night. I'll make it up to you. You know, London has the finest theaters in the world. Plus, Stratford-on-Avon is part of the tour itinerary. We'll get to see *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Won't that be great?"

Her tears subsided as her excitement grew. She still had to ask, "Have you mentioned this plan to my father?"

"Look, your dad's helped us a lot, but we got the invite to Apple ourselves. It's time for us to take charge of our own careers, and that's what we'll be doing on this trip. It just feels like fate that this opportunity came our way at just the right time."

"Fate?" Theda was skeptical yet intrigued. She had to guard against falling head over heels in love with this new Clive. "Be honest," she said. "Are you losing faith that my dad can get you the recording contract you're after?"

"Like I said, this isn't about him." Clive's admiring gaze struck her like a shimmering spotlight. "You know, Theda, you gotta make a decision too. Are you serious about making it on your own, apart from Mom and Dad? Here's a great chance to do that."

Linda Gould

He couldn't have said anything more convincing. Theda knew she would find a way to take this journey with him, and she would convince her parents that it was indeed her fate to go to England too. She made love to Clive in the near-empty dorm as if their future had already arrived.

Chapter 2

Candy

Candy's adjustment to her small-town college was a rough one, at least socially. Part of her problem was an incompatible roommate. Libby—or Little Miss Perfect, as Candy secretly called her—was popular and confident and offered unsolicited advice on every conceivable subject. “You need to be more outgoing with the girls in the hall,” she'd say with a slight smirk, as if sure Candy wouldn't or couldn't improve. “Speak up once in a while. Be the first to say hi.”

“I've tried that,” Candy protested. “When I speak up first, they seem to recoil.” She didn't add that she was sure Libby had badmouthed her to those girls.

Another of Libby's themes was how Candy spent her free time. “You're supposed to have fun on weekends. No offense, but studying on Friday and Saturday nights makes you look pathetic.”

“Nobody asks me out,” Candy replied.

“Then ask someone out yourself. I've done it lots of times.”

But Candy knew Libby had the protection of her more experienced girlfriends when she prowled through the fraternity houses. Once when Candy asked to go along with them, Libby said, “Oh, I don't think you'd be comfortable with us.” She made sure she was out the door before Candy could make a case for not being the prude she appeared to be.

Libby reminded Candy a little too much of Hope. That gave Candy the idea of writing to her former friend at the University of Maryland. She labored over the letter, trying to make her wish to reconnect with Hope for old times' sake sound plausible, while incidentally asking for the latest news about Homegrown. Was the band revving up the campus as expected? Hope would know what Candy was really asking.

She got a brief note in return. Hope expressed surprise to have heard from her "after all this time." Nothing she wrote encouraged Candy to think that they could be friends again or, more importantly, that there was any point in her trying to contact Preston.

"Yes," Hope wrote, "I guess you could say the band is revving up the campus. In fact, I think they're already too big for this place. They're rock stars, or at least act like it. Anyway, thanks for writing. P.S. Homegrown is playing a Christmas concert at Cole Field House, which is a really big deal."



Candy left campus to go to the concert, which took place on a Saturday night just before exam week in December. She didn't tell her parents about her excursion and caught hell from her dad when he phoned her on Sunday night after she got back.

"Where've you been all weekend?" he demanded. "I called several times and couldn't find anyone in your hall who had seen you."

"I didn't tell anyone where I was going, Dad. There wasn't time. I advertised on the student center bulletin board for a ride to the University of Maryland, and someone finally responded late Friday afternoon. There was a concert at Cole Field House I wanted to go to."

"What did you do? Hitch a ride to College Park?"

"No, Dad, that's not what I said." Candy tried to speak firmly. "I went in a van with several other kids who were curious to see this band. We found places to stay in the dorms on Friday night and came back late this afternoon. We didn't get into any trouble. It was the most fun I've had all semester."

"I don't object to your having some fun. But you worried your

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mother and me half to death, disappearing without telling anyone. And it's questionable timing, with exams about to start."

"I've been studying hard ... all the time, practically." Candy slipped back into a pleading tone. "I really needed a break. I'll be ready for my exams."

"I hope so. We'll discuss this again when you come home for the holidays."



As expected, Candy's parents kept pouring it on all through vacation about her leaving campus without telling anyone. When she protested that she'd signed out in the dormitory front office as required, they got to their real beef: her friendless situation.

"You couldn't even tell your roommate where you were going?" her father asked. "You hate each other that much?"

"I doubt if Little Miss Perfect thinks about me enough to really hate me," Candy said. "At least I made some new friends on my trip to Maryland. They're more my type. And I stayed overnight with Hope Witmer. You remember her, don't you? We used to be friends when we were kids."

Her parents kept worrying about the wrong things. She longed to talk about the band, but they weren't focused on why she had gone to College Park. They just assumed it was a form of rebellion. If they had asked her, she might've spilled her guts, especially about the lead guitarist. Then her dad might've connected that with the infamous tongue kiss she'd been christened with at the Bly High Christmas dance, not that she'd managed a repeat performance at the university. Since she couldn't get backstage after the show and wasn't invited to any after-party, she never got near Preston at all.

Instead of confiding in her folks, Candy holed up in her room, trying to compose an article about the concert for the student newspaper at Central Maryland, the *Copperhead*. Her self-enforced solitude had them worried again about her state of mind. If only they had taken the trouble to read her words!

When Candy got back to college, she submitted her article to the

Copperhead. It was pruned down quite a bit before it was published in the February issue. The features editor insisted she concentrate on the music rather than the personalities. "You didn't get any quotes from the musicians, so you haven't given me a news story," he said. "Let's stick to reviewing the show."

"But I do know them pretty well from high school," Candy argued, "even if I haven't talked to them lately. I can see how their unique personal chemistry helps to shape their art."

"That's another article," the editor replied. "Maybe."

At least the shortened version that got into the paper allowed her to trace Homegrown's history.

The musicians first mesmerized their classmates at Nellie Bly High by embellishing rock classics until something new was created. They took possession of all kinds of songs, from the folksiness of "Leaving on a Jet Plane" to the raunchiness of "Tutti Frutti." When original songs began to emerge from the experiments, the hallways pulsed with the newness of it. Sometimes even the sanctity of the student-teacher relationship was threatened. The band unveiled its own "Hot Teacher in Tights," "Grooving under the Desk," and "Revolution for Amateurs" at a Christmas dance. That spring, propelled by the same inspired amateurism, they made a movie called Hex.

In the fall of 1969, Homegrown moved on to university life and immediately put down new roots. The 10,000-plus fans who piled into Cole Field House for their mid-December show witnessed a growing-up process. Those of us who had been following the band from the start could see the progression. Clive O'Dell's vocal on "Season of Love" no longer depicted horny high school kids sneaking around, but a mature couple surrendering to a springtime fever in a garden. Neal McNab's hot teacher turned into a "Psycho Professor" spewing the weirdest philosophies ever heard on a college campus. The "Revolution for Amateurs" got more organized as Preston Andrews exhorted his listeners to keep following him in "We Can Change the World." Then when we

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least expected it, Andrews quieted the arena down to expose a raw, vulnerable heart in “Signals from the Clouds,” his search for a connection with his deceased mother.

That night the musicians gave us a sample of what they hope will become their first album. It will be a rich package of songs with no theme other than youthful exuberance. Homegrown is not yet focused enough as an artistic entity to do “concept” albums. As in its live shows, the band will experiment on record with everything that comes to mind: slow love-sex ballads, beat-driven socialistic screeds, hazy psychedelic dreamscapes, and more, all built on an exquisite gift for melody and harmony.



At some point during those snowy, frigid weeks when Candy was struggling with the article, Libby moved out on her. Candy was so wrapped up in maintaining her A-minus average (except for gym, which was fated to be a solid C-plus) and in figuring out how to please a fairly cute newspaper editor, that she somehow failed to notice her roommate packing. It seemed that a spot had opened up down the hall in an area where the popular girls congregated, and Libby grabbed the chance to be with girls more like her—the types who managed Bs and Cs with minimal effort, leaving plenty of time for their endless bull sessions about who was dating whom and why.

Libby moved in with Margaret, a leader of that group who was usually friendly to everyone, even Candy. Whenever Candy met Libby in the hall, her stiff greeting made Candy feel like a pariah. But then one day in the bathroom, Margaret said to her, while applying eye shadow and mascara to an already pretty face, “I really liked your article.”

After Candy stammered a thank-you, Margaret added, “You should write more about music. It’s a really happening thing.” After that, dorm life seemed slightly more bearable. Against all odds, Candy had penetrated the popular circle for an exhilarating moment.



No new roommate was assigned to her at first, which was fine. She needed solitude to launch another project. She decided to write a letter to Preston, enclosing her printed article. No doubt, he was already getting a ton of fan letters, but maybe this one would stand out.

Candy mailed her letter at the end of February and checked her mailbox in a jittery sweat every day after that. She'd received no response by the first of April, when an early morning phone call from her distraught mother blasted her world. Her father had died of a sudden, massive heart attack.



Candy went home for her dad's funeral and returned to college a week later; her mother agreed that she should get back to her studies as soon as possible. But before she went back, her mom sat Candy and Bill Junior down to discuss their academic futures. Although she intended to go back to work, her salary and savings would not be sufficient to pay for one expensive college education, much less two. Candy would have to leave Central Maryland and resume her schooling next fall at the less costly University of Maryland. Unless the financial picture improved, her brother would follow her there when his time came two years later.

"I see," Candy said when her mom finished breaking the news. She didn't trust herself to say anything else.

"I know how disappointed you are. I am too. Your dad and I wanted you to have a private college education. I know the university is large and impersonal, but you're just going to have to make the best of things there."

"I'll try." Candy's head exploded with the possibilities. The events of the past week had been shocking, untimely, and yet also liberating. The idea that she could harbor such a thought in the midst of her staggering grief made her cry harder than she had when she first got the news. But her main hope now was that she could get herself established at College Park before Preston flunked out.



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Candy intended to finish the semester at CMC with her grade point average intact, but the new roommate assigned to her while she was away threatened to distract her. She had met Josephine once before, during her December trip to College Park to see Homegrown. Jo turned out to be the anti-Little Miss Perfect. A whiz of a student, she was taking some of the toughest courses available to freshmen, including chemistry, calculus, and physics. Yet she was into pot and peace marches and loved making fun of the dominant social life in the dorm.

Candy's plan to transfer to the university earned her praise. "Personally, that's where I'd rather be right now," she said. "It's where the grooviest kids congregate. I can't stand the uptight bitches on this campus with their pretty, ignorant heads always up their asses. They barely know there's a war on, or that there's poverty in the inner cities. The ones who live here are the worst I've seen yet. Such fucking snobs. Did they even tell you they were sorry your dad died?"

"Not directly," Candy said. "I did get a card and flowers from the hall. Actually, Margaret's not so bad. She told me she liked my article."

"Of course she did." Jo tossed back her long, brown hair and adjusted her granny glasses. "Chicks like her struggle with reading comprehension, so naturally they're in awe of someone who can grind out a newspaper article. But that doesn't mean they like you any better for it."

Josephine was happy for Candy when she finally got a response from Preston Andrews. He must have seen her dad's obituary in the paper or heard about it from someone who had, since that was what it took for him to answer Candy's letter two months after she'd sent it. "It seems you and I share a heartache," he wrote. "I'm really sorry for your loss." That was all, but it was almost enough.

"Far out," said Josephine. "He must like you on some level, although he's gonna be a tough one to corral. His band's really cool, but they've got a ways to go. They're mostly in pop-song mode now because that's Neal's bag, but they've also got the balls to experiment. They really should change their name to something more professional than Homegrown—and then acquire a bass player and maybe even a

girl singer as a novelty, like Gracie Slick in Jefferson Airplane. Can you sing, by the way?"

"Not a lick," Candy said.

"Too bad. I doubt they'll get a record contract with just the three of them. But your friend Preston is rock star material for sure. Grab him if you can."

As Jo and Candy discussed plans to see the band again, Jo said, "I've got friends at Maryland I crash with every once in a while when I get claustrophobic here. My parents call it running away or truancy ... and if I do it again, they've threatened to pull my ass outta school and make me go to work as a waitress."

Despite that threat, Josephine and Candy made the sixty-mile drive to College Park in a borrowed car on the Friday afternoon before exam week. Many out-of-town kids were crashing in the dorms wherever they could find unoccupied beds. Either the rules about separation of the sexes were looser at the university, or they weren't enforced, at least on weekends.

The girls stayed in a room belonging to a graduate student in engineering whom Jo called "Pretty Boy Floyd." "He's a radical leftist from a rich West Coast family and my on-again, off-again boyfriend ... about which my parents have no clue," Jo explained. Candy never actually met Floyd since he was always away during the day. When he returned in the dead of night, he and Jo went off somewhere else to make love or whatever they did, with Candy's blessing. All she cared about, when she wasn't studying or sleeping, was figuring out how to connect with Preston.

Exams had already begun at Maryland, but that didn't seem to slow down the partying. Josephine, with her array of connections, found out which frat affair Homegrown was playing at on Saturday night and somehow got herself and Candy invited. While Jo was busy picking up guys to dance with, Candy remained fixed at a strategic spot near the stage, where she hoped to be in Preston's sight line. It was the same technique she'd used in high school, and she knew it made her look weird, but she didn't care. It seemed to pay off when he winked at her. Then she began to suspect it was a reflexive wink when she saw him bestowing it on others. How could he not recognize her as special?

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The band had worked up a British Invasion medley of antiwar songs that ignited the crowd, and then they segued with ease into their own “We Can Change the World.” Later, Preston quieted things down with his heartfelt “Signals from the Clouds.” Some of the couples grew impatient with the slow stuff and shuffled off the dance floor toward the beer kegs. Others got into the mood by slow-dancing. Candy was the only one in the audience, as far as she could tell, who took a direct hit to the heart. She understood Preston’s compulsion to read messages in the clouds, the wind, and the trees. He was trying to communicate with someone dear to him who had slipped into the beyond, where humanity rejoins nature.

The song made her cry. She was sure her bawling in the midst of the crowd made her look even weirder, but she couldn’t help it. She realized that for weeks she’d been too preoccupied with the practicalities of her situation to grieve for her father. She had even reveled a little in her newfound freedom. Now she suddenly missed his overprotectiveness, which had been the cause of their quarrels. Who else would love her enough to be shocked that she had kissed the “wrong” boy?

Candy’s tear-filled eyes met Preston’s and held them. This time she felt sure they connected. Once the song was over, he pushed the sadness aside and announced, “This might be the last time you college chumps will have Homegrown around to mess with your heads. The band’s about to spread its wings. We’re going overseas ... to England.”

Exclamations filled the room, while Candy gasped. She couldn’t believe she’d made meaningful contact with Preston only to lose him again.

“What’s in England?” somebody demanded.

“Adventure, man. A totally different scene. Besides, the Brits deserve a chance to hear us.”

Homegrown revved up a traditional “good night” tune to close the evening, speeding it up as if to hasten their departure. Candy spotted Hope near the back of the room. As she made her way through the crowd toward her former friend, Hope motioned Candy to follow her outside.

“What’s this trip to England all about?” Candy demanded.

Tossing back her long, honey-blond hair, Hope pulled a cigarette and lighter out of her purse and lit up. Candy had never seen her smoke before. She shook her head to Hope's offer of a cigarette. Hope inhaled deeply and blew out an expert smoke ring.

"Officially, it's a month-long school trip for three hours of credit. It's supposed to be for English majors. So that's what we've all become, at least for now." She chuckled at that.

"I really am one," Candy said indignantly.

"Oh yeah, right. You could get away with it, but I don't know how the guys will. They're not even taking their finals this semester; they're taking incompletes. If the band catches on over there, they might be tempted to stay ... the draft be damned."

"How about you?" Candy asked. "Will you stay too?"

"If Neal does. It's not like I'm gung ho to get a college degree. I'm not in love with studying like you are."

Hope made this sound like an insult. Candy backed away, feeling a little nauseous from the cigarette smoke. "So how much does this trip cost?" she asked.

"Six hundred dollars each, for the plane ticket, meals, hotels, everything. My stepfather says he'll pay to send me since it's for college credit. I'm sure he's secretly hoping I won't come back."

"That would take practically all my savings," Candy mused. "But I might qualify for financial aid in the fall."

"If you care about Preston like I think you do, you better find a way to go on this trip," Hope advised. "Otherwise, you can bet some British chick will snap him up."

"What if the faculty sponsors figure out it's just a ruse to get the band over there to advance their musical careers?" Candy asked.

Hope shrugged. "If that's the plan, so what? You don't have to like it."

Candy stayed an extra day at College Park to visit the registrar and try to expedite her application for admission. She also dropped by the English department to personally plead for status as an English major before the summer session began. Jo had no problem hanging out with friends while Candy was busy. They returned to CMC on Monday

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evening, where another threatening message from Jo's parents awaited her. They would let her stay in school long enough to take her final exams, so as not to waste the semester. But a waitressing career loomed after that.



Near the end of June, Candy prepared to depart with about twenty classmates on their four-week tour of England. She was thrilled to be embarking on the first grown-up adventure she had ever been permitted to have. She hadn't really asked her mother whether she could go; she'd told her she was going. Her mom had looked stunned, but so much had already happened in the past few months to change life as she knew it that she didn't put up much of a fight.

Candy got her passport and came up with the necessary \$600 herself, emptying her bank account. She promised her mom she would replenish some of the funds in August by typing and answering phones for her uncle, who was absorbing her dad's insurance business into his own.

Before departing, the English students were required to take a weeklong class on campus, a quick survey of British history, literature, and art. Preston, Neal, and Clive showed up for only the first day of coursework. Preston winked at Candy once, but that was all. At the end of the week, there was an essay exam covering the material. Professor Raymond Stitt, an earnest, bespectacled type, announced that anyone who skipped the exam would be required to make it up after the trip or flunk the course.

Hope, Theda, and Jamie were there all week, but Candy spoke to them only briefly. After class one day, Hope asked, "So, how'd you persuade your mom to let you go to England?"

"It wasn't hard," Candy said, "since I'm paying for it myself."

When Theda first noticed Candy, she remarked, "Surprise, surprise. I didn't expect to see you here."

Candy explained the financial reason for her transfer to the university.

“That’s a shame,” Theda said with a knowing look, “but I hope it works out for you.”

Candy approached Jamie to say hello. He gave her a stony stare through his thick glasses and said in a clipped tone, “It’s nice to see you again.” Then, shifting his feet nervously, he added, “Sorry about your dad.”

“Thanks,” she replied, wondering if she’d done something to offend him, other than using him shamefully to get to Preston, which he had tolerated when they were in high school.

Once the exam was over, Candy was ready for adventure. At six o’clock the following Monday evening, her mom put her in a cab bound for Dulles Airport, for the scheduled nine o’clock charter flight to New York. Her mom cried as she waved goodbye, as if she were giving up her only daughter.



Candy’s first flight ever, the brief trip from Washington to New York, was a white-knuckle but exhilarating experience that she went through alone, with nobody she knew sitting close to her. At the airport in New York, it was much the same at first; she kept finding herself either far in front of or behind the people she most wanted to be with. She was one of the first in line to get onto the runway bus that took them to the overseas plane. She kept looking back, but she didn’t glimpse the musicians until the last second. Once everyone boarded the plane, they had seats near the front of the coach section, whereas Candy ended up near the back. She saw Hope up there, busy making friends with several unfamiliar girls. Then she noticed that Jamie was right across the aisle from her. “Hello,” she said with determination.

“Hi,” he said, finally smiling a little. “Is today your first time flying too?”

“Does it show?” Candy replied.

Her feelings of frustration gave way to the glorious disorientation of the experience. During the takeoff, she made terrified eye contact with Jamie. Once they were airborne, she was fine; she ate her dinner voraciously, asked the stewardess for periodic coffee refills, and soaked

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in every sensation. She decided it was actually better to be far from the musicians, who were filling their part of the cabin with cigarette smoke. She would never forget the sight of New York City from the air at night, with the Great White Way snaking through the mass of lights and the Empire State Building rising majestically above it all. It felt eerie to leave the city behind and plunge eastward into darkness.

A little over six hours later, Candy got her first glimpse of a foreign country when they burst through the gray cloud cover and beheld a green countryside with tiny cars driving on the wrong side of the road. She felt anxious and queasy as the plane approached Heathrow Airport, and the pressure on her eardrums increased steadily. By the time they landed, she was deaf and once again disoriented. She had barely slept all night, and it was late morning when her body told her it should be the crack of dawn.

She thought they'd never get out of the airport. The small group was swamped by hundreds of foreign arrivals waiting to be processed. She and Jamie got separated from the others and spent an agonizing thirty minutes searching for the bus that would take them to their hotel at Leicester Square. When they finally located it, she and Jamie were the last passengers aboard. They took seats in front, again separated from the musicians who were all the way in back.

The group checked into Leicester Towers and gathered in the restaurant for a brief introductory talk from their British sponsor, Geoffrey. As he described the bus tour of London that they would take the next day, Candy watched Preston, Neal, and Clive across the room. They were talking among themselves, as if hatching some alternate plan. Then, while everyone sipped tea and chewed on an odd assortment of rather tasteless pastries, Dr. Stitt announced their roommate assignments. Candy and Jamie looked at each other and sighed a little; she had drawn Hope, and he had drawn Neal.

Their sponsors advised them to spend at least a few hours resting and getting settled. Once Candy found herself alone in the room with Hope, it took all of two minutes to clarify where they stood with each other.

"Hello," Candy said haltingly.

Hope tossed her blond head and barely answered.

“What’re you planning to do right now?” Candy asked, surmising that Hope had no notion of resting.

“I’m going shopping with some of the girls I met on the plane.”

“Where’re you going, exactly?”

“Piccadilly Circus. Or Carnaby Street. There are cool stores everywhere.”

Candy thought Hope might ask her to join them, if only to be polite, but no dice. It was just as well, since Candy couldn’t afford a shopping spree. She watched Hope unpack her wardrobe. “You really need more clothes?” she asked.

“Who doesn’t?” Hope eyed Candy’s open suitcase and smirked. Then she went into the bathroom to freshen her makeup and change into a frilly blouse and bell-bottom jeans. She emerged quickly, grabbed her purse off her bed, slipped into her platform sandals, and headed for the door.

“Don’t forget,” Candy called after her, “you need to find a place to exchange your dollars for English currency.”

“Oh, right,” Hope said, turning back for an instant as if startled.

“I’d go to a bank if I were you,” Candy advised. “You’ll probably get a better exchange rate than at the front desk.”

“Thanks,” Hope said as she disappeared.

It seemed Candy had traveled a long way just to relive the snobby roommate experience she’d suffered at CMC. Would she ever find a genuine girlfriend, other than flaky Josephine? She wished Jo were here.

Candy finished unpacking and then went out to locate the nearest bank. It was right down the street, and she walked in to discover Jamie about to transact similar business. Once again, they were on the same wavelength. He smiled at her as she got into line behind him.

“Having fun yet?” he asked.

“I need some spending cash first.” Candy showed him the \$100 in traveler’s checks that her mother had given her as a parting gift. “Not that I have any idea what I’ll spend it on, with most of our expenses already covered. I mean, I’m not like Hope. I don’t need a different outfit for every day of the trip.”

“You could always tag along with me and the band when we start

hitting the clubs,” Jamie said. “Trust me, you won’t have any trouble spending your bread.”

Candy’s heart lurched, but she kept her voice steady. “Oh, you’ve made plans with the guys already?”

“They don’t wanna miss any opportunities to take in the music scene—and maybe find ways to strut their own stuff.”

Then Jamie showed her the stash that had been entrusted to him: \$300 in traveler’s checks, supplied by Theda’s father to help Homegrown pursue its own course of study.

“And they’ve appointed you to carry all their cash?” Candy asked. “That’s quite a responsibility, being their treasurer as well as their roadie.”

“Yeah, that’s one way of putting it.” Jamie flushed and tapped his foot, as if irritated at the suggestion of servitude.

All plans were put on temporary hold as jet lag caught up with everyone. Despite the lingering daylight, the whole group crashed early that evening. When Candy returned to the room after a quick dinner in the hotel restaurant, she found that even Hope had tumbled onto her bed in a pretty heap.



The next morning, everyone showed up bright and early for the bus tour. As they took in the sights, with Geoffrey explaining the history behind it all, Candy wrote down as much as she could in a spiral notebook. Hardly anybody else was taking notes, but she didn’t care. She intended to make something of this trip, even if she never bought an article of clothing or exchanged a meaningful word with the musicians.

The group got off the bus frequently for photo opportunities at all the traditional tourist sites, including the British Museum, Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, and St. Paul’s Cathedral. When they arrived at Buckingham Palace shortly after eleven, they encountered a big crowd. Candy was trying to get a decent picture of the guard-changing ceremony when somebody bumped her arm, nearly making her drop the camera. “Hey, watch it,” she said.

“Just trying to get your attention, sweets.”

Candy gasped. Preston was at her side, grinning. "Excuse me," she said, as if she'd been the one who'd jostled him.

"You're sure taking this junket seriously. Every time I look at you, you're either taking notes or trying to get the perfect picture of some moldy historical site. Such a busy little scholar."

"Well," Candy said, trying to calm herself, "it's an academic course, after all. I'm here to learn."

"Yeah, of course you are. Me too. But since I blew off the class before we came, they're gonna make me write some kinda paper afterward to keep from flunking the course. How about if I just crib your notes?"

Candy wasn't sure whether to feel flattered or used. Her heart was still pounding, but she replied in a rather stiff voice, "I'll do what I can to help."

As they watched the spectacle together, Jamie joined them. When it was over, Preston announced, "I say Mr. Moneybags here should treat us to lunch."

The trio made their way out of the crowd and found a carryout place nearby. Jamie paid for three servings of fish and chips wrapped in newspaper. Nobody else seemed to have any reservations about how sanitary this was, and Candy was starving, so she wolfed it down.

"We were thinking of hitting a music club tonight," Preston said. "Like to go with us?"

"Sure," Candy said, nearly choking with the effort to keep her voice even. "Sounds like fun."

"Good. Jamie's gonna line up the place. Right, Jamie?"

"Right," Jamie said. Candy squirmed at his lowly status and vowed that would never happen to her. As much as she adored Preston, he would have to respect her, or she wouldn't stick around.

Hope

"I'm pretty sure I want to stay in England," Hope told Neal as they got on the Tube to check out a place called the St. James Club during their second evening. "For the summer, at least, and maybe forever."

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Seeing Carnaby Street today just wowed me. I spent pretty much my whole clothing budget already.”

Jamie had chosen the club, presumably because there was no admission charge. Hope was wearing some of her new acquisitions, including a white miniskirt, a pink silk blouse, and platform sandals higher than any she'd worn before. She turned heads as soon as she got on the train, but the young men only stared, instead of making passes as they probably would have in America. The train went so fast that she felt a little dizzy.

Neal responded, “We can't just stay in a foreign country on a whim, Hope. There are laws about that. We'd have to get paying jobs. And there's a little matter back home called the draft.”

“Damn the draft,” Hope said. She was sick of hearing about the Vietnam War. She knew the peace marches in the United States were starting to get big and ugly, and she'd never wanted to get caught up in one. But she couldn't picture Neal and the others being forced to fight in some tropical hellhole. It didn't seem possible.

“I know none of you guys came up real lucky in the lottery,” Hope said. “And none of you are real college students, so you can't count on staying in school until the war's over. So why not stay here?”

“It wouldn't work,” Neal said impatiently. “England supports the war. We'd be hunted down and sent back.”

“If you're really worried about the stupid war, you could move to Canada,” Hope suggested.

“Great idea, Hope. I'll bet there're Eskimo towns that would love to host a fugitive rock band.”

“Stuff the sarcasm, Neal.” She glared at him. He apologized quickly.

When they arrived at the nearly empty club, the seven of them grabbed the biggest table. Theda and Clive snuggled up together, just as lovey-dovey as if they hadn't practically broken up back at school. Candy kept looking anxiously at Preston but never touched him. She probably expected him to ditch her the moment somebody more glamorous caught his eye. Hope wished she and Neal could be alone because they needed to talk. The place was dark, with dim overhead lights and candles flickering in holders on the tables. Whoever managed

the club must have kept it this way on purpose to hide the dinginess and lack of decoration. Hope's hand brushed against something sticky on the tablecloth.

"Nice choice of venue, Jamie," Preston sneered. "Maybe if the house band doesn't show up or doesn't feel like playing, we'll take their place, assuming that stage is strong enough to hold us."

When the waiter came over, Jamie ordered and paid for drinks out of a fund that Theda's dad had provided. Dark beer in hand, Hope turned back to Neal and continued making her point. "My stepfather's a monster, you know. We'll never see eye to eye. It's not like he and Mom would miss me that much if I stayed here. They prefer my half-sisters anyway."

"C'mon, you're exaggerating," Neal said. "Your stepfather's not abusive or anything. It's just that you're the oldest, so he pesters you about grades and getting a real job and stuff. You think my dad's any different? He doesn't get my music career at all. He'd rather see me working nine to five to support the family. That way, he'd be freer to go off and do his own thing."

Hope realized Neal had family issues too, but right now she was focused on her own. "My stepfather just has to realize I don't belong in college. Now that I've seen what London has to offer, I know I was born for fashion. And I don't just mean modeling, although that'll get me in the door. I also mean designing clothes. Maybe someday I'll have my own lines, even my own company."

"Tell you what, you can design Homegrown's stage clothes when we're famous. We'll hit the big time together."

"I'm serious." Hope put her beer down hard, spilling some of it.

"Sure you are." Neal took a stab at the mess with his napkin. "I'm serious too. But babe, we just got here. Turn it down a notch, okay?"

"Are you gonna turn it down a notch too?" Hope asked. "I thought you wanted to take London by storm."

"I'm just saying it's our second day here. We've got four weeks."

"But we won't be in London that whole time, if we stick with the tour," Hope pointed out. "They're gonna make us go to places like ... where was Shakespeare from again?"

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“Stratford-on-Avon.”

“Right,” she said. “And the north of England too. What the hell’s up there?”

“Castles and shit. Who knows?” Neal laughed. “Okay, so history and culture ain’t exactly your thing. But it’ll be good, trust me. There are clubs and rock fans everywhere.”

They stopped talking when the house band appeared. The three musicians came out of the backstage area, trailed by two assistants. The musicians made for the bar, while their helpers hung back to rearrange and check the equipment on the stage. Preston, Neal, and Clive watched every move the musicians made. Their eyes grew big, as if they were lions tracking prey.

Hope could tell this band was at least a few years ahead of Homegrown. They were dressed in presentable shirts and slacks instead of T-shirts and jeans. Their hair was long but wavy and styled, not trailing down their backs like Preston’s red locks and Neal’s dark brown ones. Also, having two assistants instead of just one definitely helped. There was a big, muscular kid whose job was to move the instruments, microphones, and amplifiers into place and another more middle-aged guy who wore glasses like Jamie and who seemed to be supervising the first guy. Hope guessed Four Eyes was some kind of business manager.

Hope already knew from a sign outside the club that the name of the band was Jones, Parker, and Johns. The initials JPJ were displayed on a decorative drum in front of the drummer’s perch. The multicolored script looked professionally designed. Their guitars also looked bigger and shinier than the ones Homegrown used.

“I only see three musicians,” Neal said, “but they’ve got lead and bass guitar, drums, and keyboards. So where’s the fourth guy?”

“That’s sure a funny-looking keyboard,” Hope said.

Neal focused on it and said, “That’s because it’s a Moog synthesizer.”

“What on earth is a Moog synthesizer?”

He grinned and said, “Something even you could play.”

Hope hit him with her napkin. One more crack like that, and she’d push it into his face. She might not be a musician like him, but she wasn’t going to be a nobody either.

They all tensed up when the members of JPJ approached with beers in hand. One of them spoke for the others, just as Preston usually did for Homegrown. "Excuse me, folks," he said in what Hope guessed was a Cockney accent, "but this is our table."

"That's funny," Preston said. "I don't see anybody's name on it."

"Oh, don't you, wanker? Well, maybe I'll just pound your head into the table, and then you'll see bloody stars."

Preston looked at the Cockney and laughed. Both bandleaders were about six feet tall and on the skinny side. If they got into a fistfight, who would win?

"There's no need to get nasty, guys," Clive interjected, "especially with ladies present. Why can't you sit over there?" He gestured across the room. "That table looks just as good as this one."

"Begging pardon to the *ladies*," said the leader of JPJ, "but this is where the stars of the show always sit."

Neal shot Clive a dirty look. He always cringed at what he called Clive's "prissy actor's voice." Hope knew it would goad him to fight. "If you guys think you're stars, you're delusional," he said. "This place ain't exactly the Palladium."

"If you knew shit, you'd know the place don't mean nothing," said one of the Cockney's backups. "It's the clientele that matters. They're really into us."

"Oh yeah, your clientele," Neal said, with an exaggerated glance around the club.

"The late-night crowd, you Yank asshole. Nobody who matters gets here before midnight."

Preston said, "That I gotta see. I wanna mingle with your clientele. But for now, it looks like we're it. So you gonna play for us, or what?"

"What's your hurry?" the leader replied. "We always get refreshed before we go on."

"That's what we do on our side of the pond too."

Once they realized they were dealing with another band, JPJ started bonding with Homegrown. As they pulled up chairs at the table, Jamie went to the bar and got into a discussion with their manager. Soon afterward, a marijuana pipe started going around the table, and it was

replenished all night. The two bands got mellow, talking music and declaring, even before they had heard each other play, that they were all going to be stars.

“Call me Jonesy,” the leader said. He was seated to Hope’s right and kept brushing his leg against hers.

“Jesus, Jamie,” Preston declared, taking a hit, “why can’t you get us shit like this back in the States?”

Hope suspected the “shit” Jamie had bought to ease the group through that evening would nearly blow the stash of money he was carrying for them. But no one seemed worried about it. In fact, once JPJ started playing, Hope knew she’d have to either get pretty stoned herself or cover her ears.

Hope wouldn’t deny that they were great musicians, but the highly technical stuff wasn’t much to her taste. Their playing at times seemed more like showing off. They improvised so much that the tunes didn’t matter. Jonesy, the lead guitarist, got off lots of wild riffs. Parker, the main vocalist and bass player, had a girlish voice that could hit really high notes. And the drummer did his own solos, which could last forever.

But was it really music or just noise? In Hope’s opinion, songs had to mean something. The lyrics—what she could understand of them—were downright weird. She could do without delving into scary stuff like spirits, black magic, and death.

“They’re technicians for sure,” Neal said to Preston during a pause. “That’s a Rickenbacker twelve-string Jonesy’s playing. Sounds real professional. But they’ll never make it big. Not commercial enough.” Hope was glad he felt the same way about JPJ that she did.

“Who gives a shit if they’re commercial or not?” Preston snapped. “They’re just fucking great, that’s all.”

“Yeah,” Clive chimed in. “I’ll bet they have a huge cult following, at least.” Neal scowled at him again. Lately, Clive had been sucking up to Preston a lot, agreeing with everything he said.

“I wish we were half as good as they are,” Preston muttered.

“Come off it,” Neal said. “Technique isn’t everything. At least audiences can relate to our stuff.”

Hope got into it more when Parker sang a song about a beautiful

woman who turned out to be a spirit visiting from heaven. When the man in the song gave up everything to follow her, Preston dabbed his eyes with a napkin. She'd seen him get emotional once or twice during the five months or so they'd dated in high school, when he talked about his mom dying of cancer. She always liked him better when he wasn't trying to be a tough guy. Then she could talk to him about her dad, who hadn't died but might as well have, since he'd abandoned her and her mom when she was five.

Now Candy took advantage of Preston's vulnerable moment to grasp his hand and hold on as if she would never let it go. He smiled at her for the first time all evening. *Good for her*, Hope thought. *About time she figured out what he needs is a mommy.*

When JPJ finished their set and came back to the table, Preston and Clive both told them how great they were. Neal didn't say anything at first. Jonesy took a hit from the pipe and eyed him.

Neal finally said, "I see you have a Moog. Who plays it?"

"My wife, Kristen," Jonesy said. "She's at home taking care of the kid right now. She'll be here later, if she can get a babysitter."

"Your wife gets up on stage with you?" Preston asked. "Far out." He dropped Candy's hand like it was a hot potato.

"Yeah, I'm married to a real talented lass. Besides the Moog, she sings some and spells my man Parker on bass. And she's a bloody good artist too. She designed that logo you see on our drum."

"Wow," Neal said. "I'd sure go for a woman who could do all that."

"So would I," Preston said, "in a heartbeat."

Candy looked ready to cry. Hope, however, was no crier. She just picked up her napkin and dunked it in her beer. Neal saw her do it and turned his head away just in time to avoid having her napkin plastered across his face.

Only Clive had sense enough to keep quiet about the ideal kind of woman for a musician like him. He was too busy exchanging cutesy glances with his starlet girlfriend Theda, so they could pass themselves off as the one perfect couple at the table.

Jonesy was obviously pumped up by the flattery, but he finally said, "Enough about us. Let's hear Homegrown play."

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"I dunno," Preston said. Hope was sure he was dying to play, but he had decided to be coy about it. "Truth is, we don't belong on the same stage with you guys right now. We've got some original songs, but they're kid stuff."

"Aw, c'mon, mate," Jonesy said. "Show some balls."

So Preston took his band onstage and played a set using JPJ's instruments. As soon as they got up there, Neal grabbed the bass guitar, which he had been learning back home. During the set he also fooled around on the Moog, showing his versatility.

Homegrown started with the three songs of their own that had been such a hit at College Park: "Psycho Professor," "We Can Change the World," and "Revolution for Amateurs." They followed up with "Hex," the theme song of their movie. Then they reached further back into the past, playing their own rocked-up versions of "Heartbreak Hotel" and "Leaving on a Jet Plane" and the slowed-down "Tutti Frutti." By then a crowd was starting to gather in the club, and several couples were dancing.

When the set was finished and the musicians came back to the table, Preston looked at Jonesy. The JPJ leader took a deep hit off the pipe and passed it to Preston, giving him a spacey stare. Finally, he said, "You were right earlier, mate, about your original material. That's promising, but kinda immature. It's your cover versions that really knocked me out. You guys can fucking play."

Preston looked relieved. After he inhaled and pushed out a thick cloud of smoke, he told the story of the band's first high school performance, when they had used those altered songs to drive Joey Sherry, the conceited singing star of the show, right off the stage.

They were all still laughing over that when a slightly overweight woman with an out-of-control permanent strolled up to the table. Jonesy jumped to his feet and kissed her on the lips. He must have loved her for her talents or smarts because she sure didn't have the looks or style Hope had expected to see in a rock star's wife. Still, her red silk gown, hoop earrings, and beads were hip enough.

"I'm Kristen," she said, smiling and waving at everyone.

"I hear you play the Moog," Neal said.

"I'll let you judge that for yourself," Kristen said with a laugh. Her accent was even more Cockney than Jonesy's.

Play it, Kristen did, through most of JPJ's next set. It looked like she was making spooky sounds on the instrument just by pushing buttons and turning knobs. After a while, she changed places with Parker and took over the bass guitar.

"Man, she can do it all, can't she?" Neal said. Hope decided to reserve judgment until she heard Kristen sing, which she finally did on the last song. Naturally, it was about a woman mourning her dead lover. She sang the depressing lyrics with emotion, her voice more powerful than great.

When she came back to the table, Preston and Neal fell over themselves praising her. *Fine*, Hope thought, *pour it on. Flirt with her if you dare. Candy might kill herself over that, but I sure won't.*

"So, tell us what you're doing here in England," Jonesy said. "I hope it ain't just to steal the thunder from bands like us."

"We're English majors in college, studying history and culture," Clive explained. That got another big laugh, which seemed to startle both Clive and Theda. Maybe they really thought they were on a study tour.

"Trust me," the JPJ drummer said, "there ain't no culture worth seeing in the whole fucking country. Except maybe Stonehenge."

"We're not going to Stonehenge, or even Shakespeare's birthplace," Preston said. "Our college group doesn't know it, but the main reason we came to England was to crash Apple, the Beatles' company. We got a feeler from a movie soundtrack tape we sent them. A publicist there liked it and invited us to come by."

Their new friends laughed again. "Good luck with that," Jonesy exclaimed. "We threw our own audition tape into that pit months ago. One of thousands, we've heard tell."

"You guys ever try to get in there to see any of the Beatles face-to-face?" Neal asked.

"Tried it once," the JPJ drummer said. "Thought I could blow past the blond bird they had sitting at the receptionist's desk. She was gabbing on the phone and doing her nails. But I'm fucked if she didn't hit some panic button that brought the police."

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“My mate here almost made the papers that time,” Jonesy said, laughing. “Forget about Apple; they’re broke anyway. Even the few musicians they signed ended up getting fucked over.”

“Our situation is different,” Theda said in her high-class tone, speaking up for the first time. “My father’s a lawyer in Washington, DC. He’s the one who arranged for Homegrown to make the movie and had it professionally produced. He talked to the same publicist at Apple who originally spoke to our assistant here, Jamie, about the project. It was important for my father to get confirmation, before we came overseas, that the company is interested.”

The JPJ musicians smirked at her. The drummer replied, “Well, love, you’re welcome to try and penetrate the fortress. Just don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“Here’s a plan,” Jonesy said. “You blokes could come on the road with us instead. We go on tour next week. Gigs in Leeds, Stratford, and Newcastle.”

“Wouldn’t that be amazing?” Kristen sent a bright smile around the table. “We’ll show you our idea of culture in jolly old England. You don’t even have to be a ... what did you call it? English major.”

Before Hope knew it, Homegrown had booked itself on JPJ’s tour, which made the school trip officially kaput.

Theda

Hanging out with the band was fun and exciting, but it was interfering with Theda’s own career. All those museums, concerts, and plays she was supposed to be taking in could have enriched her as an actress. So why was she considering a side tour through a series of dingy nightclubs?

Clive insisted they could do both tours. “We could go to Leeds first with JPJ and then grab a rental car and rejoin the college tour at Stratford. That way we’d still catch *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, just like we planned.” Then Clive grinned at her and added, “You’re just as talented musically as Jonesy’s wife, in my opinion. Maybe you’ll get a chance to prove it.”

Also on the agenda, before they left London, was a visit to Apple Corps at Three Savile Row. They'd see if they could "penetrate the fortress," as JPJ's drummer had put it. Theda was curious to find out how far her dad's influence extended. Would the appointment he had confirmed from Washington be honored? They'd test that by showing up there and demanding an audition.

The night before their Apple excursion, the group returned to the St. James Club and sat with JPJ between sets, debating their chances. Jonesy showed them a recent newspaper article about the mess at Apple and then paraphrased it. "Says here the Beatles had enough loot, from about 1967 to 1969, to fund a bunch of unknown artists. A few made it big, but they also let a lot of worthless shit through their doors. It was one long party in the offices, with the phones always ringing and the employees always drunk or high. Then the Beatles started fighting amongst themselves, until they finally broke up earlier this year. They scattered to the four winds, and their lawyers are still sorting through the chaos. Seems they'd thrown away so much bread on deadbeat artists and partying, the company was going broke. Most of the musical acts they still had under contract were left in limbo or cut loose."

Johns, the JPJ drummer, changed his tune and speculated that this might be the right time for Homegrown to try to penetrate Apple. "Company could be a fucking sieve now. I'll bet they can't even afford that blond receptionist anymore. Shit, Jonesy, maybe we should try again too."

"Why the fuck would anybody bother now?" Preston said.

Jonesy waved the newspaper in Preston's face. "That ain't the end of the story, mate. If you read to the end, turns out the place is still standing."

Theda was slightly encouraged. The recording studio, which had never been state-of-the-art, was at least in use, and something of a production staff remained.

"Maybe one of these days they'll get their shit together again," Preston speculated. "Then they'll need a new stable of bands to rebuild the company with, right? I say we're going there, first thing tomorrow morning."

"Yeah, go." Parker took in the whole group with his weirdly intense

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eyes. “You got a decent shot at that audition if you take your birds with you. There’s a helluva market for girl singers in this country. They don’t gotta sing good; they just gotta look hot.”

That remark pissed Theda off. She wanted to stand up for the multitalented Kristen, who was due to arrive soon, and for herself too. But the guys all nodded in agreement. “Too right,” Jonesy said. “You blokes go ahead and try it. You birds too. If you get in, maybe we’ll be right behind you.”



The next morning, Homegrown and its entourage detached themselves from the official tour while they were supposed to be strolling through the National Gallery. They slipped out and got on a double-decker bus that Jamie figured would take them close to Savile Row.

When they got to Apple headquarters, they went into the lobby and just stood still, taking it in. It was surprisingly small and silent, but that seemed fitting for a sacred place. After a few minutes of contemplation, Theda began to realize it was more dead than anything else. She was surprised that there were no other tourists. Instead of the blond receptionist, a uniformed guard sat at the front desk, looking at them suspiciously. In the time they stood there, the phone on the guard’s desk didn’t ring, and no one went in or out of the gaping door behind him.

Not knowing what else to do, they gazed at the album covers displayed in glass cases on the walls. They were mostly familiar Beatles albums, with a few others mixed in, representing groups and singers that the company had “discovered.” Theda recognized sweet-faced Mary Hopkin and the grungy-looking band called Badfinger.

She took particular notice of a guitarist with long brown hair and haunting eyes who seemed to be staring at her from the wall. She knew about his album, titled simply *Ty Leahy*, because it was popular with the more sentimental girls in her dorm at College Park. It was a collection of folksy songs, really just poems set to music. He had sung them solo, accompanying himself on an acoustic guitar.

“Lots of history in this place,” Clive whispered, looking around with wide eyes.

“That’s the trouble,” Theda replied. “It feels more like a museum than a record company. I wonder if anybody important comes here anymore.”

“Where are the rock stars of yesteryear?” Clive quipped.

The guard finally bellowed, “Can I help you?”

Jamie stepped forward. “We’re Homegrown ... the band. We have an appointment for an audition.”

The guard almost laughed. “An audition, you say? Sorry, gov’nor, I can’t help you. You’ll have to wait for someone from the production staff to come in.”

“When will that be?” Jamie asked, checking his watch. It was past ten in the morning. The guard shrugged.

Theda couldn’t resist stepping forward. “My father confirmed this appointment from his law office in Washington, DC,” she stated firmly. “He spoke with a publicist here ... an American.” She felt herself flush. She knew what everybody was thinking: daddy’s girl pulls rank again.

“You must not read the papers,” the guard said. “The whole press office has been sacked, due to recent bad publicity. I doubt there’s a soul left up there.”

That silenced everyone for a moment. Jamie kept eyeing the phone on the guard’s desk. He said, “We’d still appreciate it if you could try calling the office, just in case.”

“Look, mate. You can either wait for someone who knows something about it to show up, or you can leave. Those are your choices.”

“Just tell me one thing,” Preston said. “That recording studio in the basement ... do any of the Beatles ever use it anymore?”

“Nah, they never did like it much, so cold and drab as it is. They went back to Abbey Road for their last record, as every fan knows. If it’s them you’re waiting to see, you’re wasting your time.”

“Thanks a lot,” Preston said, dismissing the place with a wave of his hand. “I’m splitting.”

Before Preston could make his move, a nearly emaciated man came in, carrying an acoustic guitar. Theda guessed he was in his midtwenties.

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Dressed in jeans, a plain white T-shirt, and a ratty denim jacket, he looked like a street musician. His light brown hair was secured with a ponytail in back and showed signs of receding on top. He stared at the group with those same eyes that had mesmerized Theda just moments ago. “Ty Leahy,” she said, gasping.

“The same.” His gaze took in everyone and then returned to Theda. “And who might y’all be?”

“You’re an American,” Theda observed before anybody else could reply. “A southerner.” She had never detected that while listening to him sing.

“Yeah, I am,” he said. “Originally from Georgia, to be exact. I ended a stint in the navy a year and a half ago, and I’ve been in England ever since, chasin’ the Apple dream.”

“Looks like you caught that dream,” Theda said, gesturing toward his picture on the wall. “I heard your album back at college. It’s really nice.”

“Thanks. I did think for a while I had it made, but lately the dream’s turned into a nightmare of broken promises.”

Homegrown’s leader stepped forward and announced, “I’m Preston Andrews, and we’re a band from Maryland. That is, three of us are the actual band. We were promised an audition here, but things seem screwed up. Can you help us?”

Ty laughed and said, “Do I look like an executive of this company? I’m not even sure I’m an employee anymore. I was supposed to sign a contract for my second album, but then my manager picked up rumors that it wasn’t going to happen, despite all kinds of verbal assurances. I’d try to sue, but I can’t afford a lawyer. I can’t even really afford the manager. So tell me, what would y’all like me to do for you?”

“Take us inside,” Preston said. “You must have contacts. It’d be worth it, I promise you. We’ll blow away anybody who hears us play.”

“Yeah, my great contacts.” Ty laughed again. “They’ve mostly been fired or have fled to sunnier climes, like Hollywood. In fact, that’s where my manager is right now, tryin’ to line up a new gig ... for himself, at least.”

“You’re telling me there’s absolutely nothing going down at Apple anymore?”

“Nothin’ much for musicians. Plenty for lawyers.” Ty paused and gave them all another penetrating stare. “Tell ya what, though. If you want, you can audition for me. Maybe a backup band would shake me up in a good way.”

Ty strode toward the desk, leading with his guitar as if suddenly energized. “Looks like the inmates are runnin’ the asylum now,” he told the guard, moving past him and through the door. Judging by the dirty look Theda caught as they followed Ty into the inner sanctum, Preston must have made some kind of face at the guard.



The Apple studio was bare and unfinished, as they’d been warned to expect. It hadn’t produced many hits. They found themselves surrounded by the plain, dank walls of a typical cellar, without pictures or windows to spruce it up. Even the musical equipment looked lifeless, as if it had been discarded out of boredom.

Homegrown picked up the instruments, and the skeleton crew turned on the lights and the console. Within minutes, the group filled the place with new life and promise, and Ty Leahy emerged from his funk. Leahy demonstrated his new songs on an acoustic guitar, and Homegrown jammed behind him, adding rich backings that had rarely been heard on folk songs before. They laid the groundwork for *Ty Leahy II*, still recognizably a folk album, but enlivened with blasts of rock and roll.

Homegrown wasn’t authorized to be in the recording studio at all, the guard reminded them on each of the ten days straight that they showed up bright and early at ten in the morning. Still, he obeyed Ty’s standing order to let them in. No one had a firm contract with the company to invent a new musical style called electronic folk, but it became a force that couldn’t be stopped.

“Who knew that depression, suicidal tendencies, and heartbreak could be this much fun?” Ty joked, after he and Homegrown had collaborated on eight tracks. Those were still his main themes, as on his first album. But with a lively band behind him, nothing seemed

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that sad. His personality quirks were getting more intriguing and less alarming.



The Apple sessions seemed to be winding down a couple of days before the group was supposed to be in Stratford with the college tour. Theda said to Clive, “It looks like Shakespeare is a bust.”

“So’s the tour with JPJ,” Clive reminded her. “I think missing that is a bigger deal than not seeing *Hamlet*.”

Theda disagreed. They started debating which tour they should join if their recording session wrapped up quickly.

“I was thinking we could hook up with JPJ in Newcastle,” remarked Clive. “We’d be close enough to visit my cousin Flanagan in Scotland.”

“You’re still pining to sit at the swami’s feet?” Theda asked.

“It’s such a different lifestyle up there,” Clive said. “Real peace and quiet. No drugs, drinking, or partying.”

Theda had to admit it sounded refreshing, but pulling off a side trip like that would be complicated. Clive ended the discussion by insisting, “If we’re meant to go there, we will. For now, I guess we’re fulfilling our fate at Apple.”



In the studio that afternoon, Ty scrutinized the three girls who’d been onlookers up until now. “I’ve always liked the idea of lady backup singers,” he said. He proposed that Theda, Candy, and Hope provide the chorus for a song called “Marching through Georgia Again.” Ty hinted that the back of the album cover might feature a picture of the girls standing in front of their own microphones with headsets on, looking like real professionals.

The first time Theda listened to the playback, she thought it sounded halfway decent, despite the minimal voices of the other two girls. When she heard it later, mixed into the record, it had the lovely, eerie sound of sirens calling Ty back to his native land.

Still, being part of a chorus wasn't her thing and never would be. After "Georgia" was done, Ty praised the new feminine influence on the album and planned for more. He wanted each girl to audition for a solo on "Celia," a tribute to a girlfriend of his who had swallowed a bottle of pills while urging him to join her in death. Candy bowed out of this competition immediately. "There's no way I could ever sing a solo on a record," she protested. So it was between Theda and Hope to try to render the verses as if they were the doomed girl.

Hope went first, and Theda's confidence rose. Her voice was emotionless and barely on key, although she had a way of fixing her wide blue eyes on Ty as she sang. When Theda took over, she was able to bring out the tragedy of the story, and Ty looked away as if moved.

Then he made his choice: Hope. "You remind me so much of the real Celia," he told her, getting choked up. "The long blond hair, the eyes, the voice ... everything."

Of course, Theda thought. Who could resist such raw sexiness? Why did I expect better from any man, even a poet?



"Don't sweat it," Clive told her later at the hotel. "We all know you can sing better than Hope. And the other girls couldn't play an instrument if their lives depended on it. There'll be plenty more opportunities for you to show off your talents."

Theda looked at Clive with her eyes wide open. He had a smug grin, as if he could taste fame and fortune just around the corner. In the short time they'd been abroad, he had started cultivating a "star drummer" look. There were two types, as far as Theda could see. Brad, the original Homegrown drummer, had been the burly type who played with muscle, not finesse, and lurked in the backdrop like a bodyguard. Clive had imitated Brad at first, but now he was becoming the opposite: a long-haired, scruffy artist who turned mystical whenever it suited his purposes.

Where was the actor Theda had fallen in love with back home? She remembered the neatly cropped blond hair and the distinctive squint

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that had given him such a presence in *Our School*, the first time they'd performed together. She even missed going to mass with him, although she wouldn't have turned Catholic under any circumstances. At least church had given him some stability.

What was going on now? His hair was starting to look like Hope's. He had acquired an oversized hat that almost hid his increasingly spacey eyes and a couple of baggy suits that made him look like a hobo. He seemed to have changed more than Preston or Neal, which scared Theda the most. She'd heard it was the drummers in rock and jazz bands who lived the most insecure lives, closest to the edge.

"Don't forget," she said, "you needed my help to get this far. Where would the band be without my connections?"

His so-what shrug goaded her to continue.

"You should know ... I'm thinking of pulling the plug."

"What do you mean, pull the plug?"

"In case you've forgotten," she said, "my father is funding our extracurricular activities. We've already burned through the original spending cash he gave us. I don't know whether or not I should hit him up for more. I might decide to go back to the college tour instead."

Suddenly losing the spacey look, Clive said, "All right, I get it. What do you want?"

Theda hadn't actually meant to threaten him, but at least she had his attention now. So what, exactly, *did* she want?

"You should know by now, I don't see myself as a groupie or a background singer. I see myself in the spotlight. And I'm not about to apologize for being ambitious."

"Who asked you to apologize?" Clive said. "I'm ambitious too, for both of us. But there's not a lot I can do right now. I'm in a band, and I love it, but I'm not the leader. I'm just the drummer."

"How about standing up for me? Point out that I'm good enough to sing solos, which has nothing to do with my controlling the purse strings. I'm just better than the other girls."

"Believe me, Theda," Clive said, "if I had some real power in Homegrown, you'd be the one singing those solos. But until that happens ..."

Theda knew what was coming. “Honest to God,” she said, “if you tell me one more time to trust to fate, I’ll spew.”

Frowning, he replied, “What other choice do we have?”

“There’s always Shakespeare,” she said. “If we left for Stratford tonight or first thing tomorrow, we could get to the theater like we planned.”

“But I’m telling you,” he argued, “the drumming gig is important to me. I don’t wanna blow it.”

“What about your acting career? Isn’t that important too?”

Clive visibly wrestled with the conflict. Then that intermittent light from above seemed to descend on him again.

“My cousin, Swami Flanny, will have the answers,” he said, “if we can get to Scotland to see him. His letters have helped me a lot over the years. He doesn’t have a phone, but I know he wouldn’t mind if we just dropped in.”

“I don’t know how good an influence he is,” Theda said. “Isn’t he the reason you stopped going to mass?”

Clive shrugged uneasily.

“And what about his reputation for harboring draft resisters from the US?” she added.

“I don’t know if he’s doing that now,” Clive murmured.

“I’m sure the swami could give us plenty of good advice,” Theda said, “but you can’t run away from the draft, Clive. The war won’t disappear just because you immerse yourself in drugs or mysticism or whatever.”

“That’s not what I’m doing,” Clive protested.

“And anyway,” she continued, “if I asked my dad for cash to get us to Scotland, he’d want to know about the whole setup. I’m not sure he’d be cool with my staying in a commune.”

“I don’t know much about the setup,” Clive said, “but I feel drawn there. Something tells me we’re gonna end up in Lark sooner or later.”

This felt a little bit too much like trusting to fate. Theda still saw herself grabbing the microphone away from Hope in the studio or, failing that, rushing to Stratford to take in the ultimate theater experience. But if neither plan was feasible at the moment, at least Clive offered an alternative—better than spinning their wheels in London.

Chapter 3

Candy

Candy found the ten days at the Apple studio a productive, elation-filled, but uneasy time. The university tour that was supposed to be earning her three credits in English kept preying on her mind. She worried about missing required evening events at the Palladium and Albert Hall when studio sessions ran long.

She was afraid of flunking her first course at her new school, but Preston didn't seem to give it a thought. His smiles in her direction were getting warmer and more intimate, as long as he was in a good mood. Sometimes after the sessions, they walked the London streets, enjoying the sun that lingered late into the evening or huddling under an umbrella. They talked about how the work was going. Preston would show amazing bravado one moment and then betray his insecurity the next. One night, he said, "I'm just not sure it'll amount to anything for us. Will we ever be good enough to stand on our own? Propping up Ty Leahy isn't my idea of making it."

"But it's a great learning experience," Candy declared. "The band is really jelling behind Ty. He loves you guys, and he can give you a boost up. Besides, you're still working on your own stuff." She sang a line from an antiwar song Preston and Neal were composing, to which she

had contributed some lyrics. "So many generations that went before ... convince me of the permanence of war."

"Ouch." He reacted to her voice with an exaggerated cringe. Her heart sank, but then he smiled and hugged her to show he was teasing.

The evening after Homegrown finished recording with Leahy, the band held a dinner meeting at Leicester Towers. Candy looked around the dining room in search of familiar faces from the university tour, but there were none. They must have left London for the countryside.

Jamie announced he had called this meeting to give everyone some news he'd picked up while poking around the nearly deserted corporate offices of Apple. As he talked, they were served a hearty English dinner of roast beef with gravy, broiled tomatoes, cauliflower, and Yorkshire pudding that seemed to vanish into thin air when Candy tried to chew it.

Preston interrupted Jamie to ask, "Got any extra refreshment for under the table? Like at the club?"

"Do you really think this is the right place for—"

"Christ, I'm kidding," Preston said, breaking out in a grin. "You take me for a barbarian? So talk, while you have the floor. What did you uncover upstairs while we were showing off our brilliance in the studio?"

"I came across someone of interest in the press office."

"Really?" Candy exclaimed. "I thought everybody there got fired."

"I thought so too," Jamie said, "until yesterday, when I spotted a spaced-out-looking hippie sitting at a desk. The second I heard his Boston accent, I realized he was the guy Mr. Brooks and I contacted before we came overseas ... the one who raved about our movie.

"I explained who I was, and he jumped to his feet and said, 'Here, brother, take my seat. I kept it warm just for you. Here's my Rolodex. Help yourself.' Then he just vanished."

"Yeah? So what?" Preston barked.

"So I sat down at his desk, flipped through the Rolodex, and made an overseas call."

As Jamie paused dramatically, Neal snapped, "Okay, I'll bite. Who did you call?"

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“Ty Leahy’s manager, Willie Givhans. He’s currently working out of his agency’s office in LA.”

“How does that affect us?” Clive demanded.

Everybody was treating Jamie like crap, even more than usual, although Candy sensed that he indeed had important information. As Hope and Theda snickered at him, she asked, “Did Mr. Givhans tell you about his plans for Ty?”

“He was coy at first,” Jamie said, “but he perked up when I told him what was going down with Ty and Homegrown in the studio. Then, all of a sudden, he put forth a proposal.” Jamie paused again.

“What?” they all shouted.

“He said he’s been pushing the idea to his bosses of having Ty come to LA to finish the new album. Maybe, he said, he’d propose that Homegrown come too.”

The bombshell exploded around the table. Everyone started talking at once, about instant fame and fortune, fast cars, movie stars, and sunny skies.

So why were Candy’s lips trembling, while the others rejoiced? She realized she didn’t want to lose the closeness she felt with Preston right now. As long as she could bolster his confidence by talking him through his daily challenges, he would need her. But every time he took a dramatic step up—and a trip to California would be the definition of dramatic—she knew she would struggle to find her footing with him again.

Besides, how could they just drop everything and go to California? Candy had already worried her mother by coming to England for a month. What would they do about college if the adventure stretched past the summer? What about the draft?

She scanned the group, wondering whether anybody else had misgivings. Theda and Clive clasped hands and beamed at each other as they made plans to crack the movie industry together. Just like that, Theda seemed to have forgotten all about seeing *Hamlet* at Stratford, which had been an obsession of hers for weeks. Jamie and Preston were already discussing the practicalities of getting to the West Coast.

Neal scowled at Clive, who was drowning out everybody else with

his movie talk. "Shut up a second, would ya?" he ordered. "Come back down to earth. Nobody, not even Leahy, has been officially invited to LA yet. He doesn't have a contract for that album, and we sure as hell don't have anything in writing, either."

"Besides," Hope said, stroking his hand, "we're barely begun to experience all that London has to offer." She smiled, no doubt envisioning boutiques yet to conquer.

A waiter approached the group and said, "There's a phone call for a Mr. James Weeks. You may take it here if you wish."

"Who could it be?" Theda asked as the waiter brought the phone to the table. "My dad, calling about the money he wired?"

They all nodded, thinking that must be it. Jamie took the receiver and said "Yes?" He recoiled instantly as the person apparently responded. "Yeah, I remember you," he said, recovering his composure. "You're the roadie with JPJ ... excuse me, the assistant manager. Why're you calling us here?"

As he listened, his face blanched. "What're you talking about? We didn't do anything." After a strained moment, he asked, "What makes you think you can do that to us?"

"Do what?" they all demanded.

"Making fun of our band's name is pretty immature in itself," Jamie continued.

Preston winced at that.

"Come off it. There's no way we could've gotten you guys into Apple when it was a complete fluke we got in ourselves."

As the conversation continued, Jamie picked up a napkin and wiped the sweat off his brow. "That's insanel!" he exclaimed. "We're not stealing anything from you; we're just doing our own thing. And you better knock off threatening us, or we'll call the police." After another pause, he added, "How can they arrest us for working here illegally? It's not like we've made any damned money." He slammed down the phone.

"I knew it!" Neal shouted. "JPJ is after us. I told you they couldn't be trusted." He directed this toward Preston, as if he expected brownie points for his foresight. "I told you that group was just too weird. The roadie really gave us the evil eye."

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"It wasn't the roadie that scared me," Clive said. "It was the music. Some of their songs are ... I dunno ... apocalyptic."

"We'll be in danger from those guys," Theda said in her most theatrical voice, "as long as we're in England."

Hope, shaking her blond locks, gasped, "Oh my God. What'll we do? Where'll we go?"

Candy watched Preston as he assessed the situation calmly. "Back up a little, Jamie," he ordered, "and tell us exactly what the guy said."

"He said they'd expected us to join them in Leeds, the first stop on their tour ... unless, by some miracle, we got into Apple. And if that happened, we were supposed to get them in too. He claims we had a gentleman's agreement."

"So it's Apple they're mad about," Preston said. "What was the exact threat?"

When Jamie hesitated, Neal barked, "For Christ's sake, spit it out, man. They're gonna beat us up and rape our women? What?"

Jamie finally stammered, "The roadie claims JPJ has the power to summon dark forces through their music—that people who've pissed them off sometimes develop strange illnesses or mysteriously disappear."

"How silly can you get?" Candy said, laughing out loud. "They're just a bunch of lunatics who think being musicians makes them gods." No one else laughed.

"They might be as crazy as loons," Clive said, "but that doesn't mean they're not dangerous. Black magic is a real force."

"Yeah, right," Neal said. "I'd like to see them cast an evil spell on me." He grinned at Hope, as if he thought that would only make him sexier.

Clive and Neal fell to arguing about whether JPJ was dangerous or just crazy. They kept it up until Preston growled, "Would you please zip it? Neither of you gets it."

"Get what?" Neal demanded.

Preston removed his oversized, tinted glasses and dunked them in a glass of water. "I'm saying that JPJ *is* dangerous and maybe even crazy," he said as he cleaned the lenses with a napkin. "That's because they're

closer to being genuine rockers than we are. There've always been dark currents running through the truest rock and roll. It's time you guys learned to tap into that. I mean, you're fabulous talents and stage personalities and all that shit. But you're not true rockers ... not yet."

"What the fuck?" Neal protested.

Preston positioned his glasses on his nose, the better to stare down his bandmates. "You guys are too satisfied with being groupie magnets," he lectured. "Neal, you really sell those romantic ballads, and Clive, you get off on staring at your matinee idol face in the mirror all day. Both of you think killing all the chick fans dead is the essence of what we're about, but it ain't."

Neal and Clive bowed their heads, absorbing their leader's judgments, while Hope and Theda smiled at their newfound humility.

Preston waved his fork in the air to drive his point home. "The best rock and roll bands harness the dark forces. They figure out how much violence and raw sex and rage they can incorporate into their music without blowing themselves or society up. Bands who strike the right balance can get rich and famous from it. In JPJ's case, I'd say they've been flirting with insanity for a while and not getting what they think is their due. That's why they're so angry."

"I got an idea for appeasing JPJ," Clive said. "Let's hook up with them at their Newcastle stop. My cousin, Swami Flanny, would be nearby in Scotland. He could help us out if we got into any trouble."

"You're actually making some sense for a change. Congratulations, pal." Neal gave Clive a rare nod. "Besides, it's an opportunity for us to perform live. We gotta grab every one of those."

"Agreed," Preston said, "but it isn't about neutralizing or appeasing JPJ. Understand this: I want to be like them, just richer and more successful."

They ordered a round of drinks to finish off the meal. Candy knew the dinner was covered on the prepaid university tab, but the alcohol wasn't. The cash that Theda's father had wired for extra expenses must be going fast. What if they couldn't pay the bill? Would they be arrested?

As Candy sipped her nightcap—a martini, she guessed—her

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worries subsided. Things had a way of working out when Preston was inspired.

“We’ve arrived at a crossroads in the band’s history,” he said, “but more about that later. First, we need to decide on an immediate plan. Like, where is the band headed tomorrow?” He downed his martini and motioned for the waiter to bring him another.

“For now, California is on hold,” he continued. “Instead, it looks like we’re heading to Newcastle to hook up with JPJ. Agreed, everybody?”

They all responded affirmatively. Preston continued, “There’s something else that’s been on my mind lately. I’ve been thinking about a fundamental change we need to make if we’re gonna move forward.”

Preston paused as the waiter brought him his fresh drink. He sipped leisurely while everyone else glanced around the table. Did he intend to replace one or more of them?

Finally, he announced, “It’s time to change the band’s name. ‘Homegrown’ saw us through our adolescence. But now we need to sell ourselves as a fully professional outfit, ready for the world stage.”

“So lay it on us,” Neal said. “What’s our new name?”

“Man, it’s so obvious, it’s staring us in the face. Take the first letters of our last names—Andrews, McNab, O’Dell—and it spells AMO. How do you like it?”

“Far out” was the unanimous verdict.

As it sank in, Clive recoiled a little. “It sounds ... kinda violent,” he said.

“So what?” Preston replied. “We’re a rock band, not a church choir.” Everyone else applauded this historic moment.



Jamie contacted JPJ’s manager to arrange for the two bands to meet in Newcastle two nights later. If Homegrown—or rather, AMO—got to the site before JPJ, they would pick up backstage passes at the box office and wait for the other band’s arrival. Jamie was told that the Newcastle upon Tyne Theatre was a small venue of two thousand seats, with an intimate, club-like atmosphere. Given the informality of the

place, the promoters might be persuaded to allow AMO to warm up the crowd before the main act appeared. The JPJ equipment would be set up ahead of time and ready to use.

Jamie bought one-way express train tickets from London to Newcastle. Again, Candy got nervous, realizing that no meals or rooms would be prepaid once they left London. Would Theda's dad keep wiring money whenever they needed it? No one else seemed to sweat it.

They left King's Cross Station at eight in the morning the day of the show and arrived in Newcastle shortly before noon. Instead of taking in the local sights or figuring out where they would stay, they found a pub and had a hearty lunch, washed down with pints of dark beer. As usual, Candy's anxiety subsided when she saw Preston looking confident and happy.

After lunch, they strolled down Market Street to the Newcastle upon Tyne Theatre. When they got there, they found two long-haired, middle-aged men huddled together in the box office. The pair introduced themselves as Nigel and Ian, the promoters of tonight's show. Jamie, in turn, introduced the band and asked whether the promoters had the promised backstage passes.

"Your passes are here, all right," Nigel said. "Lot of good they'll do you."

"What do you mean?" Jamie demanded. "We're close friends of JPJ, the band that's scheduled to perform here tonight."

"*Was* scheduled to perform, lad. They're not coming."

"What the fuck?" Preston exclaimed.

"Their equipment is here. Their roadie brought it from Stratford yesterday. But that was before the road accident."

"What accident?" Neal demanded.

"The band had a night off, so they went out and hit some clubs. They were driving back to their hotel around 3:00 a.m. in a rented car when they got into a head-on collision."

"I knew it!" Clive exclaimed. Everyone stared at him. "Karma," he explained.

"Maybe so," Ian said, "but the fools were drinking up a storm, no

doubt. Their leader, Jonesy, and his wife, Kristen, were killed, along with their manager. The others are in the hospital, hurting bad.”

“It was their own evil energy rebounding on them,” Clive declared.

“Sure it was,” Neal said, sneering at him. “Tell us more, oh wise one.”

Candy felt too stunned to speak. She looked at Neal and Clive in disbelief. How could they carp at each other at a time like this?

“We’ve got a sold-out hall,” Nigel said, “and in a few hours we’ll have a rowdy crowd expecting a show from JPJ. We’ve no choice but to cancel.”

“No, don’t cancel,” Neal said. Turning to Preston, he said, “This is perfect. We’ll do a show in JPJ’s honor.”

“We’re not JPJ,” Preston said, shaking his head. Candy was alarmed at his sudden pale and sweaty look. “How do we know their fans will accept us?”

Neal confronted the promoters, taking the initiative from Preston for the first time Candy could remember. “We’re a band called AMO, and we’re ready to step in. If you wanna know the truth, we’re just as good as JPJ, just not as well known yet.”

“It’s true, we’d have an ugly scene on our hands if we canceled the show altogether,” Nigel said. “The young toughs around here don’t react well to disappointment.”

“It could get even uglier,” Ian argued, “if we put on a bad JPJ imitation.”

“Imitation?” Preston shook off his moment of self-doubt and raised his voice. “Listen up. We don’t imitate anybody, ever. We played the same club as JPJ once and used their instruments, but we did our own thing. That’s what we’d be doing tonight.”

The two promoters huddled together in a corner for several minutes. Then Ian, the more skeptical one, said to Preston, “Lad, we’re gonna have two thousand kids here tonight who’ve never heard of AMO and who care even less. You’ve no idea how hostile they can be. It’s too risky when we’ve never heard of you either.”

Candy was struck by inspiration. She tugged on Preston’s arm and tried to whisper in his ear. He ignored her, so she had to speak her advice aloud. “Why don’t we call Ty Leahy and ask him to join the

band onstage tonight? He's a big enough name to give AMO instant credibility."

Preston's scowl gave way to a smile. Candy felt relieved and empowered as he turned to the promoters. "How about it?" he asked. "You may never have heard of us, but don't tell me you're unaware of a folk singer named Ty Leahy who already has a popular record out."

"What's that to us?" Nigel asked.

"We've spent the past ten days backing him up on his new album," Preston said. "If you put us on, there's a chance you can get him too."

"I need to see some proof of that, lad."

"We'll contact him, right now," Preston said, "if you'll show us to a phone."



Jamie placed the call to the Apple press office. He spoke to the hippie with the Boston accent whom he'd met once before. The guy called himself Beanner and claimed to be serving as Leahy's assistant manager while Willie Givhans was away.

"If you work for Ty," Jamie inquired, "how come no one ever saw you in the studio with him while we were there?"

The assistant manager declared he was "real tight" with Ty but preferred staying in the background and serving as a "catalyst."

Jamie explained the group's situation in Newcastle and asked Beanner if he could arrange for Ty to join them for a performance that night. Beanner was breathless with enthusiasm. He said the folk singer wasn't in the building that day but could most likely be tracked down at his flat or his favorite pub. It would be "no sweat" to get him to Newcastle reasonably close to half past seven.

"Are you absolutely sure you can pull this off?" Jamie asked. "A lot is riding on it." The rest of the group tried to look positive, while the promoters shook their heads and groaned.

Jamie listened to Beanner's reassurances and then hung up and recounted his exact words for the others: "A concert way up there in

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Newcastle ... wow, that's so mind-boggling. I'll publicize it to the skies, man. When did you say it was?"

"We're screwed," Preston muttered.

"Maybe I could go get Ty myself," Jamie ventured. Everyone else shook their heads. There wasn't time. Their only hope was that Ty would somehow get the message and grab a fast train, plane, or car north.

The promoters huddled again. Then Nigel proposed, "How about showing us what you got ... in case you end up as the whole show?"

So for the next three hours, until about six thirty, AMO auditioned with JPJ's equipment. They played their entire repertoire, hoping to impress the promoters with their original songs as well as covers. Nigel and Ian periodically went out front to watch them from the seats and then returned backstage to confer about their performance.

The girls stayed backstage, where Nigel and Ian treated them to what they called "tea," consisting of not only tea but also baked scones with cream and jam. Candy tried to enjoy the music and the atmosphere, but some of the promoters' comments to the girls about the band put her on edge. She wondered what would happen if Ty didn't make it on time. There was still a chance, she thought, that the show would be canceled.

Her heart sank when Nigel and Ian scoffed at "Season of Love" (nice but adolescent), "Psycho Professor" (too self-consciously psychedelic), and "We Can Change the World" (too self-consciously political). Then Preston gave full voice to his heart-rending "Signals from the Clouds," extending the high notes for effect and emphasizing the minor keys.

Nigel at last looked somewhat moved. "That boy must have suffered some horrible tragedy in his young life," he said.

"His mother died of cancer when he was only thirteen," Candy explained.

Ian seemed amused by the next number, "Peace Conquers All," which gently evoked the atmosphere of a warm summer night made for outdoor lovemaking. This was the song that the band had once used to pacify the cops and a turbulent crowd at College Park. "Reminds me of that love-in we attended at Hyde Park last year," he told his partner with a sly smile.

AMO next ran through several of the instrumentals they had recorded for Leahy's album. After the set was over, Nigel said, "The band's got potential but needs some tightening up. A bass player could help."

"Too right," Ian agreed. "Problem is, the drummer's a bit loose."

Candy thought Theda would defend her boyfriend from this criticism. Instead, she got an unnatural gleam in her eyes. When the musicians paused, the girls went onstage to take them some tea and scones. As soon as she got out there, Theda put down the tray she was carrying and picked up the bass guitar that hadn't been used yet.

She gave the guys a defiant look as she set up a bluesy rhythm. They stared back at her, brows raised inquisitively, but then began to accompany her. Clive, unaware that his playing had been found wanting, beamed with pride at his girlfriend. Theda stayed with the flow as an improvised riff grew more sustained and intricate. Candy and Hope shrugged in unison, acknowledging that Theda had effectively joined the band.

They returned backstage without her, and Hope stomped up to the promoters. "You should know," she said, "Theda's never been onstage with AMO until now. She decided on the spur of the moment to play with them."

"A pretty good decision, I'd wager," Nigel said.

"Just what the doctor ordered for this band," his partner agreed.

Theda kept it up as Preston attempted his latest opus, "The Permanence of War." The song went smoothly until he got to the last verse, which he had to hum because he hadn't written the lyrics yet. Both promoters had perked up at the chorus: "We won't fall into columns anymore ... We're not like generations that went before ... We reject the permanence of war."

"Now, that's both political and catchy," Nigel said.

"The kids here might take to that, being an antimilitary lot," Ian said.

"It's not finished yet," Candy said. "I've been helping Preston with the lyrics."

"Well, lass," Nigel said, "I suggest you go out there and help him finish it."

Candy literally jumped at the suggestion. She put down her teacup,

rose from her seat, and marched onstage. She told the band, "The promoters think 'The Permanence of War' is the best song they've heard yet, but they say it needs to be finished."

"Christ," Preston snapped, "do they think we're magicians? They think we pull finished songs out of our hats while we're rehearsing?"

"I hear your girlfriend's some kind of poetess," Neal remarked. "Let her try to come up with that big finish we need."

Candy bristled at his mocking tone, but Preston turned to her with an encouraging smile. "You know, smirky-face here could be right," he said. "You're the only one who can do this on such short notice. You know the song, so just make up the ending. We can always change it later."

From that moment on, Candy couldn't have cared less what the other musicians or their girls thought of her. She'd always been about propping up Preston, talking him through his insecurities, praising his talents. Never before had he challenged her like this. She almost panicked, but she said, "I'll do it. No problem."

"If it's good enough," he added with a grin, "I'll bring you onstage to sing it during the show."

Candy wracked her brain over that missing verse. She tried at least a dozen combinations of words in her head, but they all turned out too complicated. Simpler approaches seemed too banal. She imagined herself walking onstage to face a hostile crowd that would boo her unmercifully when they realized she not only couldn't carry a tune but also didn't know the words to the song she was supposed to sing.

The musicians gathered backstage an hour before the scheduled showtime and demanded that Jamie somehow find out whether Ty was coming. Jamie called the Apple press office, but no one answered. Candy was too distracted to care whether Ty showed up or not.

When the front door opened at seven, the hall remained empty. No one had lined up outside. Candy gazed through a window at the main street below, which was quiet except for folks on their way home from work or heading for the neighborhood pub. She was beginning to think the anticipated concert was a myth. Newcastle seemed too placid and remote a place to host a significant rock and roll event. Was she worried for nothing over that damned verse?

Candy looked again at a quarter past seven, and everything had changed. People were converging on the hall from all directions. The men and women alike were young, scruffy, and mostly blue-collar, with a few hippies mixed in. Candy's heart sank even further. This was no frat crowd. Most of the men looked as if they crushed rocks for a living, and the women hung onto them possessively. How would AMO relate to these folks? They filled the hall with their restless energy.

"You must say something heartfelt about JPJ, right off," Nigel told Preston after he had appraised the crowd. "Don't go into detail about what happened. It's been on the radio, and word travels fast. Maybe dedicate your first song to them."

"How the fuck can we do that?" Preston demanded. "Our songs ain't got nothing at all to do with JPJ."

"You call yourself a composer," Ian said, "so make up something about them."

As Preston insisted this was impossible, the missing verse that had been agitating Candy's brain suddenly untangled and fell into place.

"We can make it work," she said, turning to the promoters. "In fact, it would work perfectly with 'The Permanence of War.' I could sing the last verse as a tribute to JPJ."

"We'll count on you then, lass," Nigel said, "to get it out of your pretty mouth when the time comes. You're going on in ten minutes."

Ten minutes was long enough for Nigel and Ian to pass around a couple of roaches to relax the band. Candy skipped her chance to take a hit.



Candy and Theda accompanied the musicians as they walked onstage to scattered applause. Candy followed close behind Preston. The plan was for her to step up to his microphone at the spot in the song where she would deliver her vocal.

She picked out a tambourine from a box in front of Clive's drums, figuring it would be easier to shake than maracas. Unable to distinguish individual faces out there, she could nevertheless feel hundreds of pairs

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of eyes boring through her like sterile spotlights. At least, she thought, the band's jeans and T-shirts seemed appropriate for this crowd. Hope was the only one who had dressed up for the trip north, and she was still backstage, fabulous but unseen.

"Good evening," Preston said in a shaky voice that steadied as he went along. "We're a band called AMO, from America. That's A-M-O. I'd like to start with a song in honor of our good friends Jonesy and Kristen, and the rest of JPJ, who as you may know, suffered a horrible accident last night."

Sounds of dismay filled the hall. Candy guessed that not everyone had heard the news.

"This is a song called 'The Permanence of War,' and it's dedicated to JPJ."

As the band launched into the song, Candy began to sweat. Maybe the lyrics she and Preston had labored over were too intellectual for this crowd. The silence was heavy and ominous. She could only hope the relatively simple chorus would catch on.

Before AMO could get that far, someone in the crowd shouted, "You ain't nothing like JPJ!" Then a chant started up: "We want JPJ! We want JPJ!"

"Who you think you are with the poetical shit?" yelled someone close to the stage. "Fucking Bob Dylan?"

That does it, Candy thought. *They're not gonna stop until they drive us right off this stage.* By now she was bathed in sweat, not only from the stage lights but also from panic. Then she heard a voice beside her yell, "Shut the fuck up!" She looked to her left and saw an enraged Neal; this was a side of him she didn't know.

"What're you fools shouting about? We know we're not JPJ. Their accident ain't our fault. How about listening to this song anyway? You got any idea what it's about?"

Obviously, they didn't.

"It's about the fucking Vietnam War," Neal proclaimed. "It's about the goddamned American war machine that's gonna try to suck us in and grind us up as soon as we go back home. Just so you assholes know, they've already assigned us draft numbers that tell us what order we

die in. So I suggest you all can your dumbass shouting and listen to us. Maybe you'll learn something."

Incredibly, the crowd quieted down. Preston continued the song with emotion. When he got to the chorus, the rest of the band joined in.

Suddenly, Candy's big moment was upon her. Preston stepped away from his microphone, and she stepped toward it. She still clung to her tambourine, so tightly that her hand ached. It was all she could do to remember the lyrics she had written only in her head. Her voice wavered, but she made sure the words came out loud and clear:

"You left us with too many songs unsung,
While still so bright, rebellious, and young.
But you'll be with us always, sight unseen,
Casting spells against the war machine."

Candy stepped away from the microphone, and Preston reclaimed the center spot. As the band repeated the chorus, some rhythmic clapping started up in the crowd. She thought AMO might be getting through to them, even if they didn't totally understand the words. Then that same voice close to the stage shouted, "Bring back the girl!"

Preston motioned Candy back to the microphone. Stunned as she was, she managed to sing her verse again.

She stepped away, trembling and still sweating, and Preston wrapped up the song to decent applause. Compared to the earlier hostility, it seemed like a standing ovation. Candy left the stage, her thoughts racing, as the band played on. Backstage, Jamie and the promoters congratulated her while Hope just stood there, arms crossed, tossing her hair back. Finally she forced out a few words. "You did okay."

"Neal's really the one who made it possible," Candy admitted. Hope smiled at that.

Hope

Hope couldn't believe the way those girls had just waltzed onstage and made themselves part of the band. When had such a thing ever

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happened before in the history of rock and roll? Did Theda and Candy think they were going to strike a blow for women's lib in this drab English town? The crowd was still too stunned about JPJ to care, at least at first. Then they started to wake up, and Hope could smell danger. These pushy girls might not go over too well.

She knew for a fact Theda had plotted for months to infiltrate the band. Once when they were shopping together in London, Theda had informed her that she'd begun studying both the bass guitar and the drums back at College Park. Theda had always gotten a kick out of showing off her musical skills and even offering to teach others. She'd also told Hope back in London, "Preston and Neal are jealous of Clive because he's so damned good-looking. They can't stand it when the drummer in back of them gets more cheers from girl fans than they do. They felt the same way about Brad in the early days."

Hope detected a little panic in this situation now. She suspected Theda was trying to prop up Clive's playing because she sensed he could be replaced. And then there was Candy, that timid little mouse, taking center stage. Having managed to come up with some lyrics that almost rhymed, she had gotten to bask in a few moments of applause. After finishing, she had come strutting backstage like she'd mesmerized the crowd. Hope could tell she'd actually been scared shitless out there because she was sweating buckets, which must have been obvious in the stage lights. She was still clutching her tambourine.

The sad thing was, Candy couldn't sing at all. It wasn't that Hope thought she was any Joan Baez herself—that was Theda's fantasy—but she could've done a better job than Candy on "Permanent War," or whatever they called it. She didn't have a lot of range to her voice, but at least she could carry a tune. And she wouldn't have gone onstage looking like Candy, who could've been there to haul equipment, judging by her clothes. Theda, at least, having gone shopping with Hope, looked pretty snazzy in her new jeans with a V-neck white cotton blouse and silver choker necklace. But Hope was the only one who had really tried to look her best. She wore a blue miniskirt with a leather belt, and her yellow silk sleeveless blouse allowed her to show off some sparkling bracelets and beads. But did anyone care?

Being stuck backstage and left out of everything made her mad. AMO played the usual medley of British Invasion—type romantic ballads that showed off Neal's voice. The "lasses" in the crowd got into it, screaming like it really was the early Beatles playing. *Keep it up, girls*, Hope thought. *Maybe some of your boyfriends will get jealous and come looking for Neal after the show.*

She was seriously thinking of slipping out and finding a friendly pub somewhere to drown her sorrows. Then in walked Ty Leahy with Beanner, his so-called manager. Ty's eyes immediately met Hope's. Just like the first time she'd seen him, he was carrying his acoustic guitar and wearing ratty jeans and a sleeveless denim jacket over a stained T-shirt.

Beanner was just the opposite, a typical hippie with an out-of-control bleached blond permanent, multicolored bell-bottoms, and a headband. He spoke with an upper-class-sounding Boston accent that came and went, depending on what he was talking about. He had what looked like a garment bag slung over his shoulder, which Hope figured contained another set of clothes or more accessories. He shook hands with Jamie and then grumbled to Nigel and Ian about the small size of the venue.

"Hiya, girls," Ty said. "Why aren't y'all onstage with the rest of the gang?"

"Oh, I was," Candy exclaimed. She told him what she'd pulled off, and Ty nodded politely, his eyes still on Hope.

Her heart leaped out of her chest. She couldn't help thinking, *When was the last time Neal looked at me like that?* Right now he was too busy trying to recreate Beatlemania in the boondocks to give her a thought. Still, she kept her emotions in check, remembering the main reason Ty had let her sing a solo on his record. It was because she reminded him of his lost love, Celia.

"I know the crowds around here, and they're punks," Beanner complained to the promoters. "My client's a folk singer. They'll eat him alive."

Hope jumped in. "No, Ty will be fine, just by being himself. The kids here may be punks, but listen: can't you hear them grooving to Neal's ballads?"

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“Crowds like this are unpredictable,” Beanner insisted. “They turn fast. It’s my job to keep Ty safe ... at any cost. Even my life.”

Nigel and Ian laughed at Beanner’s melodramatics, and Hope did too, although she couldn’t help wondering, what if he was right? There was no turning back now, as Beanner and Jamie started negotiating with the promoters over the performers’ fees. Nigel lit a fresh roach to help this along, and soon everyone was feeling mellow. It was decided that as soon as Neal’s medley was over, Ty would walk onstage unannounced.

“Stay close by,” Ty told Hope, just before he went on. “I’ll signal when I need you to join me.”

“You’ll do great,” Hope said, squeezing his arm. “And I’ll be ready.”

Preston saw him coming and yelled, “Ty Leahy, everyone! Our special guest!” The crowd gasped and then went silent, respecting him as an established star. The AMO musicians vacated the stage, leaving the spotlight to him. Alone with his guitar, he performed several of the songs from his first eponymous album, getting the most applause for the saddest ones. When Ty paused, they yelled for more.

Glimpsing Hope in the wings, he motioned her to come out. She walked to the center microphone and heard whistles from the crowd. When she had composed herself enough, she sang “Celia” in unemotional tones, the way Ty had coached her. He had said it didn’t matter if her voice sounded flat: that helped to convey the tragedy. With only his guitar for support, she got through it without once breaking into a sweat. When she finished, the crowd cheered for what seemed like a long time. *This is the best feeling ever*, she thought.

To keep the chick thing going, Ty waved Candy and Theda onto the stage. He directed the three girls to separate microphones, and they all sang “Marching through Georgia Again” as they had in the studio. The cheers kept coming.

“And now,” Ty announced, “I’d like to ask the rest of AMO to join me, to help bring out my loud and obnoxious side ... which stays buried most of the time.”

AMO returned to the stage, and they got into *Ty Leahy II*. Hope picked up a pair of maracas, while Candy joined Neal at the Moog synthesizer and Theda continued on the bass. But for some strange

reason, the crowd began to turn on them, as if the new electronic Leahy was too unexpected. Someone sitting right below Ty yelled at him, “You really do think you’re fucking Bob Dylan!”

Hope had heard the story somewhere about how the great Dylan himself had caused a ruckus a few years earlier when he had shown up at a folk festival with an electric guitar. It was as if he was insulting his longtime fans. Maybe history was repeating itself in Newcastle.

The shouts got uglier. “Stop that fucking noise!” “Stop fucking with the music!” “Get off the stage!” “Take that shit back to America!”

There were also shouts of “Let them play!” from the back. So the band played on, but that only made the rowdies in front angrier. They pressed forward with arms outstretched, and there the band stood, unprotected. If the thugs got on the stage, they might pull the performers off of it.

“Don’t make us call the cops on you guys.” Ty tried to say this jokingly, but his voice shook.

It sure wasn’t a joke when a young brute grabbed Hope by the skirt. Was he trying to tear off her clothes and leave her nude onstage, under those revealing lights? “Just wanna get to know you, love,” he muttered. Ty got in between them and managed to shove him back, which was only possible because the bigger man was dead drunk. Another thug got hold of Ty’s denim jacket, yanked him forward, and punched him in the nose.

AMO stopped playing and started fighting. Preston unplugged his guitar and swung it wildly, and Clive jumped down from his perch, waving his drumsticks. Neal stepped over Ty, glaring at him, and then kicked Ty’s attacker back into the crowd. Hope cracked two girls over the head with her maracas.

The band’s supporters in back surged forward and started fighting the rowdies. That gave the performers the break they needed. Ty, holding his bloody nose, pointed toward the wings, where Jamie was motioning frantically. The AMO musicians threw down JPJ’s instruments and ran.

Once they got backstage, Jamie gasped, “Are you guys okay? I thought they might kill you.”

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“We’re still alive,” Preston said, brushing himself off with exaggerated care. If anything, he looked ecstatic.

“Didn’t I warn you they could turn just like that?” Beanner yelled. “You people should listen to me more. After all, I could’ve been a Harvard man.”

“I’m in awe of your brilliance,” Neal muttered.

Nigel rushed forward with a handkerchief for Ty’s nose and a check for two hundred pounds, which Beanner had negotiated for Ty based on his star status. He handed AMO’s payment of one hundred fifty pounds to Jamie.

“Please realize none of this was personal,” Nigel said. “They didn’t dislike you, not really. It was no doubt the local brew or the local weed doing its work. But now, my friends, I suggest you leave Newcastle as quickly as you can.”

“Better go before the police arrive,” Ian said. “As you’re foreigners, it would be dodgy to tangle with them.”

“How can we leave that fast?” Jamie protested. “We have to wait for the train back to London.”

“Perhaps not,” Nigel said. He pulled a set of keys out of his pocket and jangled them.

“Cool,” Beanner said, grabbing the keys and jangling them some more.

“JPJ’s van is parked down the street. I suggest you use it, since nobody else is likely to. And do come back and see us when things calm down.”

“Best of luck to you,” Ian added.

“We can’t just take JPJ’s van,” Theda objected. “That’d be stealing.”

“This is no time to go legalistic on us,” Preston said. “We’re in a hurry.”

They rushed out, found the vehicle, and piled into it. They roared away with Beanner driving. Truthfully, Hope didn’t feel any safer with him at the wheel than she had felt when she was at the mercy of the crowd.

“I’ll bet JPJ’s roadie abandoned this van when he heard about their accident,” Jamie said as they drove down Northumberland Street. “Where is he now, I wonder? Still running away from the evil vibes?”

“I’m feeling those same vibes right now,” Beanner said.

Candy, as usual, was busy trying to interpret everything. "What happened at that concert was significant on so many levels," she said. "Maybe even historic."

"Never mind what happened back there, sweets," Preston said. "We need to figure out where we're headed right now."

"I think we're going west," Neal said. "That means we gotta turn left somehow, to get us headed back to London."

All Hope knew was they were headed out of town fast. It was going on nine o'clock, and there was still some daylight, but even here in the far north, it had to get dark sooner or later. Beanner drove a mile or two farther. Then he braked suddenly, and everyone lurched forward.

As he got out of the van, he said, "I've gotta split. Something's calling me back."

He hoisted his garment bag over his shoulder and started walking up Northumberland Street the way they had come. "Where're you going?" they all shouted.

He stopped to think about it. Then he said, "I'm gonna try to hook up with what's left of JPJ."

"You idiot," Neal yelled. "There's no such band anymore!"

"Oh yeah, there still is. I feel it, like, overpoweringly. And I know they need a new manager. So goodbye, everyone. I'll be seeing you again someday. I just don't know when." Beanner strolled away.

Ty said, "Let him go. He's no use to us now. I've seen him in these trances before. He has to follow wherever it leads."

Hope was more than okay with that since Beanner gave her the creeps. But what would they do now?

"Would somebody please get us the hell out of Newcastle?" Preston ordered.

"Let me drive," Clive said. "Something tells me we should be heading north. I think the time is right to visit my cousin, Flanagan."

"Who the fuck is he?" Hope screeched from sheer nerves.

"He's a rich swami who runs a commune in Scotland," Theda answered.

"I haven't seen him for ten years, but we've been corresponding," Clive said. "He's a wise man. He'll advise us what to do next."

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Clive took the wheel and gunned the van. Just west of town, he merged onto a highway called the A1, which led north. “Yeah, this feels familiar,” he said.

“Wait a goddamned minute,” said Neal. “We’re gonna go stay in a monastery, or whatever it is, because you’re having some bullshit mystical moment?”

“Why don’t you open your mind for once?” Preston snapped at Neal. “Maybe this swami could do us all some good.”

Preston had spoken, so the course was set for Scotland. Hope could tell Theda was getting off on the way her boyfriend Clive had taken charge, but she and Neal exchanged pained looks. She felt wrung out from the rapid turn of events, and now she had a sensation of being kidnapped. A spiritual retreat with some mystic was the last thing she wanted. She longed to get back to the bright lights of London and Carnaby Street.

Theda

Theda dubbed their adventure the “Nightmare in Newcastle,” and Candy declared that would be a good title for her next article. Theda had stood on stage with the guys as long as she could, playing bass on the *Ty Leahy II* songs without missing a beat. Flashcubes had exploded in her direction, which was flattering, although she suspected Hope got more photographic attention just by baring her legs. She knew the crowd had appreciated the girls; it was Ty’s act they had hated.

They’d fled like criminals from the scene of a crime, nine of them piling into the unfamiliar JPJ van. Then Beanner had deserted them, which had worried Theda at first. But Ty Leahy, who knew him better than anyone else, had declared that this was for the best, and she was inclined to agree.

Then Clive had convinced Preston that this was a perfect opportunity to visit his cousin’s fruit-producing estate in Scotland. It was near a town called Lark, which sounded picturesque enough, but Theda had doubts about traveling so far from civilization. She knew it would blow their last chance to reconnect with the university tour.

She was also nervous that there might be no way to contact her father. And she couldn't figure out whether Flanny's operation was a farm, a commune, a monastery, or all three. Still, seeing Clive look so inspired, she wanted to support him.

"Don't worry," he told the group. "My cousin is a wise and powerful man. He'll advise us how to smooth over the trouble in Newcastle and give us insights into our future."

"I'm not worried," Theda said, hoping to encourage the others. "Not a bit. We've made out fine so far."

"So how exactly did your cousin get to be a swami?" Preston asked. "Did he go to swami school?"

"He went to seminary at Cambridge University and entered the priesthood," Clive explained. "But he's always believed the most profound wisdom doesn't come from books. He became a pacifist through many years of living and working close to nature. He shares that message with his community, and the people recognize him as their teacher. You don't have to call him Swami if it makes you uncomfortable. Just call him Flanagan ... Flanny for short."

"Actually, Swami Flanny is a great name," Preston said. "If I like his setup, maybe I'll become a mystical farmer myself. Maybe we all should. A good dose of manual labor could be just the thing to clear our heads."

Theda laughed at that, since Preston had never been known to use his hands for anything more strenuous than playing the guitar and groping girls. To see him hoeing and tilling the land would be something else.

As she might have expected, Hope and Neal looked horrified at the idea of getting soil on their hands. "I think our heads are clear enough already," Neal said, "now that it appears we've run out of weed." He glared at Jamie as if blaming him.

"I've always thought I might get into farmin'," Ty said. "It's in my blood. My Georgia ancestors raised cotton and peanuts."

"Really?" Hope exclaimed, suddenly looking more intrigued and less horrified.

"I'll believe you as a farmer when I see it," Neal told Ty. "In fact, that goes for all of us."

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Theda couldn't resist pointing out a possible concern to Clive. "Your cousin might've changed a lot in ten years. How do you know he hasn't turned into some kind of crazy cult leader?"

"He's too big a deal for that," Clive said. "His orchards power the local economy. He's the fruit king of Scotland."

Everyone tittered at that. Clive added, "You know what I mean. He raises fruit, cans it, and sells it all over Great Britain. His business has made him a fortune."

"Both rich and holy," Preston said. "I like it."

"He's a great man," Clive insisted. "He takes care of the whole community, especially the poor. And he'll take care of us too, as long as we need him."

"What about his personal life?" Hope asked. "Is he married?"

"He's a priest, silly," Theda said. "How could he be married?"

Clive hesitated and then said, "He is ... sort of."

"How can he be sort of married?" Theda demanded while everyone else laughed.

"Actually, he calls it a commitment more than a marriage. Her name's Lily."

"Children?" Theda asked.

"Three," Clive replied, "last I heard."

"It's not your parents' Catholicism, is it?" Theda said.

"It sure isn't," Clive admitted, "but trust me, he's moral in the ways that really matter."

It was getting late as they plunged into the hilly Scottish countryside. There was so little traffic that Clive kept his foot on the pedal, and the scenery raced by. "Aren't those hills eerie?" Candy whispered to Preston.

Theda thought Candy had hit on the right word to describe the way the setting sun lit up the tops of the distant hills. But it felt chilly for summer, and she was afraid night would fall before they found shelter.

It feels like we're speeding into an abyss, she thought. They weren't going to a major town like Edinburgh or Glasgow. Who knew if this Lark place would even have running water or electricity? The dips in the road were making her feel carsick after the heavy "tea" they'd had backstage at the Newcastle theater.

After about thirty minutes, the hilly country gave way to acres of cultivated trees. "Those must be Flanny's," Clive said. Then the van began to shake and sputter as if a demon had possessed it.

"We're running out of gas," Clive said.

"Wonderful," Neal groaned.

"Try to keep this rattletrap going until you see a house," Preston ordered.

After managing a couple more miles, the van coasted to a halt in the middle of nowhere. The group got out and camped at the side of the road, hoping some Good Samaritan would come along and rescue them. Giggling with embarrassment, each in turn slipped behind a private tree to answer the call of nature.

"Anybody got a cigarette?" Hope asked when they had reassembled.

"Nothing at all left to smoke, is there?" Neal glared at Jamie.

Luckily, Ty had his acoustic guitar. He started playing some fifties-style folk tunes, and the group sang along in the gathering dusk, as if they were at summer camp. *Why couldn't Ty stick to this style of music in Newcastle, Theda thought, instead of going down such a dangerous path? Maybe we could've avoided that disaster, and this one too.*

After a few minutes, a large truck loaded with crates pulled up. A rough but friendly-looking man got out and introduced himself as Jock. In a thick brogue, he asked, "Might ye all be needing a bit of help?"

"We were on our way to see Swami Flanny when we broke down," Clive said. "He's my cousin. Can you help us?"

"Aye, that I can, if you don't mind making yourselves part of my haul. This is his land, and I'm his humble servant and friend. I know he'll be eager to welcome all of ye. I'll be visiting with him myself, as soon as I've delivered my produce to the cannery."

The group piled into the truck, with the girls and Ty occupying the two seats inside the cab and the other guys sitting among the crates in back.

As they sped away, Preston leaned through the open window in the back of the truck and said to the driver, "I'm curious about this swami. Is that an official title or what?"

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"I cannot say," Jock said, "but when the spirit moves me, I pray with him. My wife and three sons do likewise, as do many folk hereabouts."

"A beloved businessman," Preston remarked. "Didn't even think that was possible."

"So what is he, exactly?" Hope asked. "Some kind of Buddhist priest?"

"I don't ken what makes a Buddhist, miss," Jock said. "I'm not educated in those ways. He doesn't shave his head or chant Hare Krishna. He wears a robe during evening prayers and otherwise work clothes like the rest of us. He preaches peace and love and opposes war and hate. What religion that signifies, I cannot tell ye."

Jock explained that he was transporting a dozen crates full of currants and raspberries to the cannery. As they approached the building, it struck Theda as several timber buildings joined together like a crazy puzzle. Jock described the processes that went on inside—cooking, steaming, jam-making, canning, shipping, and storage.

"How many people work here?" Clive asked.

Jock said there were at least a hundred families in the town of Lark involved in farming or canning or both.

"This Flanny sounds like some kind of medieval lord to me," Neal said.

"What's wrong with that?" Preston shot back.

The guys helped Jock unload the crates and carry them into the main building. A few minutes later, they were on their way to Flanny's residence. Jock drove about five miles farther north and then turned onto a dirt road that took them east. A long, white stone building loomed in the distance. The windows of all three stories were well lit.

If Theda had been expecting a monastery, she was now proven wrong. Jock led them into an immense living room with thick carpeting, ornate lamps on the tables, and numerous chairs and couches. Sinking into the plush-looking furniture made her realize how exhausting the past few days had been.

"It's evening prayer time," Jock said. "Flanny always has a large gathering for that. Make yourselves comfortable, my friends, and I'll see if he can be called away."

Theda had time to doze off before the swami arrived. She was jolted awake when he entered the room.

Who knew she could be so entranced by a holy man? His looks had something to do with it. He was medium height and muscular, with wavy blond hair and a fresh-faced handsomeness like his cousin Clive, who was fifteen years younger. Theda could even imagine Clive wearing the same lavender robe and beads. She wouldn't mind that, she decided, if he also took on some of Flanny's strength and confidence. The swami's gestures were large, like a skilled actor's.

"My dear cousin," he exclaimed, moving across the room with arms outstretched, "you finally came. I've cherished your letters, but I've waited many a long day for a visit." The two embraced and then stepped back to gaze at each other for a long moment.

Finally, Clive said, "We need your help, Flanny. We left behind a mess in Newcastle. First, we caused a sort of riot. And then, as we were running away, we sort of stole a van—not that we meant to do either one." Clive went on to describe what had happened in detail.

"Put your minds at rest, all of you," Flanny said when Clive was done. "I see plainly you did nothing wrong. If anyone in authority believes differently, they will deal with me."

His Cambridge-educated English had only a slight hint of the local brogue. Theda was reassured that this was a powerful man as well as a holy one. Looking them over, he continued. "I want to know all of you, in time. But for now, you need rest and sustenance."

"At least we don't need to use the facilities right away, Swami," Preston said. "That's 'cause on our way here, we fertilized some of your trees. Couldn't help it, you know. Nature called."

Trust Preston to be the wiseass in any situation, Theda thought.

The swami returned Preston's smile and said, "That's nature's way, young man."

Flanny escorted them into another huge room with thick carpets suitable for sitting and meditating. A prayer circle of about thirty was assembled. Theda noticed that Jock had changed out of his work clothes and into a robe like Flanny's.

There were other grizzled working men of all ages wearing religious

garb, as well as women in colorful cloth gowns and a dozen children from about five years old to late teens, who all seemed to favor long strings of beads that they handled like rosaries. Theda wondered which woman, and which of the children, belonged to Flanny. Maybe they all belonged to him in different ways. They were smiling at the newcomers, as if visitors were the best thing that could happen in their world.

A cheerful attendant served them a refreshing cup of tea. The communal pot circulated as everyone kept refilling their cups. The tea had a fruity taste and a slightly narcotic effect—a much healthier high, Theda thought, than the peace pipes and joints they'd been sharing.

“Cousin Clive,” Flanny said, “all of us here would be pleased to know your friends.” Clive proceeded to introduce them, and each tried to explain the origins of the group’s trip north and what they might be searching for. Flanny assessed them with his penetrating eyes.

Candy, Jamie, and Ty dwelled on the Newcastle disaster. Ty almost broke down when he said, “I’m afraid I’ve wrecked my career, Swami. I was beloved as a folk singer, and I should’ve been content with that. Instead, I reached for somethin’ that was beyond me.”

“You’ll find I don’t preach contentment with the status quo,” Flanny said. “It’s not wrong to reach beyond your present circumstances, if that’s where your heart leads. Now you must make peace with that new reality.”

While unburdening their hearts, some of them made fools of themselves. Preston nearly blubbered as he said, “Listen, wise man, or priest, or whatever, I gotta confess something. I’m confused, ’cause I don’t really know why we’re here. And that’s fucked up because I’m the leader of our group.”

Everyone laughed, including Flanny. “I think you do know, deep down,” he said. “Like everyone else, you’re on a journey to make peace with yourself and the world.”

Neal played the cynic. “I’m gonna need to find the way, the truth, and the life pretty fast, Swami, if that’s what you’re offering,” he said. “I’ve got things to do back in civilization.”

Hope punched her boyfriend’s arm, none too gently. Flanny kept smiling as he responded. “It’s fine to pursue material success as long as it’s done with an honest heart. I’ve spent many years building a

prosperous business. The most important thing I've learned is that success isn't only about what goes into your pockets."

Finally, he turned to Theda. She was determined to be calm and articulate. Instead, she blurted, "I'm sure it's lovely here in Scotland, Swami. But to be honest, I've never felt a need to live and work close to nature. What I need is to feel a stage beneath my feet and an audience in front of me."

"I understand that temperament, Theda," he replied. "I'm sure that some part of your artistic soul could be nourished here, if you gave it a chance." He nodded toward Clive. "The same is true of my cousin, if I know him as well as I think I do."

After each of the newcomers had been briefly counseled, Flanny said a prayer for the whole congregation. "Dearest Father in Heaven," he said, "we always feel doubly blessed when our circle is enlarged by new friends. Please let your eternal and ever-present peace and love encompass and encircle us all."

The swami's words made Theda feel as if they were on equal footing with the higher power. What a subversive concept, she thought. "Peace and love" was a phrase that every hippie on the street was spouting mindlessly these days, yet Flanny gave it meaning. Clive was so entranced that when she touched his shoulder, he didn't respond. Maybe this was what he'd been searching for: an empowering, nonjudgmental deity.

The group accompanied the prayer with exclamations like "Yes!" and "Tell it, tell it." Even Preston joined in: "Rock on, Swami!"

Flanny concluded, "Once we've embraced these basic concepts ... the essence of humanity ... no government will be able to turn us into mindless warriors."

The prayer was followed by a hymn that sounded like the familiar Christian doxology, but it was about beauty, truth, and faith rather than the holy trinity. Then came a late-night snack of homemade bread with hearty portions of jam. When they had finished eating, a thirtyish woman with blond hair falling almost to her waist introduced herself as Lily and showed them to their sleeping quarters.



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Their accommodations during the next several weeks were conducive to making love. Each of the couples—Candy and Preston, Hope and Neal, and Theda and Clive—had a small private room. The single men in the group, Ty and Jamie, had their own rooms, but Theda suspected they didn't spend many nights alone. There were enough unattached female worshippers frequenting the evening prayer circles to entertain them.

Theda slept with Clive every night, after days spent in near-perfect harmony. They were eating a healthy vegetarian diet, praying and meditating, receiving Flanny's counseling, singing and writing acoustic music, and getting in touch with nature. Once she asked Clive, "Could we be any closer if we were married?" He looked startled for a moment and then grinned.

They were supposed to earn their keep by putting in a few hours of manual labor each day. Most of the group enjoyed getting outdoors and picking fruit, but Hope couldn't bear to get her manicured hands dirty. She made a noticeable point of praising the homemade robes and jewelry that many of Flanny's followers wore, and that was how she obtained more congenial work as a seamstress.



After their first week at the compound, at Flanny's suggestion, they hitched a ride with Jock into the town of Lark so that they could telephone their families from the post office. Theda was jolted when she heard the tone of her father's voice. It seemed Professor Stitt, the faculty sponsor on the university tour, had reported them missing to the London police, who had contacted their parents. "For all we knew, you'd been kidnapped!" her father yelped.

"Sorry about that," Theda said. "I honestly didn't think anybody would panic if we went off on our own for a few days. We've just been away longer than we expected."

"What's this detour to Scotland all about?" he asked.

"It's hard to explain. Things went sour during a concert in Newcastle, so we decided it was a good time to lie low by visiting

Clive's cousin. He's a kind of mystical leader, but he's also a major entrepreneur in the fruit-producing country around here. It just seemed like the perfect opportunity to ... to clear our heads and learn about a different way of life."

"Theda, honey," her dad said, lowering his voice, "it's not like you to be so irresponsible. You know how much I've spent on your trip overseas. And you've missed practically the entire university tour, which was supposed to earn you three academic credits."

"I'll take an incomplete on that," Theda said, "and make it up some other way." Why was he focused on such mundane details when she was trying to explain the unique experience she was having? "There's plenty of time for that. But right now we're tapping into our spiritual sides. You'd be amazed what a calming effect singing hymns and meditating can have. We're learning to use every moment. That's the kind of knowledge you can't get from school."

"I thought your mother and I taught you to use your brain, not follow gurus."

"I *am* using my brain," Theda argued. "That's the whole point. Swami Flanny isn't just another guru. He's better than a therapist. The band has never been so harmonious, and even we girls are getting along for a change. And I've cut down on my swearing. That should please you."

"Yeah, that's something," he grumbled.

"Flanny seems to understand all of our needs," Theda continued. "He's assured me that if I support Clive's career, mine will prosper too."

"Is the band doing anything productive?" he asked.

"That's the best part, Dad. The guys are playing music and composing new songs like mad. Flanny has a rustic little studio on his grounds with just acoustic instruments. Very basic, but that's helping to keep them focused."

"What about you and Clive?" her dad asked.

"It's really good between us right now. We're contributing more to the band than ever before and gaining more respect. We've actually written a couple of songs together ... 'Peace Soldier' and 'Child of Nature.'"

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Her father still wasn't impressed, or at least he pretended not to be. "Just how long is this little vacation from reality gonna last?"

"Obviously, it can't last forever," Theda said. "We'll have to go back to school in the fall. But what's wrong with taking a breather? It's amazing how bright the future looks when your head is ... um, clear."

Her passing references to the pot they'd been smoking before coming to Scotland seemed to go over her father's head. "Tell me more about this man, this swami, who's running the commune," he said.

Theda described Flanny as best she could. "He's an amazing man," she concluded. "The local people love him."

"Sounds like he might have them snowed," her dad remarked.

"He doesn't hypnotize or coerce people," Theda said. "He just preaches pacifism."

"Maybe someone ought to take a closer look at his business operation."

"Why?" Theda asked, starting to get nervous. "What do you think you're gonna find?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's all perfectly legitimate, but I do have a few questions about it—such as, how does one man accumulate so much wealth and power in a place like rural Scotland? And what does he hope to gain from your visit?"

"Why does it always have to be about gain, for God's sake?" Theda nearly shouted. "Why can't it ever be about faith? Not everybody is as practical as you, Dad."

"Somebody has to be practical." After a few moments of silence, he added, "Theda, I understand why the peace and love message is so appealing these days. It's the war. But that's what worries me. Are your musician friends harboring some notion of avoiding the draft by hiding out in a commune overseas? I'm telling you right now, it won't work."

Theda assured him that wasn't the plan, and they concluded the call. She shook off her father's negativism, knowing she was a different person from the sheltered young girl who had still been tethered to her parents when she left home. Later that day in the orchard, refreshed by the sunshine and bracing air, she lifted her face to the sky and sang a hymn to the infinite power that seemed real for the first time.

Chapter 4

Candy

Before arriving in Scotland, Candy had feared the entire trip overseas might turn sour for her. While still in London, Hope and Theda were as thick as thieves, always giggling, gossiping, and shopping together. They never asked Candy to join them, but she didn't care. Those were things she just wasn't into.

But Jamie had also turned on her. Once when she approached him to ask an innocent question, he snapped, "You must have figured out by now how to suck up to Preston without my help." That was it, she decided: she wouldn't speak to him again until he apologized.

Not that "sucking up" to Preston was so easy, since he had tended to blow hot and cold during the band's sojourn at Apple. She might manage to get close to him for several days straight, only to find him withdrawing unexpectedly. She still talked up the band's prospects as best she could, but sometimes when he felt discouraged, her efforts annoyed him. Then the Newcastle concert blew up in their faces, and they fled north.

But within their first hour with him in Scotland, the magnetic Swami Flanny cast a spell that smoothed out their tangles. He nurtured their relationships, saying, "Only time can tell if physical love also means commitment."

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Accordingly, Preston and Candy, like the other couples, spent all their nights together. Often during the day, Candy compared notes on this experiment with Hope and Theda, not in a gossipy way but to help and advise each other. When things were going well, they embraced and laughed together.

Meditation was working for Jamie too. A couple of days after their arrival, he took Candy aside and said, "I had no right to snap at you the way I did. I guess I'm just jealous. I'll work on it."

New music began to ripen like the fruit in the orchards. It was a stroke of good fortune for the band that Flanny had a basic studio equipped with acoustic instruments and tape recorders. The simplicity of the setup seemed to inspire the musicians. AMO resumed working with Ty Leahy on what they now called their "peace-and-rock" album. Ty and Preston collaborated on "The Ballad of Newcastle," a humorous travelogue describing the group's flight from the riot they had innocently caused. Neal contributed "Late Sunsets," a hymn to the beauty of Scotland in which Hope was transformed into a goddess of the north country. Clive and Theda wrote tributes to Flanny as a "peace soldier" and to his congregation as "children of nature."

Candy foresaw that Preston's "Help Me, Savior," a rocked-up prayer that seemed to deify Swami Flanny, would become controversial. She wondered what their churchgoing relatives would make of it.

She went along with the flow, not too concerned about Flanny's credentials as a holy man. Maybe he was in touch with a higher power, or maybe he was simply making use of his undergraduate Cambridge degree in psychology. Either way, he was doing more for them as individuals than any school counselor ever had. He and his partner Lily were generous with gifts of homemade clothes, jewelry, and books. He had them reading not only the Bible but also sacred texts from the Far Eastern traditions, such as the Bhagavad Gita.

But she should have known to trust Neal to be the serpent in the garden. "Our swami must have a few tricks up his sleeve," he told Preston one morning while most of the group was picking fruit. "I think he had us call home just to cover his ass in case anyone accuses him of kidnapping or brainwashing us ... which is kind of what he's

doing anyway. He might try to hypnotize us into making a record for his benefit.”

Preston snapped back, “Don’t be such a two-faced bastard. You’re the one who’s been poking around to find out if the swami has any ties to British record companies. You think I don’t know what you’re up to?”



There was a small office with a typewriter to write letters and journals, although Candy seemed to be the only one using it regularly. She confided to Flanny that she was attempting an article about the band’s experiences in Newcastle. “I’m also writing to my old college roommate, Josephine, trying to describe our way of life here. She’s just the type who’d appreciate it.”

“Ask Josephine to visit us,” Flanny proposed. “I always enjoy meeting friends of friends.”

“I don’t know if her parents would allow it,” Candy said. “They’ve cracked down on her hard lately, because of past offenses.” Still, she had that goal in mind when she wrote her letter:

If you can possibly get away from your waitressing job sometime before the end of summer, Jo, you’ve got to visit us here in the Scottish orchard country. It’s not only a beautiful place, but it’s an amazing model for communal living. I know when you think “commune,” you immediately envision a collection of poverty-stricken, authority-bating, strung-out hippies. We have none of that here. We’ve embraced a healthy way of life with no drugs, alcohol, or meat. We went cold turkey on all those things as soon as we arrived. But even more amazingly, the prevailing philosophy embraces an entire town and the surrounding countryside, and spreads the prosperity and goodwill around.

The leader of the community is an inspirational man known as Flanagan or Flanny. He’s not an elected official like a mayor or county executive. The people call him Swami. He’s a visionary

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businessman who has built an empire from the local products of the land, and who treats his workers as favored sons and daughters who are welcome to whatever he has. The religion he preaches is joyous and easy. Actually, he doesn't preach at all, but simply urges us to live as close to nature as we can and tap into our natural impulses as human beings. All he's saying is that life should be about loving one another and living together in peace.

His influence isn't limited to the north country. He's well connected in ways that we don't totally understand. We do know for a fact that the Newcastle police didn't pursue us when we thought they might, and Flanny assured us they wouldn't. Lily, his partner, told me they've taken in several American draft evaders over the years. Those refugees were later sent on pilgrimages to India or the Middle East where nobody could harass them.

You must be reeling in shock, Jo, at the way I'm going on about peace and love and the wonders of following a swami. Could this possibly be the same uptight girl you knew at CNC, who was always burying her nose in her schoolbooks and avoiding hallmates like the plague? Right now I feel like a new person. I could even face down those old "enemies," like my wonderful ex-roommate, and act like their equal.

There's no telling how long this phase will last. We'd like to stay here for the rest of the summer, if possible. We'll have to find some way to make up the course we blew off, to avoid flunking out of Maryland. Maybe I'll write a treatise for the English department, recommending a few days of prayer and meditation in Lark, Scotland, as part of the itinerary for any future study tour of Great Britain.

But enough of this peace-and-love spiel. I can hear you panting to find out the main thing ... that is, how I'm getting along with Preston. Funny you should ask, because it turns out that relationships are an important part of the teaching here. Preston and I are spending every night together to test our durability as a couple. Suffice it to say, we've never been closer.

When Candy posted the letter, she also enclosed a carbon copy of her Newcastle article, asking for Jo's opinion.



After a few weeks, Hope lost her openness and became more reticent. Soon she slipped into some sort of nervous breakdown. At least that was what it looked like to Candy, although Flanny described it as "a period of intense self-examination." It began when she kicked Neal out of their room one night, forcing him to find other quarters. For the next several days, she rarely mingled with the others or spoke. She seemed to be meditating even as she walked around, wearing a cloth gown that reached the floor and fingering her beads. If anyone tried to penetrate her shell, she fled back to her room.

Flanny counseled her in private and urged the group to be patient with her need for seclusion. "She's at a crossroads," he said, "trying to choose the best path forward."

"Which path do you think she'll choose?" Candy asked Theda when they met in the prayer circle. "Ty or Neal?"

"She'll choose whoever she thinks will bring her the most fame and fortune," Theda replied. "Trust me, that's what this whole 'breakdown' is about. It's making her the center of attention, and she's just loving it."

"I don't know," Candy said. "She has a lost look in her eyes, like she really is confused."

"Yeah, poor baby. Must be really tough to have two guys fighting over you."

As Hope's "self-examination" continued, the competition between Neal and Ty for her affections produced not fisticuffs, but memorable music. They both wrote love songs for her, which they refined and polished constantly on their acoustic guitars. Hope would sit silently at the communal dining table, listening to these tributes to her beauty and womanhood. Which musician would chase that spacey look from her eyes and bring her back to life?

Candy tried to put herself in Hope's shoes, faced with such a choice. Ty's lovely ballad "My Camelot," about a latter-day Guinevere, would

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have moved her to tears. Neal's much edgier "Triangle," in which he vented about loving a fickle woman, would have frightened but also excited her. He seemed to blame Hope for the conflict between two musicians who should have been the best of friends.

Candy wondered whether these two great songs would ever grace the same album—or whether Hope would choose the man who was truly capable of loving her.



One afternoon toward the end of August, about a month after Candy had posted her letter, she and Preston returned from the orchard to find Josephine camped out on a couch in the living room, wearing her grungiest T-shirt and jeans, her knapsack pillowing her head. She sprang up and embraced them both, although she had never met Preston before. "Congratulations, you two, on your couples counseling," she exclaimed. "Looks like it's working."

"I wasn't sure you'd make it here, Jo," Candy said, "but I'm blown away that you did."

"It wasn't easy. I feel like I'm on the lam. Waitressing was degrading and low-paying and basically an insult to my intelligence. My parents know I quit that gig, but they don't know where I am right now. I almost went to California instead. I had an opportunity to hitch a ride out west with a buddy of mine who just graduated with a master's degree in engineering from Maryland and got hired as an instructor at UCLA. But I decided at the last minute that he was a bit radical, politically, even for me. So I came here for a dose of that peace and love you've been recommending."

Preston grinned at Jo and nudged Candy. "I'm really grooving to your friend here. Gotta admire someone with the courage to run away from home—something I always planned on doing, ever since I got stuck with a wicked stepmother."

"I don't know if running away is the best idea," Candy said, "but I'm glad you chose us over California, Jo."

"You might not be quite so glad I did once I tell you what I've been up to since I got your letter."

“Oh, God,” Candy said. “Out with it.”

Jo paused dramatically and then said, “You might kill me for this, but I’ve been spreading your work around. I sent your article about your overseas adventures to the student newspaper at Central Maryland. You’ve been published there before, remember? They told me it’ll appear sometime during the fall semester.”

“It was just a first draft!” Candy protested. “But actually, that’s fine. I know the features editor will do a good job punching it up.”

“But that’s not all. Wait till I tell you what I did when I got to London.” Jo paused again, and Candy began to sweat.

“You described the Apple headquarters so vividly in your article, Candy, I decided to drop by there myself. I showed your story to some folks in the press office.”

“No shit!” Preston exclaimed. “That office has a new staff now? When we were there, it was just one guy, Beanner, holding down the fort and supposedly managing Ty Leahy. Beanner hit the road with us, but we lost track of him somewhere between Newcastle and here.”

“I never saw the hippie Brahmin, as Candy labeled him,” Jo said. “Seems the company has transformed itself in record time, so to speak. A gang of three-piece suits rose out of the woodwork and parked itself in every nook and cranny. They’re all lawyers or certified accountants or whatever, appointed to save the Beatles’ millions. So I’m sorry to say, it’s now officially a place of business. Those madcap days of employees strip-teasing on the desks and offering reefers to every visitor are never coming back.”

“Bummer,” Preston said.

“Anyway, Candy, here’s where it gets tricky. One of these newly minted officials pounced on your description of the Newcastle concert, and his wheels started turning like crazy. He asked to see your letter as well. Then he announced in a voice of doom, “Ty Leahy violated the terms of his original contract with us by playing a show in Newcastle. Besides that, he and the other musicians could be held responsible for damages to the theater and injuries to patrons, not to mention the stolen van. They’ll have to come out of hiding and face the consequences.””

“Hiding?” Preston repeated. “So we’re the swami’s latest fugitives? I had no idea.” He sounded pleased.

“It’s ridiculous,” Candy said. “If we were hiding, why would we have contacted our families? And why would I have sent out those pieces?”

“We didn’t really steal that van either,” Preston said. “It was just there. Another band abandoned it.”

“I believe you,” Jo said. “I could kick myself for bringing this on you guys. I never should’ve shared any info with a three-piece suit. I just hope it doesn’t stir up the British pigs against you.”

“Even if it does, Flanny will protect us,” Preston declared.

“What is he, magical?” Jo asked.

“Sometimes I think he is,” Candy said. “Wait till you meet him. He’s a good, peace-loving man and powerful too. If necessary, he’ll stand up to anyone who gets on our case.”

“How does he do it? With bribes?”

“Jo!” Candy exclaimed, horrified. “No way. He has too much integrity for that.”

Her friend sighed and shook her head as if she were talking to naive children. “Look, I have no doubt your Father Flanagan is as good and peace-loving as you say. But if you’re right about his reputation for harboring fugitives, he’s a clear danger to the establishment. So how does he get away with it?”

“He stays one step ahead of his enemies,” Preston said.

“Enemies?” Candy protested. “I never meant to imply he was that dangerous to society.”

“Didn’t you read what you wrote yourself?” Jo asked. “This man practices pacifism and socialism in the midst of a traditional Christian, capitalist, militaristic society. He’s even proven you can get rich doing it. That would bum out any self-respecting fat ass in a three-piece suit.”

“But what can they do about it?” Candy asked.

“My parents will know what to do about it,” Jo said, “if they find out where I am. Yours too, probably. Someone will have him investigated for running a cult.”

“If Flanny can’t keep protecting us, we’ll have to run,” Preston said energetically, as if relishing the idea.

"But we're innocent," Candy said, breaking out in a full sweat. "Why should we run?"

"Didn't your Flanny send his previous fugitives, the draft dodgers, on a pilgrimage somewhere far away?" Jo asked.

"Maybe we'll follow them," Preston said. "We could use the enlightenment—especially if it also means avoiding the draft."

"What about you, Candy?" Jo said, grinning at her. "Are you prepared to move on to India or Morocco or someplace equally spiritual with Preston? Are you that together as a couple?"

Candy was speechless. Jo and Preston went on bantering about this future "pilgrimage" as if it were actually going to happen. Soon Jo was asking to go along.

To Candy's relief, Preston finally shook his head. "That much holiness isn't for me," he said. "Clive and Theda are the ones who're getting so spiritual they oughta think about going East. All *I* really care about is rock and roll fame. That means sooner or later, I gotta return to civilization and face the cops, the draft, and everything else."

"Exactly right," Candy said quickly, hoping to bury the pilgrimage idea for good. "Hiding from life is not our plan."

Hope

Hope tried to get into the spiritual stuff and the fruit-picking, but she knew from day one that Scotland wasn't for her. Everyone else was grooving to the lifestyle, but she missed London too much. It didn't help that Candy and Theda whispered about her in the dining room, often without bothering to keep their voices down. Once she heard Candy ask, "What's with Hope?"

Theda answered, "She doesn't care about finding the inner light. She craves the lights of Carnaby Street."

Hope wanted to lash out, but heaven forbid she go against Flanny's turn-the-other-cheek teachings. Those girls simply had no idea of the turmoil she was in. She and Neal made fantastic love every night, but otherwise they didn't get along that great.

Once when she tried to explain her unhappiness to him, he said,

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“It might help if you stopped flirting with every guy in the compound who’s under forty.”

“What about you?” she shot back. “Is there a girl around here you haven’t ogled?”

As they argued about who was the biggest flirt, he pushed her, and she banged her head against the wall.

“Oh, Jesus God,” he said, “what have I done?” He picked her up and kissed her on the forehead. “It won’t happen again, Hope. No way am I gonna turn out like my dad. I love you.”

Hope believed him, but she still kicked him out of their room. He could come back, she said, once he got some serious counseling from Flanny. After they separated, Ty Leahy, never without an acoustic guitar in his hands, started looking at her more intensely than ever before. That only added to her confusion.

There was no denying Neal was more attractive than Ty, with his deep brown eyes, dark hair, and sweet tenor voice that could make any girl swoon. Ty was skinny, with stringy brown hair that was bound to start receding before too much longer. He mostly sang about his sad life in a reedy voice. But he knew how to sweet-talk her whenever he got her alone. Neal didn’t really do that unless she shamed him into it.

It would’ve been nice to confide in Candy and Theda, her so-called girlfriends, but it was obvious to Hope that they were jealous. No one was writing love songs about them. If they thought her hours of meditation about her problems were put on, they were idiots. Her whole future depended on figuring this out.

After several weeks of uncertainty, Hope was alone in her room one day, trying to sort through some of this heavy stuff, when the door burst open and a strange girl came in. She was the epitome of a hippie freak with her straight brown hair parted in the middle and her granny glasses—not pretty at all, but plenty assertive. “Who are you?” Hope demanded.

“Josephine Gordon’s the name. You can call me just plain Jo. I’m a friend of Candy’s. We roomed together at college for a few months last spring. I’m majoring in physics and chemistry, all the tough sciences ... that is, if my parents let me go back.”

“What’s that to me?” Hope said, maybe sounding a little ruder than she meant to.

“I’m just taking the liberty of addressing your situation, since no one else here seems to be speaking to you, and vice versa—except the swami, but he might just be part of the problem. He strikes me as way too sexy to be a priest.”

“Yeah, he is,” Hope blurted. “He flirts with me sometimes.”

“He flirts with everyone, dear, even with me, if you can believe that. Threw me off my game earlier today when I asked him what he was up to with you guys. He’s a political animal, but those mesmerizing blue eyes and that dazzling grin tend to deflect that perception.”

“I’m not into politics,” Hope said, sitting up straighter in her bed.

“Everything comes down to politics sooner or later,” Jo told her. “Your swami has a history of needling the authorities.”

“I don’t care about that,” Hope said. “We just came here to rest. And learn how to meditate.”

“Yeah, after starting a riot and then running away in someone else’s van.” Jo moved around the room as she spoke, as if ready to flee at a moment’s notice. She peered into Hope’s clothing closet, which was fuller than the other girls’.

“I know you say it was accidental,” she continued, “but the pigs have issued a summons for you guys, and the good swami’s proposing you ignore it. What’ll he do if they come here in pursuit? Seems to me he’s begging for a showdown ... a mini-Armageddon in the northern hills.”

“Armageddon?” Hope could barely pronounce it, but she couldn’t help smiling at whatever it was. “Come on. I think you’re being overdramatic.”

“And you’re not? You’re the one who’s in seclusion, just because two guys like you.”

“It’s a real dilemma,” Hope argued.

“Be sensible, dear. From what I hear, they’re both fab choices. Both would do their damndest to immortalize you in song and make you rich and famous just because you’re so beautiful. So just choose one and prepare to move on fast, because this idyll of yours can’t last.”

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"I don't want it to last," Hope said. "I'm bored with Scotland. At least your Armageddon, or whatever you call it, might liven things up. But that won't solve my personal problem."

"Then let's boil it down, shall we?" Jo picked up Hope's makeup case from the bedside table and examined it. "Your girlfriends seem to think it's a matter of one musician being handsomer and the other nicer. Is that basically it?"

"That's too simple," Hope insisted, although in a way that *was* it. But that wasn't all. She felt an unexpected surge of energy that compelled her to keep confiding in this freaky girl she'd just met. "The atmosphere here kind of hypnotizes you," she tried to explain. "It's almost made me lose touch with myself. Sometimes I even forget to take my birth control."

"Jesus Christ. That's kinda dumb, isn't it?"

"It just doesn't seem to fit into the routine," Hope said. "Neal and I have been living together as a couple. So have Candy and Theda with their guys. That's part of what the swami preaches. It's not all about free love, like communes in America. We're supposed to find out if we have what it takes to stay together forever."

"But you kicked Neal out, so it seems you flunked the commitment test," Jo observed. "So what'll you do if you get pregnant?"

"I don't know." It shocked Hope to realize she'd been living in such an unreal world, without thinking about consequences. A baby, if it came, would be a screaming bundle of reality, yet the thought of it made her smile.

Jo shook her head. "Time for you to get your head out of your ass and see the bigger picture here. It isn't all about you," she said in a scolding tone.

"I never thought—"

"Look, it's dinnertime. There's a great-looking veggie spread out there. Father Flanagan's about to give an address or a sermon, or whatever he calls it, on the state of his world. So let's kill two birds with one stone ... eat and get some religion."

Hope and Jo slipped into the dining room just as Flanny was starting to say grace. As was usual on Sunday nights, there was a crowd

of local people there, adding up to at least twenty at the long table. But somehow it felt different. Already this Josephine chick had stirred things up.

Jo sat down next to Jamie. He grinned at her, obviously identifying with that four-eyed intellectual vibe she gave off. Ty cast a wistful glance at Hope across the table. Neal came in a minute later, sat down next to her, and glared at Ty.

Jo saw it and laughed. She asked, “Why don’t you two just step outside and settle your differences man to man?”

On a normal evening, Candy and Theda would already be whispering together, probably about Hope. But right now Theda was frowning at the newcomer. Hope heard her say to Candy, “Why the fuck did you invite that oddball here? I can see she’s trouble.”

If Flanny thought so too, he sugarcoated it. His prayer began typically enough: “Gracious heavenly father, we call on you, the source of all peace and love, to bless this food that we have extracted from the bounty of your earth through our honest labor.” Hope had heard people say that Flanny’s graces were more political than they seemed on the surface. She decided to really tune in to this one.

He continued, “As always, we need the physical and spiritual strength that only you can provide. We need it to preserve our way of life from the forces of hatred and greed that surround us. Tonight we welcome Josephine into our midst. She has warned us of a new peril, but we fear nothing. We can fight any battle with your love in our hearts.”

What did he mean, “fight any battle”? And how could you fight with love in your heart? Hope whispered to Neal, “Is he telling us to resist the Newcastle police? Why can’t we just go to them and explain what happened?”

“That could be a trap,” Neal replied. “Don’t you get it, Hope?”

“No, I guess I don’t.” But as she listened, it occurred to her that Flanny was taking on something much bigger than local police. He seemed to think Satan himself was after them. It took her a while to realize that the swami’s devil wasn’t just a spirit or a demon. He, or it, was the British government or maybe the American government—or all those that oppressed their people and waged or supported war.

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“We never engage our adversaries,” Flanny said, “but given the opportunity, we neutralize them. Last spring, when I confronted a team of military policemen in search of two deserters, I invited them to sit down to dinner and prayer with us. Touched by your spirit, those representatives of a lethal killing machine lost their desire to pursue those imperiled souls. I hope and believe they carried a message of peace back to their offices and bureaucracies.”

“I guess that blasts your theory, Jo,” Preston said out loud. “Our swami doesn’t bribe officials. He prays with them, or over them.”

Flanny tossed his blond head, spread his muscular arms, and continued. “Heavenly father, prepare us to speak truth to power once again. I know my cousin and his friends chose the right path when they fled a violent situation and used the vehicle that you surely provided for their rescue. All of this will be made plain to anyone who questions them. I call down your blessing upon us all. Amen.”

A communal amen went up from the diners. Everyone else started eating immediately, as if they didn’t have a care in the world, while Hope’s stomach churned from tension. Avoiding the brown rice and greens, she chewed on a thick piece of bread and jam and washed it down with tea.

The women on the kitchen shift cleared away the dinner plates and brought fruit cocktails for dessert. Suddenly Jo got to her feet and announced, “If you don’t mind, Swami, I’d like to give the benediction, or whatever you call it. I’ve got something to get off my chest with you and God.”

If Flanny was startled, he didn’t show it. “We don’t usually do benedictions,” he said with a smile, “but any one of us is free to pray at any time. So go right ahead, young lady.”

“Gracious heavenly father,” Jo began, but then she stopped and frowned. “Hell, no, I can’t fake the religion part. It’s you I have a problem with, Swami, not God. I’d like to know why you’re holding these people hostage to your private peace movement.”

“Those are rather strong words, don’t you think, Josephine?” Flanny said, as calm as ever. “There are no hostages here. My guests come and go as they please.”

Jo eyed the spiritual leader, her hands on her hips. "I'm sure they do, Swami," she said, "but they're under your influence. It seems to me the path of least resistance would be for the group to report to the Newcastle police and explain their position. Didn't you read Candy's article? According to her, they didn't mean to cause a riot or steal a van. Those things just happened."

"Those things happened for a reason," Flanny said. "That is what brought all of you here."

Hope watched Candy get all misty-eyed, as if her article had caused some kind of miracle.

"I get you, Swami," said Preston. "You're saying we need your protection because we're in bigger danger than we think. If the pigs catch up to us, they'll arrest us for these bogus crimes and eventually throw us back into the jaws of the war machine. Right?"

"I fear that might happen."

Clive got to his feet, his mouth dripping with fruit juice. "Only Flanny can save us from that fate," he declared. "We gotta find a way to stay here till the war's over."

"But what about college?" Theda asked. "And our careers?"

Of course, Hope thought, it's all about her career. Heaven forbid the theater be deprived of Theda's fabulous talents.

"How're you gonna take on the powers that be all by yourself, Swami?" Jo asked. "I can see you're a strong man and a good one, and certainly a rich one. But you're still just one man."

A shaft of evening sunlight from the long western window lit up Flanny eerily. Even if it was an optical illusion, it made him look almost godlike. "Very well said, Josephine," he replied. "I'm only one man, and a humble one at that. But any man with an open heart ... or any woman ... can command God's love as a powerful weapon."

"Love as a weapon? Interesting choice of words."

What was Jo insinuating now? *She'll say anything*, Hope thought, *to prove she's not in awe of Flanny like the rest of us.*

Jo continued, "You come off as a convincing man of peace. But history tells us that only force, or the threat of force, really has the power to change things. So tell us, do you have some sort of army in

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reserve to help you with your holy missions? Maybe a mob of villagers with axes and pitchforks who'll rise up at your command?"

Flanny laughed and said, "You broke bread this evening with a roomful of local citizens. Do they look like a mob to you?"

"No, not right at the moment," Jo said, looking around the table, "but who knows what lurks behind those bucolic faces? Anyway, here's what I'm really getting at, Swami. How do you get off harboring fugitives from the military ... if that's what you did? Who made you their savior?"

"That's what I meant to uncover in my article," Candy exclaimed. "Who were those fugitives, and what became of them?"

Everyone turned to look at Candy, startled, Preston especially. Taking over a room had never been her style. Hope thought she probably surprised even herself.

Candy continued, "I'm sorry I interrupted, Swami Flanny, but that's the missing piece of the puzzle. When did you harbor them, and why?"

Flanny continued smiling, but he shook his head. "I'm not at liberty to divulge their whereabouts, Candace," he said. "But you can rest assured, they're safely immersed in a spiritual culture."

"What spiritual culture? In the Middle East? India?" Candy demanded. "You mean they can't be extradited? And did you help them leave the country? How did you do that?" She had picked a fine time to become an aggressive reporter.

"Not now, Candy," said Preston, putting a hand on her shoulder. "We have enough problems of our own, like figuring out our next move."

Candy quieted down, her eyes still simmering, as Preston turned to Flanny. "Swami, I gotta tell you again, a rock and roll band is about conquering the real world. We have music to play and stardom to chase. Sure, we want to escape the draft, but we also want to make our fortunes. So we're just gonna have to find a way to do both, which means we can't hide out here much longer."

Theda beamed at this since it meant her fabulous career would continue. Her self-centeredness goaded Hope to jump to her feet and let out her pent-up emotions.

"We can't go back to America without at least some protection from the draft," she declared. "I've got an idea what we could do about that."

She paused, took a deep breath, and turned toward Flanny. "You can actually marry people, can't you?"

Shock registered on faces all around, but Hope continued, "Why shouldn't we get married if we can? We're all in love, aren't we? And afterwards, if babies should come along ... well, that's the protection we need from the draft. I don't think they take anyone with small kids."

She gave Flanny a pleading look. He beamed, as if this had been his plan all along. "It's an inspired idea, Hope," he said. "I'll gladly perform a nuptial service for those couples who feel ready for it."

Hope thought she might throw up from the tension, but she was strangely elated at the same time. The villagers smiled at her as broadly as Flanny did. She guessed most of them had been married in one of the swami's "nuptial services." Ty looked at her with anguished eyes, but she couldn't help it. Ty had already done his time in the military and didn't need her help.

"Well, how about it?" Hope said to Neal. "I'm waiting for you to propose."

Everyone tittered and then went silent. She was afraid Neal was going to hang her out to dry. He made her wait forever while he hemmed and hawed. Finally, he said, "You know I love you, Hope. But this is pretty sudden, don't you think?"

She didn't answer. Gradually, his face darkened with suspicion. "I'll bet I know what this is about," he said. "You're already pregnant, aren't you?"

Theda

It all went haywire at the communal table on a somewhat chilly late-August evening. Theda could feel Flanny's influence over the group slipping away, like a spell wearing off. She knew then it was time to leave the cocoon, although she would miss the creative vibes of this place.

Candy, of all people, started it. Out of nowhere, she declared herself

a hotshot reporter on the trail of Flanny's fugitives, whoever they were. Would she think of leaving the group behind to pursue them to distant lands? Theda was impressed by her passion, but she doubted it. Then Hope stole the floor by proposing they all get married in Flanny's chapel to give the guys some draft protection when they returned to America. She even hinted she was already pregnant. Candy looked so ecstatic at the idea of marrying Preston that her plan to be a globe-trotting reporter seemed to fly right out of her head.

At first, Theda laughed at the marriage idea. Who knew if Flanny's "nuptial services" would hold up in court? As far as she knew, he and Lily weren't officially married themselves. Still, she wished Josephine would let up on this peace-loving man the rest of them had come to love. She was practically yelling now. "None of your methods are gonna stop the war machine—not your prayers, not your hymns, and certainly not your marriage ceremonies."

"You don't know that, Josephine," Flanny said, smiling as always. "A few determined souls can save many other souls. And those who are united in a lifelong commitment are twice as strong."

"It's not enough, Swami," Jo replied. "This isn't the real world. I know some very smart and aware people who think it's time for youth to confront the violence of the Man with equal force—like this one friend of mine, Floyd Worth, who graduated from Maryland last spring with a master's degree in engineering. He decided to return to California, where he's from, for a teaching gig and to immerse himself in the West Coast underground. He says there's a revolution brewing. I almost went out there to visit him instead of coming here."

"Why don't you invite Floyd to visit us?" the swami proposed. "We might be able to enlighten him."

"Forget it," she replied. "I know your tricks. You want to get my pal in your clutches and neutralize his anger with your pacifism. That seems to have worked with everyone here ... I mean, really, no offense, but you all come off like a pack of zombies."

The idea of California stirred Theda's blood. Besides that, the "zombie" accusation offended her. "Maybe we should go and check out this Floyd's scene," she said suddenly.

Everyone stared at her, and Preston scowled; he was the leader, the one who made vital decisions about the band's future. Theda had stolen his thunder, but she didn't care. She met Flanny's calm blue eyes as she said, "I'm sorry, Swami. I really do love it here. But ... there's so much going on in California, both musically and politically."

She turned to Preston and said, "Remember when we talked about the West Coast? Before we came to Scotland?"

"I'll repeat what I said then," Neal interjected. "We'd be 'going Hollywood' on pure speculation, without enough money or a real plan."

"We could crash with Floyd, or he could find us a place," Jo said.

God, how presumptuous, Theda thought. *That girl has insinuated herself into our group, and we only just met her. But I guess we better listen to her. She's offering us a plan.*

"Floyd's folks are filthy rich," Jo explained. "They own vineyards and wineries in Napa, plus lots of real estate all over. And they're generous with his allowance, even if they're not crazy about his politics."

"I'm not ready to leave here," Clive told Theda softly.

"I know, honey," she said, "but think about it. We're drama majors, remember? Hollywood beckons."

"So do open-air music festivals," Preston said. "The West Coast has always been the happening place for those. I say it's time for AMO to go for those bigger gigs in California." He turned to Flanny, his usual teasing grin toned down. "Not that it hasn't been a great time, Swami, soaking up the communal lifestyle here," he said. "It's gotten our creative juices flowing in ways we'd never have experienced if we'd stayed put in a London studio. But every once in a while we need to change course ... radically." He pushed aside his fruit cocktail, as if ready to return that instant to his carnivorous, hard-drinking, smoking persona.

"I understand that need," Flanny said in his most reassuring tone. "There are no apologies necessary."

Preston turned to Jo. "So where, exactly, can we find this Floyd character right now?" he asked.

"UCLA," Jo said. "He sent me money for a plane ticket to get out there. But I spent all of that, plus my waitressing tips, getting here."

Ty spoke up. "If y'all remember, my business manager, Willie Givhans, split for his company's headquarters in LA just before we came here. I'm thinkin' it's time I set up a meetin' with him about my new album. But first, I gotta drop by Apple in London, 'cause they still owe me a couple of royalty checks for the first album. If you want, y'all can tag along with me and see how far we get." He eyed Hope as he spoke, agitating her even more.

Clive took Theda's hand and squeezed it. "I guess it's fate," he said. "But Theda, before we move on, we need Flanny's blessing on our relationship. So ... will you marry me?"

"Are you shitting me?" she exclaimed. As everyone laughed, she added quickly, "Excuse me, Swami. My parents are always threatening to wash my mouth out with soap."

"He's not shitting you, Theda," Hope said. "Don't be a fool. Grab him while you can."

"Let's all do it!" Preston exclaimed. "It's the happening thing to do here, right?" He cast an exuberant grin around the table. "I'll bet all you local folks are Swami-wed."

"Aye, that we are," their old friend Jock said, laying a thick arm across his wife's broad shoulders.

"Clive's right on, for once," Preston continued. "This is a way to carry Flanny's blessing with us, no matter where we end up. So how about it, sweets?" He winked at Candy, and she nodded so hard that Theda thought her head might fly off her neck.

Hope cut Ty off at the knees as she glared at Neal and demanded, "Well? Are you on board?"

Neal looked to Preston, probably trying to figure out how serious he was. His gaze shifted to Ty, and his face hardened. "Yeah, sure I am," he replied, taking Hope's hand. "Let's do it too."

Jamie grabbed Josephine's hand and waved his fruit cocktail as if it were champagne. "Lay the marriage thing on us all, Swami!" he yelled.

"Are you insane?" Jo said, jerking her hand away. "I've known you, like, five minutes. If I married anybody on a whim, it'd be my radical friend Floyd. He's really sexy."

Jamie looked so crestfallen that Jo relented and retrieved his hand.

“Now don’t be hurt. Instant marriage just isn’t for everybody. That doesn’t mean we can’t get to know each other before we leave here.”

As the swami beamed at the group, these Scottish wedding bells were sounding more and more real to Theda. Still, she objected to part of the plan. “Guys, this can’t be just about the draft. I’ve heard of family hardship deferments, but none of us are close to having kids. At least, I’m not.”

“Trust me, honey. This isn’t about the draft.” Clive gave her a long, penetrating look. “It’s about love.”

Preston and Neal managed not to groan at that, while Candy and Hope exchanged enraptured glances. Theda remembered that the two girls had known each other since elementary school. Maybe way back then, they’d fantasized about being each other’s bridesmaids someday.

Theda lowered her voice and said to Clive, “I know you’re sincere, but what’ll I tell my parents? And how legal would it be?”

“I don’t know if Flanny’s been formally excommunicated,” he replied, “but even so, his wedding services must be for real. Don’t worry, love. If we have any doubts about it later, we can always do it over.”

Theda decided a wedding, even a symbolic one, would be a nice parting gift from the swami, who had treated them with such loving hospitality. It might have crossed her mind that if things went sour, she could challenge the legality of it. But once the townspeople in the dining room embraced the marriage plans, that idea fled. One of them happened to be a superintendent registrar, and he explained the steps involved in getting licenses. Since they already had the required fifteen-day residency, they could go into Lark the next day and do the administrative stuff. After another twenty-four-hour wait, the ceremonies would follow.



Swami Flanny urged the happy couples to telephone their families from Lark and break the news. Theda got her father on the phone and explained what was going on. His immediate reaction was silence.

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“We’re getting licenses, so it’s serious,” Theda said. “Dad, I’d like your blessing to marry Clive. I love him.”

“What’s the rush?” he asked. “Are you pregnant?”

“God, no,” Theda exclaimed. “Nothing like that. We just feel it’s a perfect opportunity to ... to affirm our love, before we head home and prepare to go soon afterward, we think, to California. We’ve got big plans for the band.”

“Just as I feared,” he said, “that swami of yours has you snowed with all this ‘peace and love’ crap. I’d like a chance to talk to him, face-to-face.”

“Why?” Theda asked. She gripped the phone harder, trying to keep her voice steady. “I’ve told you before what a good, holy man he is. Besides, if I know you, you’ve already made inquiries about him.”

“And I repeat: he must have damned powerful connections in the local government over there. How else could a so-called holy man acquire so much real estate and a virtual business monopoly in the area?” He paused, probably to give her time to consider his words, Theda thought. Then he resumed. “You’re not thinking clearly, Theda. The man sounds like a charlatan, if not a crook. What’s happened to your good sense? Your sister would never pull anything like this.”

“Flanny is Clive’s cousin, Dad. You can talk to the O’Dell family if you want to get the lowdown on our swami. Maybe they’ll fill you in about the family members they’ve lost to war, including Clive’s dad. It’s no wonder they have a pacifist streak.”

That seemed to stump her dad for a moment.

“Besides,” Theda continued, feeling the sweat pop out on her brow, “do I really sound brainwashed to you? I know perfectly well what I’m doing. From now on, I’d like to travel with the band as a wife, not a groupie.”

“Just hold off on this marriage until I get there,” he ordered.

“Don’t come, Dad,” she said. “There isn’t time. And it won’t change my mind.” But he had hung up.



During the next few days, Theda and Clive made passionate love and got in tune with what he called their destiny. "You're right about Hollywood, love," he declared. "It's meant to be. Sooner or later, you and I must fulfill our destiny as actors."

Theda was on tenterhooks waiting for her dad to blow in and ruin everything. She hoped he would arrive too late for the ceremony, so her marriage would be a *fait accompli*. No more than three days after she'd called home, she came back from her afternoon fruit-picking shift to find Flanny entertaining her sister Dora, the sensible law student, in his main reception room.

Oh, God, she thought, *this won't go well*. To her surprise, Dora jumped up and kissed her. She looked tired and jet-lagged but somehow serene.

"Your swami is an amazing man," Dora told Theda.

"And your sister is a delight to talk to," Flanny said. "I'm so pleased she chose to visit us."

"Mom and Dad were too upset to come, Theda," Dora said. "They know they can't stop you from getting married, but they sent me to make sure you're all right."

Theda was a little shocked that her dad hadn't come, after acting so panicky on the phone. Had he written her off? "Well?" she said. "Do I look like I'm in my right mind?"

Dora stood back and sized her up. "I must say," she said, "you look happy and healthy."

Flanny beamed as he watched them. Their sisterly bond shone through in spite of their obvious differences. Theda had never known her sister to be so easily charmed by anyone. Had she already become seduced by Flanny's wealth and power?



When Theda became Mrs. Clive O'Dell on a foggy, autumn-like evening in those northern hills, Dora was at her side. They'd spent long hours talking things out. Dora had cross-examined Clive without ruffling his newfound confidence.

"I hope you know what you're doing," she had warned Theda. "Dad

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thinks this place is a cult. I guess I can reassure him about that. But you defied him, Theda. He might not feel like helping you or the band again ... until he gets over it.”

“That’s fine with me,” Theda had said, bristling. “You’ll fall in love yourself someday, Dora. Then maybe you’ll understand.”

“It’s not that I don’t understand,” Dora had shot back. “It’s that you seem to be staking everything on the band making it big.”

“They’re good enough to make it happen, but I’m not staking everything on it. I’m going to finish college.”

“You better get back on Dad’s good side if you expect him to pay for it.”

Clive and Theda were the last of three couples to stand before the swami, receiving a variation of his nuptial blessing. “Your love must not only endure but grow throughout life,” he told them. “It’s your job, Clive, to immerse yourself in Theda’s love every day. Only that will protect you from the family curse of militarism, which has already cost us so dearly.”

Jamie was best man, and Jo was ring bearer for all three couples. The rings were homemade ornaments that women in the congregation had fashioned from imitation gold, with tiny ruby hearts on top. While Theda was admiring hers, she saw Hope regard hers with a subtle little sneer—already plotting to replace it with a diamond, no doubt.

After the ceremonies, Swami Flanny’s sermon continued, taking on a warning tone. “There are turbulent waters ahead,” he said, “but believing as I do in the absolute power of love, I’m not afraid to send these young couples out into the world. Marital love, blessed by God, is a safe haven.”

When they emerged from the chapel, Ty was nowhere to be found. He had left a message with some local people who had shared the back pew with him at the beginning of the service. “He says to tell ye his intention is to find his own way to Los Angeles,” Jock said, his usual cheerful face clouded. “He says maybe he’ll see ye again, but maybe not ... and if not, then farewell.”

The group was struck dumb. Finally, Neal exclaimed, “He’s a thief! He’s gonna snatch his tapes from Apple and head west to get them

produced, without us. Those are our tapes too, goddamn it. We gotta stop him.”

“This is all your fault, Hope,” Theda couldn’t resist saying.

“What do you mean, my fault?” she screeched.

“You toyed with Ty’s affections and then drove him away. Now what are we gonna do?”

“Don’t worry,” Preston said. “We’ll catch up with him, if not in London, then in California.”

“Sounds like you might have grounds for a lawsuit against Leahy.” Theda’s sister, gunning to be a hotshot lawyer like their father someday, was already licking her chops.

“In the meantime,” Theda said, “where’s the money coming from to get us to California? I don’t want to ask Dad right now, although maybe if we come up with a business plan he approves of—”

“Fuck the business plan,” Jo said. “I’m telling you, if we can just get out there, my buddy Floyd’s got all the wealth and connections we’ll ever need.”

“Sounds dubious to me,” Dora said. “I predict you’ll be hitting up Dad again, unless the swami is willing to help.”

“Nah, we’ve pretty much blown off the swami,” Neal said, glaring at Preston.



Dora was anxious to return to her summer job at her father’s law firm, so she left for home immediately, catching a ride to the nearest train station. The rest of the group spent a last evening at the compound.

If Flanny thought they’d disrespected him with their abrupt departure plans, he didn’t show it. They sat down to the usual hearty vegetarian dinner, during which he counseled them not to pursue Ty in anger. “He came to me with a fragile ego, and it’s been bruised yet again. I believe he has not only a poet’s soul but also a good heart. He would never steal what’s yours unless he came under an evil influence. Remember that when you see him again. Embrace him as a brother.”

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They took Flanny's advice to stop raging against Ty, at least for now. He had nothing to say about their precarious finances, other than "God will provide."

The next morning, they gathered at the breakfast table for one last bracing bowl of porridge and one final grace. Theda choked a little as she swallowed, wondering what lay ahead. She composed herself as the swami again called on God to protect them as they headed "into the teeth of whatever storms are gathering beyond the western horizon." After the meal, they prepared to depart as they had arrived, in Jock's truck. The swami gave each of them a kiss on the cheek and presented each with a copy of his hymnal.

When he got to Jo, she flinched. For a moment Theda thought she was going to snub him, but instead she grabbed him in a long bear hug. "Funny," she said. "I'm the one who didn't believe in you. And now I'm suddenly scared to leave you."

"It's time, Josephine," Flanny said. "You know that. My door will always be open should you wish to return." Theda took heart from those words as well.

During the drive to the train station, Jo opened her hymnal. "What're we supposed to do with these?" she asked. "Have a sing-along while we're on the road?" Just then, something fell out of her book. "Jesus Christ," she said, picking up a rectangular piece of paper. "It's a hundred-pound note. If God is always this good, I might have to rethink my atheism."

Theda looked inside her book, as did all the others, and they all found themselves similarly blessed.

"Praise God!" Clive said.

"That's so like our swami," Jock said. "No one ever leaves him empty-handed. He's given ye enough to begin a new life. Mind, his faith in ye is his greatest gift."

"It's a start," Preston said, "enough to get us halfway there, maybe. Jo, would what's-his-name ... Pretty Boy Floyd ... give you another loan if you contacted him, like right away?"

"I don't know about Floyd sending us bread right now," Jo said. "His teaching gig hasn't started yet, and it's not like his allowance from

his parents is unlimited. We might have to wait until he actually meets you guys.”

“I thought you said he was plugged into the West Coast underground,” Preston said. “I hear whenever those radicals need money, they just rob a bank.”

As Jo laughed, Theda’s nervousness returned. *My God*, she thought, *is that a joke or not? What are we getting ourselves into now? No wonder Jo hung onto Flanny before we left. Maybe, on second thought, none of us should’ve left.*



When the group returned to London, they checked back into four rooms at Leicester Towers. At dinner, they agreed that their main order of business in London was to return to Apple and try to discover whether Ty had been there to retrieve his tapes. Despite Flanny’s admonition, Theda felt her anger at Leahy reviving.

The next morning, seven of them, repeating their journey of two months before, got on a double-decker bus that took them close to Savile Row. Jo stayed behind, saying she was tired and wanted to sleep in.

As before, the Apple lobby had a dead feeling when they entered it. They confronted the same uniformed security guard. “So, you and your lot are back again,” he said to Preston.

“Sure are. We’re looking for Ty Leahy. You seen him, by any chance?”

“Sorry, mate.” The guard sounded triumphant. “He’s been here and gone. You missed him.”

Neal gave the guard a long stare. “Don’t bullshit us,” he said. The man stared back, and Neal added, “I’ll bet Leahy’s in the studio right now.”

“Is he, then?”

They found themselves in a standoff. Then Preston said, “I believe you, man. But would you please do us one favor? Let us into the press office for just a second. We need to contact Ty’s manager, like we did the last time we were here. You’ve still got the number, right, Jamie? We have legitimate business with him.”

“Sorry, mate,” the guard repeated, “but you’ve no business here.

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This isn't the circus it used to be. You'll have to make that call on your own shilling."



Since they did have a few "shillings," thanks to Flanny, they went back to the hotel and bribed the clerk at the front desk to allow them to place the long-distance call from there. When Jamie got through to Mr. Givhans, Theda's hopes rose.

Jamie asked enough questions to deduce that Ty was indeed expected to meet with Givhans in Los Angeles. After that, he hit a stone wall. He could not jog the manager's memory about an earlier proposal that AMO accompany Ty to California. Nor could Jamie get Givhans to discuss whether Ty was in possession of the *Ty Leahy II* tapes, much less concede that some of that material belonged to AMO.

Neal ordered, "Give me the damned phone. I ain't afraid to call him and Leahy out for the thieves they are."

He tried to grab the phone, but Hope pulled his arm back. "No, honey," she implored. "You're too mad. Let me try to reach out to Ty."

Hope took the phone and said in a trembling voice, "Mr. Givhans? This is Hope Witmer ... McNab. I'm a good friend of Ty's." Her face looked washed out and sweaty through her makeup.

"What're you gonna tell him?" Neal spat. "That you wish you'd married Ty instead of me?"

Hope glared at her husband as she said, "I'd like to leave Ty a message. Tell him we're not chasing him. We wish him all the best in LA. And we *will* be seeing him out there before too long, and we'll be on our way up too ... Yeah, that's all. Bye."

She hung up the phone and faced Neal. "So what're you saying?" she demanded. "You think I lied about maybe being pregnant just so you'd marry me?"

"I didn't say that." Neal's face suddenly looked as pale and drained as hers.

"Because if that's what you really think," Hope continued, "go ahead and divorce me. I won't stop you."

“So you can rush out to LA and be with Leahy, right?”

Hope jumped back as if Neal had slapped her. Then she burst into tears and fell into his arms. “You’re the one I love,” she said, sobbing, “but don’t you understand? We’ve gotta make up with Ty, or we won’t have anything going for us when we get to California.”

Theda guessed those two finally understood each other because they kissed passionately. They must have made a silent pact to go on using Ty Leahy for their own purposes if they possibly could. Feeling a surge of sympathy for Ty, she stared at the pair with disgust. Just like that, they’d forgotten everything the swami had taught them. Their behavior made Theda realize that her life as a musician and the wife of a musician had to be more than a quest for fame and fortune. She knew now that a rock and roll band, in this day and age, should aspire to save the world.

Chapter 5

Candy

With the overseas trip about to end, Candy felt at loose ends. She didn't tell anybody, but she still regretted blowing off the university tour, despite all the great things they'd accomplished off on their own. The prospect of flunking that course gave her an insecure feeling. There were times when she wished she and Preston could go home together, just the two of them, and be traditional college sweethearts.

After the awkward phone conversation with Ty Leahy's manager in Los Angeles, the group tried to get its bearings in the hotel lobby. Jamie figured they could just about afford cab fare to Heathrow and airline tickets to DC. He proposed they pack up and check out of the hotel now, go straight to the airport, and wait for the next available flight.

The front desk clerk suddenly interrupted them, having just remembered that there was a letter for Candy. She took it with a sigh, expecting another round of admonitions from her mother. Then she saw there was no postage on the envelope, or anything except her name.

"Oh, God," she said, "that's Jo's handwriting. She must have split."

For a moment, everyone panicked. Theda said, "I was suspicious when she didn't want to go to Apple with us."

“She’s an idiot,” Hope said, “if she thinks she’s gonna go Hollywood on her own. It’s not like she’s talented or pretty.”

“But she’s the one with the rich California connection,” Neal pointed out.

At Preston’s bidding, Candy read Jo’s letter aloud:

“Dearest Candy, I’m writing to you since you’re the only one in the group who understands my impulsive nature. So I’m hoping you’ll be able to explain to the others how a wild, atheistic flower child like me might feel moved to run away and hide in a religious commune. That’s right, I’m returning to Swami Flanny. If you’re shocked at this, well, so am I. Despite my skepticism about the swami, I’m also intrigued. I feel a big dose of his kindness is just what I need right now.

“He told me I’d know when it was time to return. Who knew it would be the day after I left?

“I can’t say how long this spiritual phase will last. It could be for a day, or it could be more or less forever. I share your curiosity, Candy, about those mysterious fugitives from military justice whom Flanny protected, according to legend. That’s because I have the soul of a fugitive myself. I’ve always been on the lam from conventional life, whether it’s school, parents, church, nine-to-five jobs, whatever.

“Floyd’s address is below. I hope you’ll still go and see him as planned, and I’ll write him to expect you. But a word of warning: Floyd’s a man of contradictions. No question he’s a really good-hearted, generous guy; did I mention he comes from a wealthy family? Like all rich folks, he knows how to game the system. I think his parents bought him some kind of draft-deferred spot in the Army Reserves. Floyd may look like just another privileged leftist trying to use his connections to promote great causes like rock music. But if things

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blow up in California, he might turn out to be a warrior.
Just a feeling I have. Be careful.

“Until we meet again, love ya all. Jo.”

Candy refolded the letter, and they all absorbed Jo’s message in silence. Even Preston seemed stumped.

Finally, Jamie said, “This makes it more crucial to raise some quick money, in case of emergencies. I could go right now and—”

“Go,” Preston ordered, “now.”

Jamie returned to his room to retrieve his backpack and then exited the hotel. The rest of the group waited in the lobby.

“Where’s he going?” Candy asked Preston.

“My guess would be the St. James Club,” Preston said. “What a slick bastard. He must still be holding some of the stash he bought from the bartender there. He’ll resell it and make us some nice pocket change.”

“You think Jamie was holding that stuff the whole time we were at the commune?” Candy asked.

“If so, it was an abuse of Flanny’s hospitality,” Clive said, his voice rising. “We were supposed to be totally clean there.”

“Funny, I was sure we used up our stash before we got to Scotland,” Neal said. “Is it possible Jamie bought some reinforcements there?”

“It’s not possible,” Clive snapped at Neal. “Nobody in Flanny’s congregation uses.”

“Sure, man. If you say so.”

Candy thought maybe Neal was on to something. The group was shorter on cash than they should have been after spending nearly two months as nonpaying guests of a rich man. But Preston ordered Neal to “knock it off,” and he did.

Jamie returned from his mission with a flushed face but a smug smile, and they all congratulated him. Candy, for one, decided she would look back on the Scottish interlude as a physically and spiritually cleansing period in the band’s history.



They headed home with fuller backpacks than they had carried overseas, thanks to the gifts of clothing, jewelry, and books they'd received at the commune. All three girls wore the flower-patterned wedding gowns that Flanny's seamstresses had made for them. Feeling suddenly prosperous, Preston stopped the cab on the way to the airport and slipped into a music store. He bought the twelve-string Rickenbacker guitar and Gibson amplifier he had long coveted and arranged for the new equipment to be shipped home.

Flying west across the Atlantic was completely different from flying east. Stuck in what seemed like an endless day and unable to rest, Candy spent most of her time wondering how Preston and her mom would get along.

"So she was actually cordial to you when we phoned her from Lark?" she asked Preston for about the fifth time.

"I'm telling you, she was cool," Preston said, "although maybe that's because she was in shock, especially about our plans for California. Wanted to know if the marriage was legal. I told her the swami's credentials are solid enough for us."

He took her hand and squeezed it. "Don't worry, Candy," he said. "We've given her enough time to get used to the idea before we face her. And in the meantime, maybe we'll come up with a better explanation than just youthful impulsiveness."

Candy wondered why they needed a better explanation. Wasn't it enough that they loved each other? "How will *your* family take it?" she asked.

"I don't give a shit how they take it," Preston said. "My dad never asked my approval before he remarried, when my mom was barely cold."

"I'd still like them to like me," Candy said, "at least while we're staying at their place."

"If you care, go for it. We'll only be there a day or two, tops."



As soon as the plane landed at Dulles Airport, they all called home. After visiting the exchange desk, they split what was left of Jamie's

stash cash, about fifty dollars, and used it to take cabs to their various destinations.

When Preston and Candy arrived at the Andrews' comfortable two-story brick house, Preston shook hands with his father and gave his stepmother a brief, awkward hello. They were nice enough, although hardly effusive, when Candy was introduced to them. "You'll have to tell us all about your faraway adventures," Mrs. Andrews said.

Candy vowed to use this brief visit to get to the source of Preston's bitterness. She knew that Mr. Andrews was a fairly high-up bureaucrat in the federal government. He was also a weekend musician who played in a dance band that specialized in popular songs of the 1930s and '40s. He had met Preston's stepmother at a nightclub where his band was entertaining a middle-aged to elderly crowd and where she was a young waitress raking in tips. They had been married six years and had a five-year-old daughter.

During dinner that night, Preston cut through the small talk quickly. "I better tell you folks right away, this is the only meal we'll be having here. Sorry, but we'll be busy the rest of the week. We gotta check out some old friends at College Park and rehearse for upcoming gigs. Plus, we gotta see Candy's family. We're leaving for California next week."

"Have it your way," Mr. Andrews said with a shrug.

"Just like you to eat and run," Mrs. Andrews said, not quite hiding her annoyance. She turned her attention to her daughter, who was fussing at the table. She didn't make much headway, but Preston stepped in and joked the child out of her mood; they seemed to share a secret language.

Preston's bond with his little sister gave Candy a warm feeling, but his contempt for the rest of the family was troubling. Later, when they were alone in his bedroom, she said, "You don't give your folks much of a chance. What's so terrible about them?"

"A middle-aged man with a young slut for a wife is always pathetic."

That was all he would say. The next morning, Candy examined a picture of his mother in a stand-up frame on the dresser. Compared to his supposedly wicked stepmother, she looked rather plain. Had there been an affair going on while she was still alive? Preston never

made that accusation, but he simmered the whole time they were in his father's house.



The next night, it was Preston's turn to meet Candy's mother and brother over dinner. Preston turned on the charm, while her mom strove to be polite. Bill Junior, still in high school, asked numerous questions about the band. "When you write songs, do you get the music first or the words?" he asked.

"Usually the music," Preston said. "That's one reason why I'm so glad to have Candy around. She's really poetic and can help me a lot with lyrics."

"So what's your immediate goal?" Bill asked. "To make an album?"

"That'd be great," Preston said, grinning, "but first things first. My most immediate goal is to stop being an itinerant band and establish a base somewhere—to stop borrowing other people's instruments and play only our own."

"What's your favorite kind of guitar?" Bill asked. That led to a technical discussion about various models, during which Preston gloated over his newly acquired Rickenbacker.

While fielding Bill's questions, Preston kept trying to impress on Candy's mom that their marriage would be a mutually creative partnership. "Maybe so," her mom responded, "but Candy's father and I always wanted her to get a college education."

"I want that too, Mom," Candy said. "Since we already have a contact at UCLA, it makes sense to head there next. I was thinking once we get a foothold, I could enroll for the winter term."

"So could I," Preston said. "For me it's about avoiding the draft, but Candy is studious. She can study for her degree or do anything else she wants to. AMO will get enough paying gigs to help her through."

"Wow, UCLA," Bill Junior said. "That's where I'd really like to go to school. Or maybe Berkeley. Those are the real happening universities."

Candy's mother looked ready to cry at the idea. "You know I can't afford to send you out of state," she reminded him.

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“Just wait until AMO hits it big, Mrs. Collins,” Preston declared. “I’ll have enough money to take care of everything and everybody. You won’t even have to wait for letters from us to know what we’re up to. We’ll be in the news.”

His new mother-in-law couldn’t stop herself from groaning.



Jamie telephoned to say he had reserved rehearsal space at College Park. The fall semester at Maryland didn’t start until mid-September, so the group could have the space to itself for at least a week. All seven of them met there to rehearse and make plans.

Candy asked Hope and Theda how they were dealing with their families. “My stepfather’s been real snippy,” Hope said, tossing back her long hair. “Big surprise. I know he thinks there’s not a snowball’s chance in hell I can stay married. The dumbass.”

“I was a little concerned when my parents blew off the wedding,” Theda said, “especially after Dad’s ranting and raving on the phone. Dora’s been fairly supportive, though. My family still expects me to graduate from college with honors and go on to a fabulous career in the arts. No pressure, right?”

They all laughed nervously. Theda added, “I do think Dad will come around if the band keeps on taking his advice.”

“And what *is* his advice?” Candy asked.

“For starters, he’s determined to get in touch with Ty Leahy or his manager before we leave for California. He insists they should at least acknowledge our involvement with *Ty Leahy II*.”

“We’re on it,” Jamie confirmed. “I’ve been consulting with your father, Theda. I explained exactly what Mr. Givhans promised us during that first phone call from London ... even though he sort of denied it the second time.”

The group spent its time in Maryland crashing in a half-empty dorm at College Park. Still in the throes of marital bliss, the guys encouraged the girls to participate in rehearsals. Theda played bass guitar on several songs, and Hope reprised the tribute to “Celia” that Ty

Leahy had coaxed out of her in the studio at Apple. Preston prompted Candy to sing the last verse of “The Permanence of War” as she had done in Newcastle and gave the evil eye to anyone who cringed at the sound of her voice. “That’s her creation, and don’t you forget it,” he snapped.

After Candy had made it through the verse, Preston lectured his troops. “That’s part of what makes us special. We include our women in the creative process. Most bands treat women like handmaidens ... or worse. But feminism is the coming thing.”

The girls waited to see how the other guys would react to this piece of wisdom. Clive nodded and beamed at his wife, while Neal smirked at his.



They were able to set off for the West Coast with bravado because Theda’s dad had agreed to subsidize their first two weeks. He was paying for their plane tickets and hotel accommodations in Los Angeles. More importantly, he had spoken with Mr. Givhans about a possible meeting with the band to discuss *Ty Leahy II*, although Ty’s whereabouts remained a mystery. Once they arrived out there, they’d try to confirm that appointment and make their case for being put on salary to polish their previous work and help finish the album. As soon as possible, AMO would supplement that with paying gigs at and around UCLA.

“We’re on a short leash this time, guys,” Theda informed everyone before they left. “It was all I could do to convince my parents I wasn’t brainwashed in Scotland. My dad is ordering us to stay out of trouble in California.”

“Define trouble,” Preston said.

“No political shit, I guess. He’d rather we didn’t become peace activists ... unless, of course, we can make it pay.”

Clive nodded in agreement, although he visibly winced at Theda’s language.



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They left Dulles Airport at noon on a bright mid-September day. “I like that we’re saving three hours of daylight by going west this time,” Preston told Candy, sounding amazingly businesslike.

During the flight, he frowned on Neal’s and Hope’s attempts to convince a stewardess they were old enough to order drinks. “Why don’t you can the partying until you’ve actually accomplished something?” he snapped. He and Candy drank nothing but coffee before, during, and after lunch, while he bounced new ideas for lyrics off her.

After landing at smog-surrounded Los Angeles International Airport around two o’clock local time, they gathered in the lounge. Candy, Preston, and Jamie announced their plan to grab the first taxi available, proceed straight to the hotel, and get to work reestablishing their connection with Willie Givhans. As Clive and Theda seconded this plan, Neal and Hope stumbled toward the group, drunk as skunks, especially Hope.

“Let’s go to Disneyland first,” she said, giggling.

“Fuck Disneyland,” Preston said. “We ain’t here to party. We’re here to work like dogs until we get somewhere.”

Hope tossed her blond head and gave Preston an insolent look. He glared back, and her lips began to tremble. She burst into tears, the last thing Candy expected. Her mascara started running down her cheeks.

“Go ahead, Hope,” Neal said in a mean drunk’s voice. “Tell them about your fascinating conversation with Ty Leahy yesterday.”

“I didn’t mean to do anything wrong,” Hope protested, forcing out the words between sobs. “I just thought I owed Ty an apology for what went down between us in the UK. So I called Mr. Givhans’s office and asked how I could get in touch with him. Yesterday, Ty finally called me back.”

“So? What’d he say?” Preston asked.

They had to wait for Hope to collect herself. She finally choked out the words. “He said he never wanted to cross paths with me, or any of us, again.”

“That’s bullshit,” Preston said. “If he thinks he can hold our work hostage ...”

“He said he’d shelve the album rather than work with us again.”

"I'll get my dad on it," Theda said. "He'll sue Leahy's ass."

"Too complicated," Neal said. "Here's an easier plan. Hope, why don't you call Leahy again and offer to screw him for a record deal? Bribe him with your gorgeous body."

Hope turned on Neal with her long, manicured nails. Before anyone could stop her, she'd reached out and scratched his face, using her fingers like a cat's claws. Neal yelped as he pushed her away from him, so hard that she fell to the floor. He stood over her, feeling his scratched and bleeding face.

"Nice going, Hope," he snapped. "My face will look great at our next gig."

Hope lay in the fetal position, sobbing, until Theda helped her up. Jamie pulled out a handkerchief for Neal to blot his wounds.

Candy hardly cared if those two killed each other. Nor was she too concerned about losing the Leahy connection. She wouldn't have had much of a role in *Ty Leahy II* anyway. But this made it imperative to contact Jo's radical friend Floyd right away. Jo had assured them he'd be generous with his help.

But what if he turned out to be crazier than she was?

Hope

Hope meant it when she said they should go to Disneyland as soon as they landed. "Why not keep our Hollywood fantasies alive a while longer?" she said. Instead, everybody turned on her when they found out she'd argued with Ty on the phone before leaving Maryland. They insinuated she'd blown the band's future all by herself.

"At least I found out where we stand," Hope argued between sobs. "Can the rest of you say that? Who else has done anything to get us started here? From what I hear, even Theda's dad couldn't get through to Mr. Givhans a second time." She stuck her chin out. "At least I got my call returned."

That was true, even if the memory of it made her cringe. The others probably thought Ty had screamed obscenities in her ear and then hung up on her. She wished he had done that, instead of asking

in a pitiful voice, “Why’d you have to marry Neal? He doesn’t love you like I do.”

“Neal does love me,” Hope had insisted, but Ty’s words had shaken her. Had she thrown away the true love of her life? “It just seemed like the right thing to do at the time.”

“I’m sure it did. He’s such an irresistible stud when he delivers those romantic ballads. Me, I’m just a depressive strummer. I never stood a chance, did I?”

Hope didn’t know what to say, other than “Forgive me.” Then she added, “Please don’t take it out on the band.”

That was a mistake. He shot back, “Well, here’s somethin’ you’ll need to forgive *me* for. Tell your hubby and his friends there’s not a chance in hell I’ll collaborate with them on *Ty Leahy II* or anythin’ else. I’ll burn the tapes first.” Then he really did slam down the phone.

Afterward, Hope described the call to Neal in all its gory detail, only to hear her newlywed husband advise her to seduce the guy.

“You better be joking,” Hope said.

“Think creatively, Hope. We might need to suck up to Leahy any way we can to save the project.”

Hope suspected Neal was teasing her, but it wasn’t too damned funny. He still hadn’t taken it back before they got on the plane to California. Hope guessed that was the main reason they got drunk on the plane—so they wouldn’t have to talk.

All hell broke loose at the airport in Los Angeles, when the group realized their chance at an instant record deal was kaput and when Neal repeated his vulgar suggestion. For a moment, the fight between Hope and Neal got physical. Once the dust settled, all anyone could do was flag down taxis, get to the hotel, and try to regroup. The seven of them agreed to meet for dinner that night to hash things out.

Once Hope found herself alone with Neal in their room, he finally apologized. She treated his scratches with soap and water and returned the apology.

“I was an asshole to say what I did,” he admitted, pulling her onto his lap. “But Leahy’s an asshole too. The truth is, he’s jealous of us ...

not only of you and me but also the band. He knows we're good enough to make it without him. And we will."

Hope believed him. Suddenly ecstatic to be this close to Hollywood, they made passionate love.



At dinner, martini in hand, Preston asked Theda, "What do you think your dad would advise about maybe suing Givhans and Leahy for stealing our music?"

Everyone waited for Theda to express her semi-expert opinion. She sipped red wine and stroked her chin thoughtfully before answering. "My sister's the one who'd be gung ho about that, being a legal novice. Dad would be a lot more practical. He'd point out we don't have an actual contract with Givhans and Leahy, and they can sit on the album forever if they want to."

"We need to find some way to talk to them," Hope said. Since she was drinking only water tonight, owing to a mean hangover, she struck a reasonable tone. "We can appeal to their sense of fairness. I know I hurt Ty pretty badly, but he won't stay mad forever."

"Fairness, my ass," Neal said, setting his beer glass down hard. "How can we appeal to what they don't have?"

Everyone jumped at the anger in his voice. Hope reminded him, "Honey, you said yourself AMO doesn't really need Ty Leahy's or anybody else's help."

"True enough," Preston said, "but I still say—"

"We need to contact Jo's friend, Floyd Worth," Candy said, cutting him off. "Jo promised she'd write him, and he'd be expecting us. He'll at least show us around UCLA."

Candy interrupting her lord and master! thought Hope. *What are we coming to? It's gotta be that martini going to her innocent little head.*

Preston looked put out, but his wife was so hopped up about this Floyd guy, she didn't notice. "Remember, he's an instructor at the university," she continued. "According to Jo, he has connections everywhere, including the local music scene."

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“Connections?” Hope said. “If he’s anything like your friend Jo, his main connections are left-wing radicals. Do we really need to get involved in that?”

“Only if it helps our own cause,” Preston said.



For the next two weeks, the group tried to establish tentative professional connections on the West Coast but also found time to spend Mr. Brooks’s money on touristy diversions. They went to Grauman’s Chinese Theatre, the Hollywood Bowl, and the Farmers Market. They took pictures of themselves walking down Sunset Strip and Rodeo Drive. The guys wanted to see where Elvis lived, so they took a taxi to his house in Holmby Hills and had their cameras out until the guards on duty threatened to take them away. Once again, Hope’s suggestion of a thirty-mile side trip to Disneyland was shot down. Too frivolous, Preston said.

They checked out a seedy but supposedly artistic neighborhood called Venice, where drug deals were going down on the street corners. Jamie took advantage of a handy bargain, and they all got pleasantly high, although Hope shivered at the thought of ending up in this part of town. She vowed then and there that someday she’d be Elvis’s neighbor, not a drug dealer’s.

In the evenings, everyone jawed at the dinner table. Sometimes the girls locked horns and shouted over the guys. One night, during the second week of their stay, they got particularly loud. Theda proclaimed, “I doubt if suing Leahy would work. Maybe we could provoke him into suing us by playing some of the *Ty Leahy II* songs in public.”

“I can’t believe he’d sue us,” Hope said. “If only I could get him to talk to me ...”

“Face it, Hope. That’s not gonna happen,” Candy said, still trying out her newly assertive voice. “Besides, it won’t be necessary. Preston and I finally got through to Jo’s friend Floyd today. He’s offered to find us places to live and look into paying gigs for AMO on or around the campus.”

“To hell with the campus,” Hope said. “I don’t want to fake being a college student again. Studying is your thing, Candy, not mine. You might as well have stayed at the University of Maryland.”

“She left Maryland to follow Preston,” Theda pointed out, her apple cheeks glowing. “She’s still doing that, while incidentally pursuing a career as a girl reporter.”

Candy, who couldn’t stand to be teased, insisted, “I’m not trying to write articles at the moment. Right now my main thing is supporting the band.”

“Get real,” Hope said. “We girls aren’t just about following the band. We’re also into having our own careers. Right?”

“Of course,” Candy said, “if a big story came along—”

“It won’t just come along,” Theda said. “You’re gonna have to find a hot topic to write about—like maybe this Floyd character.”

“We contacted Floyd for practical reasons,” Candy protested. “I didn’t have an ulterior motive.”

“That’s what scares me,” Hope said. “God, we’re putting our future in the hands of some radical. Doesn’t anybody here even question that?”

Hope looked toward the guys, but they were too busy talking up their own coming stardom to even notice.



Thanks to everyone in the group falling under the spell of a fast-talking, charming university instructor, they plunged into poverty. At least that’s what it felt like to Hope when “Pretty Boy Floyd,” as Preston continued to call him, suggested they move into a seedy apartment building full of cash-poor students, just off campus. Floyd did lend them money for rent, some secondhand furniture, and an electric piano and drum set for the band. Preston declared he was all set once his dad shipped him the fancy new guitar and amp he’d bought in England.

If Floyd hadn’t been so damned sexy, Hope thought, she’d never have gone along with this setup. He had a way of looking at the girls with a half-smile and an intensity in his blue eyes that made each one feel appreciated, at least until he moved on to the next girl. He was tall

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and lanky, a former track star at both UCLA and Maryland who still ran several miles every day for exercise. He had flowing golden-brown hair and a scruffy beard when he wasn't in "uniform," fulfilling the cushy Army Reserves duty that his connections had bought him. Most of the time he looked more like a student than a teacher, but a lot of the younger faculty members were like that.

All in all, there was a mysterious air about him that intrigued Hope and disturbed her at the same time. He avoided revealing much about himself.



The three couples had apartments on the fifth floor, and Jamie crashed downstairs in the basement space where Floyd was setting up a recording studio. It was full of all kinds of electronic equipment he'd rigged up himself. The plan was for AMO to make demos there and send them out to record companies.

Hope asked Floyd straight out, "Why would a college teacher like you want to prop up a band you just met?"

He looked her in the eye and grinned. "I'm the black sheep of a filthy rich family," he said. "I gotta spend my allowance somewhere."

"If you're really a black sheep," Hope said, "you don't get along with your parents so great, right? Yet they give you loads of money, and you take it?"

"Sure, babe." He smoothed back his hair and stroked his beard. "It can be a mutually beneficial arrangement."

Floyd told them he wasn't involved in the family vineyards up north, which were the basis of the Worth fortune. His main interest was the estate about fifty miles from Los Angeles, consisting of a mansion on a two-hundred-acre plot. The university leased that property each spring to put on a music festival. The show always featured a combination of well-known and not-so-well-known acts and also allowed Floyd to show off some of the fancy equipment he was helping to invent.

"So," Hope said, unable to help herself, "you got your draft status fixed so you'll never have to go to Vietnam? That doesn't seem fair."

“Fair or not,” Floyd said, “there aren’t many privileges money won’t buy. That’s just the way the world works. Once every two months or so, I trim my hair, shave my beard, and report for weekend duty with the Army Reserves. But I’ll never be one of them. When it comes to the armed services of the United States, I’m a bit of a mole.”



With Floyd’s help, Jamie got to work booking AMO into local clubs, fraternity houses, and private parties. Soon the band was raking in enough bread to earn its keep. The guys were gaining a following, just like they had at Maryland, but truthfully, Hope wasn’t that impressed. All they were doing was conquering another campus on the opposite coast.

The kids at UCLA dug the same songs that had been popular at Maryland, especially political ones like “Revolution for Amateurs” and “We Can Change the World” and sexy ones like “Hot Teacher in Tights.” Preston still drove kids wild with his guitar riffs. Plus, Floyd had the band experimenting with new pedals that made weird stuff sound even weirder. He showed Preston and Neal how to use a slide on a guitar string to make it almost cry like a human voice.

The group had lunch with Floyd several times a week in the dining hall closest to the Engineering and Applied Sciences building, and he advised them on how to settle in. “You should audit some classes this term and apply for full admission next term,” he said. “That way you guys can keep your student deferments. You girls too ... it’ll look more legit if you’re all students.” That would’ve been perfectly good advice, but then he added, “We have to keep on tricking the war machine until the day comes when we finally overthrow it.”

“Overthrow it?” Hope asked. “How will we do that?”

He just smiled.

Preston said, “How about if we all take one of your classes? Even if it’s rocket science, I’m sure you’ll go easy on us since we’re buddies.”

Floyd laughed. “No, you’d hate it,” he said. “I don’t wanna be the one who flunks you out.”

The guys audited bullshit classes like physical education and music

appreciation. Hope doubted they went to class more than a couple of times a week. They were too busy rehearsing and making demos in Floyd's little studio. Jamie signed up for accounting classes, which were right up his alley.

Candy became an English major like before. She started plotting to get something into the campus newspaper, the *Daily Bruin*. That was apparently too hard, so she reset her sights on an underground rag, the *Anti-Bruin*. Theda took drama and speech courses and, true to form, tried out for plays.

"I was never much of a student in the first place," Hope grumbled to Floyd, "so why should I get stuck in a classroom again?"

Floyd gave her a long, appreciative look, his eyes lingering on her cleavage. "If you plan on lighting up a runway someday, Hope," he said, "photography and art are your prerequisites." He had read her pretty well. This didn't exactly make her trust him, but she took his advice and chose some courses to help her become a fashion designer.

Every time Hope started to relax with Floyd, he shocked her with some prediction about a future revolution or practically called her a bourgeois bitch. Once when she complained about the mystery casseroles and limp salads they were served at lunch, he said, "Try living in the ghetto on a diet of nothing but bread and potatoes."

"What do *you* know about living in the ghetto?" Hope shot back. Again, he just smiled.

This new life was fun in a lot of ways. The warm weather lasted through October and November. Kids spent long afternoons sunbathing on the quads in colorful but skimpy bathing suits or driving to the beach in shiny convertibles with surfboards attached to the sides. The tans were everlasting. Radios were always blaring, not with the Beach Boys but with harder, sometimes unrecognizable rock.

Hope found herself at a party, drinking and dancing up a storm, every weekend. But Neal worried that the band was stagnating, and she had to agree.

One day at lunch, while they waited for Floyd to join them, Neal said to Preston, "I feel like we've been spinning our wheels since we got here. Going Hollywood is an illusion, you know. All we're really doing

is getting more technical with our playing, not more creative. Seems like we accomplished a lot more in Scotland when we were composing new material with just acoustic instruments.”

“What’s your point?” Preston asked. “We can’t go back to the acoustic stuff. We’ve moved on.”

“Yeah, but doesn’t it bother you how little we’ve written since then? We could at least be adapting our acoustic repertoire to the new technology.”

“I think of the Flanny songs as hymns,” Preston said, shoveling in his casserole. “That peace-and-love stuff was fine for the commune, but the energy is different here. California kids don’t want spirituals.”

“How do you know?” Clive demanded, scraping his fork against his plate. “Have we really tried tapping into their spiritual sides? I sense there’s a lot of people on this campus searching for God. Some of the Flanny songs would speak to them. What about ‘Help Me, Savior?’”

“Yeah, and there are others that have even greater potential as youth anthems,” Theda added. “‘Peace Warrior’ and ‘Child of Nature’ come to mind.”

Of course they do, thought Hope. Trust Theda to plug the songs she and Clive composed together.

“Floyd might really dig the Flanny songs,” Theda added. “They have political as well as spiritual energy.”

“So that’s what our future depends on now?” Hope said. “Whatever Pretty Boy Floyd likes?”

“He’s been feeling the pulse of things around here a lot longer than we have,” Theda said. Her cheeks were getting that rosy look again. Hope suspected she was falling for the leftist instructor. If so, how would Clive take it? Right now he looked too blissed out to notice, as if he’d never left Flanny’s commune.

“In fact,” Theda continued, “Floyd’s become the de facto manager. Admit it, the band would be floundering without him.”

Poor Jamie choked on his casserole. Apparently, Theda hadn’t even stopped to consider that Jamie was the one who’d started managing things even before there was a real band to manage.

“That’s not fair,” Candy said, taking up for her pal. “Jamie still does

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as much or more than Floyd does. Floyd may be giving AMO rehearsal space and helping them make demos, but he hardly ever comes to their gigs. He's never around at night. Hasn't anybody else noticed that?" Candy got the words out fast because Floyd was approaching now.

When he sat down, Preston grinned at Candy and said, "Why don't you ask Floyd what you're dying to ask him?"

Candy shook her head and stammered, "It's nothing."

"Oh yes, dear, it's something," Preston teased. He turned to Floyd and said, "My old lady is a budding journalist, you know. Right now she's got her sights set on you."

"You don't say." Floyd's eyes lit up.

"Among other things, she thinks you're in touch with the radical underground," Preston said, "and that you know exactly when and where the revolution will start."

"How would I know that?" Floyd turned his grin on Candy.

Somehow, Candy managed to steady her voice. "It's just that we don't see you around much in the evenings. Sometimes you say you might come to a gig, but then you don't."

"I'm an underpaid instructor," Floyd said. "I work nights on my own projects, which I hope will pay off big someday. Then I won't be so dependent on my parents, which isn't cool."

"What kind of projects?" Candy asked.

"That's my business."

"You say you're dependent right now on your parents," Candy continued, "yet you seem to have enough money for your recording experiments."

"Being a mad scientist, I do all kinds of experiments."

Candy pressed on. "Forgive me, but I'm curious. Why are you so secretive about what you're doing?"

"You're forgiven." Floyd kept up the charm. "Your curiosity about me is quite flattering, but my private life is just that."

Floyd gobbled his lunch and then excused himself and made off. Preston smiled at Candy as if he admired her spunk, but he warned her, "Be careful, sweets. Floyd's gonna do amazing shit for us. We can't afford to alienate him."

Theda

"You women need to empower yourselves within the group," Floyd told Theda during a private conversation in his music lab, about six weeks after their first meeting. "The men won't willingly surrender power, so you're gonna have to grab it. Stop being mere accessories. Put your sexuality and your talents to work."

"Wow, you're a full-blown feminist," Theda observed, "at least theoretically."

Floyd had suggested this one-on-one session during a lunchtime discussion with the group earlier that day. Clive had frowned, and the other guys had snickered, but Floyd had explained he wanted to hear Theda sing "Peace Warrior" as a solo. He thought it might become a star vehicle for her.

There was no denying that Floyd intrigued her, but that took nothing away from her love for Clive. The two of them were already forces in the theater department. They'd gotten the go-ahead for their plan to revive her antiwar Maryland hit, *The Killing Campus*, for presentation that spring. They were creative, busy, and happy. So what was the harm in flirting a little with Floyd? Theda identified with the instructor: he was also from a prominent family that considered him something of a problem child.

"How do you suggest we grab the mikes?" Theda asked him. "Preston and Neal are the powers in the group, being the main composers. They've allowed us girls to share the stage when it suits them ... like in Newcastle and a little bit in the recording studio at Apple."

"Window dressing," Floyd scoffed. He had her play bass guitar while he picked out the tune to "Peace Warrior" on a keyboard synthesizer he had rigged up. She sang the verse:

"He gathers his flock like an army,
a cavalry of man and beast.
He blesses his friends and his enemies,
and his clarion call is love and peace."

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Floyd rolled his eyes and said, “Pretty bland shit.”

“It’s one of the Flanny hymns,” Theda said indignantly. “Clive and I wrote it at the commune. It wasn’t meant to be political. Just peace-and-love fluff.”

“Then I suggest we expropriate it for our own purposes.” Floyd directed her to sing the verse again, this time against a steady beat from his synthesizer. The strong rhythm gave it rougher edges.

“I’m not sure Clive will approve,” Theda protested when she finished.

“The antiwar movement needs muscle, not fluff,” Floyd replied. “The streets are only gonna get bloodier in the coming months. Have either you or Clive ever been to a genuine protest?”

“We were at Maryland last May when Nixon invaded Cambodia and all hell broke loose,” Theda said. “Actually, Clive was with the band in New York, auditioning for a record contract. But I was on campus and participated, at least a little—not vandalizing the ROTC offices or anything, but helping to block Route 1.”

“Congratulations,” he said. “How brave of you. I was there too, as a vandalizer. That did more to satisfy my outrage than lying down in the middle of a road.”

“How’d you avoid getting arrested?” Theda asked.

“Good disguise, cover of darkness, that sort of thing.”



Floyd and Theda continued transforming songs for her benefit. Another Flanny hymn, “Child of Nature,” turned into something they renamed “Wild Woman.” He envisioned her singing that one at center stage in a swirling robe, buffeted by artificial wind, synthesized keyboard riffs, and multicolored strobe lights.

Floyd perked up even more when Theda described the potential legal hassle the band had going on with Ty Leahy and his manager, Willie Givhans. He especially wanted to know how the girls had contributed to *Ty Leahy II* in the studio. Theda explained that Hope had sung a solo called “Celia,” and all three of them had performed on

“Marching through Georgia Again.” She added, “We’ve been thinking we might needle Leahy and Givhans by performing those numbers in public.”

“I say, shove it right in their faces,” Floyd responded. “If they sue, you can countersue and keep the project grounded until they give in. Take down this Leahy-Givhans corporation that’s denying you the fruits of your own labor.”

They tried it. The two Leahy songs featuring the girls had their debut at a pre-Christmas dance. Preston introduced them to the crowd and explained the origins of the songs. They were well received, so after New Year’s, the band repeated the performance. Audiences seemed to dig seeing women in the band.

Floyd still wasn’t showing up for gigs, and he kept stonewalling Candy when she posed reporter-like questions about what he was doing with his free time. During another private talk in his music lab, he told Theda he had additional labs off-campus where he conducted “secret” experiments.

“Musical experiments?” Theda prodded. “Or something even more revolutionary?”

“It’ll all come out one of these days.” His grin made her insides flip.



The winter weeks passed, and the band heard nothing from the “Leahy-Givhans Corporation,” assuming there was such a thing. AMO got bolder, expanding its repertoire to include instrumentals that the band had played behind Leahy’s vocals on the *Ty Leahy II* studio tapes. Preston teased the crowds with introductions. “Here’s another tune we worked on in London, in our effort to prop up the poetic ramblings of a certain folk singer who for some reason no longer takes our calls,” he said one night.

Neal often added, “Just goes to show you what some artists do when they sign with corporations. They screw their old friends.”

The next time the girls joined the band onstage, AMO played the entire *Ty Leahy II* album. Theda sang lead on all the songs she

could remember, imitating Leahy's voice. As the crowd cheered, Theda pondered whether they'd committed a copyright violation or anything else her dad might call an "actionable offense." Most likely, no one would notice.



"It's true: Ty *is* planning to put out *Ty Leahy II* on the Unique Records West label," Candy reported at lunch one early spring day. "He'll be using professional studio musicians for the instrumentals."

Candy spoke breathlessly, as if she were giving everyone a big scoop, but that was all she had. She had "interviewed" a couple of receptionists in Givhans's office, who had fed her the kind of information you could get from a company press release.

"What do we have to do to get their attention?" Preston asked. "Put out our own version of the album?"

"You'll never get their attention," Floyd said, "as long as you're just a campus band. You gotta start conquering bigger arenas." He waved his hand, as if to dismiss the entire college community as represented by this noisy mass of humanity in the dining hall.

"Yeah? How?" Preston asked. "It's a lot harder getting club gigs in Tinsel Town than it was in DC. The acts we're competing with are already semi-famous at least. And those demos we're sending out to record companies ... how's that going?" He glared at Jamie.

"No bites yet," Jamie confirmed.

"Exactly. So would somebody please tell me how we're gonna break out of this small-time hell?" Preston spat out the words.

Theda realized his frustration must have been building all through the six months they'd been here. They were making a living and building a following, but they weren't getting rich or famous. The frat parties and dances AMO played at least two or three times a week earned around a hundred dollars per gig, which had to be split three ways. Added to the allowances they got from their folks, plus some free meals on Floyd's tab, it was just enough to pay their rent, party some, and smoke a little weed.

Clive and Theda exchanged a guilty look. Lately they'd gotten so wrapped up in the theater that the band had become just a job. *Call us snobbish*, Theda thought, *but our status as actors does give us a leg up on the others.*

Now Preston looked as if he might explode and blow up their lives again. Would he make the group leave California as suddenly as they'd left Scotland? His nostrils flared, and he pounded his fist on the table. He pulled off his tinted glasses, the better to give Jamie a close-up evil eye. "I thought we were gonna use our fabulous college educations to figure out a business plan for AMO," he said. "So what's happening with that?"

"I'm just the accountant." Jamie tried to glare back, but his nervousness showed. "I can only count the money we have. I can't make it appear magically."

"We'll never crack the big time here on the West Coast," Neal said. "If we went back to DC, we'd at least have one foot in places like the Cellar Door and the J Street Club."

"Remember, you guys don't have the safest draft numbers," Hope pointed out, as she did constantly. "You could lose your college deferments, unless you got back into Maryland right away."

"Not to worry," Neal said. "We can fake being students on either coast."

"This is premature talk, folks." Floyd sent his confident grin around the table. "I wouldn't leave UCLA just yet if I were you. At least stick around for the music festival the first weekend in May. I'm on the board of directors, and I foresee a bigger blowout than ever before. What if I got AMO a slot on the bill?"

"You could do that for us?" Preston replaced his glasses and regarded Floyd across the table with intense eyes.

"How do we know for sure you can get us a slot?" Neal demanded.

"I have some say in it since it's happening on my family's estate," Floyd said. "Plus, several of my Berkeley teaching buddies are also on the board. I'm sure I'll have no problem convincing them to hire my favorite unknown band."

"Yeah, Berkeley," Clive remarked with a frown. "That's where the real radicals hang out, right?"

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Floyd laughed and said, "Radical or not, my friends have solid connections. They read their poetry and essays regularly on alternative radio. Their disc jockey pals will promote the hell out of our event, relatively modest though it is. It's not like we're trying to recreate Woodstock or Altamont from a few years back."

"That's just as well," Theda said, "especially about Altamont."

"Is it true some of those weird DJs take drugs while they're on the air?" Hope asked.

"You sound kind of prissy about it," Theda said, "for someone who's been known to go to class stoned."

"Forgive me, Floyd," Candy said in her timid voice, "but I read the *Anti-Bruin's* coverage of last year's festival. They said the whole thing was pretty much botched. The crowd was so dissatisfied with the lineup of bands, they practically rioted."

"Yeah, that was a bad scene," Floyd admitted. "Every year since the festival started back in '65, we've managed to book one or two headliners along with the unknowns. Three years ago, the Grateful Dead appeared, and two years ago, it was Country Joe and the Fish."

They all responded with "wow" or "groovy."

"Last year," Floyd continued, "the crowd thought they'd be getting at least one of those, but unfortunately, it didn't work out. And there wasn't adequate security to control the backlash."

"The *Anti-Bruin* called the bands 'experimental crap,'" Candy said. "They published a controversial editorial suggesting that the kids who paid ten dollars for admission and were misled were justified in trashing the grounds."

"That's why I'm on top of it this time," Floyd said, "to make sure nothing like that goes down again."

"So who's headlining this year?" Preston asked. "The Dead or the Fish?"

"Why choose?" Floyd replied. "We'll try for both."

Theda had to pinch herself at the thought of sharing a stage with two of the greatest bands of the era.

"Far out," Preston said. "This is exactly what we came west for ... to check out the festival scene and hang out with real stars."

“It’s gonna make things hectic for Theda and me,” Clive said. “Our play is scheduled to run the weekend before the festival.”

“Oh, right,” Neal snapped. “You two are trying to become the Rodgers and Hammerstein of the peace movement. Maybe it’s time you decided if you’re with the band or not.”

“Listen, Neal,” Theda responded, “the play’s just as relevant as the festival. I don’t see any reason why we can’t do both.” She actually had no idea how she’d get it all in. She just knew she felt empowered by being both a musician and an actress.

Candy and Jamie studied Floyd like the practical, careful people they were. Jamie asked, “Are you really qualified to be a music promoter? Even if your family provides the venue every year, there’s gotta be a lot more than that to putting on a successful festival.”

“Promoting is a form of social activism,” Floyd said. “Anybody with enough energy, guts, and organizing ability can do it. In fact, Jamie,” he continued, turning on that devastating grin, “with your accounting skills, you could be a big help to us. How would you like to be on the board?”

“Cool,” Jamie exclaimed, won over in an instant.

“This festival’s gonna be about protesting the war, right?” Hope asked.

“Babe, it’s gonna be about stopping the war,” Floyd replied, “and in the process, playing with fire. How’s that for a name? The Playing with Fire Festival.”

Candy asked, “Where do you get the funding to sponsor such a huge event?”

“We’ve been running a profitable operation for years,” Floyd said. “It’s a corporation, but it’s the good kind. No need to worry your pretty little head about it.”

If this so-called male feminist had addressed Theda like he’d just addressed Candy, she’d have bopped him one. Instead, she heard herself gushing, “Guys, what an opportunity. Imagine AMO sharing space with world-famous bands like the Dead and the Fish. We’d be set for life.”



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Theda and Floyd kept experimenting with updated versions of the Flanny songs. The plan was for her to sing one or two of them at the festival. In the meantime, Floyd urged her to grab the mike whenever she could to test the songs before party crowds. One night, when the guys probably thought she was about to perform another Ty Leahy “tribute,” she launched instead into Preston’s “Help Me, Savior.” Accompanying herself on the bass guitar, she sang the altered lyrics at a quickened pace:

“Oh, father of the northern hills,
smile down upon your child
whose search for love and glory
has made her free and wild.”

Then she pumped her fist to emphasize the recurring line:

“Save me from myself, dear savior!”

When she glanced back at Clive, his stare was hostile. Her throat tightened, but she continued with the next verse, sounding freer and wilder as she went along. Preston and Neal helped her by picking up both volume and tempo. She finished the song to decent applause. Having done her thing, she gave a mock curtsy and then put down the bass and left the stage. When she tried to catch Clive’s eye from the audience, he looked away from her.

After the show, he gave her the silent treatment. They went straight home, skipping the usual late-night pizza or burger run. Finally, she asked, “What’s your problem? You didn’t like what Floyd and I did to ‘Savior’? We just adapted it to my style.”

“You betrayed Swami Flanny,” he said. “It was a song about him, and you made it about you.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Theda demanded. “Your cousin’s not a god, you know.”

“I know he’s not a god.” Clive paused and furrowed his brow. Then he added, “Maybe I should come up with my own version of that song ... about the only true savior.”

“Who’s that?” Theda asked.

“Jesus, of course.”

“I hate it when you get all holier-than-thou,” Theda said.



Creative differences cropped up over the play as well. Clive was portraying a ROTC type who fell in love with Theda’s free-spirited character, only to choose the militaristic path that would lead to a campus tragedy. They rewrote the dialogue every day and sweated over the revisions.

“It’s okay to make your character more sympathetic,” Theda told him, “but he can’t be the hero. It’s like you want him to be applauded for his boneheaded choices.”

Clive paused for a long moment and then said the words she had dreaded hearing as long as she’d known him. “Maybe I’m more my father’s son than I thought.”

“So what’re you gonna do about it?” Theda demanded. “Go to war like he did? And maybe get killed?”

Clive didn’t answer.



At Floyd’s urging, Theda ran for a student council seat that spring. He said that political muscle was needed to make sure the administration kept its word about allowing several scheduled peace marches to go on. More importantly for the band, it was necessary to ensure that this year’s music festival would receive full university support despite the previous year’s fiasco.

Theda was the top vote-getter on a slate of ten candidates for two available seats. Coming in second was Allie McCarty, the daughter of a well-known country and western singer from Nashville. Her stump speeches were sprinkled with “y’all” and “God bless you.” Theda figured she represented some kind of conservative backlash.

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“It’ll sure be a blast working with her,” Theda told Clive. “She’s already proposed that we open every council meeting with a prayer.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Clive asked.

“I believe in the separation of church and campus. I guess not everybody does, but I’m willing to fight for it.”

Chapter 6

Candy

Everyone called Candy “the scholar” that spring. She was carrying a full load of classes as a sophomore English major: Shakespeare, American literature, Journalism 101, and a popular elective called Liberation Movements. She had faith that the band would make it big one of these days, and they’d all be sitting pretty, but she wanted that college degree.

She hit the library most evenings with Jamie, who was studying accounting and business while keeping track of AMO’s earnings. Lately he’d been trying to cultivate more of a West Coast look, with longer hair and granny glasses in place of his studious spectacles.

Sometimes they ran into Theda and heard the latest about her play rehearsals. “We’re reworking *The Killing Campus* for a West Coast audience,” she told them. “That means taking a lot more chances.” The theater was consuming most of her time, but she was also taking a course in political analysis, serving on the student council, and “researching a few things in the law library,” she said.

It was too bad, Candy thought, that nobody in their group was a scientific genius. The courses Floyd taught at the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences were inaccessible to them. Although they never got to experience him as a lecturer, his influence over them kept

growing, especially once he started cooking up the Playing with Fire Festival.

That gave Candy an idea for a newspaper article. She went to see Sherri, the features editor of the *Anti-Bruin*, whose cubbyhole of an office in the School of Communications was decorated with psychedelic posters. Sherri was short, chunky, and bespectacled but eye-catching in a bright yellow T-shirt with cleavage and blue jeans with colorful patches sewn onto them.

Candy proposed doing a profile of a first-year engineering instructor with numerous outside interests.

“Pretty Boy Floyd. That’s a good one,” the editor said with a laugh when Candy mentioned his nickname. “Yeah, I knew him when he was an undergrad here—one of these new leftists who come from rich families that they reject, or pretend to reject, until they get into trouble or need help.”

“It’s not just politics he’s into,” Candy said. “It’s music too. He spends most of his nonteaching hours devising enhancements to musical instruments and sound systems. In fact, I know of at least one campus-based rock band that’s already making use of those experiments and planning to showcase a few innovations at the spring music festival.”

Sherri shrugged. “Frankly, I have yet to see a college band that impressed me,” she said. “Floyd’s just another of these faculty types who thinks hanging out with rock musicians makes him groovy. The only difference is that he can actually afford to dabble in expensive hobbies like concert promoting.”

Candy mentioned that Floyd had vowed to attract at least one or two big names to this year’s festival to make up for last year’s bust. “That could cost an arm and a leg,” Sherri responded, “but I’m sure Pretty Boy’s not too proud to ask his folks to pony up. Why don’t you try to find out who’s coming?”

“I’ll do my best,” Candy said, her heart pounding now that she was sure she’d gotten the editor’s attention. “I won’t let you down.”



"I wonder who's really behind the Playing with Fire Festival," Jamie said to the group at lunch one day in early April, as they waited for their benefactor to join them. "Floyd says a corporation is running it, but who's running the corporation?"

Candy had been asking the same question. Preston snapped at Jamie, as he had at her. "What's it to you? Let Floyd take care of the business part. What do we care, as long as he's got the venue, a team of hotshot producers, and enough bread? Our job is just to show up, play, and reap the publicity, not blow it by asking a bunch of dumb questions."

Candy's heart sank. "Don't ask any dumb questions" was hardly the advice a budding journalist wanted to hear. Besides, Jamie's inquiry was legitimate. They'd been told that the stage, sound systems, concessions, and security for the event would be more elaborate than in previous years. Also, Floyd had hinted that the profits from ticket sales would benefit the antiwar movement. How, exactly, would that work?

"Let's just hope our festival turns out to be more Woodstock than Altamont," Theda said.

Either way, Candy thought, that's a pretty ambitious comparison.

"It won't matter which it is if they don't get any big-name acts," Hope said. "Suppose the Dead and the Fish don't show up again. The whole weekend will just turn into one huge drunken orgy that no one will remember once it's over." She smiled, as if that didn't sound half-bad on second thought.

"The Dead and the Fish aren't the only big names they could get," Neal said. "Who knows? Maybe your old friend Ty Leahy will drop by."

"Maybe he will," she shot back.

Candy noticed Jamie was working himself into a silent, red-faced lather. She hoped he'd stand up to her husband so that she wouldn't have to, and finally, he did. "Listen, I do have a right to ask questions. In case you forgot, Floyd hired me as an accountant for the event. I'd just like to know more about who I'm working for."

Floyd was approaching the table. Preston said, "Here's your man. If you're so determined to interrogate him about the festival, just get it over with right now."

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Floyd sat down and greeted everyone as usual. Jamie couldn't seem to come up with a question, so Candy pursued another topic. She pulled an envelope out of her purse and waved it in Floyd's direction.

"I got a letter yesterday from our mutual friend, Josephine," Candy said. "She was in Scotland from August to January, in case you didn't know."

"I knew," Floyd said. "I hear from her regularly too. She was sure that Father Flanagan character was gonna turn out to be her god figure, but she left him pretty abruptly."

"She went back to Central Maryland College with Flanny's blessing," Candy said. "Somehow she persuaded her parents to let her continue her education instead of her waitressing career."

"I presume she's behaving herself in school this time." Floyd grinned as if he knew better.

"I doubt it. But she claims a miracle happened in Scotland, and she sort of got religion. That was her main reason for returning to CMC ... to reexperience a place where she was unhappy before and spread enlightenment around."

"Oh, Christ," Floyd said, laughing. "Why don't you treat us to her letter? This oughta be good."

So once again, Candy read Jo's words aloud:

"Remember what I gave you as my excuse when I left you in London to go back to Flanny? That I felt an overwhelming urge to hibernate under the protection of such a kind man? There was a bit more to it than that. Truthfully, I wanted to figure him out. You had hinted at some tantalizing things about his past, something about harboring fugitives. I wondered if he might be prepared to do that again.

"Don't go reading too much into that, Candy dear. I wasn't really a fugitive myself. Flanny convinced me I should telephone my parents and tell them where I was. His compound continued to be the bastion of free love, healthy living, and detachment from the real world that

you experienced. But something kind of miraculous happened while I was there. I helped to resurrect a band that had been presumed dead.

“During one of my counseling sessions with Flanny, I asked him if he knew about JPJ, the satanic-style band you described in your article about the Newcastle debacle. Flanny said he had learned from you guys about the horrendous traffic accident that had decimated that band. I asked Flanny if it’d be possible to bring the survivors to the commune to be healed. He instantly agreed, as if he’d already thought of it himself. So per his instructions, I went into the town of Lark and contacted the St. James Club in London. Right away, I got hold of a spacey-sounding guy with a Boston accent named Beanner Cabot, who claimed to be JPJ’s manager.”

“Beanner!” everyone exclaimed in various degrees of fascination and alarm.

“That creepy, delusional flake,” Hope said with a shiver.

“Flaky or not,” Theda said, “you can trust the guy to turn up at just the right time.”

“I haven’t even thought about that fucker since he left us high and dry on the A1 in northern England,” Preston said. He turned to Floyd to explain. “Beanner used to be Ty Leahy’s manager, or substitute manager, or whatever. He’s the one who brought Leahy from London to join us onstage in Newcastle. Somehow our performance triggered a riot, and Beanner rescued us by driving us out of town in JPJ’s abandoned van. Then all of a sudden, he stopped the van, got out, and started walking back the way we came. Said he was being drawn by the spirit of JPJ.”

“Yeah, and how fucked up was that?” Neal said. “He abandoned us to try to hook up with a band that didn’t exist anymore.”

“But now it does!” Candy exclaimed. “Listen.” She resumed reading Jo’s letter aloud:

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“With Flanny’s blessing, I invited Beanner to bring Parker, Johns, and their roadie to Scotland to try to make sense of the accident and maybe even recruit new members. Of course, it was a long shot that Flanny’s hymn-singing circle would produce the kind of weird rockers they were looking for. But after months of praying and meditating over it, the swami was struck with an inspiration. He said Beanner and I were destined to step in to evoke the spirit of the deceased Jonesy and Kristen and make the band whole again.

“Rest assured, Candy, even I’m not nuts enough to believe I can turn into a rock star overnight. That’s another reason why I’m back at CMC for the spring semester. In addition to my usual brutal science studies, I’m taking two music courses. When I’m done with those, I hope to be ready to rock and roll with JPJ.”

Floyd smiled. “Science *and* music in the same semester? That girl’s crazy ambitious.”

“She’s full of crap,” Neal said angrily. “If either of those two flakes were musicians, why didn’t it come out before now? All Beanner ever did at Apple was bring Leahy his brews and smokes. And God might strike me dead for saying this, but Flanny wouldn’t know a rock band from a rock quarry.”

“Beanner has even less credibility as a manager than as a musician,” Jamie said. “Did he ever apologize for abandoning Leahy, his client, on a highway in a foreign country?”

“I’m sure Flanny’s brought out the best in him,” Clive said, “just as he did with us.”

“Flanny may be spiritual, but he ain’t magical,” Neal shot back.

Hope repeated her opinion that Beanner was a worthless creep.

“That’s not fair!” Candy exclaimed.

Everyone stared at her.

She collected herself and then continued. “Have you all totally forgotten what we owe Beanner? He’s the one who plucked the

Homegrown movie out of the slush pile and invited us to Apple in the first place. Without him, we'd never have gotten into the studio and had the opportunity to work with Ty Leahy. Beanner may not be a genuine musician or band manager, but he is a ..."

"A what, dear?" Preston asked.

"A catalyst," she concluded. "He makes things happen."

"Interesting word," Floyd said, his piercing blue eyes focused on her. "There's more from Jo, isn't there? Read on, Candy."

Candy nodded and lifted the letter to continue.

"I can now predict with confidence that JPJ and AMO are destined to meet again, at the Playing with Fire Festival in California around May Day. I know I can convince my buddy Floyd that JPJ is a great fit for this festival, mainly because playing with fire is what they do best. More specifically, Beanner tells me that JPJ's music has always been a form of black magic. They use it to cast evil spells on people who piss them off. That's an appropriate skill to have, don't you think?"

"She was almost making sense for a minute," Theda said, "and then she went off the deep end again."

"It's hilarious, JPJ thinking they have the power to screw around with other people's fates," Preston said, "when they're the ones who've had horrible shit happen to them."

Neal glowered at Clive and said, "Is that how Flanny always brings out the best in everyone?"

"He does, for his true followers," Clive insisted.

"What does our favorite scientist think?" Theda asked, casting a coy smile at the instructor. "I'd expect you, Floyd, to be skeptical about the occult."

Floyd stroked his golden-brown beard and replied, "I'm not in touch with the dark powers myself, but I'd be intrigued to meet a band that thinks it is."

After they described their history with JPJ, Floyd was sold. "Our

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festival is designed to shake up the political and musical establishments—and any other establishment we can think of. Sounds like JPJ would fit the bill. If you guys are cool with it, we'll book them."

"We're cool," Preston said, as Neal and Clive grimaced.

Neal warned, "Just keep in mind they're anticommercial. They won't pull in crowds or exert themselves as crowd-pleasers."

"Personally, I'd rather stay as far away from JPJ as possible," Clive said. "Whatever they're nurturing in their souls isn't from God. Who knows what they'll be capable of once they leave Flanny's compound? They could be dangerous."

Theda took her eyes off Floyd long enough to cajole her husband. "Honey, evil spirits have no power over us unless we allow them. You should know that."



"You were holding something back from Josephine's letter, weren't you?" Jamie asked once he and Candy were alone in the library that evening.

He was the only one who had sensed this. Candy nodded and handed him the letter, which he read to the end.

Since you're no doubt nostalgic for the old dorm life at CMC, Candy, you might be interested to hear about a little incident that erupted here a couple of weeks ago. A smoke bomb went off right outside Libby and Margaret's door, which was left ajar while they were having one of their nightly dishing sessions with their friends. A green fog penetrated the room and made the crowd inside cough and choke up a storm. You would've laughed to see the poor dears react like chickens with their heads cut off. Some evil, jealous terrorist must be out to get them!

But wait, it gets better. One of the aftereffects of the bomb was a pungent odor that lingered for days. In fact, that room and the surrounding ones had to be evacuated for a week, displacing the whole Popular Corner. I must say, I dug the atmosphere of

the depopulated hall. No one around to give me those sidelong glances that say louder than words, "Keep away from me, you dirty hippie."

As you'd expect, a full-scale investigation has been launched. All of us residents who aren't intimate friends with the victims have been called into the front office and questioned. I've told the authorities they might do better to check out a few of the boyfriends, especially the disgruntled ones, who roam around the dorm pretty freely. The curfew rules have never really been enforced for the popular crowd. As for pointing the finger at me, I told them to forget it. I may be a left-wing freak who hates shallow, privileged bitches, but why would I waste a minute of my time trying to get back at them? They're not that important.

Jamie finished reading and looked at Candy. "So do you think she did it?"

Candy shook her head. "She's a brilliant student," she mused. "Straight As in the toughest courses. I can't believe she'd jeopardize her entire future with a silly prank. When I knew her in the dorm, she was rebellious and outspoken but not self-destructive. I believe what she says ... that she wouldn't waste her time."

"If you say so," Jamie said.

"Christ, who am I kidding?" Candy said. "She's studying physics and chemistry. She certainly has the know-how to build and set off a smoke-stink bomb. And she has the motive too."

"You should know," Jamie said. "She's your friend."

"I need to answer her letter," Candy said. "Try to talk some sense into her." But what could she say, when Jo's exploit made her smile?



"Don't you ever listen to the radio?" Sherri demanded from behind a rickety desk piled with manuscripts.

"Sure," Candy said, "every day. Why?"

Candy had dropped by the editor's office to explain that she still

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hadn't uncovered the "corporation" that was sponsoring the Playing with Fire Festival, since Floyd wasn't giving any details. She continued, "Preston and I tune in to every rock station we can find. We just keep moving the dial until we find something good. But we've never heard the festival mentioned on the radio."

"Of course you haven't," Sherri said, "if you're still stuck on the hit parade. You've got to check out underground radio to get the kind of news you're looking for."

"Underground radio?" Candy repeated, feeling incredibly naive.

"There's a network serving the University of California campuses. It's KPEA here, KBOM up at Berkeley, KLUV at Davis, and so on. They're not very powerful in wattage, but they've been known to produce some explosive programming."

"I've never listened to them," Candy admitted.

Sherri smoothed back her frizzy hair and crossed her bell-bottomed legs under the desk. "Then start listening," she ordered.



Back at the apartment, Candy tried to tune in to KPEA but got only static. She went downstairs and asked Jamie to try Floyd's radio, which was equipped with a tall antenna.

That afternoon, she and Jamie immersed themselves in a new world. They discovered political currents pulsating beneath the surface of everyday life like small earthquakes building inevitably to the big one. They listened to call-in talk shows that covered the gamut of left-wing issues, from prison conditions to urban poverty to the war. The weekday afternoon host, who called himself Fire Cracker, spoke in a high-pitched, country accent that made some of his pronouncements sound downright weird. He interviewed traditional sociologists, loud radicals, and mystics with equal verve. On occasion he slipped into prayer, calling on Jesus or Buddha to stop the war.

One caller claimed to represent the People's Army, a newly formed organization that planned to conduct "symbolic bombings" against corporate targets all over California. This self-proclaimed soldier read

the group's manifesto on the air as casually as if it were a weather report.

"Can you believe that?" Candy asked Jamie. "Has anything this ... this explosive ever been heard on radio before?"

He just shrugged. The matter-of-factness of the presentation kept them from being as shocked as they might have been.

The political talk was interspersed with so-called musical selections. "For my money, that's only one step above noise," Candy commented about a piece featuring random Moog synthesizer sounds and crashing cymbals.

"How do they stand it themselves?" Jamie asked of several primal-screaming vocalists creating their own unique version of harmony.

"I hope y'all are grooving to these experimental pieces," said Fire Cracker when a set of songs finished. "That's just a sampling of what you can experience at the Playing with Fire Festival, to be held in the countryside outside UCLA on the weekend of Friday, April 30, through Sunday, May 2. All you gotta pay is ten dollars for admission to a weekend of camping out, cavorting, and caterwauling for peace. I'm told there's an excellent chance of seeing major stars at this event, which'll make it even more worth it. I'll have more details on that in the coming days, and maybe an interview with a big 'un."

Candy and Jamie stared at each other. "Well, now we know," Jamie said. "California's underground radio network is the main impetus behind the event. Not exactly Wall Street, is it?"

"What are we getting ourselves into?" Candy asked, both alarmed and elated. She wondered whether Fire Cracker was accessible off the air. A few quotes from him would impress Sherri.

"AMO will compare favorably to those experimental bands, Candy," Jamie reassured her. "Our band will dominate the good press and blow everyone else away."

"Unless," Candy said, "we're the ones who end up getting blown away."



As they kept listening every afternoon, Fire Cracker's show delivered nonstop surprises. In between diatribes from wannabe revolutionaries, the host returned to his country music roots with segments featuring Tennessee-based artists. One of these, Jimmy McCarty, he described as a close friend. He added, "Jimmy's daughter Allie goes to UCLA, and I hear she's quite a talented dish, both an actress and a singer. In fact, there's a plan afoot for her to show off her pipes at the upcoming festival."

"Allie McCarty?" Candy said. "That's the girl Theda's fighting for control of the student council."

"And the theater department too, it sounds like," Jamie added.

Candy couldn't see those two sharing the same stage. Yet she couldn't help thinking that if Allie turned out to be as talented as her dad, she could give the festival a boost. It might even be fun to see her and Theda tangle, although her brand of religiosity might be tough for AMO and the other bands to swallow.

Hope

Once spring was in full gear, Hope found herself exasperated with the student experience at UCLA. She started sleeping in instead of going to class in the mornings. When she got up, she'd spend a few hours being Little Miss Homemaker around the apartment, cooking and cleaning for Neal. In the afternoons she'd put on a bikini and sunglasses and go outside to sunbathe.

When Neal told her they had to at least pretend to be students, she said, "I just don't see how studying a bunch of dead artists and learning to draw in perspective are helping me become a model or a fashion designer."

"It takes time to reach your goals," Neal said. "Please don't go into another deep funk like you did in Scotland. I don't have the time or energy to pull you out of it again."

It was true Hope was fighting that same sad, confused feeling, but she told him, "I'll be okay. I've got the spring fashion show coming up."

She had passed a tough audition, walking the runway in both a

bathing suit and an evening gown, to earn a modeling spot in that event. At the show, she planned to model a couple of the gowns she'd made at Flanny's compound, along with earrings, a necklace, and a headband she'd designed as accessories. But she might have known the student government would screw it up for her. They got the show postponed because it conflicted with one of their all-important peace demonstrations.

Hope's other major attempt to give her life meaning was also a bust. One afternoon Neal came home to find her in bed, crying her eyes out. "What's wrong now?" he demanded.

"I got my period," she said, her voice muffled by the pillow.

Neal was silent for a long time. They had never admitted out loud that they were trying to have a baby. Hope waited for his reaction, feeling sick to her stomach.

He got into bed with her, turned her face toward his, and kissed her tears away. "It's all right, Hope," he said. "We both know we're too young to be parents. That'd be really crazy right now. Besides, it's not up to you to save me from the draft. It's up to me to save myself."

"How?" she asked.

He hoisted himself up and said, "I don't know. I just know all of us who're under the gun have gotta resist. Just say, 'Hell no, we won't go.'"

"You think that'll work?" Hope asked. She thought she better keep trying to get pregnant. A 3-A deferment on family grounds sounded like a better solution than shouting some slogan. "How're you gonna keep from getting arrested?" she asked. "All these peace demonstrations are crap, you know. They don't do anything."

"There are other ways of scaring the government."



They tried to find the answers in church, of all places. Neal persuaded Hope to start getting up early on Sunday mornings so that they could go to the most popular services being held on campus. Dean Elliott Zack, who was in charge of the religion and philosophy department, really packed in the crowds.

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At first Hope thought he'd be another Swami Flanny, spouting peace and brotherhood and all that, but his spiel was more obviously political. During the week he taught a course called Liberation Movements that was catching on like wildfire, even attracting Preston, Neal, Candy, and Theda. Before Hope knew it, Neal had convinced her to sign up for it too. She was promised she could get full credit, even after missing half the semester, by writing the required paper and giving an oral report on one of the oppressed groups the course was about: blacks, women, Hispanics, or Indians (whom they were now supposed to call Native Americans).

One Sunday morning in the chapel, before the service began, Hope happened to glance back toward the entrance and saw Floyd come in with Theda. She couldn't believe her eyes. They were dressed up, Floyd in a suit and tie and Theda in her Sunday best, a white mini-dress with black high heels and a hat with a cute mini-veil.

Floyd had always flirted with both Theda and Hope, but now it looked like something was going on between him and Theda. His dressed-up look made those broad shoulders, the blondish hair flowing down his back, and the scruffy beard seem even sexier. Just as she was thinking that, he saw her and winked. Once again, his intense eyes and grin freaked her out.

Hope was too distracted to pay much attention to the service. As soon as church let out, she and Neal caught up to Theda and Floyd outside.

"So where's Clive?" Hope asked. Theda looked miffed, but it served her right. She'd insinuated plenty of times that there was trouble in paradise between Hope and Neal.

Theda pasted on a bright smile as she replied, "He's doing his own religious thing these days."

"Praying solo," Floyd added, "just in case Dean Zack turns out to be from the devil."

"That's just like our Clive," Neal said. "The poor guy has no idea what to believe, now that Swami Flanny isn't around to prompt him."

Theda's smile lost some of its pizzazz. She obviously wasn't ready to hear Clive put down like that. She and Floyd went their

separate ways, so Hope couldn't tell whether their church date meant anything or not.



Hope thought she must be the only student in the Liberation Movements class who just couldn't get into radicalism. The dean wasn't going to get any paper out of her. Candy, on the other hand, was the star of the show on the day she gave her oral report. It was based on a newspaper article she was trying to write about UCLA's underground radio station, which was publicizing lunatic political groups like the People's Army. Candy's report managed to cover all the oppressed groups they were studying, since this "army" was determined to liberate everyone who was suffering under the white man's rule.

The mostly white class just ate this stuff up. Hope never spoke up there for fear of being called an empty-headed racist. But she told Neal, "It sounds like all these minorities want to take everything away from us and maybe even kill us. Are we supposed to just let them?"

"You're taking this shit way too seriously," Neal replied. "It's all theoretical."

Hope tried to believe that. But the day Candy's article came out in the *Anti-Bruin*, she preened like a peacock at the lunch table as she handed out copies of the paper and accepted congratulations from everyone in sight. She was especially giddy about a two-minute interview she'd scored with a DJ called Fire Cracker, a weird combination of Holy Roller and radical who was helping to promote the Playing with Fire Festival. Preston smiled at Candy as if she'd suddenly turned sexy in his eyes.

Hope should've joined in the congratulations and left it at that. Instead, she made the mistake of glancing at the article. It seemed to be saying that bombings were a good thing. She gasped and threw down the paper.

"Is there a problem?" Candy asked, raising her brows.

"Have you even thought about what you're doing, writing stuff like this?" Hope asked. "It's almost like you're glorifying violence."

"I'm not glorifying anything," Candy said. "I'm just describing a

political phenomenon that's gaining ground on the West Coast right now. And it's not pointless violence. It's an attempt to send symbolic messages."

"Symbolic, crap," Hope said. "How symbolic would it be if it happened to you?"

Candy answered her like a teacher talking to a dunce. "It's not my job as a reporter to advocate it," she lectured. "I'm just describing the philosophy behind it. The targets are intended to be political, not personal. For example, you could argue that the late-night bombing of a draft board in Berkeley was effective because it made a point, loud and clear, without injuring or killing anybody."

"You could also argue that it was sheer luck it didn't kill anybody."

"Why don't you finish reading the article," Candy suggested in a saccharine but strained voice, "before you jump to conclusions like that?"

Hope took Candy's advice, but the more she read, the more dire conclusions she jumped to. Candy probably thought she wasn't smart enough to make all the connections, but that was crap. In a couple of weeks, AMO would be playing at a rock festival that was being promoted by the same underground radio network that was talking up this People's Army. That would make the band, and everyone connected to it, at least partly responsible for any violence that broke out, "symbolic" or not.

Another piece of the puzzle clicked into place as Floyd, the main festival promoter, joined them. "What're you reading, sweetie?" he asked with his usual maddening grin.

"A fascinating article, darling," Hope replied, tossing it over to him while Neal smirked. Hope knew her husband had discounted the idea that a major campus intellectual like Floyd could be attracted to a bubblehead like her.

"Great stuff," Floyd commented as he read. He winked at Candy, and she giggled.

"Scary stuff, if you ask me," Hope said. "Makes me think if we get mixed up in your festival, we could all end up in jail, or dead. It sounds like this People's Army means business with its bombs. Then they turn around and say it's all symbolic, so they *don't* really mean it. Well, which is it?"

There were titters around the table, and Floyd laughed out loud. Annoyed, Hope added, "That's just how I read it."

"Really, Hope," Candy said, "I think you're reading too much into it."

She started in again on the difference between an editorial and a news story. Hope interrupted, "I get that, Candy. I'm not criticizing your article. I'm just saying AMO might really be playing with fire, big time, by performing at this concert."

"That's the whole point, Hope," Floyd explained. "We know what to expect from bands like the Dead and the Fish. If we're fortunate enough to book them, they'll bring in major bread and publicity. But our larger mission is to introduce unknown bands. We'll spread as many as eight or ten over two days and nights and let them do their own thing, no matter how outrageous or offbeat. There's no way they'll all meet your standard of sophistication. Truthfully, there's no way *I* like them all. I'm just saying, try opening your mind, and you might actually dig a few of them."

"My mind's already so wide open for this festival," Preston said, "that I've decided AMO needs to work on upping its outrageous factor."

"What the fuck?" Neal objected. "Why should we change who we are? We're a commercial outfit, and there's nothing wrong with that."

"We all know how much you dig being Mr. Romantic Ballad Man, Neal," Preston said, "but I say it's time we took more risks. Why shouldn't we stick a toe in the fire ourselves?"

"AMO doesn't have to do risky shit," Hope said. "Have you forgotten how close we've gotten to the big time already? We've been inside the Apple studio, for God's sake. We've sung with Ty Leahy."

"Who turned around and screwed us as soon as he could," Preston replied.

"AMO has the potential to be both commercial and daring," suggested Theda. "There are several songs that demonstrate that perfectly ... like the electronic versions of 'Help Me, Savior' and 'Peace Warrior' that Floyd and I have worked up."

Clive glared at Theda when she brought up these remakes of the peace songs that everyone called "Flanny songs."

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“This festival will boost us into the stratosphere if it’s done right,” Theda continued. “Let’s not be cowards about it. Let’s embrace the opportunity.”

“Who’re you calling a coward?” Clive asked, beating Hope to the question. He simmered at Theda and Floyd, who’d been making eyes at each other all through lunch, or at least whenever Floyd wasn’t flirting with Hope. “Hope was right on,” Clive continued, “when she said we should reconsider whether playing this festival makes sense for AMO.”

Imagine that, Hope thought. Somebody at this table agrees with me. But what good is it when Clive has no say whatever in the band? Within seconds, Preston and Neal will shout him down, and he’ll go back to being window dressing like me.

Theda stared at him. “If you can’t get on board with the biggest event going down on the West Coast this spring—”

“Then I should quit the band? Is that what you’re saying, Theda?” Clive snapped.

“You said it.” Theda gave him a sad look. “I didn’t.”

Clive pushed aside his sloppy tuna fish sandwich, got up, and left. Theda called after him halfheartedly. Had he really quit?

“This is a fine mess, a band without a drummer.” Floyd smiled as if he thought that might be an improvement. “Talk about an offbeat outfit.”

“Clive’s bluffing,” Theda said, trying to smile bravely. “It’s just the pressure getting to him. Don’t forget, we’ve got play rehearsals going on besides all the band stuff.”

Floyd said, “I think he’s mainly pissed off at the way you and I electrified those beloved Flanny songs.”

“If so, he’s being stupid,” Theda said. “Musicians have to innovate, or else they become irrelevant. But don’t worry, I’ll bring Clive around.”



Hope dropped by Theda’s apartment the next afternoon to see if she wanted to talk. Theda practically cried on her shoulder as she confessed she hadn’t yet been able to “bring Clive around.” Their fighting, she said, had gone beyond band issues and was now affecting

their play rehearsals. They were having such creative differences about *The Killing Campus* that Theda was thinking of stepping aside for her understudy, Allie McCarty, the country singer's daughter.

"She's such a goody two-shoes, she can barely handle the seminudity in the play," Theda said, "but Clive seems to like that about her. I also suspect she's the one leading him back toward a more organized church structure."

"Are you telling me," Hope exclaimed, "you're letting this religious bitch poach on your territory just because you and Clive are fighting right now? Neal and I fight all the time, and I wouldn't stand for anything like that."

"Who knows, it could turn out great for me," Theda said. "If I drop out of the play, and Clive really quits the band, I'll get a chance to prove to Preston I can fill in on drums as well as bass. Someone has to do it, and who else is there?"

They heard a loud knock on the door. Theda opened it, and there stood Floyd. He strode into the apartment with his usual sexy grin, raising his brows as if expecting to find the girls in a catfight. Hope wondered if he was in the habit of dropping in to see Theda when she was alone.

"Afternoon, ladies," he said. "It's good luck finding the two of you together. I need your female perspective on some issues pertaining to the festival."

"My perspective? Really?" Hope said. "You usually laugh at my opinions."

Ignoring her, he continued. "As I already told you, the lineup of bands is heavily weighted toward unknown outfits, especially experimental ones, not that the organizers have a problem with that ... innovation is the whole point of the event. But we also need enough mainstream acts to attract decent news coverage."

"Won't the Dead and/or the Fish accomplish that?" Theda asked.

"Looks like the Fish are unavailable this time," Floyd explained. "However, we've tentatively confirmed that the Grateful Dead will open the festival on Friday night and close it on Sunday morning. That would get us off to an amazing start and keep the crowd anticipating more."

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“What does ‘tentatively confirmed’ mean?” Hope asked.

“The thing is, the Dead can be somewhat ... capricious in their scheduling. I’m confident they’ll show up for the first set since they’ve played this festival before and enjoyed themselves. The trick is getting them to stick around until Sunday. Something else could come up, and they’d be gone.”

“Like what?” Hope asked. “An acid party?”

“My point is,” Floyd said, “if we’re smart, we’ll line up at least one other well-known act as a possible closer.”

“Like who?” Hope asked.

“Isn’t it obvious who?” Theda snapped at her. “He wants you to lure Ty Leahy back.”

“Are you kidding?” Hope was shocked and flattered at the same time. If the success of this festival depended on her using her feminine wiles on a sensitive folk singer, they might be in trouble. Or it might work.

“How about it?” Floyd served up another grin just for Hope. “Think you can do it?”

“The last time I tried to talk to Ty on the phone, he hung up on me,” Hope said. “How am I supposed to lure him anywhere when he obviously hates me?”

“C’mon, he doesn’t really hate you,” Floyd said. “That anger he’s feeling is frustrated love. Why don’t you try to use it?”

Theda

As the spring term at UCLA progressed, Theda’s role as Mrs. Clive O’Dell got trickier to pull off. She talked Clive out of quitting the band, but their creative differences, both musical and theatrical, still threatened to become full-scale fights. Worse, they were living under a cloud of uncertainty about his draft status. The only classes he went to regularly were about military history. If they were going to start disagreeing about Vietnam—and war in general—she knew they were done.

Theda had hoped *The Killing Campus*, scheduled to open in late April, would be their theatrical tour de force here as it had been hers

at College Park. She kept telling Clive, "You gotta be more daring onstage. Stop trying to coast on your matinee idol looks." The idea was to revise the play with each live performance, upping the ante on the nudity and racy language based on audience reactions. The sophisticated West Coast theater crowds, Theda predicted, would be harder to shock than the ones back home. If the police barged in, that would mean they had a hit.

During the first full dress rehearsal, one of the supporting actors slipped behind Allie, put a hand under her blouse, and unhooked her bra. "Cut that out!" she protested.

Theda looked at her with contempt, thinking, *You silly fool. Most of us aren't even wearing bras. Some girls these days are burning them.*

Clive walked off the stage, shaking his head. "This whole thing doesn't feel right."

"What the fuck does that mean?" Theda demanded. "It feels evil?"

Clive flinched at her language, as he seemed to do more and more often these days. A chorus of voices urged him to get back on the stage, but one was noticeably silent. Theda knew all of the supporting actresses, and maybe some of the actors, had the hots for Clive. Allie McCarty, who was understudying Theda's role, played it demure with her sympathetic glances in his direction. *She's a smart cookie*, Theda thought.

Hurrying offstage after him, Theda appealed to the spiritual history they shared. "Don't you think Swami Flanny would approve?" she asked. "He always encouraged us to celebrate our sexuality."

"I love Flanny ... and always will," Clive said, "but ..."

Theda knew the swami couldn't help them now. Gone was the blissful unity they'd enjoyed in Scotland. These days Theda was getting more and more into Dean Elliott Zack's politically charged sermons. Clive had gone with her once or twice but had then declared they weren't his thing. Instead, he had resumed going to mass.

"Maybe Flanny would approve of the play," Clive said, "but the true church wouldn't."

"Oh, God," Theda said, "spare me that 'true church' shit. The pope doesn't have the market cornered on truth."

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“If you must swear, at least don’t blaspheme against the pope.”

Theda knew *The Killing Campus* would fail if Clive’s heart wasn’t in it. She argued against watering it down. He insisted that the raciness and antiwar message were too strident. He added that some of their supporting actors agreed with him.

“If I took a poll on that right now,” Theda said, glancing at the others, “I suspect you’d only get one vote. The ‘nice Catholic girl’ vote.”



Going to mass was one thing; joining ROTC was another. The first time Clive raised the possibility at lunch, everyone looked at him as if they thought he should be committed. Floyd reminded them that the building where both ROTC and selective service records were kept had been firebombed two years before.

“You’re just needling us with this soldier stuff, right?” Preston asked, looking concerned. “It makes no fucking sense at all.”

“No, it makes perfect sense,” Neal argued. “It’s his military genes coming out. We’re all our fathers’ sons, whether we like it or not. I can picture Clive as the drummer boy of his unit as it marches through Da Nang and places like that, napalming and shooting peasants.”

Despite being forewarned, Theda wasn’t prepared for that bright mid-April day when Clive strode into their apartment for the first time in uniform, with his head shaved. She burst into tears.

“I didn’t really think you were serious about this,” she said through the sobs. “You’re always talking about good and evil and the importance of living a moral life. Now you’re embracing the very epitome of evil.”

“We’ve been through this before, Theda,” he said. “The military isn’t all bad. I never thought my dad was wrong for fighting in World War II and Korea. In my eyes he was a hero for doing his duty ... not once, but twice.”

Clive must have forgotten how he used to call his father names like “fool” and “cannon fodder.” Theda maintained, “I’ve never said anything against your dad, but those were different times. This war is a new definition of evil.”

Moved by her tears, he embraced her. “Try to take it easy, love,” he said. “I’m not going into combat anytime soon. I just need the discipline of the drills.”

“Don’t they hold boot camps during the summer?” Theda asked. “You’ll be away from me for weeks.”

He took a deep breath. “It’ll be good for me ... maybe good for both of us. Theda, stop looking at me like I’m the enemy.”

She tried not to. She had to admit he looked handsome in his uniform, and his shaved head could even work in *The Killing Campus*.

As she thought more about it, she got suspicious. A day or two later, she asked him, “Just who are you trying to impress with this soldier boy routine? I know it isn’t me.”

He clammed up, so Theda decided to investigate. Her research consisted of chatting with her understudy, Allie. It turned out that besides being a conservative country girl, she had a slew of relatives who’d been in the military, as well as a brother and a cousin currently serving in Vietnam.



Sometimes Theda thought that Clive’s newfound militarism was making her literally sick. She had missed a couple of periods and had felt queasy in the mornings since the beginning of April. Probably just stress, she assured herself. Maybe if she kept ignoring the symptoms, they’d disappear—except she knew they wouldn’t.

Now that Clive was playing soldier for real, Theda began to hear what Dean Zack was telling the women, especially in his course on liberation movements. Once the infirmary doctor confirmed her condition, she determined to take charge of her own life. Why should she sacrifice her body and career prospects to save a husband who didn’t want to be saved?

Theda confided her problem to the head of the drama department, who nodded knowingly, having helped a few other girls out of the same fix. She sent Theda to a clinic in downtown Los Angeles, where she was approved for the abortion on psychological grounds.

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It was unbelievably easy and quick. Theda tried to put it out of her mind and vowed not to tell anybody, although it felt like sitting on a time bomb. She knew Hope was trying to get pregnant and would probably resent her for this if she found out. But that was nothing compared to how Clive would react. It would finish them as a couple.



They were already playing with fire, as the rehearsals added fuel to the flames. Ten days before the April 30 start of the festival weekend, Floyd rented a sound stage off campus for AMO to hold nightly run-throughs. He and Preston began debating what kind of image the band should project at the festival. Now that AMO was about to face its biggest crowd by far and appear on a bill with many other bands, it needed to establish an identity.

Preston pointed out that AMO's versatility presented many choices. Floyd listened to the band run through its repertoire, starting with the innocent tunes that had livened up high school dances, followed by the edgier songs of the College Park era. Then Preston and Neal recreated the solos they had improvised on guitar and keyboards to impress JPJ at the St. James Club in London. Finally, the guys moved on to the "peace and love" style that had overtaken them during their acoustic phase at Flanny's compound. The question was posed: should AMO emphasize its pop-rock, political, heavy metal, or experimental side?

"All of that," Floyd said with a grin, "with some feminine muscle thrown in."

"Huh?" the guys said.

"Let the girls come to the forefront, early and often," he said. "They'll be original and eye-catching. It's gonna be a mixed, free-love crowd, totally into women's liberation and idealism and all that shit. So we'll tone down the testosterone rock. There'll be enough of that from the other bands."

Candy and Hope reacted with giggles and excitement when the guys agreed that the girls could be featured in the show. Theda knew that consensus might change at any time, but she would insist on inclusion,

at least for herself. She tried to placate Clive by suggesting they rehearse the folkish tunes they'd cowritten in Scotland, "Peace Warrior" and "Child of Nature," as they'd originally conceived them, without the later enhancements.

That proved to be easier said than done. Clive's mood fluctuated as they attempted to harmonize. Every time Theda added a little flair to her bass playing or vocals, he insinuated she was trying to one-up him. By contrast, Preston was patient in coaching Candy to stay on key as she practiced "The Permanence of War." And everyone was gung ho about Hope's planned rendition of Ty Leahy's "Celia," a perfect way to needle Ty from afar.

For AMO's closing number, Preston proposed "Revolution for Amateurs," the catchy hit from their College Park days. The girls would rejoin the guys onstage to sell the messianic refrain: "Tell everyone you see ... it's a perfect day to follow me."

Floyd speculated, "A political tune like that could fill up the great outdoors and ignite a movement. Once that happens, no more cheesy nightclubs and frat houses for you guys."

Neal and Clive, who rarely agreed about anything, both shook their heads. Neal said, "I can't see this festival igniting much of anything with all the weirdo bands you've got lined up."

"And JPJ will be the worst of them," Clive added. "That band's not just weird ... it's evil. They'll freak out the crowd with their black magic, or spells, or whatever they're doing these days."

"It'll all be cool," Floyd replied. "I'm counting on AMO's naive exuberance to counteract the weirdness."

"If you can't get with the program," Preston lectured his bandmates, "you can quit anytime you like. There are plenty of footloose musicians out there who're every bit as good as you are and who I could recruit in a minute. You guys think you can't be replaced?"



The tension kept building. Whether the play or the festival was causing Theda the most grief was a tossup. Less than a week before

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the scheduled opening of *The Killing Campus*, when she realized Clive and Allie had the faculty advisor's ear, she walked out with a parting shot: "Good luck with your Sunday-school pageant. It's not for me. I'm gone."

That evening during band rehearsal, Floyd began having second thoughts about the earlier plan to present mostly soft rock to a potential audience of twenty-five thousand, including hardcore Deadheads. He now favored the hopped-up versions of "Peace Warrior" and "Help Me, Savior" that he and Theda had cooked up in his studio. To demonstrate, she set up a martial beat on the Moog as she sang the revised lyrics:

"He gathers his flock like an army,
a cavalry of man and beast.
He scatters his enemies
with a clarion call that won't cease."

Seeing Clive frown, she thought, *What's his problem? It's just a few word changes. You'd think I'd started advocating mass murder or something.*

"We wrote that song to honor my cousin Flanny, a man of peace," Clive said. "This is a perversion."

"So what?" Theda shot back. "That whole 'love and peace' phase is pretty passé for us. You're the one who decided to embrace militarism."

Glaring at Floyd, Clive demanded, "And just what is it you're embracing these days, Theda? Or should I say, 'who?'"

"If you're accusing me of something," Theda said, "why don't you come right out with it?"

"I think you're well on your way to becoming a wild-eyed leftist like your friend here."

Theda had expected to be accused of cheating on Clive, which she could honestly deny. She didn't know how to respond to this political jibe. She'd certainly evolved since she'd been on the West Coast, but Clive's accusation seemed extreme.

Her eyes met his, and they both recoiled at the intensity of their feelings. He walked off the stage, saying, "Just count me out of this whole scene." She watched him leave, stunned again.

She didn't come out of it until Preston tapped her on the shoulder with Clive's discarded drumsticks. "The way you keep running off our drummer," he said, "it looks like you really want his job. How about giving it a try?"



Theda had quit the play, and Clive had walked out on the band as if he meant it this time, but they still lived together. They even slept in the same bed. They got up in the morning, grabbed some breakfast from whatever leftovers were in the fridge, and went their separate ways. The only time they spent together was at the communal lunch table. They'd exchange a brief greeting and eye each other stonily for an hour or so while everyone else gabbed up a storm and watched the unhappy couple covertly.

After lunch, Clive presumably went to the theater to rehearse the sanitized play with Allie as his new leading lady. He was a no-show at band rehearsals in the evenings, so Theda took over the drums. Playing for hours on end behind a loud band was more strenuous than she'd expected. Sometimes during the sessions she became bathed in sweat and had to wipe down her face and arms with a towel. After a long set, her makeup and hair were a disaster. But whenever Preston gave her efforts an approving nod, she smiled back, willing to do anything she could to ensure AMO's success. Preston kept busy teaching the other girls how to manage the Moog or pound a few chords on the electric piano to relieve Neal, who was now playing mostly bass.

As the event drew nearer, rehearsals became more combative. Preston bragged about how the festival was sure to make their names if they just followed Floyd's lead. Neal shot back, "What lead? He keeps changing his mind. Truth is, we don't know shit about the type of crowd we'll be facing, and neither does Floyd. We could get booed off the stage if we give them girly stuff and it turns out they want revolution."

Who was right? Theda wondered what Clive would say if he were here. He'd probably insist on praying about it first.



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The bickering between Preston and Neal continued. One night Floyd asked, “Are you guys planning to get your shit together before you hit the big stage?”

“We always get it together,” Preston shot back, “so don’t concern yourself. Just make sure all your fancy sound and recording equipment is working for us when we need it. And get us a decent time slot.”

“Everybody wants prime time,” Floyd said. “You’ll have to convince me you can handle it.”



After band rehearsal, Floyd and Theda went to his studio and worked on her vocal deliveries and body language to help her sell the revised Flanny songs. It was important, they agreed, for her to convey the emotion and enunciate the lyrics. But when she tried to let loose singing “Peace Warrior,” she got choked up at the thought of Clive actually going to war.

Floyd grimaced at her and said, “Looks like you’re mourning the guy already.”

“I’m mad as hell at him,” Theda said through her tears, “but I can’t stand the thought of him getting killed in some godforsaken jungle.”

She cheered up considerably when they moved on to Preston’s opus, “Help Me, Savior.” Mining the racy potential, she did a striptease for Floyd as if he were the savior she was appealing to. He egged her on until she was down to her panties.

“How about if I do a burlesque act at the festival?” Theda proposed. “It’ll make up for what I would’ve done in *The Killing Campus*.”

“That’ll get you prime time for sure.”

Floyd had been so kind and understanding about everything—even her sadness about Clive—that she kissed him in gratitude. She kept it up and wasn’t sure where they crossed the line, but from the studio, it was only a few steps to the bedroom. They stopped long enough to lock the door in case Jamie came home early. She drowned in Floyd’s animal magnetism, satisfying the hunger that had been consuming her for weeks.

Theda couldn't help comparing her husband and her lover. Clive had a pretty-boy cuteness that made teenage girls swoon, but Floyd impressed her as a grown man. The engineering instructor attracted attention wherever he went with those long track-star strides and the sun-kissed hair and beard that grew like gangbusters in between his stints in the reserves. Everyone could recognize a trendsetter when they saw one. Even coeds like Candy and Hope who said they didn't trust him couldn't help sighing over his sexiness. Making love to him was not only delightfully self-indulgent but also something of a political act.

Theda felt the floor shake beneath them. Was their passion making the earth move?

The shaking continued, and they sat up in alarm. "Earthquake?" Theda asked.

"I don't think so," Floyd said. They could hear shouting and screaming in the distance.

"Christ, I think it's a bomb," he said. They jumped out of bed and pulled on their jeans. They left the apartment and headed toward the commotion at the east end of the campus. Flames were spurting toward the sky. A crowd gathered, pressing as close to the fire as it dared.

Theda gasped. "Oh my God, it's the theater. *The Killing Campus* is scheduled to open tomorrow night. Who would do something like this?"

Her legs shook so badly that she sank to her knees. With the crowd pushing, she thought she might faint.

The fire department arrived with screaming sirens and took charge. Word spread that no one had been inside the theater when the bomb went off near the stage. Immensely relieved, Theda got to her feet and listened to the speculation that filled the air.

"Why would the leftist idiots do this?" someone asked. "It's their own theater. All you ever see there is Commie crap."

"You're the idiot," someone else replied. "The leftists wouldn't do it. I'll bet it was the pigs."

"Or the National Guard," a third voice exclaimed. "Supposedly there was a play about to open that blasted them."

"Could the Guard be that fucking crazy?"

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“Not so crazy. Don’tcha see? It gives them an excuse to declare martial law.”

The fire was soon under control, but Theda could see that the north end of the building was demolished. There would be no play opening tomorrow night, or anytime soon.

Her relief gave way to irrational guilt. She had quit *The Killing Campus*, and now it wouldn’t be performed at all. That was nothing but a coincidence, but what if someone tried to hold her responsible?

Theda asked Floyd again as they left the scene, “Who could’ve done this?”

Floyd shrugged. “No use speculating. The important thing is, nobody was hurt.”

“That’s a pretty casual response, isn’t it?” Theda asked, growing alarmed.

He didn’t answer. When they got back to the apartment, he wiped his wet face with a towel. He kept sweating as he paced the floor for hours, as if pondering a game that had gotten out of hand.

He brushed off Theda’s further questions, saying only, “That was too close for comfort.”

Chapter 7

Candy

Candy had broken into the *Anti-Bruin* with a piece about the upcoming Playing with Fire Festival and its connection to California's underground radio network. She'd scored a brief phone interview with Fire Cracker, the main DJ promoting the event. Her small success had been enough to get her invited to meetings of the features staff.

In the wake of the theater bombing, the editor, Sherri, challenged a roomful of reporters: "We need to find out who was behind that caper and why. Any theories?"

The room heated up with speculation, mostly about outside groups like the People's Army that had been known to strike college campuses. The attack seemed to match the PA's *modus operandi*, which was to send a loud message without intentionally maiming or killing anybody. The incendiary bomb had destroyed the stage area and left extensive smoke damage inside the building.

But why would the PA have done this? That question persisted since the group had yet to issue its usual post-action manifesto.

Candy tried to come up with an alternate theory. "The play itself, *The Killing Campus*, was turning into a powder keg," she said. "I know the cocreators of the show, Clive O'Dell and Theda Brooks, quite well. They'd been fighting for weeks about the show's direction, and

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Theda quit or was canned shortly before the scheduled opening. She was replaced by her understudy, who favored Clive's more cautious approach."

"So what're you saying? You think your friends' spat could've turned violent?" Sherri asked.

"I don't know about that," Candy said, startled to hear it put so bluntly. She'd just been thinking out loud, not making accusations. Still, she couldn't help musing, "It does seem like Theda's been getting awfully cozy with Floyd Worth."

"The rich-boy radical!" Sherri sat up straighter. "Now that's intriguing. Maybe Pretty Boy's finally done something besides blow hot air out his ass. Why don't you look into it?"



Less than a week before the festival, the *Anti-Bruin* reported a rumor that the event was about to be canceled because of concerns about further violence. Within hours, a concert that had generated only moderate advance notice and ticket sales became a major campus cause. Hundreds of kids bore down on the main administration building, demanding that "their" festival go on.

This news made the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and a few other California newspapers. Soon afterward, Floyd informed the group that he had locked in the Grateful Dead, insofar as that was possible. They'd agreed to kick off the Friday night festivities and "probably" close the festival at dawn on Sunday.

Floyd explained how he'd fill the space in between. After the first Dead set, a trio of popular beat poets from Berkeley would take the stage to read their work through the night. On Saturday morning, AMO and JPJ would play ahead of a string of bands that would keep the music going and going, as long as it took until the Dead returned.

Candy asked Floyd, "Are you at all nervous to have relative unknowns like AMO and JPJ competing with the Grateful Dead? Not to mention all those avant-garde outfits who've only been heard on underground radio?"

"It's not a competition," Floyd replied. "It's a love fest. The Dead will energize everybody."

"Listen to Promoter Floyd, going all peace-and-love on us," Neal said mockingly.

"Why shouldn't he?" Preston snapped. "This festival is gaining steam every minute, and we're gonna ride the blast—those of us who aren't too chickenshit, that is."

"Who're you calling chickenshit?" Clive was still lunching with the group while on hiatus from the band, but he often bristled at the trend of discussions. "You by any chance talking to me?"

"So what if he is?" Theda shot back. "It's time you decided if you're with us or not."

Clive cast a bitter glance around the table. "Before I decide that," he said, "I've got a question I'd like answered. Can any of you take a guess at who firebombed the theater where I was about to open?"

"Nobody here had anything to do with it." Theda turned red but stuck out her chin combatively. The two of them eyed each other.

Breaking the awkward silence, Candy turned to Floyd. "We all know the Grateful Dead aren't just about playing music," she said. "Their crews are notorious for distributing LSD to the crowds. Are you prepared for them to turn the festival into one of their acid tests?"

"We'll be hosting close to twenty-five thousand kids on the grounds," Floyd replied. "A crowd like that is bound to test the limits with all kinds of drugs and other shit. I'm okay with anything as long as it stays in the audience. I don't want my performers high while they're playing. Only the Dead can get away with that."

"So you think the administration is okay with a major drug scene? And how do your parents feel about it?"

"I assure you, my parents approve of the increased ticket sales a world-famous band can bring in," Floyd said. "They're not against profiting from things they don't necessarily understand."

Candy pressed on. "Isn't it kind of ironic that the festival got a major boost from the theater bombing?"

"I don't know what the hell you mean by ironic," Floyd said. "That's an English major talking."

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Candy tried again. “So what about Clive’s question? You got any ideas about who bombed the theater?”

“Why are you asking me?”

“I just thought someone with your political connections—”

“You’re the journalist, right?” Floyd said, cutting her off. “So it’s up to you to uncover the facts, not me.”

She started to ask another question, but Preston said, “Knock it off, Candy. You’re giving everybody a headache.”

Candy froze at his tone. It was the first time he had put her down in front of the group. She could only stare at him, waiting for an apology that didn’t come. Instead, he resumed talking up AMO’s fantastic future. Everybody at the table, even Clive, started eating it up.



It jolted Candy to realize she and Preston were drifting apart. When had this happened? She must have been too preoccupied with her studies and her newspaper career to notice the exact moment when he had stopped being her companion and turned into a full-fledged rock star.

She was no longer asked to sing “The Permanence of War” or anything else at rehearsals, so she had assumed there was no point in attending them. Instead, she prepared dinner at home every night like a good wife. That hadn’t helped her relationship with Preston, though, since he rarely got home in time to eat with her. Rehearsals were running long, he said, but he didn’t elaborate.

In bed together, they made love if the mood struck him. Otherwise, their communication was stagnant. He went on as he always had about his hopes for the band, but with less self-doubt and more swagger. Candy agreed with everything he said, but her spirits sagged. He no longer asked for her advice.

Sometimes when Candy was in the apartment alone, she rifled through his bureau and desk drawers. She found dozens of fan letters from girls he had met during gigs at the frat houses and downtown clubs. She read furiously between the lines, but she could find no

evidence of a relationship that had gone beyond the “aspiring groupie” stage.

Their lunchtime get-togethers were anything but reassuring. While the guys carried on a lively conversation, Candy sat next to Preston and watched Hope’s and Theda’s faces for signs of stress. No one was exuding marital bliss these days.

One day at lunch, before Floyd arrived, Neal smirked at Candy while devouring a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. In between swallows, he said, “Candy, how’d you let your husband get such a swelled head? Just the thought of sharing a stage with the Grateful Dead is turning him into a chauvinist pig. He says the Dead don’t bring their women onstage with them, so why should we?”

“What?” the three women screeched in unison.

Preston jumped a little and hastened to explain. “It’s nothing personal. You girls have been great. But we’re about to go big-time, and that means we need a more professional act.”

“Bullshit,” Theda said. “What do you call professional? Does that mean playing good music or putting on some macho act? You can’t deny I’ve been doing the job on drums.” She glared at her husband and added, “If Clive doesn’t get back on board soon, you’ll need me.”

“You’ve done okay,” Preston conceded, “but AMO was meant to be the three of us ... Andrews, McNab, and O’Dell. That’s why we call it AMO, sweets. You’re more of an extra.”

“An *extra*? Fuck that.”

Before Theda could explode further, Neal said, “Even if Clive keeps farting around, we have other options besides filling in with girls. Here, take a gander at the latest news from elsewhere.” He whipped out a tabloid newspaper and waved it at the group.

Candy thought at first it was the *Anti-Bruin*, but she knew Neal usually scoffed at her paper. It turned out to be the much thicker University of Maryland publication, the *Diamondback*.

“Where’d that come from?” Theda made a move as if to swipe it.

“Remember that weird chick reporter, Katie something, who used to cover us back at Maryland? She sent it to me ’cause she just wrote a

piece about Brad Callahan, our original drummer. Seems he's out of the loony bin and back at College Park, practicing to play football again. But mostly he's been declaring his intention to get back with us as our rightful drummer."

"Far out," Preston said. "When's the last time we saw old Brad?"

"I'll tell you exactly when." Theda's voice was steely. "It was Halloween of our freshman year at Maryland, right after Clive replaced him on drums. He threatened the two of us on our way home from the dance that night. After that, he blew off his football scholarship and dropped out of sight. No great loss, if you ask me."

"You gotta admit," Clive added, "Brad was never really a drummer, just a pounder. That's why I replaced him."

"Yeah, and what's to keep him from replacing you now?" Neal asked. "If we gave him the word, I'm sure he could get here in time for the festival."

"You'd love that, wouldn't you?" Theda spat. "That goddamned Katie always stirred up trouble whenever she wrote about us. She tried to cause dissension with the fans over Brad's firing. And you egged her on because you've always been jealous of Clive's popularity. When are you gonna get over that?"

"What do you care?" Neal shot back. "You gave Clive the boot yourself. You changing your tune about that?"

Theda sputtered for a moment while Clive looked at his lap in embarrassment. Floyd strode up to the table, saw Theda's red face, and asked, "What's wrong now? Don't you people ever stop fighting?"

"I just found out Preston and Neal are plotting to get rid of us girls," Theda told him. "And while they're at it, they're hoping to replace Clive with the drummer they once fired."

Preston and Neal explained their positions. Floyd shook his head. "Now's not the time to make sweeping changes. Clive, you can help us settle this. Are you AMO's drummer this weekend or not?"

Giving Neal a long look, Clive replied, "Yeah, I'll be there ... as long as Theda gets to do her thing too."

"Theda is essential," Floyd agreed, "with her versatility on several instruments. Plus, she's got the best pipes in the group."

"I've got pipes too," Hope protested. "Don't forget, I'm the one who's sung a solo on an actual record."

"If you mean 'Celia' on *Ty Leahy II*," Candy said, "it's a stretch to call that an actual record."

"It might never be released," Jamie added.

"Regardless, Hope's got a point," Floyd said, smiling at her almost as warmly as he had at Theda. "'Celia' is her song, and she's earned the right to get up there and sing it."

Preston nodded at everything Floyd said, as if the engineering instructor's musical judgments had become law. Clive and Theda smiled at each other, rather politely. Candy guessed their marriage was still kaput, but at least they'd suspended hostilities.

She envied them. No one, not even her husband, stood up for her right to sing "The Permanence of War" as originally planned. She didn't have the heart to speak up for herself.



Candy's only way forward would be to write bang-up articles for the *Anti-Bruin*. She kept rifling through Preston's private letters, telling herself it was research. Nothing caught her eye until she found a letter from Josephine.

Why would her best friend write a long letter to her husband, when lately she had sent Candy herself only a few brief notes? Candy knew she had dropped out of CMC again, or maybe had been expelled, after the stink-bomb incident. That was just as well, Jo had claimed, since it had freed her to return to Flanny's compound to reconnect with JPJ and help them prepare for their trip to the United States. Candy had heard from her again once she'd left Scotland and gotten as far as College Park with Beanner, Parker, Johns, and their roadie. They planned to spend a few days rehearsing and then head this way for the festival.

The letter to Preston, sent from Maryland just three days ago, was hard to figure. There was nothing particularly romantic about it, yet Candy found it secretive, wheedling, and unsettling.

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I'm appealing to both you and Floyd, but especially you, to help me do whatever it takes to get JPJ onstage at the festival, playing their best. Otherwise, I can see this group disintegrating in front of everybody, with dire psychic consequences. JPJ has an important message to convey, but we may need AMO's help to do it. I'm not sure Candy fully understands the power of your music. You, Preston, have enough talent and bigness of heart to use your band to prop up another that needs to be heard.

I'm helping Beanner with his duties as manager and publicist for JPJ. In fact, I'm mostly the one handling practical matters like travel, passports, rehearsal times, stage outfits, etc. Right now, Beanner is totally getting off on writing the song he and I hope to perform as a duet at the festival. We're still not really musicians, but Parker and Johns will carry us, we hope. They can still play like magic ... when they feel like it.

Beanner insists his stage name will be Jesus. That's not only to preserve the first letter in JPJ, but to take credit for resurrecting the band. I'll be the front girl when we get to California and possibly the sanest member of the group. I'll bet that shocks you, doesn't it, Preston? I know it would freak Candy out.

Was Jo implying that Candy was naive about rock bands and musicians? And how could she think Preston's own wife didn't comprehend AMO's power? Candy skipped ahead to see if she was mentioned again.

After some thoughts about political activism in general, Jo wrote,

Better not tell Candy what I'm about to tell you, because she practically wet her pants when I wrote her about a little stink-bomb incident that took place several weeks ago at our old dorm. She'd think I was headed for the penitentiary if I tried to explain why I feel the theater firebombing at UCLA was such a pivotal event. It convinced me that Southern California is the happening place right now. I don't know if it's the constant sunshine that's so invigorating, but somehow you've all become much more courageous

and sophisticated in your actions and beliefs than us East Coast types. That's why Beanner and I want to come out there, sing a tune about that incident, and advocate more actions like it.

I'll be discussing this with you face-to-face in a few days. Until then, love ya. Jo.

Candy filched the letter. As far as she knew, Preston never missed it.

Hope

So Floyd Worth, the man Hope had always found both scary and sexy, was about to do it all for the group. They were just days away from hitting the big time, thanks to his festival, and he was still giving her the creeps.

Hope tried to explain this to Candy and Theda the first time the three of them happened to be alone at the lunch table. The guys had skipped out to do a run-through on the rehearsal stage for Floyd. Hope revealed that she'd never been able to trust the guy, although she knew he'd helped them all a lot.

"Why don't you trust him?" Theda asked.

"Maybe it's those intense eyes of his," Hope said. "And his sarcastic smile."

"What's wrong with those?" Theda asked. Her cheeks got rosy, which always gave her away. From the time they'd first met him, she had lit up like a lamp whenever Floyd was around, even in front of Clive.

"He's a man of mystery, I guess you'd say," Candy said with a giggle.

"That's what makes him intriguing," Theda replied, almost succumbing to giggles herself.

"Intriguing?" Hope said, tossing her head. "You mean sexy, Theda. You know you've wanted him from day one."

Candy exclaimed, "What're you saying? She's married to Clive."

"Yeah, right," Hope said, eyeing Theda for a long moment. "I'm sure that'll stop her from ... whatever."

Hope was trying to have a real conversation for once with these girls instead of the usual sniping. No such luck because Theda shot back

at her: "Are you implying I'm cheating on my husband? What about you and Ty Leahy?"

"I never cheated!" Hope exclaimed. "All I ever did with Ty was sing his song with him in the studio and at Newcastle. Neal was right there, both times. You all were."

"If I remember," Theda said, staring down Hope in turn, "you sang it in a pretty intimate way."

Hope could see these two didn't believe she'd been faithful to Neal. They'd always been jealous of her popularity at dances where AMO played. She had nonstop partners most evenings, even with Neal watching from the bandstand. He got mad only if someone stuck around too long. Of course, that didn't stop him from ogling other girls all night long.

"What if you were to see Ty again?" Candy asked mysteriously.

"As I've told you a hundred times," Hope said, "he doesn't want to see me."

"What if he changed his mind?"

"Why would he?" Hope asked. "What do you know about it?"

Candy took her time explaining, so that she could brag about her journalism career. "I've been interviewing Floyd about festival preparations for the *Anti-Bruin*," she said. "He's trying to finalize the schedule, but there are loose ends. He's still counting on the Grateful Dead to open on Friday evening, followed by the poetry readers, and then AMO and JPJ on Saturday morning and early afternoon. After that, he'll have to throw as many as a dozen musical 'experiments' on the stage for at least an hour each to fill in the time until, hopefully, the Grateful Dead returns to close the festival on Sunday morning. Floyd's looking for alternative ideas, just in case some of his plans fall through."

"He's already asked me if I think I can lure Ty back." Hope kept her voice calm, although her heart was pounding. What would she say to Ty if they actually met face-to-face? Right now the plan was for her to sing "Celia" without him. He'd probably consider that a betrayal.

"Another contingency plan Floyd's considering," Candy said, "is putting Allie McCarty out there for a country-gospel set. She and her

father are longtime friends of Fire Cracker, the DJ who's serving as master of ceremonies."

"That's a fucking lunatic idea." Theda reined herself in and added, "This is supposed to be a rock concert. What could goody-two-shoes Allie McCarty possibly add to it?"

"Floyd thinks Clive and Allie could team up to perform the *Killing Campus* songs," Candy said. "They *were* rehearsing together after you quit the show, as you must realize."

"They can rehearse all they like," Theda said, pounding the table, "but I had a hand in writing those songs, and Clive didn't. It was a team effort by the cast at College Park. Nobody uses them without my permission. Not even Clive—or Floyd."

"It's just that things never go exactly as planned during an event this huge," Candy explained. "Improvisation is always necessary."

Theda turned on her. "Speaking of improvising," she said, "you could do a little of that yourself. You could insist on going onstage with Preston to sing the lyrics you wrote for 'The Permanence of War.' And if he objects, you could sue his ass for stealing your song."

Somehow that made Candy deflate like a balloon. "Maybe," she said in a weary voice, "it'd be easier just to sue him for divorce."

Hope and Theda gasped. "You've worshipped that guy ever since you first laid eyes on him," Hope said. "What happened?"

"Nothing." Candy took a deep breath. "Forget what I said. I'm just exhausted."

"Actually, you might be on to something." Theda's eyes began to shine. Gesturing with her hands as if she were on the stage, she proclaimed, "We've worshipped these guys for too long just because they're aspiring rock stars. Are they really that worthy? It's not like they're changing the world. They're just making it safe for partying."

"But we made a commitment when we married them," Candy said. "We're their wives, not their groupies. We've played a major role in their careers, and we've sacrificed plenty for them." She got teary-eyed as she added, "How could we do more than be willing to have their babies to save them from the draft?"

Hope and Theda jumped at the word "babies." That topic had rarely

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been raised out loud. Candy looked as if she might confess something big. She put a hand over her mouth as if she was about to spew. Besides that, her hair looked uncombed and her face pale.

Hope couldn't bear to hear it just then, so she changed the subject. "I gotta admit my stepfather was right about one thing," she said. "We were too young to get married when we did. All our marriages started going on the rocks almost as soon as we left Flanny's compound. Not that Neal and I haven't had a blast, and I'm sure you guys have too. But admit it: we could've made better choices."

"What better choices?" Candy asked, as if she hadn't just threatened to divorce Preston.

"Get real, Candy," Hope said. "You must realize by now you're out of your league being married to the leader of a rock band, especially someone with a head as swollen as Preston's. That's nothing against you ... he'd be too much for most girls. But really, you'd have been better off marrying Jamie, the accountant."

Candy was too flustered to answer. Hope moved on quickly. "And you, Theda, are so obviously obsessed with Floyd Worth, it's like Clive no longer exists. What would your dad think of Floyd? I'll bet he'd be cross-examining him about that theater bombing."

"You're talking through your ass," Theda said. "There's no evidence against Floyd."

"I'm not accusing him of anything," Hope said. "But believe me, if I ever actually saw him commit a crime, I'd turn him in."

"Why don't you straighten out your own life instead of messing with other people's?" Theda said. "You keep carrying a torch for a guy you admit doesn't even want to see you. How're you gonna solve that dilemma?"

"I'll tell you how," Hope declared. "I'm gonna get onstage at the festival and sing our song, 'Celia.' It won't be a betrayal if I put my heart and soul into it. Who knows? It might even make Ty appear out of the blue."



Hope noticed that Candy kept trying to interview Floyd. She was still at it on the Wednesday evening before the festival, when Floyd drove the AMO musicians, together with their women and Jamie, to the family estate in his van. He planned to put up as many performers as possible at the house, to get a jump on the crowd. The local access roads, he predicted, would be totally clogged by Friday morning.

When Candy started to ask a question, Preston snapped, "For Christ's sake, Candy, enough already. Floyd is our host."

Hope felt sorry for her, but she was going about it all wrong. Hope knew she could have pried more out of Floyd by flirting with him than Candy ever would with her "reporting."



That night, they slipped into another world. The Worth estate blew Hope away, even more than Swami Flanny's had. This time it wasn't a monastery they moved into, but a chateau with a swimming pool and tennis courts. The house had three stories, with long corridors on each floor, countless bedrooms, and what looked like valuable artwork on the walls. Outside the immediate grounds, instead of orchards like at Flanny's, there were endless fields where the festival crowd would camp out. Security fences had been put up in hopes of making the thousands of campers pay to get in.

The house was crawling with assistants who were at Floyd's beck and call. One of them drove the group down a private road to check out the bandstand. It was equipped with the fancy sound system that Floyd had helped to invent. The amplifiers were so huge, Hope was sure the music would blast for fifty miles around. He had also installed the equipment needed to make high-quality recordings of every act. Behind the stage was a heliport where the really big stars would arrive.

The swimming pool was inviting, especially when it was lit up at night. Floyd encouraged his guests to use it as much as they liked. That first evening, Hope put on a new bikini and had all the guys gaping. Everyone had a great time jumping in and water fighting. When they took breathers, there was plenty to drink and smoke poolside.

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After downing a flask of Wild Turkey, Floyd stripped off his trunks and shouted, "Who's up for a skinny-dip?" He dove into the water and stayed down there at least ten seconds. Then he surfaced like a whale in the middle of the pool, splashing and flexing his muscles. "Nobody's gonna join me? What a bunch of wimps."

Hope slipped out of her bikini and jumped in. She dove down, came up behind him, and grabbed him around the waist.

"You've been flirting with me for months," Hope said. "Time to show me what you really got."

"And vice versa," he said, turning toward her and fondling her breasts underwater for a quick moment. She looked to see if Neal was watching them. He seemed too absorbed in whatever he was smoking.

"You've been called a man of mystery," Hope said. "How about spilling some secrets right now?"

"What do you want to know?" He grinned.

"It's not me who wants to know; it's Candy. She's obviously never gonna stop trying to get a big scoop on you. So before she drives us all crazy, why don't you slip me something juicy so I can pass it on to her?"

"She's annoying, the way she never asks a direct question," Floyd said. "She just pokes and pries. That'll never get her anywhere with me."

"Then let me ask you straight out: how connected are you with the underground radical left?" Hope held his gaze. "For example," she continued, "were you involved in that theater bombing? And what about other bombings that have been happening in California?"

"Why should I tell you?"

Hope pawed him a little, but that only made him grin more. "Oh, come on," she said. "What's the use of being a radical if you don't tell anybody? Don't you want to publicize your cause?"

"For your information," he said, "I had nothing to do with the theater bombing. I suspect the National Guard or ROTC planted that device, hoping to pin it on someone like me, but I can't prove it. As far as other activity, my involvement is peripheral. Does that disappoint you?"

"I'm not sure what 'peripheral' means," Hope said.

"I abhor violence," Floyd said. "I only support symbolic actions meant to intimidate, not injure. But if the government pushes back big-time, who knows? That might trigger a revolution."

"Is that what you want to happen?" Hope asked. "A revolution right here, this weekend?"

"Dunno if the time will be right. Better keep your wits about you, just in case." His tone was teasing.

"And yet you're richer than God," Hope pointed out, "and waited on hand and foot by so-called assistants who are really servants. I think you just dabble in radical politics to needle your parents. We should call you the Rich Radical."

"I like that," he said.

When they got out of the pool, Hope wondered whether there would be consequences. But Neal just said, "That's guy's so far out of your league, it isn't funny."

"Oh yeah?" she replied.

He turned away as if he didn't care. Hope would have clawed his smirking face if she'd cared enough herself.

Theda kept giving her nasty looks, like she wanted to pick a fight over Floyd Worth. Hope would have reassured her that she'd just been fooling around and Theda could gladly have him, but they didn't seem to be speaking.



On Thursday afternoon, Floyd brought in several more vanloads of guests. The house filled up with bands who were supposedly stars of underground radio. Later, Allie McCarty, Clive's country singer crush, arrived with Fire Cracker, the DJ. Allie greeted everyone with a wide smile, tossing her auburn head and twitching her slim hips more than you might expect from a religious chick. Last but not least, Theda got to welcome her sister Dora, who was about to graduate from Smith College in prelaw.

A buffet was set up in the dining room all afternoon and evening. The guests mingled as they filled their plates with juicy barbecued ribs

and chicken, coleslaw, salad, and sweets. There was as much drinking and smoking inside as there had been poolside.

Theda and Dora whispered together as they watched everyone else. They seemed to zero in on the way Clive and Allie related to each other with coy smiles. Then they started noticing that Hope and Neal weren't exactly lovey-dovey. Dora sidled up to him and said something that made him laugh. Later, she cornered Floyd and gave him the third degree about the whole festival setup—exactly the way she'd questioned Swami Flanny after her surprise arrival in Scotland while the group was there last summer.

"Your sister's awfully nosy," Hope told Theda. "It's like she thinks she's already a lawyer and has the right to cross-examine everyone here." Theda started to answer and then clammed up, since they still weren't really speaking.



Thursday evening, over the well-attended buffet, Floyd announced he had one more vanload of musicians to deliver. JPJ would be arriving that night.

"How do we know JPJ can still play real music?" Jamie asked, sounding nervous. "So much heavy stuff has gone down since we last saw them."

"Josephine assures me they've resurrected themselves from the ashes," Floyd said. "Their new manager, Beanner Cabot, is doubling as their front man and has taken to calling himself Jesus, which may or may not be a good sign. They hoped to pluck some fresh-faced girl singer out of the Scottish hills to join them, but no one suitable turned up. So with the guru's blessing ... God help us ... they're letting Jo give it a try."

Neal groaned dramatically. Floyd added, "We'll have to wait and see if this outfit is for real. If it turns out they can't play, we'll just have more dead time to cover creatively. I guess we can always add more poetry readings. Anybody here write poetry?"

Getting nothing but blank stares, Floyd shrugged and set off to fetch the new JPJ. Most of the group decided to take another dip in

the pool. As they headed out there, one of the Worth family assistants announced he'd just gotten word of an arrival by helicopter. He would drive out to the heliport to pick up whoever it was.

"You don't know who it is?" Hope asked. The assistant confirmed he didn't and hurried off.

"Celebrities?" Candy suggested, perking up as if she smelled an interview.

"Maybe it's Brad, our alternate drummer, arriving in style," Neal said with a smirk at Clive.

"Why bring him up?" Clive scowled and clenched his fists, which made his Christian crush Allie open her eyes wide. "Did you maybe contact that nut case and tell him to come?"

"Of course Neal wouldn't do that," Hope said. "I'll bet it's the Grateful Dead who just arrived. And I hope they'll join us for a swim. There's five of them, right? Wouldn't that be cool?"

"Can't wait to skinny-dip with the stars, can you?" Neal said.

It was so warm, they kept taking dips well into the night. Hope had become totally oblivious to who was in the pool with her when someone grabbed her foot and pulled her down. When she came up again, breathing hard, she fell into Ty Leahy's arms.

"Oh my God," she said, "it's you! I knew you'd come." In her amazement, she kissed him full on the mouth.

They held that pose until Ty was jerked away from her and disappeared underwater. Someone had pulled him down and wouldn't let him up.

"Neal!" Hope screamed. "What're you doing? Trying to drown him?"

She called for help, but no one seemed to be paying attention. Almost everyone was so drunk or high, they treated it as a joke. Then Theda's straitlaced sister Dora came to the rescue.

Theda

Even Theda had never imagined, until the incident in the pool, that her sister Dora was such a versatile chick. Of course, she must have polished numerous skills at Smith, having been a competitive swimmer

there while majoring in prelaw and political science and minoring in psychology. So Dora was totally qualified to dive underwater, position herself between Ty and Neal, separate them, and coax them out of the pool.

Then Dora really shocked Theda by putting a soothing hand on Neal. If she'd had a chance, Theda would've warned her that Neal could be a hothead. But touching a half-naked man she didn't know seemed to turn Dora on and, even more amazingly, calmed him down. As she escorted him to a poolside chair, they struck up a conversation.

It seemed Hope was too distracted by Ty's sudden appearance to notice this flirtation. Willie Givhans, Ty's manager, settled his client in a chair on the other side of the pool, and Hope hovered over him with a towel, no doubt murmuring reassuring words after his near-drowning.

Dora eyed that group and then said to Neal, "I believe there's some unfinished business to be raised with them. Am I right?"

"Damned right," Neal agreed. "Those bastards tried to steal our music."

"You're sniffing a lawsuit, aren't you, Dora?" Theda said. "Only you could practically save a man's life one minute and then threaten to sue him the next."

Dora smiled. Trailed by Neal and Theda, she made her way around the pool to Leahy and Givhans. Without preliminaries, she took up the issue of AMO's uncredited contributions to *Ty Leahy II*. The argument raged for a good fifteen minutes, only pausing when Floyd's van pulled up with its latest cargo.

Theda told Dora, "Save the court case for later. Right now it's time to meet the new JPJ."

They gathered in the carport to greet the arriving band. First out of the vehicle were Parker and Johns, the bass player and drummer who had survived the car crash in England. Their roadie got out next and glowered at everyone, exactly as he had done at the St. James Club. All three had long beards, longer hair, and fiery eyes.

Then the new part of JPJ emerged. Beanner Cabot, self-proclaimed manager and front man, popped out with his familiar silly grin and his light brown Afro. He also had the same colorful headband and shirt

to match and jeans with holes at the knees. His trademark garment bag with the sewn-on peace symbols was slung over his shoulder, just like the last time they'd seen him, walking away from the group in Newcastle. *One of these days*, Theda thought, *I'll snoop into that bag and find out what the hell he's carrying.*

Last to exit the van was Candy's old friend Josephine, who grinned as maniacally as Beanner. "Jo!" Candy cried, rushing forward to hug her. "I'm so glad you're back with JPJ. I thought you might stay in college a while longer."

"Oh, I'm persona non grata at dear old CMC," Jo said, returning the hug. "Remember, I wrote you how I wanted to go back there to take music classes along with my usual science. But the geniuses in the administration finally traced the stink-bombing to me, so I was finished. My parents retaliated by ordering me back into a life of waitressing, but I begged to differ. It turned into a big hassle, so I grabbed my tuition refund and fled back to Flanny's commune."

"How did you like living at my cousin's place?" Clive asked.

"It was magical," Jo said. "Almost miraculous, in fact. I'll have you know the swami is responsible for my joining JPJ. At first I was just their handmaiden, doing everything they needed ... serving their meals, moving their instruments, helping them rehearse by shaking a tambourine or maracas behind them, and of course sleeping with them on demand. That's the duty I was fulfilling when Parker told me they'd given up trying to find a local girl who could sing well enough to take poor Kristen's place. So I said I'd give it a whirl."

"Can you really sing?" Candy asked.

"I'm not claiming to be Janis Joplin reincarnated," Jo said, "but it's amazing what you can do when you believe. Flanny's style of meditation and prayer somehow brings out hidden talents. He convinced us we could do anything we set our minds to, including becoming a band."

"I can't wait to hear you guys play," Candy said.

Theda cringed in anticipation.

"Well, Beanner," Preston said, embracing him, "I must say I didn't really expect to see you ever again, after you left us high and dry on the A1 outside Newcastle."

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"It was fate, lad." He spoke with a faint Scottish brogue in place of his usual Boston accent. "Look at me now. I'm in a band."

"You're actually *in* the band?" Theda asked. "Not just managing it?"

"I'm doing whatever they need, whenever they need it," Beanner said. "Sometimes I play the Moog, and sometimes I sing vocals, and sometimes I just think up ways of promoting them to the skies. The most mind-boggling thing is, I've found out the only way to manage this band is to play in it. A totally transforming experience."

"I never knew you well," Theda mused, "but for someone who claims to be transformed, you look pretty much the same to me as you did the last time we met. Same teased hair, same spacey eyes."

"What does it signify how I look? I helped resurrect a band, lass."

"I don't know if I believe Flanny's prayers alone could've transformed two hangers-on into musicians," she said.

"Oh, ye of little faith." Jo smiled, but she thrust her pointed jaw at Theda.

"Being a musician myself," Theda said, "I know what it takes."

"Congratulations on being so talented," Jo said. "We'll be eagerly waiting for you to demonstrate that at the festival."

Dora chimed in to defend Theda. "I can vouch for my sister's lucrative musical talents. Back in high school, she earned a pile of spending cash by giving piano lessons to classmates. How about if she taught you and Beanner some basics at her going rate?"

"I took a couple of lessons from Theda back then, just to give her some business," Hope said. "Can't say I learned much of anything."

"Of course not," Theda shot back. "It helps if the student has at least a little talent."

Candy stepped in quickly to change the subject. "Jo, I thought you were an atheist. Did you really pray with the swami?"

"I wasn't praying so much as allowing him to pray over me. I wanted to harness his power, whatever it is."

Something caught Candy's eye. "What's that on your finger?" She grabbed Jo's hand and focused on a ring that looked like the ones she, Hope, and Theda had worn ever since their own Scottish sojourn.

"Oh my God. You got married in Flanny's chapel!" Candy exclaimed. "And you married ..."

"Me, of course," Beanner said as his grin got even wider. "It made perfect sense at the time. Why shouldn't she marry her partner in crime and show business?"

"That's wonderful," Candy said. "Congratulations to both of you."

"Thanks, but we don't take it that seriously," Jo said. "The ceremony was a nice, symbolic sort of bonding."

"What do you mean, symbolic?" Candy sounded alarmed. "You don't think you're really married?"

"Oh, please, Candy. Do you think *you're* really married?"

"Absolutely and forever." Candy looked desperately at Preston. "How could you think otherwise? How could *I* think otherwise?"

"Flanny's a good man and powerful in his way," Jo said, "but he's no longer a real priest or part of any established religion. His weddings are lovely fantasies. He knows that perfectly well himself. I'm sure he never intended to bind us together for life."

"My wedding was real, even if yours wasn't." Candy's eyes roved through the group, searching for support. Everyone, including her husband, looked at her as if frozen. The marriage thing had soured so badly for everyone, Theda thought, that freedom on a technicality looked inviting. Still, it made her sad.

"The legality of Flanny's weddings is an issue that should be explored," Dora said. "I know there were licenses involved, but Josephine could be right. Flanny's current lack of standing in the church might mean they could be easily annulled."

Now she was invading her sister's space. Theda turned on her and barked, "Listen, Dora, what gives you the right to question my life choices? You come here and start throwing your cold legality in everybody's face. Is that what studying law has done to you? You're getting as judgmental as Dad."

"That's not fair, Theda," Dora said, recoiling a little. "We're just concerned about your welfare."

"Well, save it. I don't need it." Theda turned her back on Dora and faced the group.

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“Candy, you got it right,” she declared. “We might’ve been fools to do it, but we really did it. We got married in Scotland. Our belief in it at the time is what matters.”

Candy sighed with relief.

“Who the fuck cares who’s married or not?” the JPJ roadie said. “Me and my mates all been married two, three times at least. None of them stuck.” His fierce eyes raked through everyone and alighted on Jamie. “Hey, you,” he said, “you’re the fucker who stole our van in Newcastle, right? Why’d you do that?”

“We didn’t steal your van,” Jamie stammered, taking a step back. “You abandoned it.”

“Forget the fucking van,” said Parker. “Finders keepers on that. All I wanna know is when we play. Ahead of or behind AMO? Who gets top billing on Saturday?”

The JPJ musicians glared at Floyd, who replied, “I’ll decide that after I hear you guys rehearse tomorrow—and after we welcome in our headliners.”

“Oh, right,” the roadie said. “You’re that thick with the fucking Grateful Dead.”

He glanced around the luxurious estate as if it were beneath his notice. “I don’t see any big fucking stars right now. When they gonna get here?”

“They’re coming by helicopter,” Hope said enthusiastically. “They should be here any minute. Right, Floyd?”



Theda could see that poor Hope was dying to swim with the Dead. She was bummed out when only the Berkeley contingent arrived from the heliport on Thursday night. She grimaced at the three bony, balding poets and turned her back, not caring about their literary fame. They weren’t the type she wanted to get wet and naked with.

Her flirtation with Ty Leahy when he first arrived didn’t get her anywhere either. He and Givhans soon disappeared behind a closed door with Floyd. Fire Cracker, the scheduled master of ceremonies for

the festival, was admitted to the meeting. Dora tried to get in, but they turned her away. The gathering broke up after an hour or so, and Leahy and Givhans left the house.

“They won’t commit to Ty performing,” Floyd explained, “unless AMO promises no lawsuit.”

“Fuck Ty Leahy,” Neal said. “Who needs him?”

Preston and Clive agreed. Hope just bit her lip.



Friday was a long, drawn-out wait for the Grateful Dead to arrive. Everyone who was staying at the house hoped they’d come by and hang out for a while before they played, but they were late. Most of the group didn’t hit the pool at all that day but kept busy indoors. In the morning, AMO and JPJ rehearsed on a sound stage in the basement recreation room, going over possible playlists with Floyd and Fire Cracker. At noon everyone moved to the dining room for another huge lunch buffet, during which they raided the liquor cabinet and passed several lit pipes around.

Drinks in hand, they wandered up to the third floor, which provided a great vantage point for the campsite. By midafternoon, thousands of pitched tents covered the area. According to Floyd, most campers had brought their own food, drinks, and drugs. The organizers were contributing first-aid tents, free water canisters, several dozen portable johns, and a security contingent stronger than last year’s. A couple of TV crews roamed the grounds, while another interviewed Floyd at his front door.

At first, it was a totally fun time. The kids out there seemed content to sunbathe and toss around beach balls and Frisbees. But as the hours slipped by, restlessness crept in. A few shoving matches and fistfights broke out in the crowd. The medical facilities started to fill up with kids who had overindulged in something or needed relief from the strong spring sun. The changing mood also affected the group indoors. Queasy from the continuous buffet, they all had to keep running to the nearest bathroom.

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Theda heard Preston mutter to Candy as he paced the floor, "This crowd could turn out to be a monster."

"You've always been able to master every crowd," she assured him.

"Don't you get that this is different?" he snapped. "It's a thousand times bigger than anything we've faced before."

"I know," she insisted, but she flinched at his tone.

Around six o'clock, most of the houseguests had reassembled in the dining room for a replenished buffet when Beanner and Jo announced they were going out to "get a feel for the crowd." Floyd advised them not to stay out there too long.

After they were gone, Candy blurted, "Jo told me they're gonna try to score some acid. She says there's sure to be a lot of it circulating in a Grateful Dead crowd."

"True," Floyd said, furrowing his brow, "but I don't like it. That could be some pretty heavy shit for those two."

Clive and Allie looked at each other in consternation. But Neal said, "Nah, it's perfect for them. In fact, if all of JPJ dropped acid, their music might start to make sense."

"What're you on about, wanker?" Parker snarled. "Our music don't need to make no sense to the likes of you."

"Then why call it music? Call it noise."

Parker turned red and lunged forward, reaching for Neal's neck. Neal punched him in the face. Before they could tangle, Johns and the JPJ roadie grabbed Neal from behind. Parker sank to one knee, holding his bleeding nose and howling.

"I'll kill you for that!" he yelled.

"What's your problem?" Neal said, laughing. "I just improved your looks."

"Oh yeah? Then how 'bout I rearrange your pretty face?" Parker was about to pounce again, but Floyd got in between the combatants.

"Damn it, Neal!" Preston shouted. "We don't need you going off like a playground bully right now. We're about to play the biggest concert of our career."

Neal didn't seem to hear Preston. It looked like he would've hit Parker again if Floyd hadn't stood in the way.

To Theda's shock, Dora approached Parker. "Don't you realize what Neal said was a compliment?" she purred. "He compared you to the Grateful Dead ... a band inspired by LSD, with millions of fans, the Deadheads, who share that mindset. Who wouldn't want to be like them?"

Theda could tell her sister was totally bullshitting. She didn't know squat about the Grateful Dead or Deadheads or acid. But her mediating skills were something else.

Parker looked at Neal. "If that's what you meant, then okay. Sorry I rushed you, mate."

"Don't mention it," Neal said. He pulled a wad of Kleenex out of his pocket and offered it to Parker, who shook him off, saying he liked the feeling of blood trickling down his face.

"I feel an urgent need to pray," Allie announced. "I know Satan is trying to take control here."

Parker leered at her and said, "I've always been down with the devil, love, but go ahead and do your thing."

The AMO musicians and their women bowed their heads, having been trained by Swami Flanny. "Gracious heavenly father," Allie intoned, "we thank you for bringing us together at this ... this amazing but dangerous time. With so many of us here to display our talents to the world, it's easy to make missteps that could decimate our souls. We're so vulnerable right now, dear Lord, to the wiles of Satan. Help us to resist the evil one and put on the most uplifting show we can."

"Yeah, 'the wiles of Satan.' We got a song by that name," Johns said. "How'd you know that, love?"

Allie added quickly, "In Jesus's name, amen," and everyone repeated the "amen."

Allie and Clive smiled at each other for a long time afterward. Were they sharing a mutual love for Jesus, Theda wondered, or something else?



As dusk fell, everyone wondered what would happen if the Grateful Dead failed to show that night—a riot, they figured.

It was close to ten thirty when Floyd finally got a call from the

heliport that an arrival was imminent. He jumped in his van and drove off to meet the headliners and their crew. Shortly before midnight, the group opened the third-floor windows and took in the first exquisite sounds of the Grateful Dead. The performance began with a five-minute instrumental that revved up the crowd, and then the perfectly blended voices chimed in. The music reached over that long distance with a clarity that seemed otherworldly.

"Listen carefully to every note," Theda instructed the group. "You can hear all the details and nuances if you really listen. Floyd had a hand in creating the state-of-the-art equipment that's making it all possible. He's helped to usher in a new age of music."

"We get it, Theda," Hope said. "Floyd's a superman and a genius, not to mention a hunk."

The guys didn't seem to need any convincing, but Theda wasn't sure the girls understood the importance of what they were hearing. The Grateful Dead wasn't just a band; it was a brotherhood, in a way AMO and JPJ could only hope to be. Each of the five musicians contributed his unique talents to a perfect tapestry of sounds. Theda could hear Kreutzmann's drums interlocking with Lesh's bass guitar, both driving the melodies supplied by Garcia's and Weir's dueling lead guitars. Pigpen's rough exterior belied his gentle touch on the keyboards. The songs themselves were mini-fables that illustrated principles of the youth revolution. The long jams between songs wove the entire concert into a seamless whole. The crowd settled down into what seemed like a trance. Little cheering could be heard, but the white spotlights that sliced through the multitude revealed dervish-like dancing and twirling everywhere.

If Theda was ever meant to have a religious experience, this was it. All that churchgoing with Clive hadn't done it. She sat immovable before the window, while Hope, perpetually drunk or high or both, tried to provoke her again. "So you're gonna sit there and tell us your intimate friend Floyd is responsible for the way the Grateful Dead plays?"

"He has something to do with it," Theda said.

"Oh yeah?" Hope turned to Candy, who was starting to look

pale and sweaty. “How’re you doing with probing Floyd for your next newspaper article? You figured out yet why he disappears so much at night?”

“You both might consider the possibility,” Theda said, “that Floyd is using his free time to revolutionize the music scene. That’s a pretty time-consuming task.”

“I never accused him of anything,” Candy stammered. “I just wondered why he was so secretive. If my questions were offensive, I’m sorry.”

Clive butted in to ask, “What do you want from us, Theda? You want us all to genuflect to the guy?”

“I just think he’s as much of a guru, in his own way, as your cousin Flanny.”

“Would all of you please can the shit for now?” Preston ordered. “I’m trying to listen to the Grateful Dead, for Chrissake.”

Preston’s words had no effect on Hope. “Why shouldn’t Candy keep on questioning Floyd?” she demanded. “If he has nothing to hide, he should have no problem telling us what he’s doing in his top-secret lab. But if he refuses to talk—”

“Then what, Hope?” Theda asked.

Hope managed to focus her blurry eyes on Theda. “I’d just like to know,” she declared, “whether the theater getting bombed right after you were fired from that play was a total coincidence.”

“If you’re accusing *me* of something,” Theda said, “just spell it out, Hope, for everyone to hear.”

As Hope tossed her blond head and left the room, Theda shouted after her, “Why’re you always running away from a serious discussion?” Then she calmed down. *We’re all just nervous about our performance tomorrow*, she told herself. *This is no time to blow our cool.*

Chapter 8

Candy

Candy's face burned with shame at the way the girls squabbled during the Grateful Dead concert, although the guys mostly ignored them. She vowed to stop being drawn into the gossipy nonsense and start focusing on possible themes for a bang-up article.

Preston took in every moment of the Dead experience. After telling the girls to quiet down, his only comment, two hours into the show, was more of a moan: "How will we ever follow this?"

"Fucked if I know," Parker replied.

Sometime in the middle of the night, the world-famous band wrapped up its set and promised to return on Sunday if the crowd behaved itself. The multitude roared its approval and then gradually settled down as the first of the Berkeley poets took the stage. His words were transported through the same huge amplifiers that the band had used. The series of poets kept reading past dawn, lulling everyone intermittently to sleep. Candy wondered whether anybody else noticed they were advocating the overthrow of the government. She would drift off, only to jolt awake when she heard soft-spoken but incendiary words.

Toward morning, Floyd burst into the third-floor observation area, where AMO and JPJ and their entourages were gathered. "Didn't I tell

you the Dead would blow your minds?” he exclaimed. They all agreed that their minds had been blown to varying degrees.

As the poetry wound down, Jo and Beanner returned, escorted by a security guard. Their eyes glowed strangely. Candy asked Jo, “Where have you guys been?”

They both gave a high-pitched laugh. Jo tried to answer, but she seemed overwhelmed with emotion. Beanner babbled something, too fast for Candy to understand.

“They’re tripping,” Floyd said. “Damn, I knew this would happen if they went out there. They won’t be communicating normally for God knows how long.”

“How can you tell?” Neal snickered.

“The whole crowd’s probably tripping,” Clive said. “What if they boo us off the stage because we’re not psychedelic enough?”

“Yeah, they’ll totally shit on AMO,” Parker told Floyd. “That’s why you gotta give JPJ top billing. We’ll groove with the acid heads.”

“No sale,” Floyd replied. “I’m putting on a music showcase, not an acid test. AMO’s the band to do that, with enough variety in their repertoire to appeal to all tastes. They’re going on at 10:00 a.m.”

Parker, Johns, and their roadie erupted in expletives, but Floyd and Preston kept their cool as they reviewed the proposed playlist. If all went well, AMO would revisit its entire history in the space of ninety minutes. They would return to the high school days of Homegrown, move through the College Park, London, and Scotland experiences, and end up presenting some of the electronic musical experiments that Floyd and Theda had worked out in his lab. In between, Floyd said, there’d be room for “improvising” according to the crowd’s mood.

“They’re bound to get restless at some point,” Floyd said, “so we’ll have the girls in reserve, ready to add sugar and spice when needed.”

“Yeah, birds. Always the fucking perfect solution,” Parker said, glowering at Floyd.

“Patience, guys,” Floyd said. “JPJ will get the early afternoon slot and segue right into an avalanche of experimental bands. There’s enough outfits coming in from points north to keep the music going the rest of the day and all night.”

Handmaidens of Rock

The JPJ roadie thrust his face close to Floyd's and yelled, "No way, man! You ain't lumping JPJ with that experimental shit. We ain't one of your throwaway outfits. Plus, we never agreed to second billing behind the AMO assholes. No fucking way."

"It'll all be cool, guys," Floyd said, backing away but not ruffled. "First or second billing won't matter. It'll all flow into an amazing, seamless buildup toward the Dead's return Sunday morning. If everyone grooves, the crowd will dig it all."

"We'll actually be helping JPJ out by going first." Preston grinned gamely. "We'll test the crowd's mood, find out what they're into."

"I'll be fucked if they're into your high school shit," Johns growled.

"They will be," Floyd said. "Trust me."



It seemed to Candy that Theda was the one who trusted Floyd with her life. Theda drank in his every word, her eyes widening and those apple cheeks blooming. She mostly ignored her husband and Allie, except to whisper to Hope and Candy, "Clive's new little friend has the most plastic smile I've ever seen."

Candy agreed with her about Allie, but not necessarily about Floyd. When he declared his intention to use the girls in the show, he really meant Theda. If Candy knew her, she'd grab the spotlight when she got a chance and try to reduce AMO to her sidemen. Floyd might approve of that, but there was no way Preston would stand for it. Not being star material herself, Candy didn't care what Theda did—as long as it all fit nicely into an article.



As showtime approached, Floyd advised everyone to dress up. The guys put aside their usual T-shirts and jeans for dress shirts and slacks. Candy, Hope, and Theda donned their "Flanny outfits," the colorful homemade gowns and necklaces they'd acquired in Scotland. Hope lent Allie one of the gowns she had made herself, but Allie declined

the outsized wooden cross that went with it. Instead, she kept a smaller gold cross on a chain—"dangling between her boobs," according to Hope. Dora, who had no intention of going onstage, stuck with her lawyerlike dress suit and wore no jewelry. Floyd himself wore a dark blue jacket and tie.

Transporting AMO and its entourage to the concert venue for the scheduled ten o'clock set required Floyd to make two hauls. An hour before showtime, he piled Preston, Neal, Clive, and Jamie into his van for the trip via his private back road. Preston and Neal carried their own guitars, while Clive hoisted the usual box filled with percussion instruments. Forty-five minutes later, Floyd returned for the girls. They tumbled into the van, giggling like the silliest of groupies as they set off.

"I wasn't shitting you ladies when I said I wanted you to participate," Floyd said, turning and giving them a wink, "but how or when remains to be seen. As I said before, improvisation is the key." That only increased their nervous laughter.

When they arrived at the site, they were waved through a cordon of security guards surrounding the backstage door. Once inside, Floyd pointed them to a large table with coffee and pastries near the back of the room. No drugs were being served. Allie quickly separated herself from the others and seated herself in a corner with a miniature Bible.

Floyd counseled the musicians up front as they drank coffee, paced, and debated which of their high school-era numbers they should open with. Should it be political, psychedelic, or young-love? Ten o'clock came and went, and the argument continued. Jamie joined the group from the stage, where he'd been assisting Floyd's team with setup tasks.

"I must say, I'm not too impressed with your friend Floyd's organizing skills," Dora told her sister.

"Jesus, Dora," Theda replied with a glare, "it's a rock concert. Creative chaos is part of the experience."

"I thought you said he had a plan."

"He does," Theda said. "It's to keep AMO as clearheaded as possible and set the band loose onstage to show off their versatility."

Candy shared Dora's concern. "Creative chaos" wasn't the ideal theme for her next article. She figured the opening number would set

the tone. With indecision rampant, she tried to eat a doughnut and gagged on it. She grabbed a napkin and spit out the bite as a wave of nausea hit her.

“What’s wrong with you?” Hope looked at her with suspicion and maybe a touch of bitterness. “You pregnant, by any chance?”

“Don’t be silly,” Candy said, gasping. “It’s just the tension.”

Hope’s so obsessed with pregnancy, Candy told herself, she trumps up not only her own symptoms but everyone else’s too. Still, she might’ve freaked out if Jamie hadn’t touched her shoulder just then and pointed to the backstage door.

“Isn’t that your boss from the *Anti-Bruin*?” he asked.

Sherri waved at them from the door, where she was being checked out by a guard. Moments later, she rushed up to them, her breasts threatening to pop out of her low-cut yellow cotton top. “Hi, guys!” she yelled.

Candy started to introduce Sherri to the group, but the editor put up a hand. “Never mind the formalities,” she said, grabbing a doughnut and gesturing toward the door. “Look, I brought company. I’m sure you remember these ghosts from your Maryland past. They dropped by my office just minutes ago.”

Candy stared at the “ghosts” in astonishment as they made their way through security. Katie, the bespectacled reporter from the *Diamondback*, had finally caught up to them. Candy remembered the relentless way Katie had trailed Homegrown around College Park and how she had poked into their business arrangement with Theda’s dad.

Right behind her was an even more shocking apparition—a brooding man with dark, disheveled hair and muscular, tattooed arms. He was dressed in military-style camouflage pants and vest. He hadn’t crossed their path for so long that Candy had to stop and search her memory when he first appeared.

She grabbed Sherri’s arm and whispered, “Don’t you realize that’s Brad, the original drummer whom Clive replaced? That was an ugly scene. Brad threatened to beat him up but instead went into a mental hospital or something. We have to keep them apart.”

“Too late,” Sherri said. She watched with a grin as Brad approached

Clive from behind and tapped him on the shoulder. Clive turned around, and his mouth fell open. Then he began to shake. He took a step backward, but there was nowhere to go.

"I got something to say to you," Brad said with a scowl.

"This oughta be good," Neal said, smirking.

"Shut up," Preston hissed at him. "This is serious."

Clive waited, biting his lip. Instead of speaking, Brad got even closer. Candy thought she detected a bulge in his vest pocket, but she might have been seeing things.

Brad grabbed Clive and pulled him forward until the two were knocking chests. Then he laid his head on Clive's shoulder. "Forgive me," he said tearfully.

"What do you mean, forgive you?" Clive asked.

"I've sinned against you big-time, my brother. I need you to forgive me for trying to pound you that time ... that Halloween night, remember? There was no excuse for that, me being a cop's kid. And ever since then, I been trying to catch up to you and finish the job. Damn near succeeded too. Forgive me, man."

"Why now?"

"Cause I've seen the light," Brad said. "I need to get right with you, and with God, 'cause I'm going into the army soon. I could get killed, you know."

Clive continued to stare at Brad. Candy wondered what the ex-drummer meant by "damn near succeeded." How long had he been lurking around UCLA? She wanted to ask, but everyone else seemed caught up in this story of redemption.

Clive's look of horror faded like a morning mist. "I feel like there's no way you'll get killed, now that you've found God," he told Brad, returning the hug. "I'll pray He keeps you safe. No kidding, man, I'll pray for you every day."

"Praise God," Allie said from her corner. "It's a miracle."

Allie crowed that she and Clive had helped to bring about this turnaround through the power of prayer. Theda endured this for a minute and then snapped, "You're honestly thanking God that a young man is marching off to war? At an antiwar festival? Give me a break."

Handmaidens of Rock

"I'm thanking God that there are still heroes in this country," Allie shot back.

As the two young women stared each other down, the musicians held a joyous reunion. They talked about old times as if it had been all fun and games. Katie, the Maryland reporter, chimed in to report that a large contingent of kids from the old campus had infiltrated the crowd and were sure to cheer the songs they remembered.

"Yeah, like 'Grooving under the Desk,' Brad said. "That's the sexy one that made all the teachers and parents think us kids were screwing right under their noses. You gonna play that?" It was also the tune Brad himself had crooned until Clive had taken over his spot.

"Brad, my man," Floyd said, "I just got a brilliant idea. How about joining AMO onstage to sing that song? It's a perfect opening number and tribute to the past. You and Clive can make a duet of it and take turns pounding the drums."

The guys embraced this idea and decided to follow up "Grooving under the Desk" with two other nostalgic numbers that had been hits at College Park: Neal's mildly psychedelic "Psycho Professor" and Preston's wistful "Peace Conquers All."

"Maybe after I'm done playing, I can be your bodyguard," Brad told Clive. "I know for a fact there's a lot of threatening people out there. And I still gotta atone for some stuff myself."

"Thanks, Brad, but it's not necessary," Floyd said, patting his back pocket, which held a walkie-talkie. "We already have tight security, and I can summon more at any time. But you're welcome to hang out backstage with us once you're done."

The sound crew onstage ran through its final checks. Preston and Neal retuned the lead and bass guitars. As if Candy weren't unsettled enough, Preston chose this moment to nudge Clive and gesture toward Allie, who'd resumed reading her Bible in the corner.

"Cute redhead," he commented. "I've been meaning to congratulate you." Brushing back his own flowing locks, he added, "Always been partial to 'em myself, for obvious reasons."

Candy hadn't known that. While she considered the desperate ploy of dying her hair auburn to curb her husband's wandering eye, they

heard Fire Cracker hit the stage from the opposite end. He grabbed a microphone and introduced AMO, sight unseen: "Boys and girls, here's a l'il outfit that I'm told has a l'il bit of everything for y'all. They call themselves A-M-O, AMO. Straight shooters, huh? Anyways, here they are."

With a "Go!" from Floyd, the musicians walked onstage. Fire Cracker disappeared as quickly as he had appeared.

"Good evening ... I mean, good morning," Preston said into the microphone, laughing at his own disorientation. "We're a band formerly called Homegrown, now called AMO. We started out as high school kids, went to college at Maryland, traveled overseas, tried to meet the Beatles, and ended up crashing with a swami in Scotland. Then we returned to the US to go Hollywood by attending UCLA. We'd like to relive our own 'long, strange trip' for you now."

The band played its juvenile songs as planned, generating some of the old high school spirit onstage. However, the response was muted. Most of the estimated twenty-five thousand must have been slowly waking up during the rather clumsy duet of drummers. After the first three numbers, Brad lumbered backstage to say goodbye, a few boos in his wake.

"Thanks for letting me hang out with the band again," he said, hugging Floyd. "I got my soul back, man. Some of them freaks out there didn't like my clothes and my salute when I came off, but fuck 'em. If they mess with any of you, I'll fight 'em. Good practice for fighting the Commies in Nam."

"Just keep your head low over there, okay?" Floyd advised. Candy watched, mouth agape, as the leftist instructor embraced the budding soldier.

Allie jumped up, gave Brad a parting kiss on the cheek, and crooned, "Honey, I got plenty of soldiers and ex-soldiers in my family. In my eyes, you're a hero just like them. Don't let anyone ever tell you different."

Everyone else sent him on his way with a dubious "Good luck." *If he's doomed*, Candy thought, *he seems okay with it*.

"We should stay on his trail," Sherri whispered to her. Candy

wanted to discuss this further, but just then Katie approached. Candy thought the reporter from Maryland might want to ask some questions about AMO's musical development since leaving her beat. After all, Candy had written a couple of articles about it.

Instead, Katie asked, "What's this I hear about the band's multiple weddings overseas?"

Candy replied, "We just decided, all together ... the three members of AMO and us girls ... that the time was ripe. So we did it in a Scottish chapel, and it was beautiful."

Dora cut in. "You're still not facing reality, Candy. The legality of those unions must be examined." Her hard insistence stabbed Candy in the heart. Another wave of nausea hit and brought with it a feeling of abandonment. Was this the way a single mother felt?

Snap out of it, Candy ordered herself. *Something's happening ... the crowd is waking up*. Laughter rippled through the multitude as Neal commandeered the stage with a medley of pop standards. He was giving cheesy renderings of "Heartbreak Hotel," "Leaving on a Jet Plane," and "Love Potion No. 9." It took Candy a moment to realize he was imitating Joey Sherry, the singer whom Homegrown had backed up during that infamous first dance at Nellie Bly High. She heard girls in the crowd screaming as if Neal really were a teen idol.

Floyd signaled from the wings for Neal to pour it on. The musicians followed this interlude with rocked-up versions of all three standards, exactly as they had done to humiliate Sherry and anger his fans at Bly High. Would this crowd get the joke?

Candy heard enough cheers to reassure her. Now Floyd made motions as if winding a movie camera. That prompted Preston to announce, "Believe it or not, the summer after we left high school, we made a movie ... a musical, in fact. We'd like to play a few selections from what I'm sure will one day be a cinematic cult classic. The title song is called 'Hex.'"

That slow, bewitching number settled the kids down. Hope whispered to Candy, "This is Floyd's plot to get Theda out there. Just watch. She's about to take over the concert like she took over the movie."

Sure enough, Floyd sent Theda out to sing the third verse of “Hex.” She vamped it up, recreating her long-ago performance before the Bly High movie camera. “You nailed it,” Candy told Hope. “She’s already the star of the show in her own mind.”

Sherri, overhearing them, said, “I wonder if Pretty Boy knows what he’s doing, throwing his little starlet in front of a crowd that just experienced the Grateful Dead.”

“That means a lot of the kids are still tripping, right?” Candy asked.

“Bingo. I’ve spent some of my misspent youth following the Dead around, and I’ve seen all kinds of reactions to all kinds of trips. Trust me, this isn’t the frat house or club audience you’re used to. Potheads and drunks are relatively easy to impress. A psychedelic crowd is something else.”

“What might they do to Theda if they get really weird?” Hope asked excitedly.

“Nothing, assuming most of the trips are good ones. Unfortunately, it only takes a few bummers to make trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?” Candy asked persistently.

“I can’t say. Hallucinations at rock concerts are unpredictable. When you’re in the throes of one, musicians look like gods ... or devils.”

Candy was shaken and fascinated. She glanced around the backstage area to see if anyone else was hearing this. Dora was still conferring with Katie, presumably about the legal issues she’d raised earlier. Allie still sat alone, her head bowed. Floyd seemed to be growing mesmerized as he watched Theda’s performance from the wings.

Candy sensed the crowd wasn’t as impressed with Theda as he was. Before she and the band could get through two slow numbers, restless murmurs rose up. Floyd mouthed something to Preston, who then transitioned to “We Can Change the World,” the most upbeat song in the movie, the one that used to have kids marching and singing in the streets of College Park.

Floyd indicated with hand motions that the band should repeat the verses while he decided what to do next. So far, Candy didn’t detect a peace movement springing up spontaneously like the one back home.

Handmaidens of Rock

No one seemed in the mood to sing along with the jubilant chorus that proclaimed, “Free us, and we’ll free the world.”

Theda returned backstage, red in the face, and complained that her slow numbers had put the crowd in a trance. “They seem pretty dead,” she said with a pout.

“Not your fault,” Floyd replied, scratching his bearded chin, “but we need to do something quick to shake them up.”

An idea that had been teasing Candy’s brain sprang to the fore. She saw a way to grab the audience and coincidentally lay the groundwork for an article on one of her most promising topics: AMO’s evolution.

“Listen, guys,” she said, “why not play the swami songs right now ... especially ‘Help Me, Savior’ and ‘Peace Warrior’? Those tunes convey a forceful peace message, and it’d be easy to demonstrate how they’ve changed and matured over time. AMO could play the different versions back to back, progressing from acoustic to electric.”

Theda shot her a suspicious look, but Floyd said, “You know, that’s about the best idea I’ve heard all day. Well done, Candy.”

“I just told you, Floyd,” Theda sputtered, “this crowd doesn’t dig the gentle stuff. I sensed that when I was out there. Going acoustic right now would be a step backward and a waste of everyone’s time. Why the fuck did we go into the lab and update the originals in the first place? Because we agreed they were spiritual crap, totally irrelevant to the West Coast.”

Candy caught the intimate look that passed between Theda and Floyd when she spoke of their private “lab” work. Still, he insisted, “It’s in keeping with the theme of the show, babe. It’s AMO’s history ... the band’s evolution.”

He fished a key out of his pocket and tossed it to Jamie. “Fetch me an acoustic guitar out of storage,” he ordered, gesturing toward a door in the back wall that Candy hadn’t noticed before. Jamie unlocked it, revealing a large collection of musical instruments and equipment, as well as mysterious wires and gadgets she couldn’t identify.

“Is that where you keep the bombs, Pretty Boy?” Sherri asked. Floyd just laughed, while Katie, temporarily distracted from researching their love lives, jumped back in alarm.

Jamie unearthed a guitar and handed it to Theda, who tuned it with the help of a pitch pipe. As “We Can Change the World” wound down onstage, Floyd told her, “We all gotta walk before we can fly, babe. So let’s give them the acoustic version of ‘Help Me, Savior’ and proceed from there.”

Theda gave him a bright smile, finally embracing his plan. Candy had to admire the way Theda went back out there and commandeered the center microphone with just that instrument. The band subsided, allowing her to pluck and sing the raw original:

“Oh, father of the northern hills,
and priest of man and beast,
smile down upon your children
in their search for love and peace.”

She paused and then delivered the recurring line: “Save me from myself, dear savior!”

The crowd murmured, perhaps wondering who the “savior” might be. Theda repeated the verse tentatively. Candy sensed she was awaiting the go-ahead from Floyd to discard the acoustic guitar and grab an electric one. Candy knew she’d updated the lyrics to describe herself, a girl “whose search for love and glory ... has made her free and wild.” She had also practiced some “free and wild” guitar riffs to drive it home.

The current version hung suspended in the air while Floyd considered what to do with it. His gaze fell upon Allie alone in her corner. He must have known that she and Clive had worked up their own interpretation of “Savior” because he called out, “Allie, honey bun, it’s your turn. Go out there and sell Jesus, or whatever it is you do.”

“Thank you, God.” Allie tossed her Bible aside, sprang out of her solitary crouch, and rushed onto the stage headfirst, like a flaming spear. She repaid God for his favor by singing her devout version of “Help Me, Savior.” Candy could only imagine Theda’s reaction when the band backed Allie, forcing her to surrender the center mike to her rival.

Handmaidens of Rock

Allie sold Jesus with a vengeance. She sang with a soaring, crusading fervor, calling on her savior in heaven to mobilize worldwide armies to fight evil. She added a warlike chant: “Save us from our foes, dear savior!” As she repeated the verse, the drumming stopped.

“Damn it, what’s gotten into Clive?” Floyd exclaimed, watching from the wings.

“Oh my God,” Hope said to Candy, “I’ll bet Clive’s joining Allie at the center mike. The two Holy Rollers are gonna sing together. What’ll Theda do about that?”

“What *can* she do?” Candy asked.

They heard a sudden clamor on the drums. Theda must have taken over Clive’s perch. She started drumming against the prevailing rhythm, trying to disrupt the singers, but they persevered against her assault.

Sherri strode up to Floyd and said, “Pretty Boy, don’t you know you’re really playing with fire now?”

“Me? I’m just experimenting,” Floyd responded with a grin.

“Fuck that,” Sherri said. “You’re deliberately taunting this psychedelic crowd with these ‘savior’ songs. Who’re you promoting, God or the devil?”

“Does it matter?”

Candy started to remind them that the plan had been to illustrate the band’s evolution, not to taunt the crowd. Before she could get this out, Allie and Clive moved on to “Peace Warrior.” They transformed it from the passive Flanny song it had been into something resembling “Onward, Christian Soldiers.”

Ominous murmurs arose from the multitude. Anything that sounded the least bit pro-war was bound to roil a gathering like this. Sherri told Floyd, “Sounds like the crowd isn’t much into religious militarism. What’re you gonna do if they take violent exception to it?”

“We’ve got enough security for any contingency,” Floyd said. He patted his walkie-talkie confidently, but Candy noticed he was sweating a little.

Candy and Hope, sensing something dramatic was about to happen, joined Floyd in the wings where they could see the stage. They watched

Allie reach the climax of the holy warrior song and hit it with power to spare, spreading her arms beatifically. Then something long and thin struck her from behind, spearing her in the buttocks. Her voice gave way to a painful screech.

The music dwindled to a confused stop as the crowd cheered. Candy and Hope stood aside as Theda stormed backstage with a beet-red face, laughing and panting.

“Christ, Theda,” Floyd said, “did you really throw your drumstick at Allie?”

“Damned right I did. How do you like my aim?”

“Babe, you shouldn’t have done that.” But Floyd laughed too.

Hope

Hope knew the three of them were in this together, but Candy and Theda had been getting on her nerves even worse than usual since the festival had started. Thanks to their own ambitions, they were blowing it with the band and screwing up their marriages. Candy was too obsessed with writing an unforgettable newspaper article to notice Preston drifting away from her. And Theda’s jealousy of Allie McCarty had come to a head in front of that huge crowd. Seeing her little rival outperform her onstage, she had thrown a tantrum and wound up looking like a fool.

Even so, Hope was ready to congratulate Theda for putting an end to the Allie-and-Clive gospel show. She supposed there could be Jesus freaks out there grooving to “Help Me, Jesus” or whatever they called it, but that kind of religion spooked her. She laughed when Theda stormed backstage and when Allie rushed in a moment later, rubbing her ass.

“That was such a ... a mean, vicious, *spiteful* thing to do!” she screeched.

“Spiteful?” Theda gave a phony laugh. “It’s not about spite, honey. It’s about saving our concert from your ignorant nonsense.”

Sherri, the chubby, bell-bottomed editor of the underground newspaper, said to Floyd in a teasing voice, “Are you gonna break up

this catfight, Pretty Boy, or are you gonna let the two of them duke it out?”

“We’ve got enough problems without a backstage brawl,” Floyd said, stepping in between them. “Back off, girls.”

Allie retreated, saying, “I don’t believe in fighting; I believe in praying. I’ll pray especially hard for you, Theda. You need it most.”

“What I need,” Theda spat, “is for you to stay away from me. And from Clive too.”

Hope had to laugh again at that, since they all knew that Theda and Clive had been on the outs for weeks. Why should she care what he did? Still, Allie seemed to take Theda’s threat seriously. She scooted out the backstage door to do her praying at a distance.

Theda turned on Floyd and demanded, “Well, what now? She destroyed the Flanny songs as far as I’m concerned. There’s no use playing the electronic versions now. The crowd’s had enough of them, and so have I.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” The genius promoter pulled on his beard, a sign of deep thought. The musicians onstage, waiting for Floyd’s next big idea, stalled for time by retuning their instruments.

Floyd looked at his watch and frowned. “I gotta leave soon to pick up JPJ,” he said, “but Christ only knows how that’s gonna go down. I suspect all four of them are tripping by now. I can’t put a totally incoherent band onstage. AMO might have to cover for them.”

His blue eyes blazing at the women, he announced, “I’d say it’s time to show off our female muscle. Girls, I want you to go out there and recreate what you did in Newcastle.”

The three of them gasped. Sure, they’d played a big part in the Newcastle scene, but did Floyd realize how badly it had ended? With a riot, no less.

Theda pointed out, “That means playing the Leahy songs without him. Legally risky, maybe?”

She glanced at her sister Dora, who said, “Definitely risky.”

“We’ll take that chance,” Floyd said. “Who knows, maybe it’ll bring Ty himself out of the woodwork. We could use him to fill in on Sunday morning ... now that it looks like the Dead aren’t coming back.”

“They’re not?” Hope nearly screamed. “How long have you known that?”

“I always knew it’d be problematic getting them to stick around for another set.”

“Oh, Jesus Christ.” Hope felt herself ready to freak out. “How’re we gonna break that news to the crowd?”

“I don’t expect you to do that.” Floyd grinned and winked at her. “I just need you to go out there and deliver that siren song of Ty’s, the one about his lost sweetheart. Sing it seductively, and maybe it’ll lure him back.”

“We all know you’re the only one who can do that, Hope,” Theda purred.

If they were being sarcastic about her powers, that just spurred her on. She winked back at Floyd and then strode right out there to the center microphone and positioned herself. The sea of kids in front took her breath away with their sheer volume. The bright colors that had struck her as so fabulous when she’d observed the crowd from a distance now seemed faded from hard living and dirt. Even more overpowering was the smell that hit her nostrils. Pot was everywhere, combined with the stench of sweat from so many thousands of campers. Quite a lot of the early morning crowd was still hidden away in tents or wrapped up in sleeping bags.

Hope motioned for Preston to put down his electric guitar and pick up the acoustic one to accompany her. Then she gave her all to “Celia.” Her voice wavered at times, but Ty had said he liked that—it conveyed the sadness. She got through the song, and the roar of the crowd lifted her like a tidal wave.

She felt she could stay out there all day. Candy and Theda joined her, and they sang Ty’s “Marching through Georgia Again” as they had in the studio at Apple. The cheers kept coming.

When they were done, Preston retrieved his electric guitar and the center mike in one swift motion. “Thank you, girls,” he said, motioning them to drop back. Then he turned to the crowd. “I hope you liked our display of chick power. We recorded those numbers in London for an upcoming album called *Ty Leahy II*. You’ll notice that Ty Leahy himself

isn't with us. That's kind of a long, sad story, but suffice it to say, he and his business cronies are squeezing us out."

That set off some boos. Preston continued, "But fuck them. We still intend to give you a sampling of what AMO contributed to the project."

As the band launched into its all-instrumental, all-Leahy set, Hope and Candy stayed in the backdrop, shaking their usual tambourine and maracas. Theda returned to the front and grabbed the bass guitar, clearly determined not to give up her privileged position. Even so, Hope ticked her off and grabbed some of her thunder by moving her hips and shaking the maracas in a way that made the audience howl.

Once AMO had gone through the *Ty Leahy II* instrumentals, Preston started in on Ty again. "There you have it, folks ... the songs we cowrote with a famous strummer who befriended us in the studio and promised to share the credit, only to run off with the tapes and hide behind a corporate label."

The word "corporate" was enough to rile up the crowd. As the boos started again, Hope stepped forward, shocking even herself. She had no idea what she was going to do until she did it.

She grabbed the center mike from Preston and declared, "It's true we had a fight with Ty Leahy, but he's not a thief, and he's definitely not a corporate type by nature. He's been driven to these things by ... by heartbreak. Can't you people relate to that?"

Hope thought she heard some sympathetic murmurs, so she continued, "We should be reaching out to him, not slamming him. So if you're listening, Ty, come back to us so we can play your songs the right way, the way they were meant to be played ... with you singing and us supporting you."

Not waiting to see how this went down, she left the stage. Neal gave her a sullen stare as she passed him. Floyd greeted her backstage with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. "If anything can coax Leahy back," he said, "that should do it."

Hope stood with Floyd in the wings, her pounding heart gradually calming down as she watched timid Candy take the center mike. Preston must have prodded her forward so that all three of the girls could say they'd had their moment in the spotlight. She and Preston tried to keep

the spirit of Newcastle going by singing “The Permanence of War,” the song they’d finished writing just in time to perform that night.

Floyd grimaced as he listened. “Kinda tone deaf, isn’t she?”

“Nervous too, it looks like,” Hope replied. “Sweating buckets. Not exactly a natural performer.”

Just as she was starting the last verse, the one she’d come up with under pressure, Candy stumbled to a stop and seemed to choke. “That’s not just nerves,” Floyd said.

“God,” Hope said, “did she just puke onstage?”

As the crowd jeered, Candy burst into tears. “I’m pregnant, okay?” she pleaded. With the crowd still unforgiving, she rushed backstage, looking pale and wiping her mouth sloppily.

“Wow, what a way to announce that,” Hope said when she reached them.

“I guess congratulations are in order,” Floyd said, grinning. He gave Candy a hug and then left to pick up JPJ.

“I suspected all along you were pregnant,” Hope said. “I don’t know why you ever bothered denying it. Did Preston know about it before now?”

Candy was breathing too heavily to answer. Jamie found her a chair and guided her to it.

“It might not be polite to ask the obvious,” Sherri said, smirking at the two of them, “but is there any doubt who the father is?”

Candy, that fool, stood up, stamped her foot, and yelled at her editor, “What are you suggesting? Of course there isn’t!”

She sat back down and buried her face in her hands. Jamie blushed as he patted her shoulder.

Hope took Sherri aside and murmured, “I’m sure Preston’s the father, but I wouldn’t be surprised if he denies it. I know him pretty well, and I’ve been watching all these guys change, especially since we’ve been in California. They’re famous rock musicians now, at least in their own minds. That means they feel free to do whatever they want with whoever they want, while we girls are expected to stand by, ready to serve their every need.”

“Poor gal,” Sherri said, shaking her head at Candy. “She’s totally

besotted with the guy. But I gotta ask, what's his draft status? If it's shaky, she oughta be able to convince him the baby's a blessing."

Hope glanced over and caught Candy glaring at them. There was no way she could hear what they were saying, but she seemed sure she didn't like it.

Theda

After Candy dropped her bombshell, she fled the stage, holding both her mouth and her gut. Theda called after her, "Candy, wait!" but she didn't stop. The band played on, jamming to fill up time. Eventually bored with the aimlessness of it, Theda put down the bass and went backstage, not to wade into Candy's mess, but to confer with Floyd about what to do next.

He had just returned from the main house with Parker, Johns, and their roadie in tow. "Beanner and Jo are missing again," he announced. "Damn those two. Who knows what they're up to now?"

"We sent them out to the fields to score us some acid," the roadie said.

"Wankers probably keeping it all for themselves," Johns grumbled.

"Forget Beanner and Jo," Theda told them. "They're just worthless hangers-on. You guys are the real JPJ. It's time for you to figure out what that means."

Parker and Johns stared at her for a long, unnerving moment. Then Parker's eyes drifted to the refreshment table. "That coffee spiked?" he asked.

Floyd laughed and said, "It's probably the only unspiked coffee within a ten-mile radius."

As the JPJ members frowned at him, Theda took Floyd aside. "I've got an amazing idea," she said in a discreet voice. "How about merging JPJ with AMO for a two-bands-in-one set? That way we can contain JPJ's destructive tendencies while making use of their skills on bass guitar and drums."

"That might just be the ticket," Floyd said, smiling uneasily at the scruffy musicians.

“But it’s essential we give Clive something to do when Johns replaces him on drums,” Theda added.

“Yeah, I guess so,” Floyd said, furrowing his brow. “When you go back out there, tell Clive to take a turn on the Moog. And since Parker’s playing bass, Neal can stay put on electric piano, while you—”

“Hope and I will resign ourselves to singing background vocals,” Theda said. “Right, Hope?” Theda wouldn’t ever really settle for that, but there was no predicting how the rest of the show would play out.

“Yeah, right.” Hope’s eyes smoldered at Candy, who was crumpled up in a corner with Jamie hovering over her. She snapped, “What’s that girl so unhappy about? She could have the world on a platter if she’d just get her head out of her ass.”

As Theda and Hope prepared to walk onstage with Parker and Johns, the drummer leered at Theda and pawed her arm. “Remember what I said back in London, love?” he purred. “We just needed some hot birds to help us crash the gates. It’s finally happening.”

“Glad to oblige.” Theda smiled at the thought of how far they’d all come from that dingy St. James Club.

When she got onstage, she relayed Floyd’s instructions to Clive and Neal. They reconfigured themselves and then restarted the show. Theda was relieved to see the crowd grooving to JPJ’s weird intensity, supported by AMO’s improvising. Hope didn’t bother to hide her little frowns and cringes, especially when Parker’s falsetto got too loud for her or when Johns’s drum solos went on too long. It seemed she hadn’t grown musically in all these months.

If there really were thousands of kids dropping acid in the fields, they all seemed to be on good trips, accompanied by a perfect soundtrack. JPJ’s preoccupation with the occult had only grown since the car accident that had taken the lives of their bandmates Jonesy and Kristen. Parker reprised the song Theda had first heard in London about a lovely phantom from heaven who enticed him to follow her. He segued into the equally mystical piece Kristen had sung back then, transforming it into his own remembrance of her. Theda concocted harmonies on the fly, and Hope tried to follow her.

Standing in the backdrop gave Theda a new perspective on the

crowd. Many campers remained concealed in their tents, the flaps opening occasionally to reveal their secret world. She laughed at the sight of naked bodies rolling on the ground together. Then a tent close to the stage opened up to reveal a tourniquet being wrapped around an arm and a needle being thrust into a vein. She'd been shedding her middle-class sensitivities since arriving in California, but not enough to keep from recoiling at that. Theda refocused quickly on the pot-and-acid crowd sitting out in the open, smiling and swaying to the music.

Preston stepped up to play his most spiritual tune, "Signals from the Clouds," the tribute to his deceased mother that always made girl fans cry. It was particularly suited to JPJ's emotive style. Theda and Hope remembered it and sang along, although Hope had previously called it "depressing" and "dreary." Theda saw Hope and Neal exchange a weary look when he looked back at her, proving they could still agree on a few things.

Theda didn't care what those two thought. Merging AMO and JPJ turned out to be an inspired idea. The combined performance, free-form as it was, would prepare the crowd for the series of bands scheduled to follow. Hopefully, those outfits, by sheer energy if nothing else, would carry the show through the rest of the afternoon and well into the night. In the meantime, they'd decide what to do about Sunday morning.

AMO had been onstage for close to two hours when Floyd signaled them to wrap up the set. As they hesitated about how to finish, Neal took charge. He sang Preston's political anthem "Revolution for Amateurs" but gave his own romantic lilt to the refrain, "Tell everyone you see ... it's a perfect day to follow me." The crowd shucked off its mystical mood as kids sang along. Preston raised his brows at Neal's co-opting of his song, but it was catching on.

"What you trying to pull with that shit?" Johns growled from his drummer's perch. "JPJ's a band. We ain't no political movement."

"If you don't like it," Neal said over his shoulder, "come up here and stop me."

He kept using his sweet tenor voice to lure the crowd back to the real world. Uplifted by thousands of voices, Theda reveled in this panorama of joy and togetherness. She tried to ignore the huge

medical tent in the distance that was filling up with flailing bodies and attendants trying to subdue them. She guessed some of those acid trips were bummers after all.



Backstage, after the performance, hearty congratulations were exchanged all around. Parker and Johns shrugged off Neal's thematic detour at the end and hugged the AMO musicians for letting them share the spotlight.

"Champagne and caviar back at the house," Floyd proclaimed as the two bands piled out of the backstage door and into his van like one big, happy, musical family.

Theda, Candy, Hope, and Dora waited for Floyd to return with the van. The journalists Sherri and Katie left together, while Jamie went onstage to help the crew break down the equipment.

Candy was the only one not in the mood to celebrate, which was hardly a shock, since Preston had turned his back on her and left without a word. "Preston will come around," Theda told her unconvincingly. "It's just the shock of it, I'm sure. It's a lot for him to deal with all at once."

"Preston's a bastard," Hope spat, expressing Theda's true opinion. "I know the guy. Don't forget, I used to date him. Mark my words, he's gonna deny responsibility as long as it suits him."

"How can he deny responsibility," Candy exclaimed through her tears, "when he's the only man I've ever slept with?"

"He can make you out to be a gold-digging groupie who snared him into a bogus marriage." Hope was nearly panting in her eagerness. "That way he can convince himself you're loose enough to sleep with anyone who comes along and that you've had plenty of opportunities. And don't be too shocked if he questions your friendship with Jamie."

"Jamie and I have never ..." Candy choked with outrage.

"It doesn't have to be true," Hope said, "if Preston wants to believe it. All rock musicians turn into lying bastards once their heads start to swell. Trust me, Neal and Clive aren't much better. This festival is pushing them all over the edge."

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“How do you know that, Hope?” Theda asked.

“I’ve seen it coming for months, ever since we’ve been on the West Coast, really. Whenever we mingle with other musicians, especially in the clubs, I get propositioned. And this weekend’s been more of the same. Cheating on wives or girlfriends is part of the rock star image.”

“I don’t ... I *won’t* believe that about AMO.” Candy shot Hope a pleading look and then looked to Theda and Dora.

“If Preston denies responsibility,” Dora said in her driest voice, “it’s simple. You just sue his ass.”

Theda blurted, “An abortion might be easier.”

That stopped the others cold. Hope recoiled, Dora furrowed her brow, and Candy declared in an outraged voice, “I would never do that, ever.”



An hour or so later, the group gathered in the main dining room to chow down, smoke weed, and hoist glasses. Just then, Beanner and Josephine burst in looking rough—“like werewolves,” Hope whispered to Theda. As the pair approached the table, with their hair uncombed and their clothes muddy, they made Theda so nervous she spilled her champagne.

“Starting the party without us, huh? Not too cool.” Beanner’s high-pitched voice affected her like squeaky chalk on a blackboard.

“Candy, honey, you’re crying. What’s the matter?” Jo sat down next to her friend and hugged her. “Preston being a jerk again? It figures.” She then looked across the table and gave Preston a wink, which struck Theda as odd.

“Where you guys been?” Floyd asked. “You were nowhere to be found when it was showtime for JPJ, so we improvised with what we had.”

“Yeah, you did,” Beanner said. “We were too freaked out to go on with JPJ like we planned. But we observed everything you guys did. Heard every note.”

“That was your plan all along, wasn’t it, Pretty Boy?” Josephine said accusingly. “To get Beanner and me too fucked up to go on.”

“C’mon,” Floyd protested, grinning. “Did I tell you guys to drop acid?”

“You let us go out in the fields, and it was everywhere. What else could’ve happened?”

“Yeah, and what about the shit you was supposed to bring back for your bandmates?” Johns demanded.

“Just as well,” Floyd said. “I’m glad you and Parker weren’t too fucked up to play.”

Josephine turned her spooky eyes on Floyd. “So you admit that was your game,” she said. “We’ve been buddies such a long time, Floyd. How could you manipulate me like that?”

“Floyd did the right thing,” Theda interjected. “The set with JPJ and AMO together really rocked. You and Beanner wouldn’t have contributed anything. Can’t you get it through your heads you’re not musicians?”

Having thrown the truth in their faces, Theda felt her heart pound. Beanner turned his maniacal grin on her, which was hardly calming.

“We may not be what you call real musicians, hon,” he said, “but that’s all the more reason why we still gotta make ourselves heard at this festival. We have a vital message to convey to the crowd.”

“It’ll be easy,” Josephine told Floyd. “Just throw us into one of those experimental bands you’re gonna have playing from approximately now until sunup. They might not even notice. We’ll infiltrate subtly.”

“Hold on a minute.” Floyd’s smile was becoming strained. “Those bands might be what you call experimental, but they’re real outfits. You can’t just join them on a whim.”

The butler came into the dining room and announced, “There’s a phone call for Miss Hope Witmer in the front office.”

Hope jumped to her feet, keeping a firm grip on her champagne glass. “Who could that be?” she asked.

“Who else could it be but Ty Leahy?” Floyd seemed to relax, which calmed Theda in turn. “You must be unforgettable to him, doll. Let’s hop to it and nail him down for tomorrow.”

Hope was headed out the door with Floyd when Neal yelped, “Not so fast. My wife’s not talking to that bum without me there.”

"It's potentially a legal matter," Dora declared, "so I'm coming too." The four of them exited together.

Candy got up from the table and approached Preston, who was staring glumly into his glass. "Please, honey," she said, her voice cracking, "could we go somewhere and talk privately?"

Preston shook off her grasp and said, "Not right now. I gotta be alone for a while." He turned and left the room.

Candy sat back down beside Josephine and buried her face in her hands. Jo jumped up, declaring, "Nobody treats my friend like that. I'm gonna go tell the bastard off."

"Don't, Jo," Candy moaned. "It won't help."

"You can't let him belittle you like that," Jo said. "You're as important as anyone here—actually, more important, 'cause you're the one who summoned me and Beanner to this festival in the first place. You wrote that article exposing the political purpose behind it all."

"The political purpose?" Candy said through sniffles.

"You explained how underground radio is driving the event and using it to advance their agenda ... and how that DJ called Fire Cracker poses as a redneck, but he's really an advance man for the People's Army. That's the message Beanner and I must get out to the multitudes ... that the youth of America has its own army, and it can save us from war."

"Jo, you got a lot of that twisted." Candy then tried to explain what her article had really meant, but Josephine's praise obviously had gone to her head. She smiled through her tears and didn't try to stop her friend from leaving the room to find Preston and tell him what a great reporter his wife was.

A few minutes later, Theda's own marital drama distracted her from Candy's. The butler returned and told Clive there was a phone call for him in one of the side offices. *Of course*, she thought. *It's Allie McCarty, calling to give him the born-again Christian perspective on events.*

As Clive departed, Theda asked the butler for directions to the front office, where she assumed the negotiations with Ty Leahy were going on. She got there to find Floyd reclining behind a large mahogany desk, having just hung up the phone. Everyone looked pumped up.

“Ty’s coming!” Hope said with shining eyes. “He says he’ll perform tomorrow if I promise to join him onstage for ‘Celia.’”

“Yeah, and that better be all you join him for.” Neal sounded pretty lighthearted for someone who suspected his wife was in love with another man.

“The conversation went well,” Dora told Theda, as if she were sitting in a boardroom. “It appears now that most of the issues between Leahy’s people and AMO are resolvable.”

“Congratulations, everyone,” Theda said. “Looks like this festival can be saved ... that is, if Leahy has what it takes to replace the Grateful Dead.”

“Of course he does,” Hope declared. “He’s as big a star as the Grateful Dead, in his own way.”

Theda chortled at that. Hope took no notice as she and Neal returned to the celebration in the dining room. On his way out, Neal tossed an admiring glance at Dora. She smiled back without dropping her business persona.

Dora turned to Floyd. “So how’s your bottom line looking?” she quizzed. “Will the Worth family accountants be satisfied?”

“We’ve dodged all the major bullets so far,” Floyd said. “No need for extra security ... at least, not yet. Even if some of the Deadheads out there insist on the second coming, I’m guessing the majority will be mellowed out enough by tomorrow to embrace our substitute. We’ll wrap things up profitably enough to keep the corporation happy.”

The sight of Floyd behind that desk was both jolting and fascinating. He might be a leftist in theory, Theda thought, but he was also his parents’ son and a cog in their empire. As she watched him pick up the phone and call in a report to the “corporation,” she felt pleasant sensations ripple through her body.

“I’ll excuse myself now,” Dora said, giving Theda a wink as she rose to her feet and headed out the door. “The celebration awaits.” Theda hoped that meant her sister approved of her budding friendship with Floyd and would reassure their parents about it.

While Floyd spouted facts and figures to some suit on the other end of the line, he rolled his eyes at Theda and laughed silently. She

nodded, sharing his disdain for the business side while acknowledging they couldn't do without it. Presumptuous as it might have been, she had a vision of herself as the mistress of his domain. They'd be wealthy enough to surround themselves with servants and sycophants and still find ways of "playing with fire."

Floyd hung up the phone with a satisfied smile and gave Theda a long look. He reached into a desk drawer and pulled out a bottle of champagne, a more expensive vintage than the one being shared in the dining room. They toasted their accomplishments thus far and their hopes for an even brighter future.

The door opened, and Beanner burst in, wild-eyed and panting. As usual, he was carrying his garment bag with the peace symbol patches. As he dropped it on the floor and stared at Theda, the hand holding her champagne glass trembled. She wondered whether she could somehow take back what she'd said earlier about his and Josephine's lack of musical skills.

He shifted his gaze to Floyd and said, "Hiding behind a desk ain't too cool. What you doing, counting the money already?"

"What's it to you?" Floyd replied, smoothing back his hair. "No one can say we didn't earn it."

"I'll earn some of that too," Beanner said, "once you put me onstage like you promised."

"He never promised you that," Theda blurted.

Beanner eyed her again. Floyd diverted his attention by asking, "Where's your partner in crime? This is the first time I've seen you without Jo."

"Oh, Jo's hopeless." Beanner flicked her away with his hand. "Too chickenshit to get onstage with me. I think she went off to seduce Preston."

"Seduce Preston?" Theda repeated. "That's insane. She's supposed to be Candy's best friend."

"Did you ever stop to consider maybe we're all insane?" Beanner asked. "Like, how crazy is this?" He reached into the bag and pulled out a long, shiny object. It took Theda a few seconds to realize it was a gun. Then she let out a shriek.

"I'm perfectly willing to go onstage without Jo," Beanner continued,

waving the gun in Floyd's direction. "It'll be better without her anyway. She's too paranoid 'cause she can't really sing or play."

"Put that revolver down, Beanner," Floyd said calmly, although his eyes were bugging out. "You're on some kind of weird trip."

"I gotta hold on to this vision," Beanner said, "to impart it while it's still in living color. I'm a soldier in the People's Army. I'm here to force everyone to choose between God or the devil."

"Please, Beanner," Theda managed to say in a wavering voice, "guns don't accomplish anything. They're totally against what the festival is about."

"It's a special gun," Beanner protested, "a magic wand." He waved it again and giggled like a child with a sparkler on the Fourth of July. "See? Nothing bad shoots out of it. Just strobe lights and laser beams." He pointed it at Floyd.

Theda screamed again, but she noticed Floyd had relaxed. He asked Beanner, "Did you get that weapon out of my bedroom wardrobe?"

Beanner looked at it, pondered a moment, and nodded.

Floyd emerged from behind his desk and approached Beanner with an outstretched hand. "You forgot the ammunition," he said.

"You mean it won't work?" Beanner gave up the gun, and Floyd stuck it in his back pocket.

"You need to lie down and rest," Floyd told him, "but not in my bedroom. I'll find you another bed and see that you get a sedative. Don't worry, this bummer will pass."

Moments later, Floyd and Theda were headed down the main hallway of the living quarters, propping Beanner up between them as he babbled. "I'm just being a devoted manager, y'know. I'd die or kill for all of you if that's what it took to make you famous. You get that, right?"

"Sure, man, we get it," Floyd replied, patting his back.

An ear-shattering scream pierced the hall. They stood aside as Candy rushed by, crying hysterically.

"What's wrong?" Theda demanded.

Candy stopped short and said amid sobs, "I'll never speak to Preston or Jo again." As she ran off, Theda reflected that even crazy Beanner had seen that coming.

Chapter 9

Candy

Jo had been Candy's best girlfriend ever since her lonely freshman year at Central Maryland College. Candy loved Jo's kookiness and impulsiveness, such a contrast to her own shyness. Her friend's self-destructive tendencies had worried Candy, especially lately, but she also loved the suspense of not knowing what Jo would do next.

When Jo stormed out of Floyd's dining room during the champagne celebration, declaring her intention to confront Preston, Candy was alarmed at first. Then she thought, *What's the harm?*

After Jo had been gone a half hour, Candy went looking for her. She made her way down a long corridor and listened at several bedroom doors. Hearing muffled voices behind one, she pushed it open. There Jo was on top of Candy's husband, helping herself to him with near-violent motions, as the two of them moaned with pleasure.

Candy watched for a moment, feeling her gorge rise. Then she screamed as if it were a crime scene. As she backed out of the room, Jo called, "Wait, Candy, don't freak out! It's just therapeutic. Free love."

What really got her was that they didn't stop what they were doing. She made her way back to the dining room, where everyone saw her distraught face and guessed what had happened. Jamie opened his arms, and she melted into them.

"Please take me home," Candy said, sobbing. "And I mean all the way home, to Maryland. I want my mom. She was right to worry. I wish my dad were alive. He'd kill Preston."

"I'd like to kill him myself," Jamie said. That was a wonderful thing for her loyal friend to say, but it didn't thrill her. Nothing could lessen her pain at this moment.

Candy collapsed at the table in a heap, trying to keep from vomiting on it. Hope and Theda sat down on either side of her, patting her shoulders.

"I don't want to hurt you even more, Candy," Hope said, "but I've seen this coming, like from day one. I tried to warn you, but you resented me whenever I did. Preston has always acted like the band's leader, which makes him a major girl-magnet ... even though Neal and Clive are really more attractive, in my opinion."

"And now, thanks to this festival," Theda said, "all three of our musicians are full-fledged rock stars. So you can kiss faithfulness and humility goodbye."

"Then why did we marry them?" Candy managed to ask between sobs.

"Just to have some fun and go along for the ride," Hope replied. "That may sound shallow, but it's all we're left with now."

"Speak for yourself," Theda objected. "I'm not going into mourning just because some new chick came along. And you two are fools if you do. We're gifted women. There's no reason we can't all use the band as a stepping-stone."

Theda's face took on an intense glow as she added, "Cry your eyes out now, Candy. Get it out of your system. But no running home to mama. Stay here and figure out a way to get even."

"How can I do that?" Candy was ashamed of the weak question before it was out of her mouth.

"Write about them," Theda said. "Start by exposing them in the *Anti-Bruin*."

"Yeah," Hope said. "What could be a juicier story than Preston getting caught screwing his pregnant wife's best friend? Just tell what happened."

"But don't stop with settling personal scores," Theda continued.

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"There are far more important subjects your paper should be pursuing, like the theater firebombing."

"Stop shitting us about that firebombing, Theda," Hope said, shaking her blond locks in disbelief, "and admit that you and Floyd know something about it."

"We don't know a damned thing," Theda shot back. "If you ask me, Josephine's the one who could be acquainted with bombers. Floyd got a letter from her before she arrived here, bragging about how she stink-bombed her old college dorm. Intriguing, don't you think?"



After her talk with the girls, Candy's head was whirling. She couldn't stop crying, yet she had formulated plans for a new life before she'd even confronted the two who had betrayed her. They approached her separately in the dining room. Neither really apologized.

Preston argued, "Try to understand, Candy. It's not that I love Jo, or anybody else, more than I love you. It's just the lifestyle, and it's not gonna change. We're caught up in it now."

"What about our baby?" Candy asked.

"How do I know it's my baby?"

Incensed, she picked up a glass of champagne. He flinched in anticipation, but she held back.

"I'm just saying," he continued, "you've been exposed to this lifestyle too."

"Exposed, but not overwhelmed," Candy said, putting the glass down. "I've been faithful to you."

He moved away, as if to escape that straitjacket. "You've had your chances to screw around," he said indifferently over his shoulder.

Candy's talk with Jo was even less satisfying. "It's really no big deal, Candy," she pleaded. "Free love is healthy. If everybody did it, we'd have world peace."

"I'm not gonna do it," Candy said, "so I guess world peace is kaput."



When Candy told Floyd she felt queasy, he escorted her to a bedroom where she could lie down. She holed up in there for the rest of the day and evening, refusing to rejoin the group. She assumed they went on partying in the dining room and periodically visiting the third-floor observation area to take in the amplified music from the concert venue. The raucous sounds of an endless string of free-form bands barely penetrated her shell.

Hope and Theda tried to coax her out. When that failed, the girls began to share confessions as if they were at a slumber party. Theda confirmed the others' suspicion that she and Floyd had gone all the way. It was the timing that surprised Candy and Hope. "We felt and heard the bomb go off in the distance just as we finished," Theda said, laughing, "but that was pure coincidence. When we went out to investigate, Floyd looked totally shocked. It was obvious he didn't know anything about it in advance."

"If you say so," Hope said skeptically. "You're not the only one who's been getting it on. With all the bands hanging around the mansion, how could I not? I've been propositioned about once every fifteen minutes."

"Roadies or musicians?" Theda asked.

"I have some standards, smarty-pants. They at least have to be real musicians. I slept with two or three yesterday when I was drunk and high. Maybe more. Why should I care? Neal was off doing his own thing, and Ty had walked out."

"Did they at least tell you their names?" Candy asked. "So you can hook up with them again if they get famous?" *My, Candy thought, how cynical of me. I guess I'll never be shocked by anything again.*

Hope gave Candy a stern look and said, "I'm only telling you this so you won't keep obsessing about what went down with Preston. I still love Neal in my own way, but that doesn't mean I won't grab some cute ass when it's there for the taking. God knows he's doing it."

"You're saying I should forgive Preston and let him do what he wants?" Candy asked.

"You might at least weigh your options, Candy," Theda said. "As long as he keeps coming home to you at night, you can have the family you want and enjoy whatever fame and fortune comes his way. But if you blow him off, he'll find someone else to be his security blanket."

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“Nobody’s saying Preston isn’t a first-class jerk,” Hope added, “but who isn’t these days? Josephine’s sort of his type. If you stand aside, she could ensnare him. Just a word of warning, Candy.”

“I appreciate it,” Candy said. But she was too hurt just then to care what happened to her marriage.



They hovered around her well into the night, as if she were on a suicide watch. When she woke up the next morning, they poured coffee into her and insisted she return to the venue with them. They said it would be healthier not to run away from Preston and Jo. They smothered her with sympathy and also ate up the drama.

“You don’t wanna miss Ty’s performance, even if you’re stuck backstage,” Hope said. “He and AMO have agreed that *Ty Leahy II* has gotta be presented the right way. Trust me, it’s gonna be a blast.”

Candy bristled at the idea of being “stuck backstage” but asked, “How did all the issues between Leahy and AMO get resolved so fast?”

“Dora worked out a preliminary agreement to finish the album and share credit,” Theda said. “Is my sister gonna be a bang-up lawyer or what?”

“That’s great,” Candy said dully, “but what would I be doing there, when I’m the only one who’s not going onstage?”

“Sulking won’t get you anywhere,” Theda said. “I know you’ve been trying to interview Floyd for weeks. I’ll get him to drive the three of us to the venue, and you can fire away.”

“He always stonewalls me,” Candy said.

“He won’t if I help you come up with questions,” Theda said. “There are a few things I’d like to know myself.”



“Do you mind if I ask you a question, Floyd?”

This came out too timid. He laughed and glanced over his shoulder at Candy and Hope in the backseat of the van as he navigated the

bumpy access road. Theda had laid claim to the front seat next to him as if she were already his wife. Floyd drove so fast that Candy got queasy again.

“You never stop at just one question,” he pointed out.

“The one vital question right now,” Candy said, “is why you keep a gun in your bedroom.”

“Yeah, Floyd,” Theda said. “What are you protecting yourself from?”

Floyd responded, “I wish life could be all about peace and love, but sometimes it’s not. I frequently open my home to strangers, and sometimes they abuse my hospitality. I don’t mind spreading some of the wealth around, as long as it’s according to my own plan. I’ve been known to wave the gun to scare off shady characters, but I have yet to load it.”

“How did Beanner get hold of it?” Candy asked.

“Another vital question,” Theda said. “We’ve all been trying for months to figure this guy out. Just when he seems at his weirdest, he makes good things happen for us. But is he dangerous?”

“Don’t give him that much credit,” Hope said. “He’s just a scrawny, hairy creep.”

“God, Hope,” Theda snapped, glancing back, “will you ever stop being so shallow? You judge everybody by their looks.”

“And you don’t?” Hope returned, gesturing at Floyd’s broad back.

“I think Beanner means well,” Floyd said, “although he bears watching. Some of the most unconventional managers in rock history have been the greatest at promoting their bands. I know he’s been a catalyst for you guys behind the scenes. Let’s just make sure he never gets his hands on any live ammunition.”

Hope

After Hope had done her part to ensure that Ty Leahy would return to perform on Sunday morning, she began to suspect Neal was out to get her. Most of the group left Floyd’s office after the negotiation and went back to the dining room to celebrate. There, Neal proposed

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a toast to Theda's dowdy older sister, Dora. He claimed it was her brilliant negotiating skills that had convinced Ty and his manager to get onboard for the festival. All the time he was building up Dora, he looked at Hope with a smug smile, as if she was supposed to be jealous. She just laughed because they both had to know Ty was coming the next day mainly to see her.

All that afternoon and evening, Hope and Theda had their hands full trying to comfort Candy, who had caught Preston in one of the bedrooms with her best friend Jo. Poor Candy had to lie down in another room with a cold compress on her head. Sympathetic though she was, Hope wasn't in the least surprised at Preston's betrayal.

The music blared in the distance all afternoon as Hope and Theda nursed Candy, helped themselves to the continuous buffet, and explored the mansion. Glancing into many bedrooms, Hope saw countless demonstrations of free love, none of which shocked her.

In the early evening, after picking up some news, Hope rushed to Candy's side and reported, "I just heard your bosom pal Jo left the house with Beanner again. It seems Beanner was sleeping off a bad trip all day, but as soon as he woke up, he convinced Jo they had to go back to the fields to reignite their visions or whatever. Parker and Johns followed them out, which means all of JPJ is wasted by now. So they're out of our hair ... unless they come back and do something really flaky. Preston's sitting by himself in the dining room, drowning his sorrows."

"Good," muttered Candy.

Later, Theda came in and announced, "With all the tripping going on, Floyd's decided to play it safe by calling in extra security for Sunday ... just in case some of the loopiest Deadheads feel jilted and try to take it out on AMO or Leahy."

"I'm not surprised." Candy practically licked her chops. "Anybody who goes onstage tomorrow is taking their life in their hands."



On Sunday morning, they were all up before dawn, getting ready for the grand finale. They gathered in the dining room for coffee,

aspirin, another shot from the bottle, or whatever else they needed for their hangovers.

Floyd drove the AMO musicians and Jamie to the venue first, planning to return for the women. Hope and Theda again wore colorful gowns and accessories from their commune days, and Dora stayed in business mode. Candy had on a T-shirt, baggy pants, and no makeup. Seeing she still looked teary-eyed, Hope asked her how she felt.

“Crappy,” she said, “but I’ve got all I need to feel better, right here.” She waved a notebook and pencil. “I’ll be fine.” In fact, all through the ride, she wrote down everything Floyd said.

Thirty minutes or so after they arrived backstage, Beanner and Jo burst past a startled guard at the door. Everyone jumped back in alarm.

“Hey, Floyd,” Beanner shouted, “you musta forgotten Jo and I were supposed to do our own song. I know it took us a while, but we’re finally ready to perform.”

“How’d you guys get here?” Floyd asked, opening his eyes wide. “I thought all of JPJ was out there in the crowd, tripping.”

“Beanner and I decided we’d had enough mind-bending for one festival,” Jo said, “so we let Parker and Johns and their roadie goon plunge into psychedelic land without us. We were trying to find our way back to the mansion when we stumbled on your garage and stopped to admire your sparkling new vehicles. After a little persuasion, the attendant agreed to lend us one so we could drive here and rejoin our beloved friends.”

“That’s fair karma, you know,” Beanner added, “for the way AMO snatched JPJ’s van back in Newcastle.”

Hope figured they’d bribed the attendant, probably with some of their leftover acid. Floyd frowned but only said, “Just make sure you return my car in one piece.”

“Maybe we shouldn’t have blown off the rest of JPJ,” Beanner admitted. “It’s just the two of us, without our backup musicians. But I say it doesn’t matter. We’re totally ready to perform a mind-boggling tribute to the People’s Army.”

Hope saw sweat pop out on Floyd’s brow. He replied, coolly enough, “You guys missed the boat on performing, but you’re welcome to hang

out backstage. I'm on my way to the residence to pick up Ty Leahy and his business manager. Leahy will be closing the show."

"Not good enough, Pretty Boy," Jo said. She glared at Floyd, but he didn't flinch. So she turned to her lover Preston, but he looked away as if embarrassed.

"Okay, it's true we're not singers," Beanner said, "and we don't have a real song, if you're gonna insist on melody and harmony. I get your reluctance, man. But we can still be messengers without being musicians.

"Here's a proposal: we'll go out there and tell everyone that the Dead is being replaced by something far more poetic and powerful. I know how to sell Ty Leahy, y'know. I was his assistant manager back in England."

"I like it," Floyd exclaimed. "You have my permission to make that introduction. Just do me a favor and don't sing it."

"Wait a fucking minute," Jo yelled. "What're you up to, Floyd? Trying to get us killed by deranged Deadheads?" Floyd disappeared out the door without answering.

While Beanner and Jo argued about whether they should go onstage and deliver this "message," Candy chimed in. "Do it, Jo. You always tell me I'm not daring enough. Why not take your own advice?"

It was clear that Candy had scored one with that as Jo stared at her suspiciously. When Beanner made a move toward the stage, Jo grabbed him and pulled him back. "Don't be stupid," she hissed. "They're perfectly willing to sacrifice us. And rest assured, Candy wants me dead."

Those two kept squabbling while everyone else waited for Ty's arrival. The group was pairing off in bizarre ways. Neal kept cozying up to Dora and throwing those funny looks Hope's way. She paid no attention, focused as she was on seeing Ty again. Candy started to sniffle when Preston approached Jo and they talked. Candy turned to her reliable buddy Jamie and pretended to have a deep conversation with him.

To top it all off, that chubby hippie editor Sherri popped in again, this time with Allie McCarty in tow. Of course the Christian crooner

made a beeline for Clive and dragged him off to a corner to pray or whatever they did together. Theda turned her back on them and kept watching the door for her magic man Floyd to reappear.

Beanner bounced all over the place, still panting to go onstage. "Ty and I made the Newcastle scene happen," he reminded them, "and we can do it again."

"You're out of your mind," Hope said. "Have you maybe forgotten what a disaster that was?" Yet Beanner's words brought back a sweet memory for her. Ty had shown up for that Newcastle gig in the nick of time, dressed like a homeless strummer, carrying just his acoustic guitar. For a moment his disintegrating blue jeans, stained T-shirt, and ponytail had put her off. Then his eyes had met hers, and she'd just melted.

Hope willed the same thing to happen today, and it almost did. She watched Ty come through the door with Floyd and Mr. Givhans. "How y'all doing?" Ty said, looking at Hope as if trying to penetrate her soul. He was knocked off stride when Beanner rushed over to "manage" him, as if Mr. Givhans wasn't there.

Beanner stepped up to Floyd. "It's an unpredictable crowd out there," he scolded. "You just gonna throw my folk singer out there to maybe be eaten alive by disappointed Deadheads? Especially after the bad-mouthing he took from AMO yesterday?"

"Unpredictability is the spice of life," Floyd said. "You and Jo failed to prepare the crowd like you said you would, so Ty will have to take his chances. But we'll throw him a lifeline when Hope joins him for their duet." He winked at her.

"Fine. Just so long as my guy gets paid equal to the Grateful Dead."

"That would be nothing," Floyd replied. "They did it as a favor."

"And the MC needs to announce him," Beanner continued, "like he announced everybody else. Even the crap bands."

"Sorry, but Fire Cracker's back at the residence, sleeping off his all-nighter," Floyd reported. "Ty will have to announce himself."

That was exactly what he did. The way the heroic strummer walked out there and faced that crowd alone, with no band behind him, was the bravest thing ever. Hope moved to the wings to watch him adjust

the center microphone, throw his shoulders back, and straighten his sleeveless denim jacket.

Then he cleared his voice and said, “My name is Ty Leahy. I know y’all were told yesterday I’m a corporate shill, but it’s a lie. I’m really just a folk singer who barely understands the financial shit. I was born in Georgia, but my life’s journey took me to England, where I met—”

Interrupted by rude shouts, Ty said, “Okay, I know I’m not the Grateful Dead. They had urgent business elsewhere, so they had to leave. But they asked that you be gentle with me ’cause I’m here for the same reason they were here ... to bring you peace and love through music.”

He launched into the best-known songs from his first album. Once the rude voices went silent, the crowd seemed gentle enough, or maybe just stoned or not awake yet. Ty played three numbers, and Hope started to hear applause. As he got more into it, there were even some cheers.

She remained in the wings, waiting for Ty’s signal to join him. Her heart pounded, and her legs shook, so she tried a deep breathing exercise the swami had taught her back at the commune. When the moment came, she managed to walk onstage. She heard whistles and murmurs like before, along with shouts like “Sing louder this time, babel!” and “No more speeches, sweetie!”

Once Hope got to the center mike, the hugeness of the crowd hit her much harder than the day before, when she’d had the whole band onstage with her. It was like a village composed of thousands of tents and sleeping bags and blankets, with all the kids sitting or lying or moving around, lit up by the morning sun. They’d been living that way for two days now—eating, sleeping, smoking, snorting, making love. How would she relate to their grunginess? She thought it was a good thing she couldn’t see their faces up close, for fear they’d be sneering at her model-like looks.

As Ty picked the first few notes of “Celia,” Hope opened her mouth, but nothing came out. She nearly died, but Ty started singing the melody to help her. Once she found her voice, he switched to harmony. Their duet was a thousand times more satisfying than her half-assed solo the day before. When they were done, she heard real cheers.

Hope stood there with Ty, basking in the moment, but of course

it couldn't last. Theda barged onto the stage, parked herself in front of the mike to Ty's left, and grabbed the bass guitar. She began to sing and play "Marching through Georgia Again" as if it were her own song. She didn't get far before the rest of AMO came storming out and joined in. After "Marching," they got into the rest of *Ty Leahy II*.

The crowd, having heard just the instrumental versions the day before, now got to experience the full album with Ty and AMO both. Hope still trembled a little, remembering the riot that had arisen in Newcastle when Ty reinvented himself as a rocker. Here it was exactly the opposite: the crowd grooved to the new Ty even more than they had to the folk singer.

Hope saw a genuine smile come to his face in front of what seemed like the whole world, as he left the sad songs behind and reveled in AMO's exuberant loudness. His movements were more animated than ever before. This was who he was meant to be. Hope was totally okay, even if Theda wasn't, with grabbing a tambourine and fading into the backdrop to let this miracle happen.

If only they'd left the stage on that high note, the accolades would've been amazing. With that huge crowd rocking to the sounds of *Ty Leahy II*, Hope was sure they were all set for life. How could Unique Records West not sign AMO to finish the album once they got wind of this? *Fame and fortune*, she thought, *here we come*.

But she'd forgotten what her husband was capable of when he was jealous. Ty and Preston had plunged into "The Ballad of Newcastle," the funny travelogue they'd written together at the commune, when Neal started making weird sounds on the Moog synthesizer—an exploding bomb, a raging fire, missiles screaming as they fell to the earth.

Ty and Preston stumbled to a stop. Hope shouted at Neal, "What're you trying to pull?"

As if on signal, Beanner and Jo bounded onstage. They launched into a singsong praising the People's Army. Neal egged them on with the instrument's pounding beat and warlike sounds. The rest of the group could only stand by and listen as the weird pair chanted about the fire and destruction that had recently "blessed" the campus and would "clear the way for a new day." The crowd picked up that line.

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Hope rushed to Neal and tried to pull him away from the Moog. He shook her off, saying, “Can’t you hear how much the kids out there dig this?”

“Sounds to me like the kids out there want to start tearing everything apart.”

Theda

Once Jo and Beanner took the stage, Theda could feel the political dynamic of the event changing. Not everyone knew how to react; in fact, the other girls struck her as oblivious. Candy kept cowering backstage, wrapped up in her own misery. Hope still stood out there, shaking her tambourine, twitching her ass to make herself the sexpot of the group, and pouting when that stopped working.

Theda felt like screaming at both of them: it’s time you realized this festival isn’t just about you! She’d always known it wasn’t about her. People stared whenever she took charge with the bass guitar or vocals, but somebody had to do it. She and Floyd had agreed that they needed to wrap up the event with a strong statement to put it in historical context. That was why Floyd had changed his mind and taken the risk of unleashing Beanner and Jo, without being sure they were down from their trips.

Somehow, that scrawny, hairy pair ignited the crowd’s political passion with their talent-free “music” and their verbal firebombs. The problem was, they didn’t know when to stop. The scene escalated as many kids started throwing things, fighting, lighting fires, and provoking the security guards.

Ty Leahy stood his ground at the center microphone, positioned between Beanner and Jo, and tried to regain control with just his acoustic guitar. Theda didn’t know how he did it, but somehow he picked a tune to accompany their chant, “Pave the way for a new day.” Sensing a tempo to it, Theda added a bass rhythm. Preston got the tune going on his guitar, repeating it with more volume each time. Then he improvised an amazing riff that propelled the made-up-on-the-spot song into the realm of rock and roll.

Theda held her breath, hoping the crowd would get that they were about brotherhood and social justice, not destruction and hate: Woodstock, not Altamont. In the history of rock festivals, it had always been one extreme or the other, and this festival could still go either way.

As pockets of unrest continued to spread, Floyd came onstage and waved his arms to stop the music. Ty stepped aside to let him take the center microphone.

“Please, friends, don’t force me to activate an army of goons to put you down. It’s so uncool when that happens,” Floyd lectured the crowd. “Destruction for its own sake is meaningless. We can stand up to the powers that be without harming ourselves. We can demonstrate our own power by mellowing out and singing together.”

Floyd started warbling the “pave the way” lyric. Unable to carry a tune, he motioned for Theda to take over. AMO and Ty resumed playing behind her, while Beanner and Jo bounced up and down to the beat, cheerleading for the crowd.

The turbulence subsided as twenty-five thousand voices rose up in magical unison. Only then could Theda breathe again. She sensed that the danger was behind them and all their efforts had been sanctified. This grand finale, she felt sure, would be long celebrated as a successful merging of politics and music and as a repudiation of violence.

Theda edged toward Floyd and whispered, “Let’s take our bows now, while everything’s as cool as it’s gonna be.” He nodded in agreement.

But they were too late. All it took to change history was one dumb but sexy redhead, obsessed with her own hick religion. Allie McCarty rushed onto the stage and reached for the nearest microphone, shoving Jo aside. Her face as red as her hair, she shouted, “I’m here to spread the word, the only true word. The way to peace and love is not through drugs or rock music. It’s through Jesus Christ, our Lord!”

“Oh yeah!” Clive shouted from his drummer’s perch. “Praise Jesus!” To Theda’s horror, he stood up and spread his arms like Christ himself.

“Let’s pray,” Allie said. “Gracious heavenly father . . .”

“No, let’s not,” Theda said forcefully into her microphone. “Let’s

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expose the fascist warrior god these two are praying to. Just yesterday they tried their damndest to turn peace songs into promilitary messages. Isn't that what we're here to fight?"

Cries of "Yes!" and "Fuck, yes!" rose up from the crowd. Somebody near the stage bellowed, "Throw the redheaded bitch down here! I'll show her some peace and love!"

Jo grabbed a fistful of Allie's hair and pulled her away from the microphone. Allie let out a screech as she tried to hold onto the mike, which made a reverberating sound that nearly punctured Theda's eardrums.

"Let her go, you hippie bitch!" Clive shouted, flying down from his perch. He grabbed Jo's arms and squeezed them until she screamed and released Allie. Beanner rushed over, put his bony arms around Clive's muscular chest, and somehow pulled him off Jo. He and Clive fell onto the stage and rolled over several times. When they stopped moving, Beanner was on top. He sat on Clive's chest, grinning and waving to the crowd.

"Victory is mine!" he shouted. "Who'da believed it?"

Floyd nearly tripped over them as he whipped out his walkie-talkie and yelled, "Security onstage! Now!"

As if in response, a burly kid in military-type camouflage leaped from the audience onto the stage, yelling, "I'll protect you, Clive, just like I promised."

"Jesus Christ, it's Brad," Theda said. "Crazy as a loon and drunk as a skunk."

Brad reached out with one enormous hand to grab Beanner's left arm and yank him to his feet. With the other hand, he grabbed the front of Jo's T-shirt and pulled her toward him. He looked down at Clive. "Just say the word," he said, breathing hard, "and I'll throw these freaks off the stage. Break their necks too."

"What're you hiding under there, soldier boy?" Jo asked, patting a bulge in Brad's vest. "Your manhood?"

"Goddamn," Floyd whispered to Theda, "he's got a gun. He must've talked his way onto my security team and grabbed one of their weapons."

“What’ll we do?” Theda’s voice shook. “He’s a football player. Too strong for us to handle.”

“I’ll just have to talk him down.”

Floyd approached Brad, holding out his hand. “Listen, man,” he said, “we don’t need concealed weapons onstage. Everything’s cool here—or will be if we all take it easy. So just let me have your piece, and I’ll take good care of it.”

Terrified as Theda was, her heart swelled with pride at Floyd’s courage. She had picked a real man. Yet Clive acted just as heroically in his own way when he told Brad, “Let Beanner and Jo alone. They’re just lost souls.”

“Yes, let them go,” Allie chimed in. “What they need most is our prayers.”

Brad released them both. They fell to the stage in a heap and stayed there, staring up at him.

“You did wonderfully,” Theda told Brad, somehow managing to steady her voice. “You saved Clive like you promised, so now you’ve paid your debt to him. Your work here is done.” Brad nodded, and she breathed easier, thinking she’d persuaded him to leave.

Instead, Brad pulled the gun out of his vest pocket and waved it over Beanner and Jo. “I’ll hold the freaks here,” he growled, “so’s everybody else can get backstage safe.”

Beanner raised his arm and pointed to the weapon, nearly touching it. His eyes were glowing. “Another magic wand! Can I have it?” He reached for the gun like a child trying to grab a piece of candy. He moved so fast that Brad froze.

“It’s real this time, you idiot!” Floyd shouted.

Beanner and Brad fought for the gun. Theda was sure Beanner was still hopped up from his acid trip, and that was giving him unnatural strength against the bigger man, who was dead drunk. Floyd radioed again for help. Theda heard cheers from the crowd, as if they thought they were watching a game.

Just as three armed guards arrived, the weapon discharged. Beanner opened his eyes wide. A wound blossomed in the middle of his chest like an out-of-control flower.

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“I’m a martyr,” he said quietly as he dropped to the stage.

The nearest guard ordered Brad to drop his weapon. Brad nodded in agreement, turned the gun sideways, and held it out as if to surrender it. Then he turned the gun around and pointed it at his own head. All three guards rushed him, but Brad pulled the trigger first.

Theda had no idea how much time passed as she stood frozen in place. All she could see was a tidal wave of blood, which seemed to crest and flow along with the pounding of her heart. All she could feel was a stampede enveloping the stage and spreading into the screaming crowd. More security personnel swarmed the area from every direction, followed by TV cameras.

At some point, she must have put down the bass and allowed herself to be escorted backstage. Her legs barely carried her. Leaving the mayhem behind, she reeled from the shock. Then her analytical mind took over, as if she were her sister or her father. She weighed the costs and benefits: they’d put on the most disastrous festival in history, and it could make them world-famous.

Epilogue 1

Candy

Candy was pregnant and had been abandoned by her so-called husband, but she was determined to forge her own path. Two weeks after the festival, she signed up for a summer school journalism program at UCLA and spent the next two months researching an article for the *Anti-Bruin* about Beanner Cabot and Brad Callahan. Sherri, her editor, came up with a budget for her to travel to Boston and Washington, DC, to research their respective backgrounds. The murder-suicide had been big news on the national level for about a week, only to be pushed aside by other violent incidents in California. *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* had published short retrospectives of the Playing with Fire Festival, but no major publication had produced an in-depth feature like the one Candy and Sherri planned.

“It’s our baby,” Sherri declared. “Everyone else has relegated the story to drunk and drugged kids acting up. We’ll find the human interest in it.”

Jamie accompanied Candy on her trip east and was great at calming her nerves before she interviewed various friends and relatives. Both Beanner and Brad came from large, conventional families that were embarrassed and befuddled to have produced such black sheep. Beanner, whose given name was Brandon, was of old New England stock and had been expected to follow two older brothers to Harvard. Brad’s father, as well as a brother and sister, were police officers.

Both families had filed lawsuits against the Worth Corporation. Other than that, they seemed resigned to their sons’ fates. It was as if a monster called Rock and Roll had risen up out of a swamp one dark night, seized them, and altered their personalities beyond recognition.



During this trip, Candy also dealt with her own family. When she and Jamie visited her mom, she explained the situation according to Jo, who was still writing her frequent notes as if they were the same bosom buddies they'd always been. "You've got to understand," she told her uncomprehending mother, "Jo doesn't think what she did to me is any big deal. She really does believe in free love. She probably wouldn't mind if I tried to take Preston back."

Jo's missives came from afar since she and Preston had returned to Swami Flanny's commune in July. Preston's lottery number was in the high hundreds, which might or might not expose him to the draft. His status as a student, as always, was suspect. So he and Jo had sought refuge with a notorious protector of draft evaders, at least until they were sure the danger had passed.

"What about his responsibility to you and the baby?" her mom asked.

"Looks like he's gonna make me prove it's his," Candy said, her voice breaking. "And even if I do—"

"You need to move back home immediately. I'll help you take care of the baby until you're on your feet."

"No, Mom." Hearing her life plan challenged, Candy got fired up. "I'm going back to UCLA to finish my degree and keep reporting for the alternative paper out there. I'm even thinking of expanding the article I'm writing now into a book."

"What about your marriage?" her mother demanded.

"Mom, there is no marriage, and there never really was. I've faced that fact. Swami Flanny was sincere, but his nuptial ceremonies don't stand up legally. We probably knew that in our hearts all along. None of the guys in the band would've committed themselves to a real marriage. They're like rock stars that way. Hope always warned me they couldn't be trusted."

As her mom sputtered, Jamie grabbed Candy's hand and declared, "Mrs. Collins, *I'd* like to marry your daughter."

Candy and her mother stared at Jamie in astonishment. She still couldn't say she loved him, but she was moved to tears by the gesture.

"I'm no rock star," Jamie said. "I'm studying business and

accounting at UCLA. I've got a part-time job at an insurance firm that I can do full-time during school vacations. Besides, we can both qualify for scholarships. I'm sure we can make it ... as a family."

Now Candy was ready to bawl. When had Preston ever formulated a plan to take care of her? Their relationship would've always been about her propping up his career, like a glorified groupie.

"Whatever we decide," Candy told her speechless mother, "Jamie and I are going back to California. Big things are happening there."



Shortly after Candy's piece was published in the *Anti-Bruin* that fall, it was reprinted in the official college newspaper, the real *Bruin*. From there it went national, gaining most of its steam when *Ty Leahy II* was released shortly before Christmas of 1971. AMO had broken up, apparently for good, but they had left behind something special: the Apple tapes containing ten days' worth of inspired studio work with Leahy and the festival tapes immortalizing their West Coast reunion with the folk singer. Good reviews from *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* helped to launch them.

In early 1972, just before Candy's son Jimmy was born, Sherri helped her land a contract to write a book about the disastrous Playing with Fire Festival. She was determined to make good on this opportunity, even if it took years—and it did. It was challenging enough to pursue a book project while taking care of a husband and child and earning her college degree. What really made her sweat was the task of convincing the musicians and their spouses to relive those turbulent times.

They'd all gotten married, properly and officially, to new partners after going through a nebulous annulment process. The dynamics of these relationships seemed too awkward to contain in one place. Candy feared AMO would never get together again, even to reminisce. But *Ty Leahy II* proved to be such a moneymaker for Unique Records that the company lost no time launching negotiations for *Ty Leahy III* or something equivalent. Theda's father represented AMO's interests, assisted by full-time law student Dora. To make it happen, they figured the band should reunite no later than the summer of 1973.

In the meantime, Candy's interviews for the book were conducted piecemeal. She got to Floyd and Theda first that spring of 1973, since they were close at hand at UCLA. Floyd was up for a promotion to assistant professor in engineering and was progressing toward his PhD. Theda was about to graduate with a double major in theater and political science. She was also serving as a teaching assistant in the drama department and as vice president of the student council.

They met in Floyd's office at the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. As Candy took in Theda's diamond wedding ring and her designer dress suit, she reflected that thanks to family money, these two teachers were among the richest couples in Los Angeles. They had moved into a spacious condo downtown, and they had use of the Worth family mansion for relaxation. Candy wondered if they still called themselves leftists.

"I understand the official investigation into the Playing with Fire Festival is ongoing," Candy said to Floyd. "Think it'll ever end?"

"I'm a poor excuse for a radical these days," Floyd said with a smile, "but the authorities are so flustered about the uptick of bank robberies and bombings in California, they have to question somebody."

"They have nothing on us," Theda declared. "We abhor violence. We've long since severed all ties with the People's Army. That group's become too radicalized for us."

Floyd added, "I'll always be suspect because I organized a festival that turned violent. But Theda and I are going about our business here in California, with absolutely nothing to hide. We're not the ones who fled overseas to some guru's commune."

"Speaking of festivals, Floyd," Candy said, "the annual events on your family's property have been canceled for two years now. Do you think there's any chance they'll be revived?"

"After a decent interval, my parents will fire up the part of the corporation that sponsors music events. There's too much potential profit at stake not to."

"I think it'd be great," Theda said, "to someday bring together AMO, Ty Leahy, and maybe even JPJ for a reunion concert at the scene of that horrible event. It would be healing."

Candy asked, “Do your parents approve of your life in California, Theda?”

“Why wouldn’t they approve?”

“Didn’t your dad come rushing out here to defend you when you were questioned about the theater firebombing?” Candy asked. “The authorities apparently suspected a connection between that incident and your quitting the play.”

“As I’m sure you know, those same authorities concluded that it was Brad Callahan who set off the incendiary device ... and that his intended target was Clive.” Theda suddenly hugged herself and shivered.

“Is that what you believe?” Candy asked.

“I thought Brad was trying to confess something when he visited us backstage at the festival,” Floyd said. “I remember thinking he was having either a religious conversion or a nervous breakdown.”

“He should never have been released from psychiatric care in Maryland,” Theda declared.

They took a break as Theda opened a mini-refrigerator and brought out a bottle of club soda and some hors d’oeuvres. While they sipped and ate, Candy waited for Theda’s brow to unfurrow. Then she broached another sensitive topic.

“What do you hear from Clive? Or about him?”

Theda sighed. “I honestly thought he had a death wish when he quit ROTC, which could’ve kept him safe at UCLA for another three years,” she said. “Who’d be fool enough to give that up to join the infantry in the middle of a war ... unless some super-patriotic bubblehead was behind it, nagging him to be a hero? Although I must say, it’s turned out pretty well for him so far. He made it through his tour in Nam almost unscathed ... got a Purple Heart for some bullshit wound, while Allie and her daddy wrote and produced a song about his so-called heroics.”

“That song made a splash on the country charts,” Floyd said with a teasing grin in Theda’s direction. “Maybe we should invite Allie to perform it at our future festival.”

“If she performs,” Theda huffed, “I won’t.”

“Who asked you to?” Floyd said, laughing. “It’s not like you were officially in the band.”

“Official or not,” she replied, “I was essential. If AMO ever reunites, they’ll need me to play drums. Clive isn’t coming back, and even if he did, I’m better at it than he ever was. And while we’re on the subject, dear, I’m as good a bass player as Neal.”

“If you say so, hon.” Floyd smiled indulgently.

“Speaking of Neal,” Candy said, “how are he and your sister getting along back east? Were you surprised by their marriage?”

“Not really,” Theda said, a sly smile playing on her lips. “I’ve seen Neal mature a lot under her influence. He’s the kind of guy who needs an older woman ... not someone like Hope, who’s as childish as he is. He’s even become a fairly serious student at the University of Connecticut while Dora goes to Yale. Now that the draft’s over, it’s not like he still needs a student deferment. He must be doing it to please her.”

Floyd observed, “Neal’s the only former member of AMO who has a solo music career going right now.”

“Yeah, we hear he draws decent crowds in clubs and restaurants all over New England, with just his sweet tenor voice and his electric piano,” Theda said.

“You think maybe that’s sort of who Neal really is?” Candy asked. “A solo act, like Joey Sherry from high school?”

“God, no,” Theda snapped. “Don’t go comparing my brother-in-law to that nonentity. Neal has ten times the talent and name recognition. Plus, he’s writing new songs.”

“More importantly, Dora’s managing his career,” Floyd said. “Her scheme is to get him a contract for an album featuring his romantic ballads.”

“So what about you, Theda?” Candy asked, shifting gears. “Any big theater projects coming up?”

“My focus right now is on *The Killing Campus*,” Theda replied. This topic seemed to bring out the actress in her. She put down her glass and gestured as she spoke about her beloved play. “It’s been a long time coming. But this spring, *The Killing Campus* will finally—*finally*—be performed as it was originally intended, in our modern, rebuilt theater.”

Theda kept expounding about her show business plans. Once Dora

finished law school, and Theda had her UCLA degree, the sisters planned to launch a mega-production company that would produce everything in the entertainment field—films, records, plays, concerts. With their dad advising them, they'd be on firmer ground than most new businesses.

"I'll have you know, my wife is also a professional politician in the making," Floyd added. "We're considering a run for LA city council."

Theda blushed and got out a short stump speech: "Leadership in this city urgently needs to get younger and more energetic. I'll advocate radical change, but it must be nonviolent change."



A few weeks later, Candy visited Hope and Ty in their modest but comfortable cottage near Venice Beach. They greeted her together, but Ty quickly excused himself and went into his private studio. Hope watched him disappear with sad eyes. She had warned Candy on the phone that he didn't have much to say these days.

"He's never gotten over what happened at the festival," Hope said, "and lately his depression has taken a turn for the worse. All the fame and money from *Ty Leahy II* is actually a burden to him. Since the publicity helped sell the record, it feels like we're benefiting from an awful tragedy."

"Still, it's a great record," Candy said, "and Ty deserves his success. I'm glad to see it's allowed you two to prosper. You have a really nice place here."

"Thanks," she said, brushing back her long blond bangs and adjusting the multiple bracelets on her tanned arms. She was still the lovely hippie she'd been two years before, in contrast to Ty, who had some gray hair and looked as if he might be going bald. Candy noted that she continued to favor bright-colored, super-short skirts and blouses with cleavage. Hope had decided to pursue a modeling career instead of a UCLA degree and was doing pretty well, judging by the photos on one wall and a magazine cover displayed on the coffee table.

Still, she often sighed before she spoke. "How's your little boy?" she asked. "What is he, a year old? Is he walking or talking yet?"

“Both,” Candy said, smiling. “He’s sixteen months.” She was grateful for Hope’s interest. Theda hadn’t asked about Jimmy at all.

“You’re lucky to have Jamie to help with him,” Hope said. “What a bastard Preston turned out to be. Does he even pay child support?”

“A little,” Candy said. “He can’t avoid it, even living overseas. I know he has money coming in from *Ty Leahy II*, so I’m working on getting the payments increased. And Swami Flanny has been more than generous with gifts, which help pay for lifesavers like babysitters.”

“I just hope you’re not letting Preston off the hook too easily because deep down you’re still in love with him.”

“Oh, no way,” Candy said. “I wouldn’t jeopardize my son’s welfare like that. I have a lawyer working on it, a colleague of Theda’s dad.”

“It figures. Well, good luck with that.” Hope’s bitterness was obvious, even when talking about someone else’s troubles.

“Strangely enough, it’s Jo who’s reached out to me,” Candy said. “She’s taken to writing me long, philosophical letters, just like the old days. Sometimes she insists Swami Flanny has all the answers, and the simple life in rural Scotland is best for her. Other times she’s restless and wishes she were back here in LA.” Candy paused and then added, “She’s pregnant herself.”

“Oh, that’s just great,” Hope spat. “I suppose we should congratulate Preston for actually marrying the tramp.”

Candy wasn’t sure where it was safe to tread in this interview. Hope took the reins herself. “I hope you really dig deep into all the shit that went down two years ago,” she said. “Not just the festival disaster, but the theater bombing beforehand that really started all the trouble. How about getting to the bottom of who was responsible for that?”

“The official determination was that Brad was trying to carry out a vendetta against Clive,” Candy pointed out.

“I’ve never totally believed that. I think if Brad did it, somebody egged him on.”

“Who?” Candy demanded.

Hope leaned toward her as if imparting a secret. “Who else but our favorite leftist stud?” she said. “I still think Floyd could’ve been building bombs in his secret lab, with Theda in on it.”

“That’s kind of a legend that’s built up about Floyd ... the bomb-making professor,” Candy said. “But nothing’s ever been proven.”

“Don’t be naive, Candy. He bragged about it when we first met him. I can’t believe you haven’t followed up on that.”

“Actually, I have,” Candy said. “He’s admitted he once had an advisory role with the People’s Army on so-called symbolic actions. But now he’s cut ties.”

“If he was ever involved in criminal acts, he should’ve been arrested,” Hope argued. “He could’ve killed someone.”

“But he didn’t,” Candy said. “Maybe he’s lucky as hell, but no crime has ever been traced to Floyd Worth. And now that Theda has her eye on a respectable political career, they’ve disavowed radicalism. They’re ordinary Democrats now.”

After stewing over this for a moment, Hope said, “To be totally honest, I’d like to see Neal investigated too for what he did that last day of the festival. He egged on Beanner and Jo to take over the stage and instigate the crowd.”

“How could Neal have known what would happen just from making a few random sounds on the Moog?”

“Candy, he knew the kind of people he was dealing with. He’s got a nasty temper like his dad. You don’t know the half of it. Neither does his wife, not yet. His ballad-singing image is the opposite of who he is.”

“He could sure get jealous of you and Ty sometimes,” Candy said, prompting her to elaborate.

“God, yes. He had thoughts of injuring Ty when we started falling for each other. He actually tried once or twice.”

“But again,” Candy said, “he didn’t succeed. Lucky, maybe.”

“I totally get why he married a future lawyer like Dora,” Hope said. “He knows his temper’s gonna get him into deep shit sooner or later. He’s gonna need all her smarts to get him out of it.”

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that.” Candy’s vision of a peace-and-love reunion was dimming.

Hope frowned for a long moment before she spoke again. “In a way, Theda’s a criminal too. She had an illegal abortion. I mean, that’s her business, but it was wrong of her not to tell Clive.”

“Looks like Clive and Allie are making up for that,” Candy said. “I heard they were already expecting their twins before he went to Vietnam. And the minute he got back, they started working on the next baby.”

“Maybe we should take bets on how many kids they’ll end up with. Six? Eight?”

Candy asked gingerly, “Are you and Ty planning to have a family?”

“We’re not planning on much of anything until he gets out of his funk.”

That stymied the discussion. They moved into the dining room, where Hope served coffee and pastries. She eyed the liquor cabinet but held back since it wasn’t even noon. They chatted like old school friends over their continental breakfast.

After a pleasant hour, Hope pushed back her chair and headed for the kitchen, saying, “I should take something in to Ty. He’s feeling the pressure to come up with new songs for his third album. Man, it’s been tough sledding. He sits in there for hours with his acoustic guitar and a tape recorder and just messes around.”

Contrary to expectations, when they went into Ty’s studio with refreshments, they found him smiling. Candy wondered whether the presence of a friendly reporter might have helped to get the depressed strummer moving in a creative direction again.

“Listen to this, girls,” he said, hoisting his guitar, “and tell me what you think.”

Fingering the instrument with an exquisitely light touch, Ty sang three verses about a beautiful princess trapped in a tower by an unnamed villain. Numerous princes had tried to rescue her, only to find the tower unassailable by force. She could be freed only by a magic incantation. The rescuer who finally found the right words was not a prince at all, but a humble servant.

Ty kept singing until he glanced at Hope and saw tears in her eyes. The song wavered and then broke off when Hope pushed his guitar aside and planted a long, deep kiss on his mouth.

Candy moved awkwardly toward the door and said, “It’s been nice seeing you both. I’ll be in touch.” They didn’t stop what they were doing but waved to her as she left.

Epilogue 2

Candy

Hope and Theda seemed to have their lives on track, but what about Candy? Just getting her college degree had taken five years. In the late spring of 1974, the book was still unfinished, and AMO had yet to reunite. Her son, going on two and a half, had received a few phone calls and greeting cards from his father, but no visits and scant monetary support. Rumor had it that Preston and Jo had blown most of their money from *Ty Leahy II* traveling through Europe and the Far East.

Still, things were looking up. Jamie had left the insurance business to take a much more lucrative job with the Worth Corporation. Around the three-year anniversary of the Playing with Fire Festival, they met with Floyd in his campus office to discuss a prospective AMO reunion.

"Isn't it time we sponsored a second Playing with Fire Festival?" Jamie proposed. "If it went off smoothly this time, the positive publicity would sell the next album."

"A rock festival these days, in California, is a scary proposition," Floyd objected. "With the radicals getting crazier all the time, the cost of security would be astronomical."

"You think the performers would be at greater risk now than they were three years ago?" Candy asked.

"Not only the performers," Floyd said, his eyes blazing. "I've received several threats myself since I blew off the People's Army. 'Sellout' is the nicest thing they call me."

He could be paranoid, Candy thought, but he could be right. Despite ruling out a single big event, Floyd agreed that the long-defunct band must schedule a series of live performances before attempting to make a record.

"There's only one way I can think of for AMO to get its old

groove back,” Candy ventured. “Go back to high school and become Homegrown again.”

She longed to go home, if only for a short visit. She expected Jamie and Floyd to shoot down her idea as impractical or childish. After a moment, Jamie responded, “That’s brilliant, honey. How about a Homegrown mini-tour of our old hangouts? First the Bly High gym, then a Maryland frat house or two, then a couple of DC clubs. Maybe wind up at Cole Field House.”

“I must say, that’s an ingenious plan,” Floyd said, grinning at Candy as if he detected something devious. She wouldn’t deny it. She doubted that she could bring back the old Preston, but she could try.



“I like the proposed theme of your book,” Jo wrote Candy in response to a note requesting an interview with her and Preston. They were back at Swami Flanny’s compound with their year-old son, resting from their far-flung travels and planning to return to the United States soon.

You’re right on when you say we’re all responsible for what happened at the festival and should be willing to face the music. We unleashed Beanner and Brad on each other. And even if they’d never met, an explosion was inevitable, because we’d nurtured that same violence in varying degrees within ourselves. So I agree, Candy, your book needs to be completed. Who knows, it could become a new Bhagavad Gita for our generation.

I’m also grooving to the idea of our sons meeting and establishing their brotherhood while they’re still little. You don’t mind that I named my boy Preston Junior, do you? You could’ve used the name yourself, but you didn’t. Anyway, you’d be amazed at what a nurturing father Preston has turned out to be. It’s a good thing, since I’m not particularly maternal myself.



The logistics proved to be tough. Not until late summer of 1974 did the reconstituted Homegrown band finally begin rehearsals at Nellie Bly High School in suburban Maryland.

Attending the sessions were several couples reveling in their second chances at love: Ty and Hope Leahy, Neal and Dora McNab, Floyd and Theda Worth, and James and Candace Foster, with their son Jimmy. Clive and Allie O'Dell had declined an invitation to participate, since Clive was soon to be deployed again. He had sent his blessing for Theda to replace him on drums, though, saying he knew she'd "shake up the old gym" better than he could.

Preston and Josephine Andrews were late, but Jo kept reassuring Candy by mail that their arrival was imminent. Parker and Johns had been invited to represent JPJ, but they hadn't responded.

Since the proposed new album was slated to become *Ty Leahy III*, Ty himself kicked off the rehearsal by singing his lovely tribute to Hope, "The Princess in the Tower," accompanying himself on acoustic guitar. Hope lounged cross-legged on a floor cushion in front of the stage, receiving Ty's love letter once again with moist eyes. Neal sat idle behind Ty at the electric piano, a slight grimace forming on his face. Dora, standing next to Candy on the dance floor, sent him a warning look, and the hint of sourness disappeared.

When the song was done, Ty put down his guitar and declared, "Enough of my old style for now. I'm ready to rock and roll with AMO. Anybody know where I can borrow an electric guitar and amplifier?"

Jamie had, in fact, obtained the key to the supply room from their old music teacher, Mr. Clark. Once Ty was set up, he spent the rest of the session giving a fair imitation of Preston on lead guitar. Backed up by Neal alternating between keyboards and bass and by Theda on drums, he easily picked up the old tunes "Grooving under the Desk," "Hot Teacher in Tights," and "Hex." Hope frowned a little, as if she preferred the gentler Ty.

"Fair is fair, you guys," Ty shouted after an exhilarating stretch of music. "I think we've all had enough of the Ty Leahy Roman Numeral concept. Y'all are gonna get equal billin' on the new album. That's a promise."

“Honey,” Hope said, “are you sure that’s the best ...” She stopped short and shrieked as Neal got up from his seat, approached Ty, and grabbed him from behind.

“Thanks, pal,” Neal said. “Really appreciate it.” Once Ty realized he wasn’t being attacked, he returned the hug, as Dora beamed at them both.



The fun and frolic of that first rehearsal gave way the next day to a much weirder session. Parker and Johns turned up with their roadie, who told Jamie, “Stand aside, mate. Time to show you what the fucking stage should look like.” A Moog synthesizer was installed, a requirement for the otherworldly song that JPJ intended to perpetrate on its unsuspecting audiences. During the thirty-minute free-form tribute to the deceased Beanner and Brad, the roadie was enlisted to make the Moog shriek and groan in ghostly ways behind Parker’s guitar and Johns’s drums. It made for tough listening and would test the patience of high school and even college crowds. Candy found it mesmerizing.

Afterward, Theda delivered an even bigger surprise. Blushing feverishly, she grabbed the center microphone and sang Allie McCarty’s recent country chart-topping hit, “Sky Ranger.” She outdid Allie herself in making it heartfelt. “It’s my way of keeping Clive’s spirit alive within the band,” she explained. “Who knows what’ll happen to him the next time he goes into combat?”

“Nothing can happen,” Neal sneered, “as long as God is his drill sergeant.” Another warning look from the ever-vigilant Dora had him apologizing for that crack.

“Don’t forget, Theda hon,” Floyd said, looking up from a notepad on which he’d been scribbling ideas for a playlist, “Clive chose the army.”

“Did he really?” Theda argued. “Or did his wife choose it for him? Why should she care if he perishes someday in some stupid war? She’ll still have the perfect life for a country singer ... a houseful of kids and all the material she needs to inspire an endless string of heartfelt, patriotic hits.”

Theda looked ready to cry over her lost love, until she caught Floyd's eye and smiled instead. Candy grabbed that opportunity to ask if Theda would be willing to revive one of her high school moneymaking schemes by giving both her and Jimmy a piano lesson or two.

"I've always wanted to learn," Candy said. "I also have a slightly egotistical reason for asking. I'm curious to find out how my old song 'The Permanence of War' sounds as a piano solo. I'd be glad to pay your going rate for lessons."

"Don't be silly," Theda replied. "Floyd and I don't need the money. I'll do it as a favor."



Candy, Jimmy, and Theda were at it a few days later, sitting at the offstage piano, when Preston and Jo burst in. Candy gaped at their stringy-haired, somewhat gaunt look, their colorful Nehru jackets, and their ornate necklaces. They had two children with them, similarly decked out in Indian styles.

"Candy!" Jo gave the toddler she was holding to Preston and rushed over to hug her old friend.

"Jo," Candy said, too distracted to know where to start. She met Preston's eyes, which looked panic-stricken. She finally asked, "Two children?"

She guessed the unexpected child was of Indian descent and slightly younger than Preston Junior, their biological son. "We adopted the girl, Sahasra, from a poor Bombay family," Jo explained, "sort of unofficially and spur-of-the-moment. Still, I'm sure it was the right thing to do, karma-wise. Both kids are sort of impulsive mistakes we made out of an excess of love. What can I say? We're lovable screw-ups."

"What an awful thing to say about any child ... that he or she is a mistake," Hope exclaimed. She approached Preston, who had his hands full with both children. "Let me take her for a minute," she ordered. The little girl settled into Hope's arms.

Preston ambled over to the piano with Preston Junior. The closer he got, the more familiar he looked. His old teasing grin popped out,

amplified by the familiar oversized, tinted glasses. Still, Candy sweated as she waited for him to initiate a conversation. He looked away from her and eyed his older son. Jimmy looked back steadily.

Preston finally said, "I guess it's time these little guys met."

Theda's laughter was startling. Still sitting beside Candy on the piano bench, she said what Candy couldn't seem to get out. "Yeah, and I guess it's also time you met a child of yours who's already, what, two years old? Who, incidentally, seems to have an interest in music."

"That doesn't surprise me." Preston smiled, ignoring the jab.

Candy said to Jimmy, "That's your other daddy I told you about. He called you on the phone, remember? And he's brought your little brother to meet you. Say hi."

Jimmy's eyes opened wide. Instead of saying hi, he gave both Preston and Junior a stern look. His dad flinched, and Candy quailed inside. Would this sudden encounter traumatize her son?

Jimmy took his time thinking it over. Then he smiled and announced, "Red hair!"

"God, it's true," Jo exclaimed. "Preston and both his sons have the flaming crown. That must mean something, right? I guess they'll be tight all their lives."

The adults laughed at this revelation. Then the awkwardness returned, until Theda cut through it. "I've been coaching Candy to play 'The Permanence of War' on piano," she told Preston. "In case you forgot, that's her song. Why don't you take it away, Candy? Impress your ex."

Theda slid off the bench and made for the stage. Jamie came by to gather up Jimmy, and they joined her up there. That left Preston and Candy with no choice but to face each other.

After hesitating a moment, Preston said, "Well, yeah, I know it's your song. Let's hear it."

"I'm no musician," Candy admitted. "I can only play the opening chords so far. And it's an exaggeration to call it my song. I just helped finish the lyrics when you were in a pinch."

"It was a big deal at the time," Preston said.

"Be brave, Candy," Jo said. "I'm no musician either, but remember,

I got up the nerve to perform in front of that huge festival crowd. Why can't you do your thing in front of just us?"

"Maybe I can help," Preston offered. He picked up Preston Junior and handed him to Jo. Then he sat down next to Candy on the bench. Jo staggered as she carried Junior across the dance floor. They joined Hope, who was still nurturing the Andrewses' surprise Indian child.

Candy played the few chords she had learned and tried to catch Preston's eye. "How are you?" she ventured.

Preston took a deep breath and glanced at Jo. "I married a crazy woman," he muttered. "You should know, Candy. She was your friend before she was my wife. Sometimes it's great because I can truthfully say I'm never bored. Who knows what she'll have us doing next? I just go along with her momentum."

"I used to do the same thing," Candy said.

"Yeah, but it's driving me nuts. I can't restart my music career with us always on the move. And there's no way we can raise two kids. We're running out of money, and we already had our hands full with Junior."

He almost met her gaze and then turned away at the last second. "It's my own childhood coming home to roost," he said, anger rising in his voice. "I was essentially abandoned. Try to understand, Candy: my mom died, and my dad blew off his responsibility to me when he started a new life. Now I'm repeating the pattern."

"What a pathetic excuse." Candy had never scolded Preston before, but now she had a son who needed at least acknowledgment from his father. "Break the pattern. You can be as responsible as you choose to be."

Shrugging this off, he said, "I'd be tempted to leave Jo right now if she wasn't so screwed up. I'm afraid she'd end up in the gutter. She's really smart in some ways, but she's not practical like you."

That wasn't quite the compliment Candy had hoped for. Still, she insisted, "I don't want you to leave her. Preston, it's no use pretending you didn't marry Jo for real and take on a load of responsibilities. Unless ..."

Candy paused, catching sight of Hope's glowing face as she mothered the Andrews brood.

“You might consider asking Hope and Ty to adopt your little girl. I know for a fact they’re having trouble getting pregnant, and Hope’s wanted a child forever. I’m sure they’d do whatever was necessary to legalize the adoption.”

A smile formed on Preston’s lips as he watched Hope take a load off Jo’s hands.

“And as for you,” Candy continued, “if you’re ready to rejuvenate your music career, you’ve come to the right place. That’s what we’re all here for.”

He finally turned his reluctant smile on her. Pointing to the stage, he said, “Why don’t we try out your song up there? I’m thinking it might fit nicely into our reunion show.”

As Preston and Candy took the stage to rehearse “The Permanence of War,” the other musicians dropped back willingly. Ty handed Preston the electric guitar he’d been using and retrieved his own acoustic instrument. Jamie put Jimmy down, and the toddler ran to the electric piano, where Neal taught him to make chords. Theda tapped the drums so as not to overpower Candy’s voice as she tried to emote without overdoing it. When they finished the song, everyone applauded, and Jo let out a cheer.

“It’s generous of you to bring me onstage,” Candy told Preston, “but we both know I’m not a performer. I’m here to write about *your* performance. When it’s time for you to unleash it, I’ll position myself in front of the stage like the first time, taking in your power ... your talent.” She trembled like the schoolgirl she’d been.

“I remember that night,” he said, a dreamy smile playing across his features. Then he shook his head and added, “It can’t be the same as it was. My talent has dried up.”

“You just need to get the juices flowing again,” Candy said.

“I can barely even remember the last time I wrote a song,” Preston murmured, fingering his guitar. His frown intensified while he fooled around, but then a tune emerged. He experimented with it, switching between major and minor keys. It proved to be a slippery piece, needing several repetitions before the other musicians picked it up.

Neal established the major-minor alternate lines on the electric piano. “This could work,” he announced.

Preston added lyrics to the tune. He sang rhymed lines that must have been germinating for some time, about “free spirits on an endless highway.” Candy realized that the words celebrated his union with the freest spirit any of them knew. Jo reacted by bursting into tears, and Ty exclaimed, “Pure poetry, man.” Candy applauded along with everyone else when Preston brought the new song in for a landing. Jimmy capped it off by pounding his own invented chord on the electric piano, making everyone jump.



Ten days later, Preston stood before a transformed audience in the Bly gymnasium, which once again served as a dance hall. These kids were five years more sophisticated in the wiles of rock and roll than Candy and her friends had been in high school, but they were no less enthusiastic. Preston had written two more songs in the past week, and others were coming.

Candy planted herself in front of the stage as before, while Jamie looked after their son backstage. She got misty-eyed when Preston announced, “We’re a group called Homegrown. That’s a name we once had to come up with on the spot. It kind of stuck.”

He commandeered the stage as he had the first time, thrusting his guitar in a near-sexual way and tossing back those red locks that caught the light like a halo. But he was no longer the upstart who had blown away the “star” singer Joey Sherry. He both led and supported his current bandmates: Neal on electric piano, intent on following Preston’s guitar riffs with equally intricate keyboard maneuvers; Ty on acoustic guitar, delivering musical poems of his own whenever the spotlight shone on him; Theda on drums, no doubt champing at the bit to let loose with some fancy solo but restraining herself until the time was right; and even the JPJ musicians, whose weird improvisations goosed the AMO message without torpedoing it.

Preston sang a song he’d finished only the day before, “The Stranger Within.” Candy was glad he had chosen that one over the sinuous “Free Spirits of the Road,” which celebrated his footloose marriage.

“Stranger” brought her closer to the old Preston. It made her blood pound with its catchy tune, passionate high notes, and troubled yet defiant message. His guitar glowed with shiny newness, exactly as it had when she’d never seen such a fancy instrument before.

When the musicians took their bows and left the stage, the crowd coaxed them back for an encore with wild cheering, foot-stomping on the gym floor, and lighted matches held high. AMO returned, and Preston sang Candy’s all-time favorite, “Revolution for Amateurs,” in a fair imitation of the time she’d first managed to catch his eye.

What had he seen in her, a gawky teenager, that set her apart from the more outgoing girls at the dance? Maybe that she got what he was singing about. The first part of her book would explain the “revolution” when it was new. The last chapter, as yet unfinished, would describe its rebirth.

Their love had been doomed from the start. Still, she would always remember the moment when the budding rock star descended the stage and miraculously approached her. She hadn’t gotten a chance to tell him that night what his performance had meant to her because he’d interrupted her with that scandalous french kiss, in a moment that couldn’t last, with all those catty girls watching and her dad lurking outside.

She stood at almost the same spot tonight, reliving a scene that must stay in the past. Yet she could still feel the taste of his lips and tongue on hers, as his essence coursed through her veins. She’d always feel it, as long as the music lasted.

It is the late 1960s, and Jimi Hendrix is at the height of his career, America is undergoing political and social upheaval, and a rock and roll band is shaking the rafters of its suburban Maryland high school. As Preston, the founder and lead guitarist of Homegrown cranks out the tunes with keyboardist, Neal, and drummer, Brad, three girls appoint themselves as the band's official groupies without any idea of what lies ahead for any of them.

After the band members sign with a management company and make the controversial decision to replace popular Brad with another drummer, they decide to pursue a dubious lead in England, accompanied by the girls who love them: Candy, an aspiring journalist; Hope, wannabe model and fashion designer; and Theda, a thespian with big dreams. As their journey takes them to Europe and back again, the girls—challenged by love rivals, partying lifestyles, and the growing stardom of the musicians—remain determined not to be mere “handmaidens of rock.” But it is not until Brad embarks on a vengeful quest at a festival that the three finally have the opportunity to prove their worth as grown women.

Handmaidens of Rock is the compelling tale of three high-school girls who attach themselves to a rock and roll band in the late 1960s and embark on a wild adventure across the world.

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Handmaidens of **ROCK**
