

# **Pink Lotus**

**Manfred Mitze**

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*Banish learning, no more grief.  
Between Yes and No  
How much difference?  
What others fear I must fear –  
How pointless!*

*People are wreathed in smiles  
As if at a carnival banquet.  
I alone am passive, giving no sign,  
Like an infant who has not yet smiled.  
Forlorn, as if I had no home.*

*Others have enough and more,  
I alone am left out.  
I have the mind of a fool,  
Confused, confused.*

*Others are bright and intelligent,  
I alone am dull, dull,  
Drifting on the ocean,  
Blown about endlessly.*

*Others have plans,  
I alone am wayward and stubborn,  
I alone am different from others,  
Like a baby in the womb.*

*Lao-Tzu, Tao Te Ching ~ Confused, confused ~ T'un t'un hsi\**

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## *Acknowledgment*

*Deep gratitude for lightening the flame within to*

*Buddha*

*Lao-Tzu*

*Osho*

*John de Ruiter*

*Eckhart Tolle*

*Love and blessings to Maja, Mukta, Christina,  
Andy, Thomas, and all who have touched my life story.*

## Eternal Hula

My name is Maddox Hough—as in hamstringing a cut of beef from the leg, used in stewing. Sitting at Lu Min's restaurant in Lahaina one rainy night in December, I cannot avoid speculating about what I will be able to offer as an heirloom gift. In my family, there are no precious possessions, and recently the economy was slow to react to stimulation, resulting in the pitiable amount of spending money in my purse.

Even the visit to Lu Min's separates a part of me, as if I were cut with a knife. I am thinking, *we could also adopt if I am too old to even offer the tiniest bit of sperm necessary to have our own child*. I am deep in thought while Lei is sitting right next to me. She is my fiancée and named Lei because her parents recognized in their child mother nature's expression of delicate flowers.

The rain that has poured for a while stops abruptly, as if severed. Across the street, the Pacific Ocean reflects solitary stars and some virginal clouds that are lightened by a hidden moon. Small boats bob up and down in the dark, iridescent water.

A Chinese boy, probably the child of the owner's girlfriend and server at the same time, is showing off his way of dealing with an extraordinary situation. He acts up, irritating people, to pass the night away.

My initial impulse is to ask politely, “Would you like to come to our table and we do something together, like play the little golden harmonica on the golden chain around my neck?”

For a moment, it catches the brat's attention, and at the same time, I notice the white guy, who I cannot pin an age on; he feels very familiar to me.

Lei suddenly intervenes and helps to entertain the disagreeable child who is interrupting our fun and could ruin the night. The waitress mother relieves me and all other guests momentarily of her mutinous youngster.

Across from the Chinese restaurant veranda where we are sitting, guests arrive in shorts and hula shirts for the trendy and costly restaurant at the water's edge. The street asphalt is sparkling with rainwater from the recent heavy shower.

I am a sociable person, and intrigued, I ask the lonely but civilized-looking guy at the table on the other side of the aisle, “Where do you stay here?”

Since I noticed him a moment ago but was preoccupied by my thoughts and the kid, it feels like I am helping destiny on its natural path. Slowly the man turns his head and looks at me with blue eyes, his thinning hair not quite blond anymore. For a moment, it feels as if time is standing still. I am not positive whether I am making a serious mistake, or perhaps the stranger actually likes the interruption.

“I am staying at a hotel,” he says, after looking at me for a long time as if lost or unsure how to answer. “The Royal Ohana.”

At that moment, I realize that the stranger likes the attention, and I become aware of an accent. “Where are you from?”

“Originally from Germany,” he says, as if going through a ritual, “but I live in LA.”

I must confess that I am thrilled by this revelation. A German in a cheap Chinese restaurant in Lahaina at this moment is perfectly opportune. It feels and appears to be a promise of distraction and an opportunity to practice my talent and trained investigative brain.

“What part?” I continue.

“I was born near Frankfurt,” he replies.

In this rather swift exchange, we establish a prescribed procedure of getting to know each other. He seems to be a somewhat interesting, unusual person. I am certain this impression is reciprocal, that he welcomes the interruption of events this early Sunday evening.

I invite him to our table, catch a closer look at the man's features, and am surprised by his adolescent appearance. I am thinking he might be almost my age. My fiancée, Lei, appears to be rather pleased, and the boy vanishes into the background. I am able to let go of depressing thoughts and can now dig deep into my memory bank. I tell the stranger that during World War II, I spent time with the armed forces in his home country, specifically in the area he just mentioned. This confession on my part makes it easy to interact with him. I do not mention that I was in Germany because I was in the newly founded CIA as an analyst, interpreter, and evaluator for all kinds of situations and individuals. We order Japanese beer, and then my new friend talks for a long, long time.

Lu Min wants to close the place down. Lei and I have been very silently listening for a few hours, sipping on beers and experiencing how a stranger with the name Walter gently turned into an intimate acquaintance. I invite Walter for lunch at my place the next day and ask him whether it would be OK to record his story while we eat and during his visit with us. I know by

now that Lei will not object. Being a Hawaiian *wahine*, she enjoys a good, long story. Walter has many days of vacation and agrees to my offer; he appears to enjoy recounting his own life's narrative and also looks younger, fresher, and rejuvenated while doing it. We quickly say our good-byes and *mahalos*.

We continue the next day with recording.

Lei and I own a jewelry store in Lahaina. We specialize in Hawaiian heirlooms, diamonds, and Tahitian black pearls. As I mentioned before, business is not doing so well; tourists keep a tight belt while staying on Maui—in the event they even make it to Maui. Walter's arrival is a perfect distraction and helps me practice my journalistic abilities. Of course, uncertainties and doubts cross my mind—and especially Lei's because it begins to look like I am spending more time with Walter than with her. Meanwhile, she attends the store during business hours, and I operate the tape recorder while Walter tells his tale, occasionally interrupted when I ask him a question or two.

I have no idea where it will lead or whether there will be any notable outcome. It simply is a pleasure to listen to him, and for Walter, it appears as if it is an opportunity he has been waiting for.

## DIRECTORY OF INDIVIDUALS

**ABHIRAT** ~ YOUNG AND BRITISH. CHANDRA'S LOVER  
**ADARSHA, MA** ~ WALTER'S LANDLADY IN POONA  
**ANDREA, EGON, AND THEIR KIDS KATJA AND LUKAS** ~ IN THE COUNTRY  
**ANDREAS (AVS)** ~ LIAISON OFFICER IN WALTER'S ARMY UNIT AND FRIEND.  
**ANTHONY AND ALEXI** ~ TRAVEL COMPANIONS IN IN THE EAST, TURNED LONG-TERM FRIENDS  
**ANTJE** ~ KAVITA'S LEGAL NAME  
**ARIS** ~ YACHT BROKER AND FRIEND IN PIRAEUS  
**BETTINA, HAUKE, AND WILMA** ~ ACQUAINTANCES FROM THE DISCO IN BRANSFELD  
**BUD** ~ HILDE'S LOVER IN OKLAHOMA CITY  
**CHANDRA** ~ MOTHER OF WALTER'S THIRD CHILD  
**CHAKSHAN** ~ HOST IN RAMESHWARAM  
**CHRISTEL** ~ VISITOR IN VOLKER'S BIG HOUSE  
**CLAIRE, ELISABETH, WENDY** ~ THREE WOMEN IN OKLAHOMA CITY.  
**CLAUDIA** ~ HILDE'S DAUGHTER WITH KURT. HER THIRD CHILD  
**DAGMAR** ~ ARRIVES WITH MARKUS, IS INTERESTED IN WALTER  
**DENISE** ~ GIRLFRIEND WITH BABY.  
**DENISE HAUCK** ~ ANDREAS'S GIRLFRIEND—OR NOT?  
**DIETER AND ANNE** ~ HILDE'S FRIENDS WHO ALSO BECAME WALTER'S FRIENDS. THE TWO COUPLES DID A LOT OF SOCIALIZING TOGETHER.  
**EDELGARD** ~ CHANDRA'S RESEARCH SPONSOR  
**ELISABETH** ~ RED LIPS, WHITE BLOUSE, LARGE BOSOM. FRIENDLY GIRL, DAUGHTER OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD PUB OWNER.  
**ELIZABETH** ~ FROM FRANCE. MEETS WALTER IN GOA  
**ERZEBET AND GASPAR** ~ EMIGRANTS FROM HUNGARY. ROOMMATES AND LONG-TERM FRIENDS.  
**ESHANA** ~ SANNYAS NAME OF MONIKA  
**EVELYN** ~ FIRST LOVE, INTENSELY. SCHOOLMATE OF WALTER'S.  
**FRANKIE** ~ FELLOW PATIENT IN THE HOSPITAL  
**FRAU GRETE MUELLER** ~ BEST FRIEND OF WALTER'S MOTHER. SOMETIMES HIS BABY-SITTER AND MORE.  
**FRIEDER** ~ LEGAL NAME OF CHANDRA AND WALTER'S SON  
**FRIEDRICH HERZOG** ~ HIS "FATHER."  
**GERHARD** ~ IRENE'S BOYFRIEND AND CHESS PLAYER FOR MONEY.  
**GERHARD** ~ WALTER'S TRADE SCHOOL CLASSMATE TURNED FRIEND.  
**GERLINDE KIRSCH** ~ INTELLECTUAL ACQUAINTANCE OF WALTER  
**GIL** ~ CUSTOMER IN THE CAFÉ WHO IS FRIENDLY TOWARDS WALTER  
**HANNCHEN** ~ ONE OF FRIEDRICH'S NIECES AND **KLAUS** ~ HANNCHEN' SPOUSE  
**HANS** ~ BOMBAY LUFTHANSA OFFICE  
**HASMUKH, SWAMI PREM** ~ WALTER'S FIRST SANNYAS NAME  
**HEDDA** ~ KLARA'S GIRLFRIEND. CLASSMATE  
**HELMUT AND PERCY** ~ TWO SWEET ACQUAINTANCES.  
**HILDE** ~ WALTER'S LONG-TIME PARTNER, MOTHER OF TWO CHILDREN. CONFIDANT.  
**IRENE** ~ HILDE'S BEST FRIEND IN FRANKFURT. ALSO BECAME WALTER'S FRIEND AND CONFIDANTE.  
**JAAN, SWAMI ANAND** ~ WALTER'S SECOND SANNYAS NAME



**JOHANNES** ~ HILDE AND WALTER'S SON. SECOND CHILD  
**KAETHE MUELLER** ~ GRETE'S DAUGHTER. TALL, SLIM, LARGE BREASTS, MANY BOYFRIENDS, AND OCCASIONALLY WALTER'S SITTER.  
**KARIN** ~ WHO LIVED NEAR TRIER  
**KIERSTEN** ~ BEAUTIFUL, BLOND, AND CARING DANISH WOMAN  
**KLARA** ~ GASPAR'S NEW GIRLFRIEND  
**KNUT** ~ BAKER AND NANNY  
**KURT** ~ ARTIST. WALTER'S SUCCESSOR WITH HILDE  
**LALITYA, ALKA, PARICHARA, KAYA** ~ SANNYASIN WOMEN WHO BECAME FRIENDLY WITH HASMUKH  
**LARS** ~ FELLOW TRAVELER, THE EXPLORERS MET IN BHADRA, INDIA  
**LINA** ~ SWEETHEART OF A WOMAN WHO LOVED WALTER. OPA MITTLER'S SECOND WIFE.  
**LISA FROM LOS ANGELES** ~ PERKY, CURLY. IN AND OUT.  
**LISA HERZOG** ~ HIS MOTHER.  
**MADELEINE** ~ WALTER'S FIRST INTIMATE GIRLFRIEND FOR SOME TIME.  
**MADIR** ~ DEALER IN SIDNEY  
**MAGDA** ~ WALTER AND HILDE'S DAUGHTER. FIRST BORN CHILD  
**MANUELA** ~ AND HER DAUGHTER AGNES IN GRUENEBURGPARK  
**MARGARETHA** ~ LOVES WALTER. HE LOVES HER  
**MARKUS** ~ STUDENT OF THE LAW. FREQUENT VISITOR AT WESTENDSTRASSE  
**MELANIE** ~ AFFILIATED WITH THE INFORMATION SERVICE  
**NELSON** ~ LAWYER'S SON AND ACTIVIST.  
**NIMISHA, SARANGO** ~ ROOMMATES WITH BABY IN HAMBURG  
**NIRVESHA** ~ MARGARETHA'S SANNYAS NAME  
**OLOF** ~ KAVITA'S FATHER  
**Opa MITTLER** ~ LINA'S FATHER, WALTER'S GRANDFATHER. GRUMPY OLD MAN.  
**PARMESH** ~ FRIEDER'S SANNYAS NAME  
**PHIL** ~ GI TURNED HIPPIE FROM THE BRONX. ORIGINALLY PUERTO RICO.  
**PUNITAM** ~ HOUSE OWNER OF THE SMALL COMMUNE IN WOHLTORF  
**RAIMUND** ~ FRIEND AND VOLUNTEER AT THE INFORMATION SERVICE  
**RAINER** ~ BUSINESS-SCHOOL CLASSMATE AND FRIEND.  
**RAKKASA** ~ HASMUKH'S BELOVED FOR QUITE SOME TIME  
**RONALD** ~ IMPRESSIVE GUITAR PLAYER. QUIET HELP IN THE CAFÉ  
**RUTH** ~ WERNER PICK'S WIFE  
**SAMIT** ~ SWISS SWAMI. DID NOT HAND OVER THE FUNDS FOR HASMUKH  
**SANDOR** ~ HUNGARIAN HAPPENING ARTIST. ONE-MAN-BAND  
**SAROJA, TANYA, MICHAEL, HARSHINI, YOGESH** ~ OF THE HOISBUETTEL COMMUNE  
**SILKE** ~ MOTHER OF A TWO-YEAR-OLD AND PREGNANT AGAIN  
**SUDHA, MA YOGA** ~ FAVORITE THERAPIST  
**SUSANNE** ~ LISA HERZOG'S SISTER WITH WHOM SHE GREW UP IN FRANKFURT.  
**UDGATA** ~ FELLOW STUDENT OF CHANDRA  
**ULRIKE, SHEIK, BERT** ~ COUNTRY DWELLERS  
**VOLKER** ~ FOUNDER OF ANOTHER LAND COMMUNE  
**WALDEMAR** ~ NEW AGE LANDLORD OF THE FAMILY IN HAMBURG  
**WALTER HERZOG** ~ THIS BOOK IS A TRUE STORY ABOUT FIFTY YEARS OF HIS LIFE.  
**WERNER PUCK** ~ FIRST, FRIEND OF RAINER'S, THEN WALTER'S BEST FRIEND

## Pink Lotus

Walter Herzog was born in a small town near Marburg, in the state of Hessen, about fifty miles north of Frankfurt. Looking back at his life, one can only say that it was and is like a dream—a dream filled with the spectrum of all colors imaginable; a life full of love, drama, and fear, with inner richness but disenfranchised. It was a life and existence of courage on the verge of desperation, as if madness tried to find guidance through him. He experienced deep depression, loneliness, and indescribably awesome bliss.

From when he was born in the forties of the last century until the year 2000 may not seem like a long time, but to remember standing at the crossroads of a small town in the middle of Western Germany when John F. Kennedy was assassinated seems like the brink of eternity.

Walter had been locked up; had survived stabbing; was spit on, yelled at, and cursed; and had stuff thrown at him. One Sunday morning, however, he was fortunate enough to ask a true question at the proper moment.

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Tree leaves had already fallen to the ground after turning red and yellow. It was a melancholy season in Germany, with a certain smell ascending from the soil: putrid leaves on wet earth. A symbol for some that winter and death are close, the darkness in the Nordic hemisphere may cause sadness to rise in people and some to develop depression. On a gray day, a boy made his way through his mother's birth canal with a little help from a doctor and some midwives. No complication occurred during the delivery process except the unfavorable time and place into which Walter Herzog was born.

Everybody was very quiet during postnatal care, and soon Lisa Herzog needed to go home and try to get food for the newborn baby and herself. Germany was defeated, crushed to the ground, bombed, and the Allies had dismantled all major industrial factory equipment and shipped it abroad for others' use. Germany's infrastructure had been destroyed by British and American bombing and by fighting on the ground. Twelve months after the end of the war in Europe, it still took seventy-two hours to travel by rail from Munich to Hamburg. Heavy war reparations had to be paid by the remaining Germans.

The alleged father of the baby, Friedrich Herzog, had yet to return from a prison camp in Russia. When the Russians released him back to Germany in 1947, he could not work in his own bakery because of his membership in Hitler's National Socialistic Democratic Party, the Waffen SS, and the Sturm Abteilung.

Of great significance in Walter's life was his unawareness of Friedrich not being his biological father. Walter did not think differently until much later, when he turned fifty, and that happened long after his parents' demise. The reality they made him believe was that they conceived him during one of Herzog's honor visits at home, when the Russians let him leave for a vacation to see his wife for a few days.

Frau Herzog was not happy about any of it. Another child at that time presented only predicaments for her. She had no love left, being in pain from everything in her life. The death of her first child only four months earlier, the war, the end of the war, the grim and hopeless-looking future, and her husband in Russia were devastating conditions. Her own need to feel loved resulted in this pregnancy, and the prevalent emotion was guilt. Her wounds from the death of her firstborn had not healed. The death triggered mental impairments that would never mend; she remained broken until her sad ending. Walter's presence continually reminded her of her sexual indiscretion during her husband's absence. The never-ending efforts to feed and take care of the bastard overwhelmed her, and she unconsciously blamed the child for being a burden, even though the aberration happened only as a result of existential survival mechanisms. The fact that Walter developed into the sweetest boy one can imagine, with large blue eyes and fine features, made her even more ashamed when watching him. He reminded her of the hours spent with the good-looking foreign lover.

Walter's first memories were of bakery aromas coming up the stairs into the modest Herzog apartment. Freshly baked loafs of rye bread coated with water by a wide brush emitted steam and particular fragrances that Walter relished. He also remembered how he placed sugar cubes outside on the windowsill; Walter badly wanted a brother or sister. He was told that sugar cubes would help bring about his wish. Although he tried a lot, brother and sister never arrived.

His parents gave him a used tricycle with solid, hard rubber tires on metal rims. He made his way back and forth on the sidewalks and around the corner down Erbsenberg Hill, pushing the cycle up the hill and greeting the neighbor with a huge mustache.

On one of those occasions, he saw his father, who had returned from Russia, leaning against the house next to the big pile of wood he had been splitting with an ax. He seemed to be in pain, and his left hand was all bloody and wrapped in a piece of cloth. Then Walter saw that Friedrich Herzog had just lost half of his left thumb. For a few moments, the boy froze in panic and became sick to his stomach. Somehow, he managed to race up the hill, around the corner, and up the stairs to the kitchen into his mother's apron.

During his bike rides along the sidewalks of his immediate neighborhood, Walter encountered the presence of the victorious American forces. Army platoons went down Main Street, maneuvering troops and machinery through town. They created a lot of noise with their jeeps and large tanks. For the first time in Walter's life, he met black people face-to-face. The Americans tossed chocolate bars and chewing gum from their armored vehicles and waved back with smiling faces. Walter loved them immediately.

Local authorities made sure that Walter's father could not run his own business for the next ten years because of his involvement with the Nazis. He got a job at a bakery where the son also became a frequent visitor because the bakery owners were caring, friendly people. Sitting at the long kitchen table with all the employees, everybody had lunch together, like an alternate family. Most of the workers came from Eastern European countries, decimated by the dramatic events of the recent war.

The Herzogs moved into a small apartment with kitchen, tiny living room, and one bedroom on top of an electric-appliances store. All three rooms, as well as the lavatory, were separated by a long, large hallway. With no bathroom, the family used a large zinc bucket instead and had to clean themselves in the kitchen. At night in bed, Walter would hold a blanket in his hands and slowly pull the edge of the blanket through his mouth from one side to the other and then back again, while chewing on his right or left thumb at the same time. A special scent from the starched saliva developed on the blanket rim. It had a soothing effect on the boy. Both of his thumbs developed somewhat larger right in the middle of the lower joint, and after some time a callus layer built up due to the constant rubbing of teeth on skin.

Next door was a little public park with sandpit, large trees, and grassy area. Walter became friends with other children by playing in the sandpit. They invited him to their homes for some sweet stuff or fresh juice.

Everything was nearby in the small town. He could visit his father in the bakery and also walk to neighbors' homes. Behind the apartment and electric-appliances store, a very large, uncultivated garden stretched for a quarter of a mile, with berry bushes, fruit trees, and all kinds of unexpected things to discover. At some point, the owner must have owned a construction business. A mysterious shed was off limits for the boy, and all kinds of slowly rusting equipment had been dumped on the property. It presented daily adventures for Walter, roaming around the bushes, trees, and equipment on the estate. At the same time, it was a challenge to avoid the owner, who did not want anybody to pick apples, quinces, cherries, or berries from his trees or bushes. The apples, gooseberries, red currants, and cherries tasted very delicious when ripe. Beyond the fence surrounding the property flourished many weeping willows, and a river with greenish water ran through it.

In winter in Germany, it could become very cold, with lots of snow. Small ponds and frozen river backwater gave the kids space to enjoy the cold season. Every day after homework, it was time to go outdoors in snow and ice. Walter's parents gave him used, old-fashioned ice skates that he had to screw onto his boots. Much more fun was riding on the sleigh. It was very thrilling and sometimes dangerous to rush down a hill covered with trees and make it through them. All the neighborhood kids did it endlessly until it became dark.

Summers were hot and whenever possible were spent in the public swimming facility, the Ohm River, which ran around the town. Walter went there with his parents; Frau Mueller, his mother's best friend; and Frau Mueller's daughter, Kaethe, with her various boyfriends. It was great fun to spend a little time with his father, who would go with him into the river. Walter could not swim yet; the water was deep, cold, and had a current. Friedrich let him sit on his shoulders or kept him close between his arms, and they played games for some time. He would let go of him and catch him, teasing the shrieking Walter.

Walter loved the world. In summertime there were always many Maybeetles flying around or climbing in trees. The brown, fat, shiny beetles would eat leaves, and the kids were allowed to shake the trees and collect them. It was much fun to keep them in shoeboxes with small holes punched in them, then feed the beetles until they really stunk and Mother or Father would throw them out. By then, most of the beetle collection had already died.

Very few incidents disturbed those peaceful, joyful first six years of Walter's life. One of these incidents occurred when he noticed other children with small leather bags loosely dangling

around their necks. He became fascinated by them and wanted one for himself. Naturally, he also was curious to find out where the children went with satchels around their necks. His mother told him they were going to kindergarten. So Walter wanted to go to kindergarten and wanted a bag like the others. He paid a visit to the neighborhood leather-goods store and convinced the owner that it would be OK to give him one; his parents surely would pay for it later. Of course, the sales clerk gave it to him smilingly, and his mother returned the purse immediately. Then Frau Mueller took Walter by the hand and walked with him to the kindergarten to test him on the subject of attending. At the point when they entered the building and Walter heard children shouting through the closed door, a great panic overcame him, and he would not go inside. Walter just froze on the spot, and nobody could convince him to enter that room.

The same panic returned three years later, on his first day of school. But then he was not allowed to go back home.

The year 1954 was an important one for the Germans when the national soccer team won the World Cup by coming back from two goals down to defeat Hungary. Walter remembered how extremely exciting it was to sit around the radio and listen to the moderator. When it was over, he yelled out of the window with joy.

## Lisa Herzog and "Father"

Friedrich Herzog had been born in 1908 in a small village in the state of Hessen. He was one of eight children growing up on a small farm when it was the custom that the firstborn male takes over the family business. Since Friedrich did not inherit the farm, he became an apprentice in a bakery. Times were tough in Germany, with an increasingly high number of unemployed. As a result of the unemployment, frustration, and people's needs, Adolf Hitler's organizations grew very strong in the early 1930s. They not only offered ideological content, but provided work, clothing, and food. Friedrich joined them.

About six feet tall, hook-nosed, and black-haired, he was a gentle soul if not provoked. He treated Walter with care, and only occasionally, when Lisa distressed him for some reason, complaining and whining about Walter, did he rush after him, grab, and beat him fiercely. Friedrich used his hands; Lisa usually grabbed a coat hanger or wooden cooking spoon. She broke countless of those on Walter's back and behind. It also happened frequently that his father hit him in the face because his mother put too much pressure on her husband. Friedrich could take tension, but only to a point, and then he needed relief—and that was usually his son. After a while, he would feel guilty, almost apologizing, and sometimes he even wept. During those moments, a bond and understanding developed between father and son, resulting in a relationship in which the third person, Lisa, was transformed into an outsider.

Lisa had been a beautiful woman with hazel eyes and wavy brunette hair. What did Frau Herzog really do when her husband was detained in one of Russia's prisoner-of-war camps after World War II? Could it be that she tried to enjoy life in one of Frankfurt's nightclubs, where local girls went to have some fun with American soldiers? It will stay a mystery. She never told her son. She confided in nobody except possibly Frau Mueller, but then again, maybe not even her.

Walter never really understood or knew what was driving his mother until he was able to forgive her completely. She and her sister, Susanne, who was two years older, had grown up in Frankfurt with a railroad-worker father, who was a discordant, irritable person most of his life, and a mother she had dearly loved but who passed away much too early. After her mother's death, her father married Lina, a friendly and compassionate person. Through the marriage, the

two combined owned a respectable number of smaller agricultural properties in the garden farmland suburb of Oberrad. The girls had to start working early. Lisa became a tailor after completing junior high school. She was thirty-four years old when she conceived Walter.



## First Changes

Grete Mueller, originally from Pomerania, which had been annexed by Poland and then Russia, had escaped the Russian troops occupying that part of her country. Her status in Germany was that of a refugee; the German government provided her with a pension. She had a daughter, Kaethe, a tall, slender, brown-haired girl. Often Walter reluctantly had to spend time with them because his mother was busy with something. The Mueller home was about twenty minutes' walking distance from where Walter lived. They rented rooms in a farmhouse that stood between railroad tracks on one side and fields and meadows on the other side. The land belonged to the working farmer's family, which occupied the downstairs floor and kept livestock in a large stable.

One day Walter made his usual trip up a hill, crossed the railroad tracks by a bridge, and then went down the road along the tracks toward the last building. When he arrived, he found that Frau Mueller was not at home. Kaethe and her girlfriend, the farmer's daughter, had to take care of him. They wanted him to come outside and play. Of course Walter went with them; he did not want to sit alone in the Mueller's' one and only large room. As it happened, Kaethe and friend directed Walter to the railroad tracks. The steep and densely overgrown embankment area provided a great place to play hide and seek.

Suddenly, both girls stopped in a clearing in the brush and told Walter to join them. He tentatively moved to them, and Kaethe said, "We want you to do something for us, but you are not allowed to tell anybody. If you tell, you will be punished the rest of your life."

Of course, Walter did not want to be punished at all. So he asked, "Yes, what do you want me to do?"

Kaethe took his hand and said, "You have to touch my spot; it makes me feels good."

Walter did not know what her spot was and let her take his right hand. She pulled at the elastic band of her black pants and then widened the gap of her panties. She guided Walter's hand into the opening and then below, to something that to Walter felt like his father's chin because of the growths. He was scared and dazed, but Kaethe insisted that he keep on touching, and so Walter did. It felt extremely peculiar and outlandish to him. What he touched was not a developed female organ, just a young girl's crevice between her legs. For Walter, the experience

was horrible. When Kaethe let go of his hand and the other girl wanted him to touch her spot, he started to cry, and they let go of him.

As Walter's mother best friend, Frau Mueller and his mother moved through Walter's life, seeming almost identical. Sometimes he preferred the presence of Grete Mueller over his mother's, but there were limits. Grete was very strict and serious when she gave orders, and Walter could feel that she held back something from him—her eyes would radiate a knowing, and sometimes she would put her arm around Walter's thin shoulders as if she wanted to tell him, “You sweet, little, poor boy.”

During summer school holidays, his mother sent him to stay with grandfather in Frankfurt-Oberrad. Walter did not mind being at the old man's home; he had a way dealing with Opa Mittler. When he turned very grumpy, Walter would simply tickle him around the cheek area. That would do the trick. Opa would then smile and sometimes laugh. He enjoyed early retirement because of an accident while working for the railroad company. His right upper torso had become caught between two rail-car bumpers and was crushed, leaving a deep disfigurement and gap in the right breast area. Whenever Opa Mittler cleaned himself in front of the kitchen sink, Walter could see his naked, upper body and would stare at the deep hole the railroad carriage bumper had left.

There was no time to lament, however, because of Oma Mittler, a loving, compassionate woman and gardener by birth. Her whole family owned gardens and properties in Oberrad on which they cultivated vegetables, fruit trees, and bushes.

One time, seeing that Walter was bored, she asked him, “Why don't you come with me? Let's break gooseberries.” *Breaking* meant picking the berries from the bushes.

So it happened that Walter spent a lot of time with Oma's side of the family in the fields and gardens. At the end of the day, Oma would sit in the kitchen and peel hulls of string beans, taking off the top with the attached thread to prepare them for the preservation process.

One night, Opa, Oma, and Walter went to the movies. A local pub-and-restaurant owner sometimes set up a movie projector and presented a film. That night it was a scary thriller with Gert Froebe acting the lead role of a killer in the woods. Walter became very scared, could not fall sleep, and cuddled up with Opa and Oma.

Then one day, when Frau Mueller appeared on Opa and Oma's doorsteps to pick him up, Walter discovered the reason why he had spent such an extraordinarily long time with his grandparents. Frau Mueller told him they would go on a long journey by tram and then by bus to his new residence. When the two arrived at the main train station, they took a bus to Walter's new hometown: Bad Homburg, about thirteen miles from Frankfurt.

The new house had a massive hardwood entrance door with an iron handlebar. Inside the door, they walked into a lobby area, followed by a very dark staircase and another open door. Walter entered alone into a large, gloomy space. He recognized three thick, wide iron structures embedded in the opposite wall. Through a window high up on the left, covered by bushes outside, daylight seeped. Walter slowly moved down three steps of stairs, and then the hairs on the back of his neck stood straight up.

When he stepped onto the stone floor, it made a creaky, grating sound. It was covered by two inches of compacted black cockroaches, some alive, most of them rotting. When he stepped on them unintentionally, their bodies disintegrated. The embedded wall structures on the other side of the room were black, narrow iron doors, three levels high.

Walter must have heard noises, because he became aware of his parents, who had returned and realized that Walter was in shock. The Herzogs tried to explain. "This is the new bakery, our new home, and we shall be living here from now on."

When Walter was alone for a moment, he stood in the doorway to his new home and looked outside. To the left and right, he surveyed a narrow lane, perhaps nine feet wide, and a fence, behind which some grass grew in what appeared to be a garden. A bridge loomed overhead, and the underpass seemed almost like a tunnel. For the first time in his life, Walter felt like a stranger in a strange land. Hinter den Rahmen, beyond the weaving looms, with nine feet of paved, blue basalt cobblestone, did not reflect any leniency.

As it turned out, the bakery did not do well because of its location below the bridge. Additionally, there were two competitive bakeries in the immediate neighborhood. The Ritter-von-Marx Bridge with pedestrian traffic might as well have been in a different country. The bakery's entrance was located underneath. Only few neighborhood locals became genuine regular customers. Someone walking on the bridge who wanted to visit the shop had to make a detour around the block.

The property was located in the old part of Bad Homburg—old meaning established in 782 AD. History could be found all over town. Medieval times left their mark, especially the Dark Ages, when executors of the established order burned promiscuous women alive. Later there was talk of the Homburg witch-hunt craziness. Stone towers and high walls were everywhere. Walter passed one witch tower every day on his way to school.

## Challenges

Walter did not have to wait too long for the new school year to start; it happened sooner than he expected. The classroom was filled with yelling, squealing, shrieking kids of both genders. The first day he sat, crying, on the lap of a compassionate, welcoming teacher. She explained to the other kids that Walter was a little afraid and new in town. She smiled at him, pressing him close to her heart, and told him there was no need to be scared. Walter loved her immediately.

The next three years went by fast. Walter did well in school and then wanted to attend high school, which was supported by his good grades and the encouragement of well-intentioned teachers.

Although he was able to walk to grammar school through the old town, he now used a secondhand bicycle his parents had obtained for him. The route was four miles, but led through the spa area with its manicured gardens and beautiful trees, some of them imported from exotic places. He passed large park meadows, golf courses, and the famous casino, the Spielbank. At the end of the trip, up a little hill, was the elite school Kaiser Friedrich Gymnasium. Mostly the well-to-do and the nobility sent their offspring to it. Walter, from the blue-collar old town with a shared water closet on the public staircase, had been unaware of these differences until now, though he still did not understand the connection between money, status, and support system.

He innocently began a time of learning and suffering. His first four years in school had passed in a playful way. Now, the demands, schedule, and pace of new subjects, along with his personal limits, made it difficult for him to keep track of what was taught. His parents paid for an afternoon homework group where Walter could get his assignments done by someone else. After time, however, it became obvious in class that young Walter was simply overwhelmed by the prerequisites that he could not deliver.

He started eating during lectures because his stomach hurt when empty, which caused teachers to record him frequently in the class register. The form teacher did not ignore any opportunity to expose Walter's weakness in front of the class. He called him a dreamer and sleepyhead. Walter's world turned into a place of torment in which he suffered a lot of pain and humiliation afflicted by a neo-Nazi assistant teacher.

To top it off, his mother followed the habit of listening to and commiserating with strangers who would complain about her son. Walter could not recall a single instance when his mother defended him in any situation. This time she listened to the blond, blue-eyed, young teacher. Frau Herzog had several choices about what to do with her son: let Walter repeat one class, let him switch to middle school, or alternatively, simply send him back to elementary school—, which she did.

Walter's mother allowed him to purchase a guitar and take lessons with Herr Brandt, a private music teacher. What he wanted to learn was how to play like they did on the rock-and-roll records. Herr Brandt gave him Salem-brand cigarettes without filters or let Walter smoke his own when he had some. During rehearsals, Walter's talent triggered Brandt's passion of talking about the old philosophers Nietzsche, Hegel, Kant, and Schopenhauer. He would also play a classical piece on the piano for him—all of which shortened the time he had to count the beat, transmit a note from a page through his brain into his fingers, and then find the right spot on the fret board.

Walter returned to his former grammar school. His class was boys only, and he realized instantly that he looked at an endless four years. For various reasons, many of the youngsters had been demoted for the second and even third time. They were two, three, and more years older than the rest. Coming from a disciplined high school, Walter was in absolute shock for some time. It appeared as though none of the teachers cared what happened behind those closed classroom doors.

Only the religious education teacher, Merkel, enforced strict rules and habits in the Protestant section that Walter attended. Merkel's specialty was to enter the classroom, pull out his used, large, cotton handkerchief, and blow his nose with a lot of force until the tissue was drenched. Satisfied, he then decorated the hot radiator with it.

Merkel would ask, “Where did we stop last time?”, and when somebody told him, he would order, “*Weitermachen!*” (“Continue!”).

One of the boys would begin to read aloud stories from the Protestant religion schoolbook. Merkel would place his head between both hands and close his eyes: forty-five minutes of peace, sometimes interrupted by snoring. The boy who was able to keep reading became somewhat of a hero because of the valuable time he gained for the group. In this way, Walter, a proficient reader, secured his entrance into the circle of hard-core boys; now they

needed him. He could read flowingly without mistakes and had just the right tone of voice that rocked Merkel into sleep. The boys' main concern was that someone keeps on reading; keep the flow going, no matter what, because when Merkel found out that something else had gone on, he sought extreme countermeasures, such as hitting fingertips with a wooden ruler or cane stick.

One day a classmate brought a selection of soft pornographic pictures, and all the boys peeked at them. They may have been ripped-out pages of a fashion magazine. All the adolescents in the classroom had been in various stages of puberty for some time already, and hormones in their bodies caused turmoil. Walter, on a reading break, suddenly noticed the wild eyes and red face of the oldest and most bullish one of class. The boy had his huge penis in one hand and was masturbating wildly while staring at the pictures. Then he ejaculated a colossal amount of semen onto the color picture page. When Merkel suddenly woke up due to some involuntary noise or an energy blow-up of sorts, he used the cane stick on fingertips again.

## Life at Home

In the old-town building where the Herzog family rented two small rooms on the second floor, a separate apartment became available. They let go of the two small rooms, which they had used as bedrooms for the parents and for Walter, whose room was also used as a bathroom with a zinc bathtub. The family moved into the vacant apartment next door, which had a living room and two bedrooms, a real bathtub alongside running cold and hot water, heated by the bakery oven below.

Soon after the move, Frau Herzog decided to sleep on the new couch in the living room. Her explanation was that she could not tolerate her husband's loud snoring anymore. After trying the second bedroom for a while, Walter decided to use his mother's empty bed next to Friedrich. The separate room that he could use had a window high up in the wall and hence had no view and very little daylight. As it developed, the son sleeping with the father in the marital beds became a constant element of the Herzogs' family life.

Different people moved into the space next door. Although the city owned the building, it both subsidized the rent and leased it to welfare recipients or city workers. The first new renter who appeared one day was a woman with an extremely deformed body and slurred speech. Walter was shocked and afraid the first time he saw her, and that never changed until she moved out. The woman was not friendly, but rather grumpy and antagonistic. Even to the young Walter, she never uttered a kind word. Because of her contorted mouth and facial areas, it was very difficult to understand what she said. On top of her scaring him whenever Walter met her in the hallway, the Herzogs had to share the toilet with her. Walter dreaded the times when either he opened the toilet door and the woman was sitting on it or she had left a piece of feces behind on the wooden toilet seat.

After the woman moved out, a middle-aged man and woman came to be the new neighbors. He labored in the garbage-disposal department, and his girlfriend worked various jobs. Both were blessed with family members from previous relationships who visited them frequently. There was a lot of coming and going next door, and the couple owned a television.

Occasionally Walter had been able to watch TV at a friend's home, but the friend's father became too erratic and dangerous; there were many tears and fights in that family, and his friend asked him to stay away. One night Walter collected all the courage he could and knocked on the



door of the new neighbors. When a man opened, Walter asked, “Would it be OK if I watch some television with you?”

“Yes, of course, come in,” said the man, who had a large hooknose and thick eyeglasses.

Walter had found his new locale to watch shows such as the American TV series *77 Sunset Strip* and *Lassie*. Sometimes, five to seven people were in the small room, all of them smoking cheap, sweet-smelling cigarettes. When that occurred, without an open window, it was almost impossible to see the TV set because of the smoke. The neighbors did not mind that Walter smoked as well.

## First Love

Elisabeth was a bubbly brunette with big breasts who allowed Walter to kiss her and touch her full bosom from the outside of her blouse. She had cherry-red lips, was the sweetest thing, and was the daughter of the neighborhood pub owner. Walter's father frequented the pub almost every night after the long day's work to drink a few beers, smoke cigarettes, and sometimes play a game of skat. The regulars had their reserved table. On weekend nights, the pub owner organized entertainment with a trio or just music from the jukebox. Sometimes Elisabeth and Walter, who came with his father, sneaked out into a dark corner to kiss and touch. Soon Walter found out that he was not the only one who enjoyed this pleasure. It was only a matter of time until Elisabeth became pregnant, and then he did not see her anymore.

When Walter met Evelyn in the classroom, he became familiar with the intensity and madness of young love. Evelyn drove him crazy. He rode at least once a day about five miles on his bike just to catch a glimpse, have a few words with her, and perhaps catch a kiss with mouth shut. Those deep-blue eyes! She was the first and most intense love he ever encountered in his life. Evelyn's parents were very Catholic and raised her according to the rules of the holy book and of her draconic father. An important rule was that nobody, not even Walter, could touch her breasts. She had perfect breasts, not too small and not too large. He was allowed to kiss her with slightly opened lips, and that was it. It was a painful experience for Walter, because once he kissed her—and she was a good kisser—he really became quite excited. She had an inviting, intense look in her blue eyes that promised a lot but gave no satisfaction.

Two years later, Evelyn suddenly married because she became pregnant. The lucky guy was at least ten years older and had managed somehow to get between her legs. The couple married in an official wedding in a conservative setting. Walter attended the party. He and Evelyn stayed friends, but her husband, who was a bully with many issues, tried always to cause conflict with Walter. Especially when intoxicated—which was every time they met—he acted extremely jealous. Evelyn and he had a daughter, and when the daughter was three years old, the husband shot himself with his hunting rifle in their living room.

Walter's grammar-school graduation was encouraging and gave Walter some meaning for his future. He enrolled in business school to learn the basics of business management. Evelyn happened to be in the same class.

Rainer was also in the class, and he and Walter liked each other's company immediately. Through Rainer, Walter met Werner Puck, who lived in the same neighborhood as Rainer. In a housing development somewhat outside town, Werner lived with his mother in a two-bedroom apartment. His younger brother was still in a public children's home, where Werner spent time as well. Neither of them had ever known their father, and Walter never found out why the boys spent time in a children's home. Rainer, Werner, and Walter met frequently to have a good time, hang out, and party whenever possible—depending on the available cash. Werner owned a small record player, and the three boys sat in front of it, playing Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, and Stevie Wonder's "Fingertips Part Two." All three of them smoked many cigarettes with the windows closed due to the cold weather or because of the record-player volume.

During their two years of business school, Rainer and Walter slowly turned into the bad boys of the class. Neither was really interested in certain subjects or the way a dreary teacher taught. They did like not having to work already as an apprentice in the office world. They met at someone's home or in a bar, drank beer, and partied as much as possible. Whenever the party was at someone's home, everybody danced the twist or close-up blues. People hugged, kissed, and performed heavy petting, but most of them were virgins. Bad Homburg's youth moved strictly within their own scenes and circles, since it was not a big town.

Walter developed a habit that was not really a habit. It became a necessity for him to eat frequently during class. He tried to hide it, but of course, the teachers caught him every so often, and then Walter was written up in the class-register book. His stomach killed him when empty. When he had just turned fourteen, the doctor diagnosed a duodenal ulcer.

Frequently he and Rainer arrived late to class and left early. On occasion, they ended up drunk in school. As soon as Walter signed an apprenticeship contract with a midsize forwarding agent in Frankfurt, he had no further interest in school.

They all began different apprenticeships, except for Werner Puck, who had not attended a business school and instead had gone straight from eight years of elementary school to Kaufhof, the department store chain in Frankfurt, as apprentice sales clerk in the men's clothing department. The employer required that he always wore a suit and a tie, which he hated. It was unclear why he had chosen to become a sales clerk when he did not like it and it did not fit him.

Werner was a half orphan and spent time in orphanages until his mother was able to support her children. He had to start working as soon as legally possible. All three of the gang—

Rainer, Walter, and Werner—did not originate from wealthy backgrounds, but Werner was the least fortunate of them. It took Walter a long time to gain Werner's trust. However, after Werner finally opened up to him, Walter liked the friendship because of Werner's reliability; he was always responsible for himself and kept his appointments.

Werner's one-year experience in Frankfurt turned out to be a valuable advantage. The city's entertainment scene offered the Star Club on Kaiserstrasse and a large swing club near Konstabler Wache. There was also the tiny Jazz House in Kleine Bockenheimer Strasse, as well as a couple of bars and a discotheque. This tiny, narrow alley went through old stone structures that had been built like towers and refuges. One of the bars was the well-known, but at this time objectionable, establishment for gay men.

People entered the Jazz House through a cramped door, and then made a sharp left turn into a small space that included the bar. Two or three coffee tables with small chairs left and right and the short counter made up the first floor. The upstairs was reached by a constricted spiral staircase that turned into a loft with a few more little tables. Any order from upstairs needed to be yelled downstairs to the bartender, who would then fill a basket on a pulley and hoist it up. Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Albert Mangelsdorff, John Lee Hooker, and Roland Kirk on his double horn performed from the stereo. This place became a favorite hangout for Walter and Werner. They would sit at a table, sip on beers, smoke strong, filter-less German or French cigarettes, and listen to Jazz.

At this time in Western Germany, a feeling of knowing filled the air, and at the same time, there was a vacuum, as if something constricted the space. A sense of something that had been misplaced, suddenly unavailable, left a void behind. Teachers in school had no real answers. To approach parents made no sense because of what they had been through, what their generation had experienced. Everybody appeared to be in a straitjacket, and something had to give eventually.

## Madeleine

On Saturday nights, there were parties to go to, or if not, something had to be organized. Places to hang out, drink a lot of alcohol, and make out. Walter was still a virgin. One Saturday, Werner and Walter went to Frankfurt on the bus to go to a middle-class dance school, which organized a dance party with a live rock-and-roll band. Down in the basement, where the dance party was held, they bought beers and checked out the crowd.

As the two stood on the side of the dance floor and enjoyed the music for a while, Walter noticed the petite girl in black dress and chestnut-colored hair with a French-style haircut. The hair rim had been cut higher up in the back. The girl looked back at him through very blue eyes while dancing with somebody else at the same time. Walter returned her gaze for long time, and when she was available, he asked her to dance with him.

Initially, the band played a couple of fast tunes. Later they segued into a slow dance. The dancers' bodies came closer and closer. Soon the two were squeezing each other from face to lower torso, and any curve or mold was filled with each other's body parts. There was some initial caressing here and there and then the first gentle touch of lips—and for Walter looking into endless, deep-blue eyes. He had arrived prepared for a situation like this, having done research with more experienced acquaintances. To arouse a woman while dancing with her, he was told, the man needed to breathe deeply and while doing that rub his chest against her breasts. It worked. The girl pressed back, and they started to press and rub against each other more passionately. By then they were also kissing deep in the throat with entwined tongues. The slow dance turned into an extremely exciting and lustful affair.

Walter felt safe and comfortable with her from the start. He fell in love that night. The next day, he talked to Werner about it and confessed that he loved the girl named Madeleine.

This time, when Walter fell in love, he had no doubt that it was real *love*. On one level, he felt firmness and excitement within; on the other were fears about whether what occurred was real. The long distance they lived apart presented an obstacle. Madeleine's father owned an apartment building in an upscale neighborhood of a suburb near a small town south of Frankfurt. It was thirty miles and about two hours by bus from Bad Homburg. The family lived in the penthouse of that ten-story building and enjoyed a 360-degree view over forests. When Walter visited Madeleine for the first time, he was very impressed and somewhat cautious about

meeting the family. He met them all, including Madeleine's twin sister, and they had dinner together. Everybody appeared to be friendly and interested in the new boyfriend. Questions were asked, and Walter left assured that everything went well. He said good-bye for the long journey home to the old town of Bad Homburg.

It became tough for Walter to see Madeleine. Since he spent the days working in Frankfurt, he was the one who made his way to see her. They met either at her home or for a movie or even the theater or opera in Frankfurt, where Madeleine's parents held season tickets and let the daughters use them. Walter always had to make sure to catch the last bus for home. Only on weekends could he sleep satisfactorily. Love provided him with the endurance to maintain this relationship as time went by.

Every so often, Madeleine took on a baby-sitting job. One Saturday night was *the* night. She had given the signal—"do not forget the condoms"—and of course, these condoms occupied Walter's mind for months. With his new driver's license and using his father's car, a red Opel station wagon, freshly bathed and the condoms in his pocket, he drove the thirty miles to the apartment where Madeleine was baby-sitting.

When Walter arrived, the baby was asleep. The couple did not waste any time; it was the first time for both of them. Walter fumbled to roll the condom onto his very virile member. The atmosphere in the apartment surged with hormonal visualizations and exceptionally uninhabited sensations. By applying arduous patience during heightened anticipation, he managed to get the condom on all the way. When Walter finally meant to enter Madeleine, he climaxed and came before he could. That eruption caused most of his semen to squirt onto the black cotton couch's upholstery, because the condom had slithered off his wiener during the short performance. Exhausted but eager, the lovers tried it repeatedly that first night. After a few weeks and months, the young couple's experiments with their love's physical aspect became very effective, and all worked out all right.

A modest circle of friends kept them busy. Sometimes Madeleine visited Walter in Bad Homburg when his parents traveled on a weekend; other times Walter stayed overnight with Madeleine when her parents went on a trip. They managed their relationship according to reality and practicality, and Walter suffered, being so far away from his sweetheart. Considering the distances they traveled, Walter acquired his first car only in his third and last year as an apprentice. Then affairs turned for the better. The lovers met much faster and at various places,

such as the drive-in movie theater, which they enjoyed a lot, regardless of what movie was playing. In the backseat of a Volkswagen Beetle with split rear window, or later in a small Fiat 500, they reveled in serious petting with wet fingers, moaning and groaning, and an occasional sperm flow into underwear or onto a skirt. Now and then, friends joined them in a second car parked next to them, and they got busy as well. Everybody shared food and drinks and enjoyed a splendid time.

Once on a Sunday, Walter and Madeleine drove with Walter's father in his station wagon to visit farming relatives in the country. Walter's mother stayed in Frankfurt with Frau Mueller. The ride to the small village took about two hours each way. They spent the day at the ranch of Walter's cousin Fritz, who raised many animals: pigs, cows, chickens, ducks, and horses. In a separate building, he also operated a large machine that distilled schnapps out of potatoes or turnips.

On the way back home, Madeleine and Walter sat together on the backseat, his father driving as it turned dark. It happened slowly that Walter moved toward the left, to Madeleine, who sat behind his father's back. They started kissing and pressing, rubbing and fingering. Walter could feel her dryness turning into wetness very quickly. In addition, while the hugging and pressing intensified, Madeleine rubbed Walter with maximum effort but ample sensitivity, not hurt him. He moved fingers up and down and into her. Her eyes sparkled when a car passed by, she moaned with restraint in his ear. His father lighted another cigarette in the driver's seat.

## Summer Holidays

For their annual vacation, Werner and Walter planned a trip to Italy. Madeleine had left with her parents and sister for one of the Greek islands, Rhodes. Thus, one warm summer morning, the two young men headed on foot for the Autobahn entrance ramp outside town, starting off on the holiday. They were extremely lucky that day, getting rides in cars heading south and toward the Alps. For the last tunnel, in Switzerland, they took a train.

Before midnight of the same day, as they stepped out of the train station in Italy, a man with a small Alfa Romeo stopped at the roadside and asked, “Where do you want to go?”

Werner replied, “Alassio.”

“Well, why don't you guys hop in? You are very lucky today, I am going all the way.”

Early next morning, arriving in the little seaside town of Alassio at the Ligurian Sea, across from the islands of Corsica and Elba, they rented a room in a small hotel on the beach. Walter and Werner stayed happy for a whole week, not moving a lot except at night. During the day, they sat under large umbrellas, next to many other umbrellas. At night, they went into the open-air disco or some other bar to have a few drinks.

French-Italian love songs, supported by bombastic sounds, stirred the emotions. Listening and dancing to this passionate music under the stars and the moon sparkling in the Ligurian Sea, a person could get close to another when lucky enough to find a like-minded partner. For Walter, just listening to the music was enough; he missed Madeleine and thought about her a lot. One night two girls from England went with the boys to their room. Werner had arranged this event; he was not in love with a girlfriend at home. Feeling extremely sexy under the circumstances, he had no intention of missing out, and he got lucky that night. Walter, with Madeleine on his mind, was unable to perform with the shy girl next to him in one hotel bed, while Werner and the other British girl were in the other double bed.

Their money ran out after a week. It was not really the kind of trip they had planned, but what the hell—it had been fun and comfortable. Walter actually welcomed going back home to Bad Homburg, back to Madeleine, who was to arrive from Athens any day.

Because the friends had spent less than two weeks on the road, Walter looked forward to one more week of vacation at home alone. With his parents on a trip to Austria and the bakery closed, he could enjoy the apartment without any disruption.



Madeleine called on a Sunday morning, saying, “I missed you so much. Hello, how are you doing? We had a lot of fun.”

He said, “I thought about you all the time. Would you like to come over? My parents are still on their vacation.”

She said yes, and two hours later, he was holding her in his arms and kissing the one he loved so much. She returned these feelings and wanted to demonstrate them whenever possible. It was a sweet and delightful situation—finally together again, alone with each other and nobody to interfere. This time they used his parents' bed. Immediately very randy, they spent hours in the bed. Then Madeleine caught a bus back home because she could not stay away from home overnight.

The couple had one more opportunity like that, and then events began to transform the situation around them. Walter's parents closed down the bakery in Bad Homburg; Lisa Herzog had never liked it anyway. Friedrich Herzog took a position as a warehouse manager in one of the domestic harbors in Frankfurt. Walter moved with his parents into a three-bedroom apartment in the Bockenheim district. Since he worked at the airport, his commute was shorter, and he could see Madeleine after work much faster and more often.

## Military

This perfect condition changed drastically when Walter was drafted after his apprenticeship. He joined the military for the mandatory eighteen months. Madeleine moved to Heidelberg after receiving her high-school diploma to attend a language school. Now they were separated farther than ever before. Walter was stationed in bases far away, and it became more difficult to see each other even on weekends.

Madeleine tried hard to keep the connection going, but it happened anyhow. One day, after she returned from a school field trip to France, she confessed via telephone and with tears to Walter that she had slept with a Frenchman. During the ten days she had been away, they had sent each other letters almost every day and phoned many times.

When Walter heard the news, something snapped in him. He broke off the relationship right then, even though Madeleine's mother and sister both tried to mediate.

The same night, on weekend leave from the base, he went by bus back to Bad Homburg and got drunk in a disco club where he knew a few of the people present. A familiar-looking girl sat at the table next to him, and having met before, they started talking. A few years back, her family had been the talk of the town because of the two daughters. They were somewhat branded in town, and gossip about them circulated. Walter was happy to meet her because he had heard the rumors about her suicide attempt and was curious to find out more about it. Walter liked her sincerity and directness while they talked and drank. As he and Denise left the bar, Walter asked her for a ride home, and she said OK.

When they arrived at his parents' apartment, they drank another bottle of alcohol in his room, and then Denise said she had to leave because her work started soon. She worked as a nurse in a hospital about twenty miles north of Frankfurt and lived within the hospital complex.

Walter did not want to be alone and asked, "Can I come with you?"

She said, "Are you sure, it is a long way back to Frankfurt, but why not?"

When he woke up in the morning with a hangover, he was looking into a baby's face next to him.

Denise and Walter tried to sustain a connection that was different from Walter's first experiences with love. The new liaison contained weightiness and fear, which were new to him. It also included a heavy dose of realism because of her baby boy, who had come into the world

after her previous relationship had ended. Madeleine's playfulness was replaced by seriousness and skeptical questions from Denise, who feared that her newly found companion would suddenly vanish. She was very eager to please Walter in any way. This became shockingly apparent one day when he found out that Denise had been to the plastic surgeon.

She was on the phone crying. "Please come to me, I am in pain."

"What happened?" he asked.

Denise answered, "I had nose surgery."

He found her with bandages across her face. It was extremely swollen and in yellow and blue colors.

Denise told Walter, "You said that I have a hook on my nose—that's why I did it."

A speechless Walter remembered that they once talked about her nose and that he mentioned the little hook, but it had never been a concern for him. He told her that, and she cried even more. It took a long time until her face healed completely.

## Important Decision

After completing boot camp, Walter requested a reassignment from the barracks location, a three-hour drive from the small town in Northern Hessen to Frankfurt. He wanted to be closer to home. He was transferred to a unit located in Giessen, a provincial industrial and military town. A large number of American troops were also stationed within the city limits.

The main purpose of Walter's new unit was to protect American missile and other warheads hidden somewhere in the German forests—a very cold job. The winter of 1968 was a bitter one; temperatures outside could drop to minus eleven degrees even without a wind chill factor. The soldiers in Walter's company were armed with standard NATO rifles plus four magazines of live ammunition. Their command covered a square of real estate in the middle of nowhere that looked like a concentration camp or prisoner's site in Vietnam or Guantanamo—just colder. Twelve-foot high, double barbed wire fences surrounded it, with a narrow path on which to patrol back and forth. At night, bright floodlights lit up the area. Visible in the center of the region were a number of slanted iron doors covered with soil, grass, snow, and ice. The few Americans on duty stayed invisible and always enjoyed the comfort of a small but heated building.

Duty involved two weeks of mind-numbing routine in the barracks. Occasionally there was a day exercise in the field, but primarily they cleaned equipment and marched within the barracks compound. The extremely tedious duty in town did not prepare them for the next week in the forest compound. Being in the woods, the soldiers felt stressed out and in a horrid space. Small off-duty quarters did not provide any distraction except playing cards. When on duty, they guarded two hours outside and were off duty for four hours to sleep, rest, eat, and play cards. Then again, two hours of guard duty and four hours of rest—repeatedly for a whole week.

Four soldiers had to be on duty at all times, plus a sergeant inside the small guardhouse with heater and communications. Their immediate instructions in case of trouble were to shoot anybody who attacked the fence. Before shooting, however, they were to yell three times a warning: "*Halt stehenbleiben oder ich schiesse!*" ("Stand still or I shoot!") What it really meant was to shoot at potential demonstrators who hit the fences with a stick or throwing stones. The sixties were politically active times and demonstrations a constant in daily life. Anything could happen in the woods around Giessen. At that time, Americans were the main culprits because of

their ongoing activities in Vietnam. Many Germans hated that war and expressed their feelings about it. Walter did not like the idea of actually shooting a person.

During one extremely cold and unpleasant night, around three o'clock in the morning, Walter walked up and down the fenced path with a steel helmet on his head and heavily wrapped in winter clothing, the floodlights glaring into the woods. Suddenly he heard a single shot, somewhat muffled, and then screaming followed by whining. After his round of duty, he found out that one of his comrades had shot himself in the calf. He spent some time in the hospital. When he returned, he fell, saying he slipped on an icy spot on the walkway. But everybody knew he just wanted to get out of this misery.

For the Easter holidays, Walter got leave to go home. As he walked outside the barracks toward his ride, he saw a crowd of loud, shouting people with banners, lined up in front of the main entrance, handing out pamphlets. Walter took one of the leaflets and started reading. Suddenly a bright, red light went on in his head with a bang, and he decided to put the paper into his bag. This was the first time a choice he made changed his life.

At home, as soon as matters calmed down, he studied the handout more closely. It was a two-color brochure that explained how to become a war resister and, thus, a conscientious objector. It contained each step, detailing the process for current members of the military: how to file, what to do first, what to write to which military or civilian organization.

Essentially all one had to do was express in one phrase, "*My conscience does not allow me to do any duty in the military.*"

After the Easter holidays, reality turned out to be adverse but controllable. Being the first soldier in the whole regiment ever to file to become a conscientious objector, Walter felt like an outcast. People knew about conscientious objectors from the news media, but to meet with a real live war resister was a novelty.

Walter told his officers how they had to treat him according to his new status; he showed them in writing what to do next. They assigned him an office job, where he spent two more months until he became a government-approved conscientious objector. He filled out forms, wrote a letter for his father to sign in which he stated that he had raised his son in a nonviolent environment. This was neither true nor Friedrich's frame of mind, but his own war experience made it sound trustworthy. He had suffered the consequences of war, and he wanted to show that he was a good father and not the old Nazi one might presume, so he signed the letter. As backup,

Walter visited a Protestant church official who had made himself a name by serving sometimes as a counselor in conscientious objector court cases. The clergyman consulted with him and appeared in court when the big day arrived, though he never said a word.

In court, Walter had to prove that his conscience was in the right framework to resist the war. He was prepared with numerous customary arguments, primarily from the brochure, but in reality, he explained to the judges that he did not want to shoot any protesting demonstrator who did not like the fence in the forest. The verdict gave him an honorable discharge from the military, under the condition that he spends eight months in civil-service work. Walter was free, and it felt wonderful.

## **Andreas, Ombudsman**

During his ordeal of separating from the military, Walter met Andreas, the man of confidence in his unit. Walter had never met him before; his chief officer told him to visit Andreas. Perhaps Andreas's position was a secret, but Walter had not been aware of his existence until then.

Andreas had been blessed in numerous ways. He enjoyed private living quarters outside, separated from the barracks. He spent his time in a camouflaged truck in the shape of a container and slept there alone in his own bed. The truck was equipped with different types of communication apparatus and a bunk bed. In addition, it contained a cooking plate, which Andreas used to produce a good cup of tea and which they drank while talking about politics, the world, and music.

Andreas seemed impressed by Walter's decision to become a conscientious objector. He also owned his own transportation and lived in Frankfurt with his parents, which enabled Walter to secure rides back home on a regular basis.

Andreas may have earned the privileges he received during his time in the army from his birth. He made his home in the basement of his aristocratic parents' residence in a nice Frankfurt neighborhood next to the River Main. His elite education, sharp mind, and good humor made the time Walter spent with him an encouraging, supportive experience. The two became close friends.

## Hilde and Frankfurt

Shortly after his discharge from the army, back in Frankfurt with his parents and a senile grandfather, Walter looked for his first real job since his apprenticeship. Andreas told him about a small advertising office in Bockenheim that was looking for someone. Walter made an appointment, had an interview with the office manager and the owner, and got a job in administration. The work description included being a “guy Friday” person, checking newspaper ads, billing, and providing customer service.

Walter liked Hilde from the start. She was friendly, sweet, intelligent, lively, and sexy, with dark hair, brown eyes, and an exquisite body. They worked together for some time in different departments of the small office. Hilde had been hired straight out of advertising school, thrilled to be on her first assignment as a creative copywriter. Walter found out she had a boyfriend, who was a medical student, and never had any second thoughts about her. He respected Hilde for her honesty, directness, and refreshing style.

One evening, when it was just about time to go home, Walter entered the front office and found Hilde sitting and crying on a file cabinet.

Shocked and very concerned to see her like that, he asked, “What happened to you?”

She told him between sniffles that she found out her boyfriend had a lover.

Walter instantly tried to console her. “Hilde, I am very sorry, I do not like to see you suffer. Would you like to go to the movies?”

She said yes, so they drove downtown in his Volkswagen Beetle to a movie cinema and watched Clint Eastwood in *A Fistful of Dollars*. During the show, Walter noticed Hilde's mood change; she became more relaxed.

After the movie, Walter suggested going to a disco. Hilde agreed but said, “I can't dance.”

“Well, let's see, it does not really matter, we shall have some fun—let's go.”

The disco he had in mind was in the basement of a building near the university, the Brueckenkeller in the Westend. On a Wednesday night, the place was half-empty and the disc jockey turned on top forty Motown and some of the bands from England: the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Hilde conquered her initial dance shyness, and the couple continued to dance for quite a bit. After a couple of hours, they somehow ended up in Walter's room and made love.



It was a kind of love he had never experienced before: fully developed physical adult love. For him it was like making love for the first time—exceptionally sensual and lewd at the same time. Hilde undoubtedly liked it a lot as well; she screamed into the pillow, panted, gasped, and welcomed him inside her as they melted into each other. They did it repeatedly, and soon morning arrived. The new lovers, working in the same office with only a handful of colleagues, made sure not to arrive at work at the same time.

After the first night together, Hilde and Walter started to see each other almost every day. First, he stayed at her place and then went home, pretending for his parents that he slept in his bed. Gradually, he stayed overnight in Hilde's studio on the top floor of a nearby apartment building. There were issues with Hilde's boyfriend and another lover, but they all smoothed out. Soon they were a couple and moved together into a rented two-bedroom apartment on the third floor of a building in Frankfurt's Westend.

Walter began to learn more about the office in which he worked. Behind the scenes, it was a place where individuals plotted plans and political maneuvers to gain influence and insert people into key positions, a second-tier think tank and organization that engaged in power manipulations for a specific group inside the liberal party of Hessen and Frankfurt. The advertising agency made money from and for small and midsize clients.

Walter ran into his friend Andreas frequently in the office because of Andreas's meetings with the agency boss and others. Walter found out that Andreas was very active in the liberal party, as well as the youth organization Young Democrats. He introduced Walter to Denise Hauck, who had just obtained her high-school diploma and enrolled in college to study journalism. At the time, Denise had attained a certain degree of prominence. The contents of her farewell address from high school attracted media attention. She was praised as a citizen with civil courage. A major magazine featured an article about her, and she was also active in the liberal party and the Young Democrats.

Office gossip persisted that the much-older owner of the ad agency served as more than her protégé, that Denise thanked him with sexual concessions in return for him helping her with her speech and career. Andreas told Walter that he valued Denise a lot. The young men talked a great deal about women, and when Walter mentioned what people in the office said about Denise, Andreas did not believe it.

The two met frequently for a beer at either Andreas's place or the Club Voltaire, where the student elite met to discuss current events, which happened in an increasingly intense way. People on the streets demonstrated against the Vietnam War and against nuclear power and the garbage it produced. There were daily sit-ins and meetings protesting student fees, the ministry of interior and its miscellaneous security agencies, and the exploitation of the masses by the bourgeoisie. Citizens occupied vacant houses in the Westend and other districts to live in them for free. Being young and in Frankfurt, or any other big city in Europe during this time, one could not avoid witnessing or even participating in heretofore unknown events, which spread out and motivated many people. Whenever he wanted and was able to, Walter joined a rally or demonstration.

Sometimes Andreas invited Walter into his basement rooms to play chess or listen to classical music and have a bottle of beer. Both liked strong filter-less French or German cigarettes.

During one of these visits, Andreas said, "Why don't you lay down on the bed and relax?"

Walter did, and Andreas joined him on the bed as well. After a while, he casually put his arm around Walter and kissed him on the cheek. Walter froze; he did not know what to say or do. Apparently, this hesitation encouraged Andreas to kiss Walter on the mouth. He tried to stick his tongue in it, but Walter did not give in and wanted to get off the bed.

Andreas said, "Please stay, it is OK. I just love you."

Walter, quite shocked, tried to ease up and keep his guard at the same time. Then Andreas started to caress him and went down to his private part, which hardened, and started to massage him. Walter did not interfere at this point, and after a few moments, he came. It was an embarrassing moment for him, and he made sure it never happened again. Afterward, Andreas told him that he had sex with other men but also liked women, especially Denise Hauck, who soon became his girlfriend. Though he had no confirmation, Walter suspected that Denise had affairs with other women in the office and in the party. He made sure to be always vigilant around Andreas.

## Following Sardinia

Hilde and Walter planned their first vacation together on the island of Sardinia. It also was Walter's first airplane flight ever, in a turboprop from Frankfurt to Alghero. Their room in a small pensione had a balcony with view of the blue Mediterranean Sea down the rocky hill. The family business, a restaurant with a couple of rooms and full board, was set on top of a beautifully nestled bay with sandy beaches and space to walk.

The couple liked to hike to the neighboring beach beyond a hill and then another hill where they could bathe in the nude. Often, both of them spent hours in the water snorkeling, while fishermen anchored their boats out in the water, catching lobsters in wooden traps, and mussels, calamari, and tuna fish with nets.

One early morning before sunrise, Hilde and Walter went on a boat with one of the fishermen and his helper. The captain, a strong, stocky, small man with a huge mustache and deep lines in his brown skin, owned the wooden boat with its diesel engine and a couple of tanks in the floor. When the sun reached its zenith, no more shade was on hand, the tourists began to dry out and feel nauseous. Hilde puked over the low barrier while Walter held her. For him it was thrilling to be so close to water, fish, lobster, and many shrimp. The fishermen, the sun, and the wind were used to each other; the men worked very hard to retrieve their traps from deep in the sea, secured on strings and marked with small buoys. On that day, the traps contained a rich haul of fresh lobster, which crawled all over the boat deck with their large calipers clicking until one of the fishermen threw them into a tank. In wide nets, they also caught a lot of tuna fish and smaller red snapper, a delicacy in the Mediterranean.

Being on their first vacation together and very much in love, Hilde and Walter enjoyed each other's company. Her body had round curves at the right places and looked like a pristine Roman sculpture. Perfect hairless legs and black hair that shimmered in sunlight gave her a unique desirability. Medaled breasts were round and firm, with nipples that became hard when aroused. Between her legs rested a sexual wonderland, surrounded by a full tuft of black hair. They made love in the morning, during their lunch siesta, and again at night while having a bottle of wine. Sometimes they hung out on the beach, snorkeled, went for a walk to the beach over the hill, and made love on the sand or between some rocks. One afternoon, after extensive snorkeling, watching the starfish and fish swimming around, they reached an isolated pebbly

inlet and climbed slowly up some slippery rocks. Both took off their wet gear, standing on their feet and leaning against a big rock to dry. At that moment, Hilde pulled him toward her and between her legs, and since he already had a beautiful erection, entered right into her and made love to her on that rock. Both bodies glimmered in the sun from sweat mixed with salt water shining on their skin.

Their prepaid vacation package had been booked for two weeks, but Hilde's personal time off covered only one week. She called the Frankfurt office and reported a sudden illness. This decision produced consequences. By the beginning of the second week, Walter became tired of the lovemaking and Hilde's screams, the wine, the food. The situation evolved suddenly in a direction difficult for him to handle. He felt bored and lethargic, eating three meals a day and developing his first paunch. An initial tension built between the couple, but Hilde's love for Walter expressed itself; she bought him a nice, soft leather jacket and matching dress shirt. Walter felt satiated and confused. He showed his gratitude by participating during the usual activities in a mechanical way, but was not really involved anymore. Because the couple did not use their return flights, Hilde and Walter went back to Frankfurt by way of ferry to Naples and then took trains through northern Italy and Switzerland.

After their return, when Hilde went to the office, she got tortured with questions "How could you do that, coming back one week late?"

Walter called in sick, feeling depressed. After a few days, his boss stood in front of the door, presenting him with a resignation letter to sign. It was an agreement of contract termination; they wanted to fire him. Hilde also quit and moved to a larger advertising firm with big clients where she became liked and respected.

She appeared very happy with Walter and the things they did together. The couple took short weekend vacations to Alsace or southern Germany. They enjoyed cooking together, invited friends over and listened to music on Walter's used stereo. He bought vinyl records from British and American bands, such as Faces with Rod Stewart, Cream, Eric Clapton, and Jimi Hendrix.

Walter enrolled in night school to obtain a high-school diploma. He also got a job as the secretary of the Young Democrats in the state of Hessen through recommendation and mediation of Andreas, who thought this position would be perfect for Walter, and sat on the executive committee of the organization. Andreas and Walter went to meetings together, talked to individuals about the direction and positions the organization should take. Statewide conventions

needed to be planned and organized, which fell under Walter's responsibilities. He learned about influence, power, and internal politics and felt content with his administrative position, which did not require him to get involved directly in power plays and scheming.

It was the summer of the Woodstock festival; Walter's hair grew curly and longer and soon reached his shoulders. He caught hepatitis from eating mussels in a Spanish restaurant and spent six weeks in a hospital. During that stay, he met Helmut in the isolation unit. Helmut also had hepatitis, but a different kind. Walter caught it through a virus in food, Helmut infected himself by using a dirty syringe to shoot something up his vein—a more severe type of hepatitis. The two became friends during the long days and nights in the hospital.

Hilde received permission from the teachers at evening school to attend in Walter's place. She made sure to collect all necessary details for Walter to continue with class when released from the hospital. She painted large posters with Latin verb conjugations, which she posted on the opposite wall of Walter's bed in the hospital.

The long period of rest and the ability to think and observe the world from that place affected Walter in more ways than he or anybody else would have thought. After he was discharged and returned to his apartment, he was amazed by the intensity of the colors of items such as cushions, towels, and furniture, and by the smell of everything.

One day, sitting on the large meadow in nearby Grueneburgpark, Walter bumped into Gerhard. He knew him from trade school and his apprenticeship. Gerhard happened to live only a few blocks away, with his mother, in a very fine, large condominium. Walter invited him to his apartment, and Gerhard happily accepted, glad to escape his mother for a while to meet with an old friend.

At Walter's apartment, Hilde, Walter, and Gerhard became comfortable in the small living room where they kept the stereo, self-made furniture, and a cozy easy chair. They opened a couple of beer bottles and then Gerhard asked, “Would you like to try something I have here?”

He showed them a small plastic bag with a few small, brown-greenish lumps in it. “Hash,” he said.

Walter and Hilde looked at each other and then answered, “Why not?”

Gerhard squeezed and knocked the tobacco out of one of his filter cigarettes. Then he took a little lump of hash, put it in a piece of tin foil, and heated it up. When it started to smoke,

he crumbled the hot hash over the tobacco, kneaded both into one mass, and refilled the empty cigarette with it. Then he cut off the cigarette's filter, lit it up, and inhaled deeply.

He immediately started to cough fiercely and handed the cigarette to Walter, who also inhaled and kept the smoke down his lungs as he was told. An unfamiliar feeling overcame him, as if the room expanded in its dimensions, and suddenly the music of Led Zeppelin sounded more detailed. He had never noticed certain background drum rhythms before. The three looked at each other to see how they were doing; Walter and Gerhard first smiled widely and then chuckled wildly for a long time.

Hilde appeared unaffected. She said, "Perhaps I did not do it right," and puffed again on the cigarette.

They told her to inhale and keep it down. Walter had never enjoyed the records so much and sat down in front of one of the speakers. With tears in his eyes, he could hardly trust his own ears to experience what Eric Clapton did with his guitar. He had never distinguished Ginger Baker so much on his drums.

Hilde went to sleep in the bedroom, the boys continued to enjoy the effects of this one cigarette for hours, having extreme fun.

## USA No. 1

Walter connected with Anne and Dieter. Both had socialized with Hilde for some time already. Dieter studied psychology and Anne economics at the Frankfurt University. Together, the two couples went to France, where Dieter used *Guide Michelin* to find recommended, barely affordable restaurants. They also hiked the Alsatian mountains. In Frankfurt, it became their custom to visit each other for dinners. At some point, they formed a discussion group, along with another student who shared the apartment with Dieter and Anne. The group talked about books and topics by Karl Marx, Mikhail Bakunin, and the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel. They also used current events and comments from members of the Frankfurter School—Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse—to analyze the political situation.

While chatting about everything that was going on in the world and their personal issues, likes, and dislikes, Walter learned that Dieter wanted to visit the USA during the approaching summer vacation.

He himself had imagined visiting America for quite some time and asked Dieter, “Would you like to travel together with me?” Dieter said yes.

The idea became reality when they purchased a reasonably priced round-trip ticket that allowed for spending time at multiple locations in different states.

Walter knew he definitely wanted to see Oklahoma City because of an invitation he had received. One of Gerhard's American friends, Phil, who had been stationed with the military in Frankfurt, had talked a lot about Oklahoma, where he lived. He had just ended his service after four years, traveled through Europe, and eventually met Gerhard, who invited him to stay at his mother's house for a while. When the mother found out that they smoked pot, Phil had to vacate the apartment, and Gerhard asked Hilde and Walter whether Phil could stay with them. They agreed and shared their small living room with a guest for some weeks. Dieter's relatives had settled in Kansas City, which is why he selected that destination also.

Their final route carefully chosen, Walter and Dieter departed for a six-week vacation that correlated with Walter's school holidays, including permission to stay some extra days. The first leg of the flight took them to New York City and then to San Francisco.

The vastness, the extent of the land, and never-ending, shimmering lights during night arrivals impressed Walter a great deal. In the city on the bay, which both of them loved, the

friends lodged in a YMCA hostel. They walked through Chinatown, Haight-Ashbury, and the Fisherman's Wharf every day in an atmosphere of awe. Something new each day elated Walter more than anything he could remember: the hippies in their loose, colorful clothing, the hairdos and jewelry they wore; never-before-seen shops with interesting utensils on sale; music and fragrances emanating from everywhere. People took time to stand still for a moment, look into each other's eyes, and occasionally hug. Beautiful, plentiful young women who did not wear bras made Walter feel as if he were walking on clouds.

He remained in a state of persistent enjoyment, listening to local music bands he had not heard of before, such as Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Quicksilver Messenger Service, and Grateful Dead. They visited the Fillmore, where the heavy rock band Mountain was performing that day, and also took in the musical *Hair*.

Dieter wanted to visit the University of California campus in Berkeley, which became famous as an originator of student revolts and the Free Speech Movement. As they walked through the enormous university grounds, on a square with fountains and people throwing Frisbees, a man suddenly appeared in front of Walter and would not let him pass by; he just stood there, looking at him in a reassuring, still way. The man had very long hair, blue eyes, and a loincloth around his waist. For a long time, Walter returned his gaze until he heard Dieter say, "Come on, let's go."

That night in his room at the Y, Walter could not fall asleep. He carried a few crumbs of Gerhard's hash hidden between his German cigarettes and loaded one of them with some of the crumbs. He felt he had to get out of the room and take a walk, but there were no restaurants or bars in the neighborhood. He noticed someone standing in front of an apartment building on the other side of the street and realized it was a young black woman. She seemed to signal in his direction, and he crossed the street.

She was pretty, skinny with a lot of hair, and asked him, "Would you like to have some fun with me for forty-five dollars?"

Walter said, "Yes, of course. Where?"

She pointed above her and motioned him to follow her. They walked up three flights of stairs into an apartment, empty except for a bed and mattress in one room. She undressed and asked for the money. Walter gave it to her and then went on top of her. The girl asked him, "What is the problem? Did you take drugs? Let me go on top."



They exchanged positions. She sat on top of Walter's large part, riding him wildly without any success. But Walter saw her movements and expressions become more intense and articulated, and at one point, her body shivered on top of him.

Later, after crossing the street to return into his room, sleep came easily. The next day Walter did not mention anything about the incident to Dieter.

After a two-day stopover in Kansas City at Dieter relatives' home, the young men took a plane to Oklahoma City. For some reason, Walter felt remarkably thrilled, as if he expected something special to happen. The aircraft landed around noon at the Will Rogers Airport, where Phil picked them up at the gate. Since Walter had seen Phil in Frankfurt, he had grown a beard and was wearing blue, washed-out overalls on top of a T-shirt. He looked happy to welcome the visitors. When the group left the terminal and walked to the parking lot, dry heat struck Walter breathless. As they were driving on the highway in Phil's girlfriend Kathy bleached, light green Volkswagen Beetle with the windows open, they heard on the car radio that temperatures lingered around 104 degrees.

Walter loved it and made sure to buy a pair of overalls for himself as soon as they settled into the single-family house where Phil and Kathy lived. One night they watched the movie *Woodstock* for the first time. The theater packed with young people enjoying the movie, Walter thought he had arrived in heaven. After the movie, they went to a bar and had a few beers. Everywhere they went they saw people smoking weed and other stuff—at home, before the movie, during the movie, after the movie, outside the bar, and when driving home—always with caution, though, because police would materialize to enforce the law. While Walter enjoyed every second in this exotic place and said so, Dieter showed his intellectual, skeptical side, though he participated as much as he could.

The next day, Walter rode around with Phil in his blue and white pickup truck, taking care of errands. They stopped at a Baskin-Robbins, with its thirty-one flavors of ice cream, and later at a burger place. They walked into the place and ordered something to drink.

A girl started talking to Phil and then noticed Walter. She asked him, “Where are you from, man?” When he answered Germany, she cried, “Far out! Come with me.”

Out they went hand-in-hand. She said her name was Claire. Claire made Walter jump into a car, and off she drove through endless streets of greater Oklahoma City, talking nonstop. She explained that she had just stopped shooting heroin; she tried it for a while, but not for long. She

had taken downers the previous day and afterward some speed. Walter did not understand half of what she said, but tried hard to get the meaning. They spent the day visiting her family, which had distant relatives in or from Germany. Finally, they ended up at Kathy and Phil's, who had been somewhat concerned about Walter because of his sudden departure, but understood. The day ended with a home-cooked chicken dinner that Kathy provided after she returned from her job as a hospital nurse. Dieter and Walter bought a bottle of wine in the nearby liquor store. Claire stayed with Walter overnight on the living room floor. She attempted to make love, but passed out after brief foreplay.

What Walter had witnessed and experienced so far in this country filled him with a feeling of ease. He became aware of details that amazed him to the fullest, such as the terminal building windows at the Denver airport, how they slowly appeared in the shimmering, hot air, very black, and no human in sight. The size of the shopping malls with air conditioning in Oklahoma seemed like a huge indoor settlement. He imagined how it must have been living there not too long ago when the locals had to try surviving during the dust bowl; it was at the same time that Hitler gained power in Germany. He loved the new clothing store in town, the Gap, how they openly displayed the goods in self-made shelves and crates. Bell-bottom pants, blue jeans, shirts, and very colorful corduroy bell-bottoms. He spent a lot of his budget there, stocking up. Nor did he forget Hilde at home—when he walked by the leather department, he noticed a beautiful leather purse shaped like a seashell, engraved and carefully ornamented with colored leather.

It happened that Dieter, Phil, Kathy, and Walter were at the right place and the right time one night when they all headed to the Civic Center Music Hall to see the British super group Led Zeppelin. Seating approximately twenty thousand, the place was packed with lovely-looking, smiling people. It became natural that joints, reefers, and pipes were passed secretly, which established a trusting intimacy with neighbors. When the band appeared far away on a huge stage and the sound hit the crowd, everybody appeared stunned at first, but then slowly loosened up and went with it. Robert Plant and Jimmy Page with John Bonham did the crowd in. The long, long, curly hair and leather shirt with its hundreds of straps made Robert Plant look like a large bird extending its wings on stage, running and jumping until the last sound.

It continued to be hot in Oklahoma that summer. Dieter wanted to leave for New York City, and Walter was scheduled to go with him. The last weekend before leaving, they went with

Phil and Kathy on a camping trip to a lake surrounded by forest, about four hours from the city. They all crammed into Kathy's Volkswagen and made their way to the country on a freeway and then on smaller, two-lane roads. No one else appeared to be nearby; the lakeshore was densely overgrown with bushes and trees. Everybody was constantly checking for ticks; these parasites were very active that summer.

Phil had indicated that he had a surprise but did not say what it was until after their frugal meal. Then he opened his denim purse and pulled out a small leather box. When he opened it, the attentively watching companions saw a quantity of purple-blue, slightly moist-looking, midsize, round tablets.

“Organic mescaline,” he said. “Who wants to try one?”

Everybody wanted, washing it down with water. Walter was expectant because of his first encounter with a psychedelic drug. He also felt very safe. Phil had assured them the pill did not contain any chemicals. For a long time, nothing happened; he forgot about it as they smoked a couple of joints and calmed their throats with the last bottle of wine in the cooler.

All of a sudden, Walter felt sensations in the back of his neck that went down his spine and on top of his head. At the same time, he became absolutely relaxed, free of any anxiety, and peace settled into him. He lost sight of the others as he stood between some trees in a small clearing, fully aware of the sky and the stars blinking through the tree leaves. He looked down at the ground around him and noticed how the roots stuck out, the grass surrounding them colored in an intense neon green, the adjoining bushes gently rustling their leaves in the nightly breeze, which caressed and cooled him. He welcomed the refreshing quality because at the same time he felt an intense, hot energy flowing through his stomach and abdomen, spreading into his breast, arms, and legs. Blue shining colors appeared between individual plants and blades of grass. Slowly he moved along a path he had not seen before. It opened up for him to pass through the clearing and beyond, but the mossy area turned fluorescent, and he felt no need to proceed. The world as he knew it turned into a dance of energy and light, and he stood still. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he thanked existence and the energy for the first time in his life. An eternity passed, and nothing interrupted this deep communication with nature around him.

He wanted the experience to continue, but gently a shift occurred. The lights changed to a darker shade. He followed the path and reached an open space close to the water's edge. There he lay down on the soft ground with eyes wide open and fell into the sky: millions of tiny blinking

spots and constellations of densely arranged light, individual bright, single spots. Walter let them all in to be one of them.

He heard brittle branches cracking, slow steps heading toward him. Only at the last moment did he recognize Phil, who stood over him, looking down without uttering a sound. Walter got up, and they walked very gently back to their camp, where a few pieces of wood glowed between some rocks.

The friends made their way back through the dry Oklahoma heat with the car windows rolled down and did not talk much.

Dieter prepared for his departure to the Northeast. After camping out and the mescaline experience, Walter decided he did not want to fly with him to New York City. When they talked about their experiences at the lake, Dieter understood. Walter told him that the event had changed his mind about some details, independently from Dieter. "Please do not be mad at me, it has nothing to do with you. I simply want to experience being here a little longer."

Dieter said carefully, "I am surprised, but I wish you have a great time. I will meet you later in New York for our departure to Germany."

Walter felt he needed time to digest and, most of all, experience the place and people further. The feeling of being so comfortable around strangers was new; he had not experienced any adverse situation.

He had also met Elisabeth in the same burger joint where Claire hooked up with him. She was different, a few years younger, with a dazzling smile and not a trace of pessimism. To Walter she represented the feeling of the new movement. They spent a few nights together. Elisabeth told him she just returned from the West Coast. She had been invited to be with the Grateful Dead, helping out with whatever she could. Elisabeth explained that bands like the Dead and Jefferson Airplane traveled together and had much fun. She transmitted to Walter new levels of communication and a feeling that there was nothing to worry. Even though she was unable to have sex with him during their first meetings, he was elated to meet her. She had since left for another road trip, and he hoped to see her again before he left Oklahoma.

Walter and Phil went out to different bars and clubs together. Local bands performed blues and rock-and-roll music with authority. At home, playing all the time on the stereo, were Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young; Joni Mitchell; James Taylor; and a local duo, Brewer and

Shiple, who became Walter's favorites for a while. He met a few other women who were interested in him and went to their places, or they stayed with him in the house.

On one of these occasions, he experienced a novel situation for him. In one of the bars, Wendy appeared as a petite, bubbly personality. She was captivated by Walter and his accent. When she found out where he came from, Wendy told him that her family included relatives from Germany. Some hours later, they went to her apartment on the second floor of a two-story apartment building; Walter realized it had no window, only the air conditioner. Wendy said she was going to the bathroom, and he made himself comfortable on the bed, waiting for her return. When Wendy returned, it was as if a different person stepped out of the bathroom. She had removed her hair, a wig; the black eyelashes and long, red fingernails were gone. They started foreplay in bed, but even subsequent attempts and various forms of stimulation did not help him get hard.

Walter had long talks with Phil about writers, poets, plays, books, and politics. Born in Puerto Rico, Phil had moved with his family to New York City, where he grew up. After four years in the military, he was able to attend college in Oklahoma, where he studied social sciences and art. Walter frequently mentioned he really liked the idea of being there and wanted to return. Phil encouraged him, and a plan developed. They would save money for a year, and then Walter would return with Hilde, if she wanted to come with him. With this in mind and a heavy heart, Walter boarded the first plane on his trip back to Frankfurt.

## More Changes

During the long night flight over the Atlantic, Walter realized the dimensions of what had occurred in America and specifically in Oklahoma. The closer Europe came, the more certain he felt that he did not want to attend afternoon school any more with the goal of acquiring a high-school diploma and ultimately studying psychology. It no longer made any sense to him. He felt strongly that knowledge about life and being as a whole was not taught in a university. He also realized that the desire and need for the status that diploma would provide him had disappeared.

When he told him this in the plane, Dieter replied, "Think about it. I understand you, but perhaps you will change your mind."

Walter's luggage was filled with the clothes, gifts, and accessories he had bought, but also contained a small plastic pouch. Wrapped in soft materials, the pouch contained a respectable number of purple-blue pills.

Early in the morning, Walter made his way up the stairs to the third floor with his heavy baggage. He rang the doorbell, and Hilde appeared in her white bathrobe and black hair. She immediately started to ask questions, but Walter said nothing. He just hugged her for a long time, putting his index finger against his mouth to indicate silence. They went into the bedroom, where he quickly took off his clothes and opened her bathrobe to kiss her beautiful breasts. They made passionate love while Walter looked into Hilde's eyes, hoping he would be able to explain what needed to be said later.

Walter was on a mission. He felt he needed to share the contents of the small plastic bag from Phil with his friends; he hoped to trigger an event comparable to the one that had happened to him near the lake in the Oklahoma countryside.

Irene had been Hilde's friend for some time before she met Walter; she knew the couple's secrets and difficulties and turned naturally into their confidante and best friend. Her boyfriend, Gerhard, stayed somewhat in the background, but agreed to the idea of having a group mescaline session. On a few occasions in the past, the two couples had smoked some hash together and had a good time. Irene, with her blue eyes, blond hair, immaculate body and appearance, turned men's heads wherever she went. She and Walter liked each other a lot. They shared a strong connection with their issues and secrets and could talk about everything in their lives, like brother and sister. Both of them had grown up the only child in their families.

On the first Saturday night after Walter's return, the four met at Walter and Hilde's place and exchanged news of their lives, since they had not seen each other for almost two months. They drank a glass of wine together and then Walter pulled the bag out of a drawer and showed them the tablets. There were some remarks about how they looked, still slightly wet and the unusual color, but everybody swallowed a tab and then waited.

Nothing happened for a long time, and Irene said, "It is not working for me; perhaps I should smoke a joint."

Walter emptied a filter cigarette, crumbled some hot hash onto the tobacco lying on a piece of paper and rubbed it together into one substance, then refilled the cigarette and lightly tapped it on the table. While doing that, he realized something was happening to him. The space of the small living room expanded, and Irene appeared to be farther away than before. The bedside lamp, which stood in a corner on the floor, shone much lighter and engulfed everybody in clear, yellow light.

He heard Irene gently exclaiming, "Wow, I think now it is working."

For an elusive amount of time, no one spoke. Walter realized the music had stopped playing. He slowly got up from the armchair. It took time because his body appeared to be controlled by an independent, internal force, but he managed to move toward the stereo, select a record, and put it onto the turntable—*Déjà Vu* by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. He stayed with it, sitting in front of a speaker, the music pouring out with brilliant clarity, leaving small moments of silence between the tones and words.

When the initial, powerful effect of the drug subsequently decreased, the participants could communicate with words. They shared what occurred inside of them, and outside the night turned into early morning, birds starting to chirp in the trees on Westendstrasse.

During the week, Walter went to work full time for the Young Democrats, strictly in an administrative office position. He hardly ever met Andreas because of an election campaign on behalf of the liberal party. Hilde accepted Walter's decision not to attend afternoon school any more, with some reservation; however, she participated in their ongoing experiments at home with different attendees. On Saturday nights there were sometimes up to eight people joining a psychedelic session in their apartment. They also visited at Irene and Gerhard's apartment.

Events began to happen in the Westendstrasse apartment. The small living room turned into a mattress-covered floor space to which people came and went. One day, when Hilde and

Walter visited Dieter and Anne in their apartment, they were introduced to Lisa from New York City, a beautiful girl in her mid-twenties, with curly black hair and a pleasing, sparkling personality. She and Walter connected instantly; he liked her and the fact that she came from the United States. Anne had picked her up at the American Express office where Lisa was exchanging traveler's checks. The two had started talking, and Anne found out that Lisa needed a place to stay, so she had invited her to their apartment for the night. They all had dinner together, and Walter invited Lisa to visit them the next day.

When Lisa arrived with her backpack, she told them she did not want to stay at Dieter and Anne's place anymore because of the third person who lived there, a guy she felt uncomfortable with. Since Helmut and Percy were already living in Walter's apartment, they all discussed having Lisa stay with them as well, and everybody liked the idea.

At night, Lisa asked, "Who would like to share some LSD with me?"

Hilde went to bed because of her work the next morning, and Walter declined. Since his vacation, he had heard and read much about this drug and acquired a deep respect for its effects, but he was afraid to take it. Walter was familiar with Timothy Leary's studies and experiments through information in the underground newspapers. He liked the motto "turn on, tune in, and drop out"; a joint in the morning and the day is your friend; and once a week a session with LSD. He felt that this might be a miracle cure for any issue humanity faced.

Lisa's stay extended to three days and then a week. She once again asked everybody, "I have one pill of Orange Sunshine left. Would somebody like to share it?"

This time Walter agreed, but first he went into the bathroom to be alone for a moment. He wanted to make sure this was what he wanted. His heart raced as he stood in front of this huge decision to do something he was afraid of. For a long time he looked into the bathroom mirror, breathing fast and deeply. Suddenly and very slowly, his eyes started to move together in the direction of each other and turned into one eye. Stunned, he looked into his one eye in the middle of his forehead. He could not believe what he saw, but it was there.

A thought arose in his head: "Oh my god! I am Buddha's son."

The thought stood there and manifested, became stronger, and went through his whole being; his skinny body trembled. After a long time, someone outside knocking at the bathroom door asked, "Are you OK?" and then Walter opened the door and went to Lisa to take his part of the Orange Sunshine.



The long-feared effects of the drug never materialized. Walter's mind turned still, and clarity overcame him. He stayed up all night and the next few days and nights. Hilde left for a hospital visit to have minor surgery.

Walter was sitting on the mattress landscape in the middle of their small bedroom when Percy came home from work and asked him, "Would you like to come with me to visit Dieter and Anne?"

He agreed, and then Dieter arrived with his car and picked them up to drive to his apartment. Dinner was ready, but Walter did not eat and continued to talk about his recent experience.

Dieter and his roommate, both in their final phase of becoming certified psychologists, asked Walter questions such as, "When did you sleep last?" and said, "You should rest now."

Walter wanted neither to eat nor to sleep; he enjoyed having this advanced state of awareness and absolute clarity, combined with limitless energy. The two students tried to convince Walter that it would be better if he lay down for a while in their empty room. They each took one of his arms and mildly forced him to go into the room, then shut the door and locked it from the outside. Walter noticed the stereo equipment in the room and put on a record by Jimi Hendrix. The door opened again, and Dieter and the roommate entered and removed the speakers. Walter laid down on the mattress close to the turntable with the turning Jimi Hendrix record, listening to it. He could clearly hear Jimi's singing, transmitted by the diamond needle in the spinning vinyl, and then suddenly talking to him. That was mind-blowing because Jimi had died not too long ago of an overdose in London. Walter felt that not only did Jimi talk to him, but also a part of his soul shifted into Walter. It filled him with deep gratitude, and he started to weep.

He cried because Jimi had been a hero for him. A few months before, Hilde and Walter had gone in his Volkswagen Beetle to a three-day open-air concert on the island of Fehmarn in the Baltic Sea. The weather was rainy and stormy, and they stayed in someone's tent in sleeping bags. The couple took the last mescaline trip and enjoyed some good music acts while waiting in the mud until the third day when Jimi was scheduled to appear. Jimi had been late, very late. When he finally appeared on stage, everybody whistled and booed, but Jimi plugged the Fender into his amp, said, "Fuck you, I don't care," and started playing his magical music. The crowd, including Walter, was fascinated and forgave the long wait.

The door opened again. Dieter appeared with his roommate and told Walter they all would take a drive now. When Walter asked where they would be going, they told him they would take him to a place where they could help him sleep.

Walter said, "I don't want to go to a place. I want to go home."

Once again, the students forced him to get dressed and then accompanied him down the stairs, into the car, and through half of the city. They stopped in a parking lot, walked with Walter between them to a gray building, and entered a lobby area and then a room with chairs.

Dieter said, "Good bye, Walter. Please sleep and eat something. You need to get strong again. See you later, and get better."

After a while, someone in a white outfit ushered Walter into a smaller, darkened room, where a man with a short beard sat behind a desk.

He started to ask questions such as, "Do you know what day and date it is?"

Walter was not sure about the answers. He told the man, in part, what had happened during the last week. After a few tests with needles tickling various parts of Walter's body, the door opened, and two more men in white appeared. They took Walter into a large room with many beds standing next to each other and three lanes leading through them. About thirty beds were in that one room, most of them occupied by people.

The men in white walked him through the passage on one side into another room, and said, "Undress yourself."

However, Walter did not want to. They unbuttoned his pants and pulled them down, then took off his shirt. Tears flowed down Walter's cheeks, as he stood naked in front of them. He just looked at them. They handed him a shirt without collar and wide pants with a strap to tie it with, both white with thin, blue stripes.

A vacant bed was assigned to him, and an assistant nurse handed him a small container with a few pills inside, saying, "You need take them." But Walter did not.

Another assistant arrived on the scene, and the two nailed him down on the bed while a third injected something into Walter's right arm. Quickly, all went dark.

Waking slowly, Walter did not realize where he was and what was going on. Many different voices in various languages came through Walter's senses; he tried to understand them all and finally did. The man resting in the neighboring bed nodded toward him; nobody else paid any attention to his awakening. A lot was going on in the room at the same time. It was ablaze

with neon lights, and Walter noticed that four men in uniform pulled a man through a large door. They steered the man like a horse on reins with the help of leather straps around his waist. His hands were tied up behind his back. The uniforms untied him and left him standing on the spot. He was a tall person, perhaps six feet five inches, with broad shoulders and bloody fists. His nose and lips were bleeding as well.

A tray with food had been placed on a movable tabletop next to Walter's bed. He did not touch anything. Then someone approached his bed again with a small container of pills, which Walter declined to take. The same scene as before occurred until an assistant nurse could safely stick the syringe into his vein, and Walter went nowhere. Next time he awoke, he noticed the dryness in his mouth and an urge to use the bathroom. Almost unable to get up, he made his way through the rows of the beds, past the walking lane, and saw the latrines without doors. Walter also became aware of his own mind, which felt as if it had been tightened, bound, and shackled. When he tried to ask for some water, his words came out garbled, and he almost forgot what he was asking for.

It soon became obvious that the most admired and sought-after person on the unit happened to be the one who possessed the most cigarettes. Walter became friendly with a man his own size but ten years older, who had been delivered to the floor in leather straps and tears in his eyes. He told Walter that he still owned several cases of cigarettes. The two were sitting next to each other in the recreation room, smoking a lot, trying to have some type of fun in this peculiar situation. When the next medication delivery arrived, Walter capitulated and took the pills. Next time he immediately started to reduce the dosage by hiding one of the pills under his tongue. Then he continued the hiding procedure so he did not swallow anything at all. It made his head feel much better, and the dry mouth subsided somewhat.

Hilde visited during all official visiting hours, and some of his friends came by as well. It hurt Walter to see Andreas and Irene while he was locked up in pinstriped white-and-blue. He was hardly able to have a comprehensible conversation; he felt embarrassed but could do nothing about it. Walter went to meetings with a psychiatrist he liked and had the impression that she, in turn, thought he was an interesting case. To get a better understanding of his situation, the doctor also talked to Hilde, and with her support and approval, released Walter before two weeks had gone by.

## Darkness

Hilde welcomed him back home with care and understanding. She told him that some people around her thought it not a good idea to continue her relationship with him, but she did not want any of that. To Walter, it did not really matter one way or the other. What happened on the outside could not penetrate him. In the few moments he felt anything at all, it was only dullness, a nebulous, gray, guilt-ridden pain. Most days and weeks in the period ahead, he lay on the mattress in the small room and watched the ceiling. An impenetrable darkness lingered persistently in his head, with no other place to hide or to go. When everybody left, Walter spent the time at home with himself on the mattress. When Hilde came home from work, she cooked a meal, and they talked a little. Sometimes she asked him if he wanted to start doing something, perhaps go for walk or to a movie.

Walter's parents had not visited him in the hospital, but Hilde told him that she talked to his mother once and that she had exclaimed, "Oh my god, Hilde, why didn't you give him a rope?" That did not help much of anything, but Walter at least knew that someone besides Hilde thought of him.

Dieter and the roommate showed up once for a brief and awkward visit. To Walter, they looked like two young boys with bad consciences. For a while, he took some medication they gave him in the hospital, but he realized that on top of causing dryness in the mouth and a murky disposition, the drugs did not improve his general well-being.

Walter and Hilde visited Irene and Gerhard for dinner, and it felt good to be with them because Walter knew that neither of them held any preconceptions against him.

Suddenly one day, the doorbell rang. Walter got up from his mattress with the green corduroy cover that Hilde had made and opened the door. Frankie stood in front of him in all his glory. His long hairs, broken nose, and big smile that exposed the gap of missing front teeth made Walter smile as well for the first time in weeks.

He had met Frankie briefly as a fellow patient in the hospital ward where he spent a week in rehabilitation to get clean and flush the poison out of his system. They had connected instantly, and Walter learned that Frankie, as an old heroin addict, had been there numerous times, even though he was no older than Walter was. He liked Frankie because he did not have a façade and most about him was real and true.

Frankie said, "Come on, let's go for a walk and have a cup of coffee."

They took the road straight up to Grueneburg Park, and then turned into a neighborhood with a few cafés. Walter invited Frankie to have dinner sometime. The companions talked for a long time, and the meeting became a defining event for Walter. It made him realize that what he currently did would not help him start a future. He remembered the plan created in Oklahoma: to save some money, fly to America, and open a restaurant with Phil and Kathy. He considered a return to the Young Liberals as secretary but did not think it appropriate at that point. With his friend and benefactor Andreas running for office, the situation had changed within the organization; plus, Walter did not like the thought of sitting in an office every day.

Researching the job offers in the papers, he noticed an ad for how to become a taxi driver. He was referred to a taxi owner who operated a fleet of eight taxicabs. The owner would sponsor him to obtain the license. After his second attempt at the test, he obtained the license and became a cab driver in Frankfurt. Doing the day shift from six to four, he earned enough money to support Hilde and himself that they were able to save Hilde's affluent monthly income for the time to come in Oklahoma.

## USA 2

Before their departure from Frankfurt, one of Hilde's girlfriends subleased their apartment for a year. On a cool spring morning, Walter and Hilde departed on an inexpensive charter flight to New York City via Iceland. Both knew that Phil would pick them up in New York City, where he was staying a few days with his aunt in the Bronx. The three of them would then drive in his bus across the country to Oklahoma City.

The early spring provided a cool journey through the midsection of the United States. At night, everybody cuddled up in warm clothing and sleeping bags in the back of the bus. After three days and nights, the team reached their destination, where they were greeted by Kathy, moved into the second bedroom in her house, and started a new chapter in their life.

Kathy, with a petite physique and friendly toward everybody, continued working as a nurse, and Phil took a semester off from college to see how affairs would develop. They searched for the perfect location to open their restaurant by reviewing newspaper ads and driving around in Phil's old pickup truck. A side effect was that the Germans received firsthand information of the city's uncomplicated layout, its highway system, and most of all its dimensions. It was the country's second largest city, behind Los Angeles, California.

By accident, they met Nelson, who was somewhat of a prominent local activist and organizer of events in the city and whose dad was a lawyer. Nelson explained his idea: to open a meeting place and communication center together with a group of people. He asked them if they wanted to look at a place on Sixth Street, close to downtown. It had been a print shop on the second floor of a brick building with walk-up stairs, some office spaces, and a large, extended undeveloped area with iron beams supporting the ceiling. Everybody became excited about the idea of a project that combined their mutual interests in a relationship where each party could realize their ideas. They shook hands to seal the deal.

The café would occupy the entrance space, and the community program would use an office plus the large empty space for collective events. Renovations started, and within three weeks, the People's Workshop Café opened its doors for guests with a grand-opening night that included the performance of a favorite local band. It looked good, and the place was packed. They were all excited and happy with their success.

Phil, Kathy, Hilde, and Walter developed modest advertising ideas and the menu that needed completion. A fifth person, Ronald, contracted as a supplier for the daily hot-meal specials. They served sandwiches, coffee, teas, lemonade, and fruit juices. Everybody had a lot of fun performing their tasks, purchasing the supplies wholesale, serving the customers, cleaning the place, selecting music for the stereo, and meeting new people. Walter and Hilde moved into their own home, a single-family house in a decent neighborhood with grass in the front and a backyard.

When Irene arrived for a vacation, they all loved seeing each other again. Walter, Hilde, and Irene had grown together into a trio of friends in past years. They had done many activities hand-in-hand and shared a sizable assortment of encounters during their sessions at home. Phil and Kathy agreed to Walter and Hilde's request for time off, who wanted to use their new used 1962 Chevy Impala for a ride south to Mexico with Irene.

Off they went through Texas and across the border toward Mexico City. After a side trip to Vera Cruz at the Gulf, they crossed the country again to see Acapulco. North of Acapulco, the trio rented a basic room with two beds in a small bungalow-style hotel. International travelers on a budget with backpacks frequented this location. Irene, Hilde, and Walter went into the city to sightsee and enjoy food in nice restaurants. On one of these trips, they sat at a table in an open-air restaurant, white linen on the table, birds chirping outside in the trees of the lively plaza. The table had space for four, but the fourth chair served as luggage deposit. Everybody enjoyed good food and wine as they talked and went to the restroom.

When it was Walter's turn and he returned to the table, he asked, "Hilde, where is your leather purse?"

It had been hanging on the chair but was not there any longer.

Hilde grasped about, looked next to her, scratched her head, and said, "Let's look in the car."

The three Germans checked the passenger space, the trunk, everywhere, but did not find it. They went back into the restaurant to talk to the waiter and anybody else who would listen. None of the employees had seen anything.

"Perhaps you forgot it in the hotel," Irene suggested, but Hilde replied, "I know I had it with me, but let's check the room."

They drove back to the hotel and searched their room without success. The beautiful purse Walter had bought in Oklahoma City more than a year ago was gone, along with some identification documents and personal stuff. Unquestionably, the most critical piece was the booklet with their American Express traveler's checks; it represented their total cash resources.

Distressed, Walter and Hilde drove back into town to file a police report. What they encountered did not encourage them. They had to visit the main police station, a large, square-block building. Trying to find the proper department, walking through corridors up and down stairs, they noticed a space in the middle of the building. It contained the open-air jail where hundreds of people slept on the floor, standing in groups, some waving at them. Finally, the visitors found the tourism police office and filed the report. All this activity took time, and it grew dark outside. They could do nothing more that night.

Next morning, Walter got up first. He slipped into his Clarks boots, which he always placed next to the bed, and felt a strong, piercing pain in his left heel. He threw the boot off and saw something that looked like a scorpion quickly scramble under the bed toward the wall. Walter went to his knees and looked under the bed but could not see again, what had pricked him. The spot on his heel turned numb and thumped in a rhythm.

Business had to be attended. Walter forgot about the heel as he went with Hilde into town again on an exhausting journey to find the exact location of the American Express office. When they found it at last, the clerk asked many questions for a report and copied by hand the endless row of check numbers from their copy into the report.

After a while, the clerk asked Walter, "Are you OK? You look pale."

Walter answered, "Something bit me this morning; it might have been a scorpion."

The American Express employee shouted, "Oh my god, you have to go to the emergency room—you can die from that!"

Walter must have turned even whiter and felt woozier than before. The clerk offered him a glass of water, and then he and Hilde made their way to the emergency room nearby. A nurse injected a large shot into his behind. Walter stayed knocked out in bed for the next two days.

All three vacationers took it easy in and around their bungalow right at the beach, where powerful waves of the Pacific rolled in. Other travelers visited, and occasionally at night, a wood fire lit up the area. Someone played guitar, and people crooned songs from different countries. Gradually, Walter recovered enough to walk around, eat food regularly, and enjoy the holidays.



Hilde picked up the replacement traveler's checks, and other than her stolen, beautiful purse and Walter's insensitive left heel, all appeared well.

From the hotel clerk, Walter obtained a modest quantity of local grass, which tasted as if it had been covered in mud for a while—but nobody complained. Before they had left Oklahoma City, a new roommate had moved into their house, Bill from Southern California. He had had in his possession some of the famous Orange Sunshine, which contained the strongest LSD available at that time, and let them take it on their trip. Irene and Hilde did not want to miss the opportunity to experience it on that beach north of Acapulco, with the full moon rising and the shore all to themselves. The trio made sure they had sufficient clean water and juices available and some food for the long night.

When the drug kicked in, it literally was as if a thrust of energy took over the inner system, as well as the body. A clear, absolute awareness of reality ascended into the sensory perception, and the mind became merely a device, stripped of any doubt, question, or fear. This force lasted for many hours. Naturally, with the ocean right in front of them, its movements took a lot of their attention. Sometimes, however, it melted into a background activity with attached noise. The moon's slow movement across the firmament activated awe within the quiet group of friends, who sat next to each other or sometimes moved here or there, but not far. Its brightness gave way to black vastness, filled with galaxies upon galaxies and tiny, blinking light elements. All of this provided consciousness beyond words, leaving indices of it in the dancing minds of these three fortunate human beings.

For Walter, it also provided a glimpse into the order of nature's chain of events, happening at the shore of the southern Pacific Ocean. The incoming surf there contained at all times four- to six-foot waves that had a tendency to smash onto the beach with a loud sound, roll slowly up and off, and then retreat. After hours of watching and listening absolutely within the moment and being able to differentiate small portions of time through noise, then silence and motion, he realized that there was no real time, that everything that happens, happens now.

A couple of days later, the Germans took another psychedelic expedition with equal results. New visitors from Europe, the USA, and Australia arrived, and another campfire burned on the beach as the last week of their vacation began. The moon did not show up that night; a light breeze cooled the singing tourists, their backpacks scattered around the fire. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a group of ragged-looking men with antique rifles appeared. About ten of them

surrounded the smaller group of tourists at the campfire. One of them shouted something in Spanish upon the startled exclamations of a few travelers. Chaos and confusion unfolded between both parties because some of the tourists jumped up on their feet and some of the gunmen began waving their rifles and shouting.

Hilde pulled herself together and slowly approached the man who appeared to be the spokesperson. She asked him in Spanish what was going on, and the guy told her, “We are the police. You are all under arrest for sitting on the beach and smoking marijuana. You have to come with us or give money to us. You did something illegal.”

As it happened, that night nobody had smoked anything but cigarettes, and the men could not find any trace of illegal drugs. Hilde concentrated on finding sufficient vocabulary and explained that her two friends, who could not speak Spanish, and she were on their vacation, renting the bungalow behind the scene. Irene, a secretary from Frankfurt, and her fiancé all came with the same car from the United States. She persuaded the leader to let the three Germans go back to their room before the unidentifiable police force in civil clothing could search their backpacks.

When the adventurers arrived back in Oklahoma City at their new home, a Harley-Davidson stood parked on the carpet in the living room. Bill, the biker, had moved in with his girlfriend. The bike and girlfriend were items previously not discussed with the landlords, Walter and Hilde.

At the People's Workshop Café, the restaurateurs learned that their property-owner had given notice to vacate. Frequent disturbances due to drunken people standing on the roof of the building caused police action and neighborhood complaints. There were several reasons for the issues: being close to downtown, the homeless, and the fact that generous Phil and Kathy sometimes gave away free food. In addition to the progressive courses and classes offered in the community center, good-looking, young white girls could be seen around the place. This drew extra attention. After brief discussions with Phil and Kathy, the two couples decided to separate. Phil did not really want to continue working with others on a nonprofit basis; he wanted to open his own restaurant and make money. For Hilde and Walter, this was not an issue; they intended to hold onto the concept of running a café within a larger center.

It did not take long before they received word from Nelson that a new location had been located, across the street from the city's venerable newspaper, the *Oklahoman*. The front entrance

double door with spotty brass bars opened onto a wide staircase up to the first floor and straight ahead to the former ballroom. It could accommodate about fifteen hundred people standing or sitting on the floor. The team transported the furniture and essential kitchen equipment from the old place to the new location. Walter purchased stereo equipment, and he and Hilde refreshed the paint and installed improved lighting. At the same time, volunteers completed the bookstore, conference rooms, and treatment rooms for bodywork. On opening night, the favorite local band played for free, and a sizable crowd filled the large hall, people perusing the new facilities and checking out the bookstore and plant sale.

As it turned out, the usual day crowd stayed away from the new place. In the afternoons and at night, it filled up a bit, but it seemed the locals did not favor it. Nelson arrived in the company of a man who had previously worked as a disc jockey, then opened his own company and promoted a variety of music acts coming to town. After he looked over the facility, he made an offer to build a large stage in the ballroom on which the bands could perform. The crew accepted his offer, hoping it would increase the appeal of the establishment and the volume of regular customers during business hours.

The stage was built, and the bluegrass band Boz Scaggs highlighted the inauguration and opening night. With the place packed, the café sold many soft drinks, lemonade, and iced teas that night. Concerts were held once or twice a month with known local groups and domestically famous bands, culminating in with the booking of the British rock group Yes, which had made it big internationally. When the band performed in the old ballroom, there was not an inch available; probably three thousand fans showed up, and the band delivered.

After the grand events, however, revenue and customers during regular business hours declined. Hilde and Walter moved into a different apartment, a duplex. The couple split shifts during the week and on weekends both attended the café counter.

One night, after Walter's tour of duty, Hilde did not show up to pick him up with the Chevy they shared. It grew later and later. Panic overcame Walter. It did not help that lovely blond and friendly Gil, who waited with him, offered a ride home, mentioned that she saw Hilde leaving with Bud, a longhaired hippie who lived with Gil in the same house in a commune situation. They might have left for the house because people were having a party, she said; Walter could come with her and enjoy it as well. Already too traumatized at that moment, Walter declined but accepted the ride home. Feeling that it would be a long night alone, he opened the

fridge and started with an almost-full bottle of vodka, occasionally adding some ice cubes to the glass. When Hilde finally arrived home late the next morning, Walter had already been up for some hours; the alcohol had worked only temporarily that night.

The partners had an argument. Hilde apologized but indicated that she did not know for sure whether there was more to it, that she would have to see. The episode happened to be the first of its kind to become known in their relationship. Walter was not aware of any affairs Hilde had had during their time together, but he knew he had had a few love affairs; one of them could have become serious, but he had decided to stay with Hilde.

Devastated, he worked through the day to clear his dazed brain. At some point, he called Phil to tell him what had occurred. Phil offered him a place to stay at his new house if Walter wanted; he had separated from Kathy and rented a two-story house where he operated his own restaurant on the first floor and lived on the second.

Walter thanked him and said, "Let's see how the situation develops. There is still the Workshop Café, and we have a car and apartment together. Right now, I feel awful and do not know what to do."

It took about three weeks until the practical and emotional situations sorted out. Hilde decided to pursue her new relationship more closely, and she looked for a different place to stay in the downtown area. She also looked for a job. They gave notice to Nelson that they wanted to close the café. Phil offered Walter a job as busboy and dishwasher, including room and board. Walter gratefully accepted and moved his modest belongings into Phil's living room, where he spent the nights on the couch.

Sporadically during the previous months, Walter had called Denise Hauck in Germany using a calling card and public phones. She had refreshed the connection initially by sending him a letter, and then Walter called. Meanwhile, she was working on her first job as news reporter for a German network television station in Wiesbaden near Frankfurt.

It was a pleasure talking to her. She appeared interested in Walter's activities and well-being. When he told her the news about Hilde, she asked him, "What are you going to do—dishwashing?"

He had not contemplated any further steps; depression and general misery overshadowed any planning.

"You know, if you want to, you can come to my place and stay with me for a while."

Surprised, Walter asked, “Yes, but what about Andreas?”

“It will be OK,” she replied.

He instantly felt a degree of new energy returning and foresaw a future in his life. The remaining three weeks in Oklahoma City Walter spent with Phil at different entertainment spots. They also talked in the living room about the ongoing war, Leary, Huxley, Gurdjieff, and the Black Panthers.

## Homecoming

Walter recognized that something had changed within him during the exciting and hapless week in Frankfurt that he finished off by being committed to the psych ward by his friends. He had accomplished his return to reality in time and with help from friends and a few signs, he observed in the city.

One of these pointers occurred one day when he walked through downtown Frankfurt from the Hauptwache toward Liebfrauenberg. Lunchtime crowds trying to catch a quick bite and the usual groups or individuals posting their attention-drawing messages kept the moderately small space busy. Walter was trying to crisscross through the masses without any delays when his attention was caught by a sign and then the sign bearer, in a split-second between two passing bodies. He stopped, turned around, and waited for a moment to catch a closer look at the person, who held a red-on-white sign that exclaimed, "Jesus will save you!" It was not the sign that interested him, though. With disbelief, he recognized the female psychiatrist who had helped with his swift release from the hospital. She held the pole with the attached cardboard sign high above her head, smiling.

Walter had asked himself then, "*Who is insane here?*"

Later, after a year when he met Phil at the airport in New York, as well as during his time in Oklahoma City, he recognized a continuous background sensation of latent depression in himself and secretly pondered, "*What is wrong with me?*"

Walter examined the initial diagnosis of the admitting psychiatrist, who had recorded schizophrenia, psychosis, impairment of the motor nerves, and a few other minor misfortunes. He knew the diagnosis was wrong; he was happy to go on with his life. Then again, Walter had not been able to figure out what caused his sadness and depression.

After deciding to return to Germany, he purchased an inexpensive ticket from Oklahoma City to New York City and a charter flight ticket that took him to Luxemburg, where Denise waited for him. He immediately noticed her as he walked through the small arrival terminal; she was standing on the upper level looking down at him over the balustrade.

Neither talked much during the three-hour ride; Walter was tired, and Denise's shyness in personal matters made her appear restrained. She had picked him up in her Citroën Dyane, which allowed a comfortable ride. Denise's interests were causes, the underprivileged, disasters, and

war zones. She never talked about her personal life if not asked. Denise looked at Walter with her blue eyes and embedded question marks at all times. One of her habits was to examine people when talking to them. Neither he nor she knew exactly what to expect or even what to wish for in this unfolding situation.

Walter wanted to lay down somewhere and sleep. He also knew that the reason he sat in the car was that Denise liked him and in a way admired him for what she knew he had done so far with his life. In the past, they had met occasionally and had become a little closer during party events or socially, together with Andreas and Hilde. Once in winter, all four of them had gone together to Prague, Czechoslovakia, where they had a good time during the Prague Spring. Before Warsaw Pact governments occupied the country.

To bridge the developing uneasiness in the car during the drive from Luxemburg to Wiesbaden, Walter pretended to sleep slumped in the seat, his head toward the window. Then at some point, he suddenly felt a tender hand on his upper leg, and from that moment, he knew that all would be OK.

She insisted that he could stay at her place as long as he wanted. After the long trip and a modest dinner at home, the time arrived to go to sleep in Denise's studio apartment. His host did not point to a spot on the floor where Walter should place his sleeping bag; it became unmistakably evident that she expected him to sleep next to her on the futon mattress, and he did not mind.

As she walked naked through the room, with her thin, tall body, pale skin and round behind, long legs, and an amazing pair of soft, large, upright breasts, she looked very appealing. Walter's fatigue faded away. When Denise slid down to the mattress and looked at him, he detected not only question marks, but also encouraging flashes in her eyes. She moved swiftly toward him while opening her legs. With one move, he managed to be on top of and inside her, starting to go in long-lasting strokes. Walter turned her around and entered all the way into her wetness, then pulled back again and repeated the same pelvic push. Denise grunted once in the beginning when he entered her. That was all Walter noticed as a sign of enthusiasm. During the entire performance, she kept her eyes wide open and looked at him inquisitively.

Walter thought, *Perhaps I can help her step out of character for a moment.*

Before his departure from Oklahoma, he had also received a farewell gift from Phil: a quantity of organic mescaline. Some of Walter's friends never indulged in any drugs other than

alcohol and tobacco, especially not psychedelic drugs. Denise was one of them. Walter thought that using a dose of mescaline in the current situation might help to arouse passion in her and enable her to feel her body instead of investigating through her mind at all times.

He mentioned it to her. “You know, I have some of this nonchemical mescaline. Would you like to try it sometime?”

She thought about it for a while and said, “I am a little afraid of it, but you will be there with me when I take it.”

It was a Wednesday; she had to work for another two days until Friday. The next evening, Andreas came by to visit and say hello to Walter. It was their first meeting since the hospital visit. Another awkward aspect was that Andreas and Denise had been together for some time, and Andreas did not know what to make of Walter's presence at Denise's apartment; nor did Walter have any clue how and what to talk to him about. The three went out to dinner.

During the meal, Andreas asked Walter casually, “Would you like me to give you a ride back to Frankfurt later?”

Puzzled and not knowing what to say, he answered, “I do not know where I should go in Frankfurt, Andreas.”

Walter's contact with his parents had been limited to a few postcards and letters during the past year and one telephone call when he came back from America. He did not know any other person in the city whom he could stay with and had no intention of asking his parents.

“So you are staying here for a while?” Andreas asked hesitantly.

Denise jumped in to help. “You know, Andreas, I invited Walter to stay here for some time until he knows what to do next.”

Andreas appeared to accept it; he gave no external sign of any disagreement or argument, but an attentive observer would have noticed reluctance and a gulp of his Adam's apple.

After the trio left the restaurant, Andreas took his car to drive back to Frankfurt, while Denise and Walter got in the Citroën Dyane and headed back to the studio, discussing what had just occurred. She said they had been together for more than a year, but she never knew what he wanted from her. He was always busy with his career in the liberal party and his law studies and did not show any determination regarding the relationship or its potential future. Denise and Walter stayed quiet for the rest of the evening, watched the news, and then went to sleep.



The next day Walter called Irene in Frankfurt to let her know that he had returned and what happened in Oklahoma. Irene immediately invited him to stay at her and Gerhard's apartment if he wanted to. But she did not like his news, saying, "It is not OK that Hilde and you are separated. There is no future with the hippie, I tell you."

Walter was happy to hear her voice and being able to talk to someone who understood, said, "Let me see. I have to figure things out, give me some time."

Besides money salvaged from the café, Walter had also saved some of the modest wages Phil had paid him for his services in the restaurant. He did not need to look for a job immediately. He enrolled in a local martial arts studio to continue practicing Korean karate, which he had begun six months earlier in Oklahoma City.

Denise invited him to come to a party with her. Coworkers celebrated at the apartment of a male fellow journalist. Walter felt uncomfortable appearing for this occasion since it happened to be a birthday party with people who knew each other. When they arrived at the small residence, the discrepancy became even more obvious when he noticed the dress code. All the men wore dress shirts—no tie, but some with a coat. The women were less formally dressed, but Walter stuck out in his blue worker shirt and bell-bottom blue jeans with the leg edges decorated in hand-stitched needlework: a red and white rim that he had done himself. In addition, his long, curly hair had reached shoulder length by this time.

Friday night after Denise returned from work, they had a salad and then sat down on the futon. Walter opened the plastic bag containing the few little blue tablets. They agreed to take only half a tablet each. Walter doubted there would be any real effect with a quantity that small, but thought, *Better than nothing*. As time went by and the drug launched, the actual effect was as subtle as the amount taken. This set the mark for what followed. Walter hoped that Denise could experience an opening in her emotional expression and a richer sexual experience. The night, however, turned into a repetition of the first night, a lot of initiative on his side, with curious examination by Denise. Reality revealed the truth, and both realized there was no future for them as a couple. Walter quit the martial arts training, called Irene to accept her invitation, and took a train to Frankfurt within a few days.

## A New Chapter

As Walter walked up the stairs to the third-floor apartment where his friends lived and arrived at the second floor, Irene shouted down to him, “Walt, Walt, you know what happened? I talked to Hilde. She wants to come back.”

The news took his breath away, already a bit strained from carrying his luggage up the stairs.

When he made it up the final set of steps, the two hugged each other and said at the same time, “Good to see you.”

Laughing aloud, Irene added, “Welcome back. Make yourself at home.”

At that moment, Walter experienced happiness for the first time in months.

He sat down and asked, “How did that happen?”

Walter found out that the relationship with Hilde's new boyfriend never actually developed into one, and Hilde's desires did not include keeping a waitress job without cause. Irene and he contemplated the situation, not knowing what Hilde's plans looked like or even whether she had any.

“Well, she could stay here; we could all live together for some time,” Irene said, smiling.

Walter liked the idea, even in the ignorance of the moment and the ambiguity of the future. When Gerhard arrived, he greeted Walter with warmth and a hug and totally agreed with the idea that all four could live together for some time. Therefore, Walter made his bed on one of the couches under the roof, and all of them waited full of expectation for Hilde.

During the week of waiting, Walter went to the hairdresser and got a short haircut to look presentable while searching for a job. The country's economy was in full gear, enabling him to find a position within a few days. A small securities-trading company hired him as telex operator immediately after a typewriting test.

Drained, weary, and uncertain, Hilde arrived back at the end of the week. The friends welcomed her and gave her the option of taking the second couch for a while until she knew what to do. It meant sleeping with Walter in the same room, but on a different couch. He had forgiven her a long time ago, still liked Hilde a lot, and could not imagine anything better than being together with her again. Through her exhaustion, she recognized the efforts of her well-

meaning friends and at the same time felt sure that Walter would not interfere with her wishes. She fell onto the couch and slept instantly.

The next morning they all relished breakfast together. It was a feast none of the travelers had enjoyed for a long time. Over the weekend, they went into the Taunus, a low mountain range close by, and took a long hike, followed by brunch in a rural inn.

Walter sensed that Hilde still favored him, and she enjoyed all the attention she received. He knew this part of her very well—standing out from the crowd, excelling through her sharp mind and composed approach. She liked to be courted, and he did not mind playing the part of the wooer silently. When alone, they chatted about the past. Hilde told him that after only a brief stretch, she realized that this person in Oklahoma City was with her only to have some fun and appeared unable or unwilling to go deeper or make any effort at all. She did not feel sorry for what she did, but found herself clueless, considering what she had projected into the guy. Walter was happy to see her softening on the subject of himself and his efforts and vulnerability.

One day she asked him straightforwardly, “If we live together again, where should we do that?”

“What if you contact your friend who lives in our apartment and give notice that we are back?” he said smiling. “This would be the way.”

The situation normalized rapidly. Hilde found work at her previous advertising agency, with increased benefits. Walter operated the telex machine of the securities-trading firm. Both of them met with old friends and found a few new ones.

One day as Walter sat in the red rattan rocking chair, the telephone rang. He picked it up and heard, “Hi, this is Werner”

Walter asked, “Werner who? What Werner?”

“Werner Puck—you remember. You intended to join me in Australia but you never did. Why?”

An old movie passed in front of Walter's eyes. Five years ago, he and Werner had gone to the Australian consulate in Frankfurt and filled out immigration applications. Because both of the boys were underage at that time, the applications needed to be approved by their parents. The Australian government would pay for the passage by boat or a plane ticket, plus a modest amount of start-up money. Werner completed his apprenticeship six months earlier than Walter did and had no patience to wait for him. He left for Australia immediately by ship. Walter had

used his father's car to drop him off in Bremerhaven at the North Sea. He waved good-bye while the huge cruise ship left the harbor in direction of Genova, Italy, and then Sydney. Walter had never followed through with his own departure. He could not separate from Madeleine and his life in Germany.

“Man, where are you, and how are you doing?” he asked.

“We arrived three days ago from Sydney. I visited my mother in Bad Homburg, but it did not work out. Now we are staying in a hotel near the train station. It is a miserable situation.”

“Why don't you come to our place, then?” asked Walter.

“I am not alone; I came with my wife, Ruth.”

“Hold on a second,” Walter said and looked for Hilde, who had just entered the room. He explained the situation and asked if she would be OK with having two guests for a few days.

“It is your friend, and if he is OK with it, they can stay here and sleep on the mattresses,” Hilde said, indicating the smaller room, which served as living room.

When the visitors arrived, breathing heavily and with serious faces, Walter knew immediately the couple had gone through a rough period. He greeted them in a friendly manner, shook hands, and took a close look at Werner. He appeared more mature, much thinner in the face, and Walter sensed a rough edge in his attitude. Walter tried to make them feel at ease, offering tea and some cookies, and later Hilde cooked one of her fast but delicious dishes. They opened a bottle of wine.

Werner related what had happened to him during the five years in Australia. It must have been tough in the beginning because he started in a mining town where he could make the most money. He labored in different places and jobs until he moved to Sydney, where he eventually met Ruth. Werner had never really forgiven Walter for not showing up in Australia.

Then Walter explained his reasons and situation of the past. With the help of good food and wine they all appreciated, Werner warmed up enough to laugh once or twice. Ruth appeared to be rather introverted, with large brown eyes and black hair. Both of them wore black corduroy and seemed to share a bond that included secrets not revealed straightforwardly. While Werner and Ruth exchanged remarks about stories they had written, Hilde and Walter looked at each other and raised their shoulders a bit, wondering what they might mean.

Walter felt guilty for breaking his promise to move to Australia, but Werner and Ruth's visit relieved him greatly from that weight. The more they opened up to him and talked about their recent past, the better he felt about his decision.

He had obtained a piece of Lebanese hash from Gerhard, who still lived only a few blocks away, and a routine was established. After work and dinner, the guests and hosts came together in the small room with the stereo and drank a bottle of beer, while Walter fabricated a cigarette with tobacco and hash mix.

Walter and Werner delighted in extreme audio pleasures while listening to his record collection of about two hundred popular and less-well-known blues and rock-and-roll albums. There were long periods when nobody talked, the volume turned to the maximum without distortion. Ruth and Werner loved these nightly sessions; they were their first experiences with hash. They revealed that during the previous six months they had lived in Ruth's parents' house, in a room they insulated against external light so they could be a hundred percent focused on what they did. Werner presented Walter with a couple of handwritten pages, but when Walter tried to read them, he could not understand them. He blamed his English for it. Ruth and Werner talked in a different accent and perhaps used a different vocabulary—very dark, and as if stemming from a combination of Nietzsche and Nostradamus, perhaps as an attempt to express nihilism.

When the couple left for London, Walter was pleased. He received a few letters and always replied, but one day the letters stopped coming.

One weekend, Hilde and Walter visited her parents in Wetzlar; they had just purchased a townhouse outside the city. Hilde's sister also dropped by, and they all joined with friends from their past and celebrated a reunion.

They also visited Walter's parents in Oberrad, where Lisa Herzog had inherited a modest piece of garden property, the last of her father and stepmother's estate. Her father had passed away years ago. Walter's parents kept the garden land with a shed for weekend visits, to sit outside under an apple tree and roam around, keeping the place in order. Lisa and Friedrich Herzog appeared to be enjoying life in a modest fashion.

Hilde and Walter enjoyed a pleasant summer in Frankfurt, during which an idea surfaced and slowly matured. Both read books by Hermann Hesse, short stories, articles by Leary, and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, and they listened to Bob Dylan. Once again, a yearning, almost an

aching, rose within Walter. People he knew or heard of had gone to the East, to India and other places, and seemed different when they returned. Small shops, tearooms, and cafés offered imported items from these very exotic places: scents of incense and patchouli oil, colors and textures of fabrics, Ravi Shankar's music. Many famous people went on pilgrimages to meet gurus in India. John McLaughlin named his new band Mahavishnu Orchestra. All of these observations left impressions on Walter.

The couple spent another relaxed, warm Sunday afternoon outside Frankfurt at a former gravel pit that contained cool, greenish soft water. It had been converted into a public recreation area without any services or lifeguards. The swimmers and sunbathers were students, hippies, alternatives, and political activists who initially had liberated the area from the city. Most of the visitors used the opportunity to be in the nude. As Walter and Hilde were lying naked on a blanket in the sun, they talked about what they would like to do next.

Walter burst out, "I want to visit India."

Hilde's reply from the back of her throat sounded like a growling, "Hmmm..." The sun shined pleasantly on her outstretched body, her breasts turned up and legs ever so slightly apart. "How do you want to travel?" she asked.

Walter said, "I would like to go over land, make the whole trip by bus, and see all the countries in between, have a lot of time available."

Later that night, when they returned home and went to bed, they made sweet love and the following week started implementing the idea.

## Arrangements

Hilde learned about Erzebet on the cafeteria bulletin board of Goethe University where she sometimes ate lunch. Erzebet was looking for a room, and Walter and Hilde were searching for someone to share their apartment with; one of their immediate ways to save money was to rent out the small room next to the kitchen. Erzebet, in her advanced years of sociology studies, had moved to Frankfurt to separate from her boyfriend of many years, meet new people, and perhaps find different opportunities. She had come to Germany from Hungary as a refugee, leaving her home country to avoid living under the oppressive Communist regime, in greater freedom. The Germans accepted many people escaping from the so-called Eastern-bloc countries.

Right away during the initial meeting in the Westendstrasse, it was obvious that everybody liked each other, and within a week Walter and Hilde welcomed Erzebet as their new roommate.

All three benefited considerably from each other's presence. Walter and Hilde provided a protected environment, and Erzebet taught them a lot about her native country and let them see the world through her eyes. She liked to cook and did it well, producing delicious soups, pancakes, and meat dishes. Walter thought her presence also helped his relationship with Hilde open up a bit more for other people.

When Erzebet asked them if it would be OK for her boyfriend to visit over a weekend, they naturally agreed. Gaspar arrived from Cologne in old, beige Citroën Ami 6, and it became immediately apparent that he had a unique personality. Gaspar had also left Hungary for the same reasons Erzebet did and at about the same time, but used different channels. He settled in Cologne, where Erzebet was previously enrolled in the university. Gaspar worked in Germany on radio documentaries, wrote short stories, and translated from and into Hungarian. He maintained ties with Hungarian artists and other performers, writers, musicians, and entertainers who had immigrated there.

Two months went by, and suddenly the Westendstrasse apartment housed four roommates who shared a lot of fun together. Walter did not use chemical drugs during that period, but all four members of the brand-new commune appreciated homegrown grass joints or tobacco mixed with hash and grass.

The seasons changed, and Irene, Gerhard, Hilde, and Walter took Gerhard's comfortable Peugeot for a ride to the Alsace. Afterward they headed west and south along the River Rhone, passing through Lyon, all the way to Marseille. The trip contained a touch of good-bye because everybody knew that Hilde and Walter's travel plans were on schedule. They had taken the opportunity to spend time together before saying “cheerio” again.

On the way home, they stopped for the night in a beautiful, picturesque small town near Dijon and took rooms in a modest inn. The friends had driven a long distance that day, more than five hundred kilometers, and looked forward to a nice French dinner. The four walked through town, crossed a marketplace with fountain and sculptures, and took pictures of each other.

When the time arrived to enjoy an aperitif before dinner in a small bar, Walter suddenly felt very odd and had to excuse himself to rest on the bed for a moment. Lying down, a deep, grayish space engulfed him, and his energy drained completely. He also felt nauseous, but it stayed in the background. The previously unknown but absolute power that had invaded him made him so helpless that when Hilde appeared, she cuddled up against him from behind and just held him. Walter started to cry because he was scared to death for no discernible reason. It took another thirty minutes before the emotional and physical assault faded away—as quickly as it had taken hold of him.

Walter searched for literature he could read as preparation for the long journey east. Two books left an impact on him. One was written by a German nobleman who had traveled to India early in the previous century. Because of his status, he met with many high-ranking officials, Indian royalties, local princes, and maharajas. The book conveyed a likable picture of the rich and colorful world someone faced when traveling to the Orient in style and comfort—although by coach and elephant.

The other book had been published more recently and included details that Walter wanted to know. Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* came to Walter through the university library, but he read it like a mystery novel from the supermarket. It contained all the information Walter needed to be prepared for the trip and to look for when he arrived at the destination. He realized his wish to witness at least one miracle, Yogananda described in numerous examples. Men lying on nail beds or buried six feet deep for a month; men materializing or invoking an object to appear out of thin air; men producing ashes to shower



from the palms of their hands; and women who never talked a word during their life healing others' medical conditions through touch or gaze.

Walter had no mistrust, no reservations about the author, who he thought sounded solid as a teacher. His credentials were unchallenged, even in the Western world. In this book, for the first time, Walter also encountered the Eastern concept of a teacher-disciple relationship. He found it remarkable that the author had grown up feeling his intense desire "to know what lay behind all the experiences of life and death" even as a child (as described in his book *Autobiography of a Yogi*). It touched something within him that made a lot of sense. It waited hidden, deep inside, for something to happen to help it become realized and released. Walter sensed its importance but had no control over the discovery of the mystery. He had no instrument to start digging deep, and his place at this time provided no guru who could help him on a path.

The New Year started with Elvis Presley giving a concert in Hawaii, the first worldwide telecast by an entertainer watched by more people than had watched the Apollo moon landings. The last US soldier left Vietnam.

Walter and Hilde purchased a used yellow Volkswagen Westfalia Camper with a pop-up top, gas fridge, two-burner gas stove, sink, and built-in shelves with folding doors. A thick, full-size mattress in two pieces fit into the back, and the roof, when popped up, contained a third bed. Walter installed a spare-tire carrier for the front, researched and obtained a variety of small spare parts to take along. They also purchased a carnet to allow them to drive the vehicle temporarily through various countries, as well as a variety of medications for minor external injuries, for diarrhea from different causes, and to prevent malaria.

Erzebet and Gaspar wanted to keep Westendstrasse apartment during their absence, which turned out to be a perfect solution: the two who stayed behind could enjoy the apartment without roommates, and the travelers had a place to go to when they returned.

## The East

On a glorious morning in the merry month of May, after saying good-bye to Erzebet and Gaspar, the long-distance travelers left Westendstrasse. They headed for the Nordend to pick up Irene. Irene did not let go of her friends readily; she simply went with them. Irene came down from the third floor, accompanied by her backpack and Gerhard, who wanted to say good-bye. Walter and Hilde had agreed that she would come along on vacation as long as she wanted.

The threesome left Frankfurt, heading south toward Bavaria, crossed the border to Austria behind Passau, and arrived in the early evening in Vienna, where they consumed a hearty dinner in a new wine restaurant. They slept very well during their first night on the road, in the yellow travel-mobile parked at the sidewalk.

Departing east on major highways, Walter navigated the bus all the way to Budapest. Here they found the address where Gaspar's mother lived. On the fourth floor of an old apartment building, a very friendly woman dressed in black greeted them with love. Sign language and Hilde's ability with Romance languages, combined with some English, helped them understand her. Gaspar's mother told them how much she loved and missed her son and what a wonderful person he was. As evidence, they looked at many black-and-white pictures. The Germans took a couple of days to explore the old city with the Danube running through it and then continued the trip toward a small place in the country named Satoraljaujhely, where Erzebet's father lived.

On a sunny day, Hilde, Irene, and Walter slowly entered the large front yard of an extended one-story building. It had been painted in yellow ocher. In combination with the weathered greenish window shutters, the place appeared enchanting. Fully-grown grapevine branches intertwined on the house's walls. A small man opened the front door, painted the same color as the window shutters, smiled, and extended his arms toward the still-moving camper. His black hair was combed straight back, held in place by hair cream, and a thick black mustache ruled the area above his upper lip. The visitors exited the vehicle, and Mr. Alla hugged everybody while talking in his native tongue.

He invited everybody to a restaurant in town that featured authentic gypsy music and exceptional local food. Menu items were rabbit, lamb, and carp. Waiters served assorted wines and spirits while everybody awaited the food. The gypsy band played songs that almost

everybody in the restaurant sang along with passion. When someone did not participate in the singing, the band assembled around that person and played one song after the other while looking at the guest. In the event they detected an emotional weak spot in that individual, their play intensified until they saw tears flowing down the cheeks of the guest, who sang along admirably. Hilde, Irene, and Walter crooned as well, and the next day they departed with a lot of heart-felt affection for Mr. Alla, Hungarian food, drink, and gypsy bands.

Because their voyage had taken them to northeastern Hungary and its neighboring Romania possessed a mysterious attraction for everybody, they crossed the border into this country. Everybody loved the never-ending two-lane parkways with trees flanking both sides of the road. At some juncture in the mountains, they reached a spot where the asphalt suddenly ended and a bumpy, dusty gravel road started. Hilde consulted a detailed map of the area, and they decided to continue. It became an endurance test for the Volkswagen and Walter because the road quickly turned into a washboard for more than twenty miles. Hilde steered the Volkswagen over a very high bridge crossing the Vardar River at the border with Yugoslavia. They had no intention of stopping before they reached the city of Split at the Adriatic Sea.

Walter, Hilde and Irene reached the day's destination early in the evening and found a spot in a camping site outside the city. A favorite European tourist attraction, the city was packed, and the camping site, on the main road, did not invite them to stay a second night. Back in the camper, the journey continued, going along the coast for a whole day and then inland to reach the border crossing into Greece and the highway that proceeded first to Thessaloniki and then to Athens.

## Greece

One of the oldest cities on the planet, Athens covers a large area with a high population. The home-on-wheels rolled all the way to Piraeus at the Aegean Sea without locating the day's destination—the home of their friend Aris, who expected their arrival and had invited the trio beforehand to stay at his parents' house, where he also lived. Sometime previously, Aris had lived in Frankfurt while attending a hotel-management school. He met Hilde's sister, and became friends with all three of the travelers. Hilde called Aris, who directed them to a nice area of town with single-family homes and estates. His parents owned a two-story building, plus a guest cottage in the garden.

Aris immediately made it unquestionably certain that the visitors could stay as long as they wanted. Irene moved into a room in the main house, and Hilde and Walter chose the cottage, where they made unrestricted love and then fell asleep. They woke up refreshed to enjoy their first Greek *dolmades*, *spanakopites*, *tzatziki*, and the obligatory Greek salad. Aris was a customer-service professional and a man who knew how to treat, entertain visitors, and act as a tourist guide. As a bonus, he revealed that he had opened his own business as a yacht broker in Piraeus. He indicated there might be opportunities in the near future when all four of them could use one of the hundred-foot vessels for a few days by returning one from an island to the harbor in Piraeus or delivering one to an island in the Aegean.

All four took the ferryboat to the island of Mykonos for a week in that beautiful place. The weather played along for the boat ride, as if summer had arrived; the sea looked azure blue and clear with a breeze that caused a few small waves to crest on the surface. Within twelve hours, they had reached the island, where they rented a shared room in a small private guesthouse on one of the numerous narrow paths running through Mykonos town.

Aris attended to business while the Germans hiked over a rocky area toward the beaches. Two beaches lay next to each other; one attracted nudists and was separated by a high dune. Walter purchased snorkel gear. He enjoyed viewing the seabed with an occasional piece of coral or a shoal of small fish floating in the water. The vacationers, lying on towels, made sure their sunburns stayed under control. In the late afternoons, in a small bar on the veranda, they watched the sunset and relished ouzo with dried octopus pieces or had a glass of Retsina, the wine infused with pine resin.

After their return from Mykonos and throughout the next couple of weeks, Aris needed to deliver or pick up boats with sails and power drives to or from the islands of Páros, Santoríni, and Patmos. His German friends sailed with him. Sometimes the job was done in one day, other times with sleepovers in small island hotels.

Hilde and Walter wanted to visit Crete, and Irene came along with them—without the mobile home. For the journey to the big, faraway island by sea, they took a huge ferryboat that carried vehicles as well and sailed overnight. Like many backpack travelers, the three were equipped with sleeping bags, which had to be spread out on deck. All of them slept under the stars on the Aegean Sea. Next morning, the ferry arrived in Heraklion. They searched for and found the next bus connection to their planned destination, the small village of Vai at the eastern tip of Crete. Here existed the only palm-tree forest in Europe.

At night, they had to be fast in finding camp spots between rocks and palm trees. The road through the palm-tree forest ended at a small beach area where local fishermen anchored their boats and two establishments served the backpacking tourists who camped out in the forest or between the rocky hills. The actual village of Vai stood a couple of miles inland. The trio enjoyed hiking around the eastern part of the island. They relaxed at the beach, observed the activities of fishermen and tourists, who complained frequently about the rats crawling in the palm trees. At night, they gazed at the firmament above, which contained glimmering stars, the Milky Way, shooting stars, and galaxies viewable for free.

After roughly a week, Walter remembered the reason they had left Frankfurt and asked Hilde “Wouldn't you like to go on to Turkey now?”

She thought about it for a moment and said, “OK, let's do it.”

The difficult moment came when they said good-bye to Irene, who had decided to stay a little longer on the island. For some nights already, she had rented a room in town and enjoyed the tourist scene, especially one American man with whom she had become intimate.

## Turkey

To cover the distance from Athens to Kesan, the first larger city in Turkey beyond the Greek border, the refreshed travelers required two days, including a night's rest close to the road, their first night alone in the mobile home. Using the luxury of a gas stove, the morning began with brewed filter coffee, fried eggs, and Hungarian meat. The fresh white flatbread came from a local bakery.

They covered the two hundred kilometers to Istanbul in a full day and crossed the Bosphorus into Asia on an early evening in the middle of June. After crisscrossing town for some time, they found a place to stay between the Hagia Sophia, a marketplace, the Blue Mosque, and a hotel. During the day, they visited museums, mosques, and a Turkish bath, ate gyros for lunch and kebab for dinner. Walter enjoyed sweet coffee with grounds in small glasses or cups, while Hilde preferred strong black tea.

Before they left Frankfurt, Walter had purchased a stereo cassette recorder and player and brought along a substantial number of cassettes with his favorite music. He also installed a couple of speakers in the mobile home, which enabled the travelers to listen to music whenever they wanted.

Driving 550 kilometers from Istanbul to Izmir on major roads did not present an issue except learning how to avoid, bypass, outwit, or circumvent the truck and bus traffic. Most of Turkey's goods and people seemed to be transported on the road at all times. Immediately, it became clear that the "law of the more powerful" ruled the roads in Turkey and that to survive, one needed to use passive driving at all times.

The yellow camper made it to Izmir, a large metropolis in western Anatolia and a popular tourist spot for foreigners as well as Turks. To avoid the summer activities of the crowds, Hilde and Walter decided to continue south toward Antalya, a city on the Mediterranean's southwestern coast that was known as Attalia in 150 BC.

After a night's rest, they continued farther south and stopped for lunch. Opposite the little restaurant, they noticed a gravel road turning off the highway. When they asked the restaurant staff about the road, which occasionally a truck or mule cart turned into, they were told to avoid this road because of its condition but that it would lead eventually to the ocean. The partners

considered the situation for a while, and then decided to try it and find out what a side trip on this stretch would offer.

Stocking up on a few supplies, including fresh vegetables, water, and milk products, they turned off the main road and moved slowly onto the dirt road. Meanwhile, the temperature rose higher than 104 degrees. After a couple of hours, they studied the left, seaward side more closely to find a place to park. It was abundantly covered with pine trees and all kinds of bushes, but they noticed a small space where they could turn off the dusty road and drive onto the land next to it.

Walter navigated slowly between vegetation and rocks, at the same time making sure they could return. An area opened up next to what appeared to be ancient ruins, deep inside the trees' shadows. The shade suppressed the heat, but the hot air between the trees did not stir. No breeze at all moved through the space. It forced the new arrivals to sit down, drink water, and rest. They could hear the ocean behind, through foliage and ruins. Some relief came from cool water with fresh limejuice and later hot black tea.

As they sat on a blanket in front of the camper, sometimes lying down inside with all doors and windows open, they caught peripheral movement in the distance between the trees. Scanning the play of light and shadows more thoroughly, Walter thought he saw a man moving slowly through the trees, sometimes bending down and picking something up. The sun moved slowly across the sky, the shadows changed, and suddenly leaves began to rustle and a light wind fanned the area. The breeze gave them enough energy to walk around and familiarize themselves with the immediate area.

The couple found out that the seawater splashed against rocks and that no sandy beaches were in sight. The ruins looked as if there had been a building a very long time ago; they faced the ocean, and only the remains of one thick wall had persisted during the ages.

Hilde whipped up a delicious dinner of fresh vegetables and rice with flatbread. Then the breeze subsided, and the mosquitoes arrived to have their dinner. The couple quickly gathered all items from outside the bus and retreated inside. They closed the sliding door but left the back door and rooftop open, which had attached mosquito nets. Sleep did not come easily that night because of the heat and the sound of cracking, dry tree branches, as if someone were walking around.

## Mehmed

The duo had been fast asleep when they heard a knock on the sliding-door side and a voice shouting rather loud. Walter realized it must be already late in the morning because when he looked outside, sunlight shimmered through the tree cover. With his head positioned toward the back door, he could not immediately see who knocked at the side entrance. As he moved forward inside the bus and released the sliding door opener, the hair on the back of his neck rose; he felt an intense attention while the sliding door slowly opened.

A small man stood close to the door, enabling him to look inside the camper. Hilde remained under a bed sheet. Walter glided as elegantly as possible from the bus toward his slippers, which were on the ground outside. This caused the man to step back and lower his head. Looking up again, he used his left hand to knock his fist against a wiry breast and said something in Turkish ending with “Mehmed.”

In the meantime, Hilde dressed and stepped out of the bus. Extending her hand to the man immediately changed his demeanor from serious to comfortable, and a bright smile appeared on his toothless mouth. She used her foreign language talent and a little Turkish dictionary to discover that the man, named Mehmed, owned the land they were parked. He was a farmer who also kept a few animals, and his house with his family was not far from where they all stood. He made sure that Walter and Hilde understood that he wanted them to come over for dinner that night, and they promised to be there.

The explorers took the Volkswagen bus on an investigative trip farther down the road to find out whether there might be easy access to water, perhaps even a sandy beach, but it did not turn out that way. Still, many ancient ruins hidden within the vegetation and a beautiful panoramic view of the Mediterranean Sea made the trip worthwhile.

They returned to the parking spot on Mehmed's land just in time for sunset. To honor the dinner invitation, Hilde and Walter changed into their best clothes. The host came to their vehicle, and all three walked together for about ten minutes until they reached a large clearing with a house and some smaller buildings that looked like sheds or stables. In front of the house, a woman squatted at a small, round stove that produced light smoke. Mehmed introduced the guests to his wife and then guided them into the building.



They entered a large room that appeared to be completely empty except for some futon-like mattresses stacked against the back wall. Most of the center space was covered by various carpets and heavy, colorful materials. The compacted, rolled-clay earthen area in the middle had been left open for a variety of pots, pans, plates, glasses, and cups. Three girls of various ages were busy brushing the floor covers and arranging pots and dishes, as well as adding new items to the enormous collection already in the center of the dinner area. While Mehmed's wife worked the bread oven outside, placing large oval pieces of baked pita onto an aluminum tray covered with a towel, Mehmed poured boiling water into a teapot and scooped yogurt from a round jar into a clay pitcher. He placed both containers in the center. Then he started to laugh and clapped into his hands, signaling the guests to sit down on some pillows.

To the surprise of the travelers, Mehmed also produced a bottle of Turkish Raki, poured an inch of it into each of two glasses, and handed them to Walter and Hilde. In addition to water and Raki, Mehmed's wife offered a delicious cup of *Ayran*, which was made from yogurt. Everybody ate rice pilaf and pita bread. Soon the guests and the family were filled up.

Mehmed poured another Raki and offered black, sweet tea, and then started humming a tune. Walter had come to the dinner party prepared for just such an opportunity. He attached two stereo microphones to his cassette recorder and began taping the sounds around the house, including a myriad of crickets chirping and dogs barking. Mehmed's initial humming and eventual singing of a couple of folk songs became a delight for everybody present. When the guests bid their emotional farewell to the family, Walter realized that throughout the night, almost all attention had been on Hilde; he had stayed in the background. Mehmed walked them back to their vehicle with a candle in his hand.

The following day, the travelers waved good-bye through the open windows of the camper to the entire Mehmed family. It took a while to reach the main highway again, from where the yellow camper set out toward the next destination: Pamukkale, where hot springs and travertines—terraces of carbonate minerals left by flowing water—awaited them for a relaxing bath in the late evening. They slept very well in the cooler climate of the higher altitude inland.

Hilde and Walter looked at the map and planned how to travel through Turkey. Both liked the ocean and hence decided to return to Antalya and travel east along the beautiful and interesting Mediterranean coast, using the scenic route where many historical sites were located. Taking time to enjoy leisurely places, beaches, ancient ruins, mosques, and restaurants, it took

them almost a week to reach Side, founded by Greek settlers most likely in the seventh century BC. Alexander the Great had occupied Side without a struggle in 333 BC.

On a spot near the ocean, not far from the city, Walter and Hilde met a couple from Switzerland. Possibly the fact that both couples were using Volkswagens to travel in or merely the beauty of their surroundings led the two couples to talk to each other. A common pattern was to exchange tips and warnings and ask questions about issues that might arise along the way. The coincidence of meeting Hans and Marie from Bern resulted in a rich source of information and an encouragement regarding the method of transportation. The two had been on the road already for more than eighteen months. They had covered the whole continent of Africa, from north to south, and then shipped their vehicle by boat to Asia. Only once, during the Sahara passage in northern Africa, did they have an issue from a never-ending washboard road. They told Walter and Hilde everything from where to change local currency and in what denominations in various countries, to oil change instructions and customs border checks at different borders, as well as what country to avoid and where visitors were welcome. Hans especially cautioned about the border between Persia and Afghanistan. He told them that a young boy employed by the Afghan border authorities had either inherited a sixth sense or had the sniffing talent of a trained dog. He could be very dangerous in case drugs or any other contraband was hidden in the vehicle.

For nearly two weeks, Walter and Hilde progressed, sometimes south on small coastal roads, but continuously east. They met new travelers and many they had seen before. In Kayseri, Hilde and Walter noticed a change in how people dressed and behaved. Women did not appear without scarves and long dresses almost touching the ground, and more men wore wide pants with a lot of space in the front; their demeanor became more serious when the foreigners entered shops in the country. Children seemed very excited to see the strangers. Until this point, the visitors could still park anywhere on a quiet piece of land inside or near a town or on the property of an inn or hotel without disturbance, and nobody approached them.

On the road between Kayseri and Malatya, it became apparent that they had left Europe and were traveling in Asia. Children now stayed frozen still with somber expressions when the bus passed by. Some of them picked up gravel and threw it at the Volkswagen. From there on it became the norm that angry children around villages appeared from nowhere. They would run next to the car for a while, trying to throw something against it. Whoever was driving the camper at the time tried to avoid being hit, sometimes without success. They were approaching Malatya,

a city site that had been occupied for thousands of years by Assyrians, Romans, and then Ottomans, and had been the scene of anti-Armenian violence during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whether one had anything to do with the other or whether the children were Armenian children, Walter and Hilde did not find out.

Continuing east, they remembered Swiss Hans's advice to park only in fenced and guarded compounds at night when traversing eastern Turkey. The region also changed dramatically into mountainous terrain with wide valleys and high peaks, very little green, occasionally a village-turned-oasis next to the road.

Van Gölü emerged behind a turn of the road. When they caught sight of it for the first time, it generated a feeling of awe. Lake Van, the largest lake in Turkey and a saline and Soda Lake, stretched for seventy miles at its widest point. The watercolor ranged from deep blue to white. Walter and Hilde enjoyed the lake's company for two more days through the driver's side window because the road they traveled took them from one end to the other.

## Persia

As they entered the city of Tabriz in East Azerbaijan, Walter thought once again, *this is finally Asia*. With wide eyes, he took in whatever he could observe. They had covered the distance between Van Gölü in eastern Turkey and Iran's fourth largest city—and one of its historical capitals—in three full travel days, including border crossing.

Once in Iran, the scenery changed gradually. Road quality improved, as well as available gas stations along the highways and in populated areas. The well-maintained highways made it easy to drive long distances through rocky flats and high mountains on both horizons. It felt relaxing that no one appeared to care or take offense at the foreign vehicle.

The season had changed to midsummer. A massive quantity of harvested apricots was laid out to dry in the sun wherever humans lived along the road. Whether in small hamlets or midsize villages, apricots were everywhere on specially prepared clay sites between houses or on market squares. People spoke some Turkish and French, which enabled Hilde to obtain whatever they needed.

Tabriz welcomed the visitors with a festival. Hilde and Walter succeeded in finding the camper compound, properly secured within gray-brick walls; foreign travelers who toured in vehicles could lodge there as long as they wished. The new arrivals maneuvered their camping bus between other automobiles and modified trucks, parked side by side. A small building contained restrooms and shower facilities. Other tourists advised them immediately of all necessary details they needed to know. They mentioned that a local festival was occurring within walking distance, and everybody could attend.

Hilde and Walter wasted no time in making their way toward the fiesta. They came to a soccer field in the park on which a huge tent had been set up. Music sounded from a distance—the kind of music they called *ashyg*, which is found in most parts of northwestern Iran and particularly in Tabriz. *Bağlama* or *saz* instruments and a type of flute played the Mugam Ottoman classical music. On long tables, a buffet provided the local fare of grilled meats, lamb and gyros, kebabs, different yogurt drinks and dishes, fruits and fruit drinks, and sweet pastries. Hungry from a long day on the road, the Germans helped themselves to whatever tempted them and sat down among the locals. Some of them tried conversations, but the noise

and most of all the language caused difficulties. Nevertheless, everybody enjoyed the special occasion, and after sunset, the happy visitors returned to the camper complex.

Very early the next morning, Walter woke up with extremely painful cramps in his stomach and intestines. He got up, quickly released the sliding door of the bus, and ran to the restroom building. He luckily found a vacant toilet and spent a long time sitting on it with recurring spasms and liquid discharges. After this initial rude awakening, Walter's routine changed dramatically from sitting behind the steering wheel to sitting on the toilet in that compound in Tabriz, East Azerbaijan. For the entire next week, he tried everything available, except food, to stop the pain—antibiotics, diarrhea medication, activated carbon tablets, herbs, herbal tea, salt tablets—but without success; anything he swallowed shortly came back out in liquid form. After three days, he noticed a subtle relief of the symptoms when he drank black tea. From then on, he concentrated on black tea and drank a lot of it the following days and nights, and by the end of the week, he felt better and started to eat a little dry flatbread.

When Walter felt strong enough to walk, he and Hilde drove to town, parked the bus in what appeared to be a safe place, and strolled down a busy street. As they walked, Walter took the position he had in such situations ever since Antalya, Turkey: about four feet behind and slightly to the right of Hilde. He changed into her bodyguard. This had been a learning process starting when they left Europe, crossed the Bosphorus, and entered Asia. Many invitations had followed the memorable experience at Mehmed's place, and Hilde and Walter had accepted a few, but the more east they advanced, the clearer it became that the only interest anybody had was in Hilde. Additionally, local women stopped existing for the Western visitors; they never appeared during the few moments the tourists had any contact with local residents while trying to purchase something. The attention of the suddenly men-only society concentrated purely on Hilde and increased to the point where Walter automatically took his bodyguard position whenever they were in public.

In Tabriz, the experience intensified a notch or two. It felt to Walter as though he were running a gauntlet while moving on the sidewalk. Frequently groups of men or individual men would try to touch, grab, whistle, and talk to Hilde in Farsi or English, with Walter behind her struggling to keep them away. In addition, shopkeepers of jewelries, materials, work of local artists, and carpets tried to catch the attention of the foreign pedestrian. To get relief from the constant coming-onto, Hilde and her bodyguard accepted the invitation of a solicitous shop

owner to visit his cooled store with carpeted floor that sold materials “Give you good price, come on in and have tea, please sit down, make you baksheesh.”

Six hundred kilometers from Tabriz to Tehran could be done in half a day. The team did just that. In Tehran, the local compound was close to the downtown area. Surrounded by solid, six-foot wooden walls, it looked like a rest area next to a freeway and felt like hostel lodging, but was not much different from the Tabriz facility. Surviving traffic and driving methods in the city required a driver to be either cold-blooded and merciless or intelligent and proficient. Hilde did not drive in Tehran, and Walter drove as if he had been born cold-blooded. No rules of the battle existed; no authorities supervised the combat situation.

Much of the city was covered with wide avenues and medians that reminded them of Madrid or Paris. The friends visited various extensive bazaars, which specialized in the sale and repair of specific goods, such as copper, brass, clothing, jewelry. Some sections of the city reminded them of historic old towns in Italy or France, as did the small café bars. Hilde and Walter enjoyed the European flair before continuing farther east. To savor a strong, delicious cup of coffee with cream and pastry seemed like a real delicacy, and later a dinner in an international restaurant made the time enjoyable.

None of the vehicles in the compound stayed longer than a day or two, and the yellow camper from Frankfurt left after three nights in town. The leg from Tehran to Mashhad was nearly nine hundred kilometers and passed through deserts in beautiful brownish colors, mountains with high peaks, and the Khar Turan National Park, which protected a small surviving population of Asian cheetahs and at times looked similar to German forests. Because of excellent highway conditions, and no traffic jams, the travel couple rolled into Mashhad the second day after leaving Tehran.

Having been on the road for roughly two months by then, Hilde and Walter had become an expert travel team without relationship issues, tensions between them, or even the slightest misunderstandings. Life on the road, crammed into a small space, did not affect their respect and love for each other. Wherever they parked the mobile home and opened its doors, they lived with a magnificent vista or uninterrupted space to the horizon, the beauty of a beach with turquoise seawater, or a secluded garden in a hotel. Frequently, they enjoyed all of it alone. An established routine ensured smooth transition through the days. Walter drove two-thirds of the time, and Hilde looked after their bodily needs during lunch breaks, producing delicious fresh salads or

cooking a hot meal on the stove. They listened to many hours of their own music from the tape recorder system, and Walter felt increasingly excited by thinking of where they would be going next: Afghanistan.

The mobile tourist campground in Mashhad did not look much different from the ones in Tabriz and Tehran. Travelers humbly accepted their necessity and availability. The city, the second largest in Iran and one of the holiest places in the Shia Muslim world, immediately appeared even more impenetrable than any they had visited before. Entire city blocks were inaccessible to foreigners, even with proper dress code—especially the area around the Mashhad shrine of the Imam Reza, which had been bombed by Russian forces in 1912. Considering the situation and weighing the reasons, Walter and Hilde decided to keep their layover brief, but not without satisfactory rest and some sightseeing in parts of the town, they could access.

One visit to a bazaar similar to those they had previously seen ended in an impressive carpet store, where they sat down with the owner on top of folded and piled carpets and sipped black tea with a lot of sugar in it. The proprietor spoke English and had his staff exhibit carpets of different design and materials allegedly handmade by local artists. As time went by in the carpet store, Walter noticed a prayer rug in subtle light green with delicate ornamentation of the Razavi Khorasan Province he liked. When he showed his interest, the owner would not let go, proposing better deals by the minute. Suddenly Hilde announced her interest in a rug with dark-red colors plus ornamentation. Fresh tea arrived and the parties discussed details of the sales. Everybody agreed on the sales price; the carpets would be sealed in secure jute bags and put aside until the tourists returned to Frankfurt and deposit money in a Persian bank.

## Afghanistan

Knowing that the Afghan experience would be different from the previous Islamic encounters, Walter looked forward to it very much. On the map, the city of Herat was their next destination. Before they could continue from the Persian part of the desert into Afghanistan, however, they needed to cross another border with customs formalities and Carnet de Duane entries. Hilde and Walter also remembered Swiss Hans's advice—from what seemed a long time ago in Turkey—to watch out for a small boy at the border station, that if they had something to hide, they should get rid of it before the border.

As Walter slowly maneuvered the last few miles in Iran, the highway turned rougher and tighter, and they spotted a couple of buildings in the distance, wavering in the midday heat. Advancing closer to these structures, which solidified before their eyes, the travelers identified the construction as a small fort built in a square with ten-foot-high clay walls and large closed gates. When they reached the stronghold, the gates opened and let the yellow recreational vehicle enter. Then they closed again.

A relatively large interior space opened up where a variety of vehicles were parked, including buses and trucks, domestic and international, limousines and camp-mobiles, some with doors open and others from which assorted parts had been removed. Groups of people stood around the vehicles, while men with beards and in long, loose black trousers and jackets reviewed papers or maintained heated discussions while waving with their hands. One orderly file of tourist vehicles lined up in the middle of the inspection area, and a bearded man in tattered clothing pointed their bus toward this row of vehicles.

From inside the bus, both Walter and Hilde simultaneously saw the boy. He had just scaled a medium-sized reconfigured bus, touching and sniffing at stuff. He walked atop its roof, where a lot of luggage and other items were secured by ropes and chains. The license plate was in Arabic, but they could not determine the country of origin.

It took a long time until someone attended to the camping bus from Frankfurt. As if he happened to be the only customs agent at this particular border station, the perhaps-fourteen-year-old teenager looked at Walter and Hilde. He gazed at their rooftop, where a modest storage space contained a large gasoline canister and a metal box with such spare parts as spark plugs and light bulbs. The boy entered through the sliding door and sat down for a moment on the extra



seat between the bench and the fridge. Smiling, he asked for papers, pointed to the carnet in Hilde's hand, then grabbed it and left.

Fifteen minutes later, a different man came up to the bus and handed the carnet back to Hilde with one less page inside it and an entry stamp on another piece of paper. Fully aware that this meant freedom to enter the “promised land” of Afghanistan, Walter started the engine with authority and Hilde closed the sliding door without delay. Their bus moved gradually through the compound to another gate opposite the entrance. When the gate closed behind them, Walter looked at Hilde with a big smile, feeling relieved and happy.

Hilde smiled back at him and said, “Now, let's go to Herat.”

The sun had set miles earlier, and no city of Herat was in sight. They did not want to be on the road when darkness arrived. The closer they came to the third-largest city in Afghanistan, the more activity there was on the highway and the more dispersed dust filled the cool night air. People with kerosene lamps directed almost invisible traffic. Suddenly the small convoy stopped.

A bearded man came up to the driver's-side window and asked Walter something in Herati. Walter replied, “Hotel, motel,” while opening both hands and pulling up his shoulders.

The man signaled to the right and soon thereafter, another kerosene lamp appeared in front of a dark fortress-like building with closed doors. The person with the lamp waved to them while standing on the other side of the road. Walter slowly drove across the dark street; the man must have knocked at the building's gate because it opened just enough to let the bus enter and then quickly closed again. After adjusting to the lighting conditions, the arrivals identified dim light bulbs over a number of doors, as well as vegetation in the middle of what appeared to be the central point or garden area of an inn.

They had made it. Some friendly faces appeared out of the dark and one who asked, “Would you like something to drink or to eat?”

When the couple had finished their lamb kebob with rice pilaf and yogurt, they remained sitting for a moment in the small chamber, which functioned as dining and breakfast room. Being that late, they were the only guests. They drank Dutch beer from bottles that the waiter had offered.

The tired travelers retired to their cozy bed with the green corduroy cover, grateful to have made it so far and very appreciative for the small amount the waiter asked for dinner. Next morning, they awakened refreshed and, after breakfast, eager to see the important Friday Mosque

of Herat from the twelfth and fifteenth centuries with its intricate tile work and the ancient citadel built by Alexander the Great. They also checked out the trip to Kandahar, their next destination. To reach Kabul, the general consensus from fellow travelers and a few local, English-speaking individuals was to take the longer route via Kandahar because of road conditions and safety issues. Therefore, the yellow bus left Herat early next morning on the highway, first going south and then north again.

A motorway in reasonably good condition and fast-moving convoys enabled them to cover the distance before sunset. They stopped for lunch and other pressing matters whenever necessary, using cultivated areas that appeared occasionally in the moon-like landscape. Wherever humans gained access to water, green oases had been developed.

What did not happen in Herat materialized in the city of Kandahar. From the outside, their accommodation facility was almost identical to what they had found before, except that more sunlight reached the atrium, and the grass in the middle looked alive. The motel staff appeared friendlier than at the one before, and the place seemed almost fully booked. People sat on the grass and at small tables drinking tea or yogurt beverages. When they exited the camper, Walter had a big grin.

Hilde asked, “What is happening?”

He pointed to a group of young men and women. One had lit a huge self-made joint, and the person who inhaled from its rolled cardboard end started to cough profusely. A couple sitting on the lawn sucked on long, flexible tubes that were attached to a hookah. The water in it bubbled as if boiling, and smoke moved up into the tubes.

“That’s why I am grinning,” Walter replied. “Shangri-La in Kandahar.”

The atmosphere in this fortress-turned-lodging-house had a peaceful effect on minds and bodies of the arriving tourists.

After Hilde and Walter finished their camper preparations for later in the night and took a shower, they had a delicious stew with lots of spices and fresh vegetables. Then Walter asked a trustworthy-looking local man where he could obtain some real black Afghan hashish.

The man, with short-cut black hair and a thin mustache, answered with a disarming smile, “My name is Barbrak. You can buy the black from me—a short time ago, my aunt finished working on a fresh clump.”

The man left for a few minutes and then returned with a rolled, six-inch-wide, light-blue band of plastic open on both sides. He handed it to Walter, who smelled the fragrance of fresh vernal flowers. Walter unrolled the thick plastic stripe slowly and then saw for the first time what people sometimes talked about in the West: black Afghan, a generous lump of oily, sticky hash, fresh from Barbrak's family workshop, for an insignificant amount of money.

The two men started talking about Germany and traveling, and Walter mentioned that he had had a bad case of food poisoning in Persia.

His new friend said, "You know what, if it happens again, take this. It will help you for sure." He handed Walter a black ball of soft material that did not smell like hash. "This is raw opium. It will cure problems with the intestines."

Walter accepted the gift gratefully, remembering that nothing had produced any healing effect during his encounter with dysentery in Tabriz.

Along with two young men from Germany riding in the backseat, they left the motel complex the next morning, heading north on the main highway toward Kabul. The additional passengers in the van needed a ride east. Their final destination: India. Occasionally Hilde and Walter provided lifts to people who appeared friendly and cooperative.

When the troupe reached Kabul, Walter found the perfect hotel, the Tajwar, with parking space for the mobile home. The young Germans took a room in the hotel. The Tajwar was a two-story building with twelve rooms, a small restaurant, shower facilities, and the car lot between trees that provided plenty of shade during the hot summer months. Walter maneuvered the camper in such a way that the pop-up top extended right into a tree. It became a relaxing habit to use the third cot bed up in the tree for a siesta after lunch.

By good luck, they visited Afghan during a time when no unrests, revolutions, invasions, or other foreign interventions were occurring. All the different ethnic groups and tribes lived together harmoniously and thought of themselves primarily as Afghans. None of the locals cared how the Western tourists dressed or behaved—except the salespeople along streets, in the bazaars, and wherever they offered their products, who tried to attract their attention. Anything available could be bought for a fraction of what visitors paid in their home countries. A favorite restaurant offered Wiener schnitzel and French fries plus salad for fifty cents—though nobody in their right minds touched the salads. A variety of beer brands could be obtained at any time. In

addition to all sorts of homegrown products from the fields in the countryside, the trouble-free environment provided every visitor to Kabul an enjoyable time.

One day, Hilde and Walter went to a traditional Afghan fine-dining restaurant with host and separate dining niches for every guest. They sat on large, soft pillows on the floor instead of chairs, and a round brass plate with rims functioned as a table. Walter brought his cassette recorder in anticipation of the local music. After they had settled on the pillows, he fabricated a tobacco-hash joint from the local black and lighted it. This moment would be unreal and unimaginable anywhere else in the world, except Amsterdam. Walter handed the joint to Hilde, who felt somewhat unsure about this and initially passed, but she later accepted the potent smoke. At most sitting nooks, one or all the guests smoked something and in different ways.

Musicians near the center wall began to tune their instruments: the *dombura*, a *dutar*, and a *rubab*, as well as a *zurna* flute and percussion instruments *tabla* and *daf*. Walter settled back into the cushion leaning against the wall, his right hand on the cassette recorder, waiting for the right moment to press the record button. Stereo microphones had been inserted left and right into a khaki denim bag that Hilde had handmade specifically for the recorder. The musicians intermingled tuning of their instruments and real play. Suddenly, Walter felt transported to a world of sounds he had never heard before. A sense of Orient carried him somewhere else for a while. When he opened his eyes, fresh yogurt, coriander, garlic, spring onions, tomatoes, potatoes, and fruit stood in front of him on the brass plate.

Hilde looked at him and asked with a smile, "Do you like this music?"

He replied, "Oh man, I love it. Is this real?"

Naturally, the tourists visited the old part of town, with bazaars nestled along narrow, crooked streets. Carpets, rugs, wall covers, trousers, shirts, blouses, fabrics, copper, brass, semiprecious turquoise, lapis lazuli, tourmaline, and quartz were all offered for below-bargain prices. Professional purveyors and importers from all over the world filled container loads with cheap Afghan products to be sold in European or American hippie stores.

Two weeks into their stay, Hilde and Walter decided to make a side trip to the Buddhas of Bamiyan, about 180 kilometers northwest of Kabul. On a bumpy, unpaved road, they made the drive in a day and took in the sights of these ancient statues from 500 BC. The temperature in the area, more than eight thousand feet in altitude, turned quite cool at night. Souvenir shops

dominated the vicinity of the site, and facilities did not exist. After one night near the Buddhas, the yellow camper returned back to the capital, their spot at the Tajwar still available.

The next day, Walter went on an errand, walking down the main street, where every few steps someone offered something for sale. He was not in a bargaining mood; his mind was set on buying only yogurt and some flatbread at a nearby small, wooden shack, when he noticed a very young boy cuddling something in his arm.

The boy saw him approaching. He conjured a few-days-old puppy into his hands and said, “You can have for good price.”

At first, Walter did not want to come close to the boy or touch the tiny dog. Then something made him stop and take a closer look at this heartbreaking scene. The puppy's eyes were closed, and it was trying unsuccessfully to suck on something. Within thirty seconds, the boy decreased his demand from five hundred to fifty Afghanis. An internal struggle began in Walter, debating the pros and cons and at the same time looking at the puppy, which produced barely audible wailing sounds. He passed the money, less than twenty-five cents in value, took the tiny body that fit on one hand, and moved on because a crowd of bystanders had already gathered.

When Walter returned with yogurt, bread, and dog, Hilde cried out, “Oh my god, what did you do?” and then a little softer, “Look at it—it is crying.”

A concerned and trying time began, during which the new dog owners struggled to find the right diet for their new bus mate. When the situation seemed stabilized and the puppy kept everything he swallowed inside, the three left Kabul for the Indian border.

## India

Before Walter and Hilde reached the next "promised land," however, they had to overcome a few obstacles. The first one came in form of the Hindu Kush mountain range and, in the middle of it, the infamous Khyber Pass. Nobody with opinions about it advised crossing during nighttime due to the activities of bandits. The transit through the mountains and the pass went through an extremely desolate zone on endless winding roads, where Walter made sure to be in the company of other vehicles at all times.

They left Kabul early one morning and stopped for the night behind the mountains and Khyber Pass, in a valley not too far from the Pakistani border. The next day began with another piece of carnet taken and another country opening up for them. After about six hundred kilometers, they reached Lahore, a city a short distance from the Indian border. The traffic of people, animals, trucks, buses, and very few cars meant slow progress and heightened attention at the steering wheel. It also caused them to reach Lahore after sunset. Walter became lost in the city, more so than he had ever experienced before. In addition to darkness and extremely crowded streets—which looked like a scene from a movie set before Christ—a dust cloud enveloped everything, preventing safe maneuvering at more than ten miles per hour. Scarce street lighting added to visual confusion while they tried to navigate the ancient streets. Luckily, penetrating all of it was a neon sign that not only displayed Urdu letters, but also the word "hotel" in a Western language.

Hilde yelled, pointing with an outstretched arm to the left. "You see it?" At the same time, Walter jerked the steering wheel of the Volkswagen and turned into an entranceway of the hotel with a courtyard.

They took a room and then showers, but that did not supply relief during night temperatures of around ninety degrees and high humidity. Hilde soaked her bed sheet in water, which helped her fall asleep while a ceiling fan whirled on maximum speed.

The next test waited for them at the border with India. Because of the ongoing conflict between the neighboring countries, each traveler had to be scrutinized especially thoroughly. The carnet with its official stamps helped to some extent, allowing them to drive into India.

The spectacle on streets did not change when Walter and Hilde entered the country, unless one added the cows to it, which enriched the atmosphere. In Amritsar, the pair secured a

parking place in the garden area of a guesthouse within walking distance of the Harmandir Sahib, the Golden Temple.

Still early in the evening, they walked through a residential area with manicured lawns and large mansions before reaching a hill and going up an easy rise to the top. When the couple arrived at the crown of the hill, they sat on the ground, awestruck. Constructed as a square, the Golden Temple was surrounded by a large lake. Within the temple complex, adjoining the lake and the temple were other white buildings with lots of marble and gold work. The whole development appeared to vibrate. Initially meant to be a place of worship where men and women from all lifestyles and all religions could revere God equally, its daily activities started very early in the morning. The holy scriptures, Siri Guru Granth Sahi, were brought down from their nightly resting place, and then priests read the message of the day. Musical chants and prayers amplified by a speaker system could be heard until late.

The total image reverberated up to Walter and Hilde's position on the hill. They walked down to the entrance, where everybody left their shoes. The kitchen provided free cooked vegetarian food for everybody who needed to eat. As a result of the uninterrupted prayers, chanting, and meditative music over the loudspeakers and the enormous amount of people inside the complex, they naturally dropped into a trance-like state of consciousness. It was late at night when they left to return to the guesthouse.

What followed could be called training days for their visit in the Indian subcontinent. Getting used to persistent masses of people was the largest part. It happened frequently that where a moment before nobody seemed to be around, suddenly an entire village surrounded the yellow bus. The novelty of this situation, combined with the behavior of the locals, was challenging. The natives customarily simply glanced at the strangers without saying anything or motioning. Every so often Walter and Hilde quickly gathered and secured all their things and left the scene. When that happened, usually someone had pulled the handle of the sliding door, which then opened and had to be closed again and locked, either from the outside or with Hilde working her way back and managing from the inside. Other times, Walter tried funny faces, jokes, guitar playing, or simply talking in German to villagers, sometimes producing smiles on some faces.

The pair learned to locate and use government guesthouses. These facilities had been built for traveling government employees all over the country and stood mostly empty. When

they happened to be at an especially pretty location or building, the couple rented a room for the night to feel the luxury of a wide bed with a mosquito net and a solid roof over their heads. In most cases, they just parked the bus within the fenced, guarded property of the guesthouse and enjoyed time in peace without being watched.

On their way to the capital city of the country, New Delhi, they needed to pass through a region where many waterways crossed each other. The monsoon season had left a lot of them enlarged, and some areas stood under water. As the yellow bus made its way through the state of Haryana, it came to a flooded piece of road over which water streamed with a current. Floodwater also stretched on both sides of the road as far as the eye could see. Small islands with trees appeared here and there, but no buildings; this part of the state seemed largely unpopulated.

Walter stopped the bus at the edge of the deluge and asked Hilde, "What do you think?"

They looked around the area and noticed a couple of people with some water buffaloes moving through the water in their direction.

"Mmm," she said, "this is risky. What do we do if we get stuck? On the other hand, there is no place to return. I can see where the water stops and the road appears again. It is not that far."

Walter started the engine, put it in first gear, and moved slowly down the road into the water. After a few yards, the water level rose because of a decline in the road, and the engine died. Walter struggled to restart it unsuccessfully and then stopped trying; he did not want to waste the battery as well. Leaving the bus via the driver's-side door, he stepped into knee-deep water. Hilde took the driver's seat while Walter tried to push the bus from the back, but it did not move an inch. He waved toward the group of men with buffaloes, and two of them approached and started watching. Straining to stay calm, Walter made the pushing motion against the bus, but the men in their loincloths shook their heads. He then realized that this was the traditional head motion that could mean anything.

Walter said in English, "Please help pushing the bus for a little distance."

Eventually, the two men came to the vehicle, and then the three of them pushed the bus, which began to move. It actually moved better than expected because no barriers had shifted onto the road under the water. After about ten minutes of hard pushing, the bus stood back on a dry piece of road.



After thanking the toothless men for their helping hands with a “Namaste” and some rupees, Walter climbed back into the front passenger seat. Hilde tried the engine again, and it came alive after a few tries. Down the road, the water withdrew considerably. Walter looked for a good spot to stop and then performed an emergency oil change to make sure no water remained in the engine block.

The two companions and their little friend, Fritz, entered the National Capital Territory of Delhi before noon on a hot, smoggy day, and Walter thought again that he was driving onto a biblical film set. What had previously occurred occasionally during the journey now became solid and constant: oxcarts and buffalo carts with wheels as large as the Volkswagen bus between smoking trucks, public buses, mopeds, meditating cows, and human beings in a jam-packed composite on the roads. It was never clear where the sidewalk started or even whether it existed. The drive through ancient times continued for hours until Hilde noticed a sign in English that indicated gas production in an industrial area.

While they had tried to boil water for the morning tea at the last rest stop, their propane gas bottle was emptied. They got a refill, and by lucky coincidence, a man working in the refill station office knew exactly how they could get to the location in New Delhi that had been recommended to them.

Within the hour, they entered New Delhi and navigated to the secret lodging place, about which information had been handed on from traveler to traveler. Leaving the wide avenue they had driven down, Walter navigated the bus through a hidden gate behind dense shrubs and slowly entered a large clearing. In amazement, Walter and Hilde encountered a genuinely perfect place of rest in this gigantic city. Many trees provided sufficient shade for mobile tourists, some of whom were already in the park. To their surprise, they discovered restrooms and showers in a redbrick building.

A well-deserved week of rest, shopping, and sightseeing began for all three. The smallest of the three needed additional tender loving care because during the travels he had become infected again with all kinds of bacteria and germs. His owners found a veterinarian and obtained medications for the young puppy. Walter and Hilde investigated the Connaught Circle area where shops carried anything a traveler might want or need. Walter got some loose, white cotton shirts, jackets, and trousers that he noticed other tourists occasionally wearing and that fit perfectly the climate and the touring job. Hilde stocked up on sari material and colorful bracelets.

## Going North

Many travelers they encountered wanted to live in a houseboat on Dal Lake in Srinagar, Kashmir. Walter and Hilde had alternate plans. They had heard about an area in the mountains with the same characteristics as Kashmir, but with fewer tourists and no insurgencies and killings. They proceeded north toward the Himalayan foothills, passing through the city of Chandigarh. A bit cooler already due to altitude, they enjoyed nights in gardens of various government guesthouses.

The road to the next stop, Dharmsala, proceeded in fairly good condition for the most part through beautiful forests. Both of the travelers knew that the Dalai Lama had established the Tibetan exile administration in the region and resided in a suburb of Dharmsala, McLeod Ganj. They did not know how many Tibetans moved into the narrow valley, which narrowed the higher up they went.

It began to rain and did not stop during the rest of the day and the following night. The weather generally reflected the mood in the valley, but Hilde and Walter also encountered many smiling faces. Most of the refugees dressed traditionally, women in dark-colored wrap dresses over a blouse, and if married, a colorfully striped, woven-wool apron. If they were fortunate enough to have kept some of their jewelry, they displayed it in the form of amber, red copal, and turquoise beads on leather bands around their necks.

Merchants along the wet streets sold many items from small shacks and off wooden racks. From a woman they bought a prayer wheel that included the handwritten prayer manuscript inside and a set of meditative, hand-painted images of deities. Eating food there represented an issue. Many eating-places lined the center of town, but it took time to find an acceptable-looking establishment where they could risk having dinner.

One of the reasons they had gone to the Dharmsala valley was a desire to meet the Dalai Lama in person. Neither claimed to be religious in any way, but the persona of the Dalai Lama and his potential presence in the area attracted their attention. They had no idea whether he even stayed in McLeod Ganj at the time. Still, off they went by foot from the camper's parking spot to

the former colonial British summer picnic spot two miles away where the Tibetan exile administration had settled.

After walking straight up for half an hour, they reached a dead-end lane with a white wall and a wooden gate. Behind the gate was a guard without any weapon. He ushered them into a reception room. Two monks in dark-purple robes sat behind a small table and when asked explained to the visitors that, yes, the Dalai Lama was present and granted audiences. The next one was scheduled for the following morning and had two spaces available; no more than fifteen to twenty people would be present at His Holiness's meetings. Hilde and Walter happily entered their names onto the guest list.

The next morning after breakfast, they dressed up in the freshest, immaculate items they could find in the bus's wall closets and made sure to be on time for the event. The group of guests included both Westerners and Asians who sat on benches in a small carpeted area covered with a clay tile roof but open on all sides. Pillows had been placed for comfort for the waiting crowd of no more than fifteen. When the Dalai Lama arrived in his purple robe and eyeglasses, he smiled, greeted everybody with the Namaste salutation. He sat down on a low bench about six feet away from Hilde and Walter. People asked questions, and the Dalai Lama answered all of them until no further requests were made. Many visitors wanted to know about his daily life. Walter remembered the Dalai Lama's enchanting humor, that he was very amusing as well as comforting in his normality. The audience lasted perhaps forty minutes until His Holiness got up from his seat, folded his hands in front of him, bowed toward the guests, smiled, and then left the premises.

As Hilde and Walter, with little Fritzi, traveled back slowly through the valley toward the highway heading east, they thought about the meeting with the Dalai Lama. "Did you feel anything?" Hilde asked.

"Not really anything special, He just appeared so ordinary, sympathetic."

On the third day, they shifted north again and soon entered the Kullu valley with a final destination of Manali. Having reached the valley at noon, Walter stopped the bus to stretch out and perhaps find a restaurant to eat lunch.

The sun shone brightly through the forest of tall pine trees between majestic hills, but not too hot, as the couple walked hand-in-hand. Light and shadows played a diffusing game between the trees and undergrowth. Strolling toward a village, they reached a lengthy clearing between

two hills. Walter said, “Wait a moment,” and let go of Hilde's hand, continuing to walk by himself and using both hands to kind of slide and rub specific green plants between them. Hilde did not notice that it was a wild plantation of ripe ganja plants through that they had walked. Walter showed her his greenish-black hands and massaged them for a moment. He came up with a nice bullet of fresh hash.

As they continued to walk, another type of wild plantation came into sight: apple trees. Immediately he picked one low-hanging, ripe specimen of the most beautiful apples he had ever seen. He took a hearty bite out of it and cried out, “Oh my god, this must be nirvana!”

Hilde agreed that the apples tasted delicious. Kullu valley offered free gifts from nature they had never received before, especially not in this sequence.

Traveling through the north Indian state of Himachal Pradesh continued to be an experience of uninterrupted enjoyment, and when the city of Simla materialized through their windshield, the Germans did not expect further indulgences. To their surprise, the British occupants of the onetime capital city of the state had left their mark in eye-candy fashion. Solid buildings with a European touch, constructed not too long ago, paid tribute to the English affectation of living in luxury and style, even if only temporarily. A lot of effort and energy had been invested during the eighteenth century to prepare a suitable summer resort during the hot season in various government locations in the southern plains. The combination of the genuine luxury from the past and the pleasant weather made the partners' visit an exceptional event. After digging deep down into their closets to find sweaters, they enjoyed a stroll through town and breathing in the fresh, cool, humid mountain air.

After descending into the foothills of the Himalayas, being once again surrounded by an enormous number of people, animals, and vehicles on the roads, as well as everywhere else, reminded them of where they had already traveled. Chandigarh, Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh, and then Gorakhpur carried them close to an entry point into Nepal.

## Roof of The World

The rather short distance from Gorakhpur to the Nepalese border, plus the uneventful transit from one country into the other, did not prepare them for the actual mission of advancing farther into Nepal. The border-crossing station was in a large, mostly gray-brown, rocky valley with creeks rushing next to the road. No questioning or investigations took place, only the usual carnet formalities concerning the vehicle and a friendly pat one of the soldiers at the guard station gave Fritz's head.

Off they went to nearby Butwal, a large town in southern Nepal. Because of the time of day, they decided to spend the night and then head out to attack the mountain road early the next morning. A local restaurant served the traditional Nepalese menu items *dal*, *bhaat*, and *tarkari*.

The next day rain lashed sporadically while dark clouds raced across the skies. The almost vertical mountain wall on the left side of the road shimmered in black from the moisture running down. A few vehicles, mostly trucks, moved slowly in procession mode up the perilous, steep gravel-and-rock passage through a long valley. Occasionally the water from the mountain wall increased to a torrent that flooded the road. Here and there, some workers with wide straw hats and shovels appeared to be digging into piles of mud. In stop-and-go style, the convoy managed about five miles per hour. Nobody in the Volkswagen thought about a break, instead concentrating fully on the environment and the movements of the vehicles.

Late afternoon it felt as if the pass was coming closer, and then it happened: the river on the right side, which came down from the mountains, filled almost the entire space necessary for any maneuvering of the convoy, and on the left side appeared heavy equipment and men with flags indicating they should stop.

Walter opened his window and yelled, "Why stop?" A road worker pointed toward the mountain wall, and then they saw.

Where previously the valley had broadened somewhat to provide space for a stretched curve to the right, the wall had become alive with masses of gravel and rocks sliding down. A small path had been cleared through the shifting tons blocking the road. Everybody stared at the falling debris.

Then Walter noticed movement in front of him. The truck they were following continued driving, accelerated quickly, pushed itself through water and rock gravel, managed to come free,

and disappeared around the corner in the distance. The flagman closest to the Volkswagen raised his hand up and suddenly started to wave with force. Walter put the stick shift in first gear, changed quickly into the next one and started to slide left and right. He saw gravel coming his way. He pushed the gas pedal all the way down, and the yellow camper passed the danger zone.

Within another hour of driving, they found a settlement with some space where they could park the bus. Hilde quickly fabricated a home-cooked meal out of Hungarian cans and leftovers, and later Walter sat on a small chair, rolled a black Afghan joint, and played his guitar with passion for the first time since they had left Frankfurt.

Next morning, bright sunlight awakened the sleepy travelers. Even Fritzi, the puppy, hadn't risen with the nearby rooster. When Hilde opened the sliding door, she said, "Look, look—the mountains."

For the first time, they could see a variety of Himalayan Mountains with their snowcaps far away in the clear air. Taking in the view a little longer, Walter prepared their first tea in Nepal while sitting in the door of the dew-covered camp-mobile.

It took them only a couple of hours to reach Kathmandu, at an altitude of forty-six hundred feet. They found the recommended small hotel on the outskirts of the city but within walking distance. The inn provided space for tourists with vehicles and let them use showers and restrooms for a small fee. Walter parked the bus on a spot with a view of mountains as well the city. The couple and Fritzi went shopping to stock up on fresh vegetables, rice, fresh milk, yogurt, and a few other necessities. Sweet leisure time began; resting and recuperating from the miles they had covered became the number one priority.

After a week, Walter's birthday approached. At the same time, he began to feel uncomfortable with his situation. After five months of traveling, being with the same person twenty-four hours a day had caught up with him. Having to be aware of the environment and other people at all times, wherever they went, made him feel restricted inside the bus with Hilde. The couple talked about it. Hilde said she did not experience the same. When Walter told her about his impasse, she felt hurt and apprehensive. Should they separate for a while and take a room or what else could they do in this situation?

Some days passed during which both of them spent time alone in town on errands. Out of curiosity, Walter investigated the availability and price of Nepalese hash. He found a grocery store that also sold bowls and pieces of local ganja.

The atmosphere between the partners improved gradually. Hilde gave Walter a handmade birthday card, and they made love for the first time in what seemed like an eternity.

The next day a friendly couple they had noticed before from a distance walked over to them and said, “Hello, we are Anthony and Alexi from New York City. Where are you from?”

The Americans had traveled from New York to Greece, where Alexi's family came from, and then made their way to the East by trains and buses. They had married shortly before they left and considered this journey to be their honeymoon trip, of which they were in the fourth month. After initial information exchanges and extensive talks about their traveling experiences, they smoked a joint together. Anthony picked up his small drum, and Walter strummed the guitar for a while.

The Germans got to know the city by walking through the maze of narrow alleys and countless squares, where people prepared new crops of rice in the open air and dried their laundry. Souvenir shops offered braided bands, woven rugs and carpets, all sizes of colorful cloths, pipes, jewelry made with precious stones, artifacts, and clothing. They visited the Hindu Pashupatinath Temple and walked 365 steps up to the Swayambhunath complex, also called the Monkey Temple because of the holy monkeys that dwelled in parts of it. Kathmandu offered a few restaurants that cooked Western-style dishes the visitors appreciated.

One day the couple joined an organized tour with a young guide. He led the group up a valley where the tourists viewed a variety of villages and how farmers grew rice on terraces attached to the mountainside.

On one of their music and chatting sessions at the bus with Anthony and Alexi, it became obvious that all four wanted to see Pokhara. The new friends asked if they could join Walter and Hilde in the bus when they drove there. “Of course,” said Hilde and Walter. They set a date for departure.

In the late afternoon, the travelers reached the spread-out city of Pokhara, easily accessible within a day's drive, even allowing for leisure breaks to take pictures and rest along valleys and streams. They investigated a recommendation of where to stay near Phewa Lake. The road wound through a valley, passing shops of all kinds, restaurants, and other businesses. Suddenly it merged onto a large plain. Everybody went silent. Walter stopped the engine, and they all exited the bus.

Majestic, magnificent, and scenic, Dhaulagiri, Annapurna, and Machapuchare, also called Fishtail, all rose up next to each other. These mountains controlled the horizon with their gigantic dimensions and snowcapped peaks. After everybody had soaked up enough of the astonishing first view of the range, Anthony and Alexi went to find accommodations. They discovered a room on top of a grocery store and restaurant building, which also provided space for the camping bus under a large, shady tree. Fritzzi enjoyed the new neighborhood as well, because she could run around without any restrictions. The lake on one side, the valley on the other side, and the mountains as a backdrop created an exceptional location. While Alexi, Anthony, and Hilde left for a five-day trek into the mountains, Walter stayed behind with the dog. He wanted to be alone for a while and used the time to see the neighborhood and enjoy food at various restaurants.

One month passed quickly in this healthy neighborhood. Given that the German couple's schedule put them in Goa for the Christmas holidays, they began to wrap up their visit in ancient Nepal, replaced food supplies, and went to say good-bye to their friends from Brooklyn, New York. To their surprise and delight, the friends asked whether they could travel together for a while because they also wanted to visit Goa but were on a different itinerary. Walter enjoyed the occasional jam sessions with Anthony a lot, and Hilde liked being around Alexi, a fellow female travel companion. When they all completed their chores and errands, everybody said farewell to a number of local people and headed toward the first major attraction of this portion of the trip: the city of Benares on the Ganges River.

About fifty miles into India, the scenery had already leveled into the vast plains of Uttar Pradesh. The team of five drove swiftly along a remote country road. Suddenly Walter, who was in the driver's seat, noticed two figures in the distance, positioned on both sides of the road, with a barrier pole, which had not been lowered across the road. Two men in khaki shorts and shirts looked in their direction with serious expressions on their faces. When the bus slowly reached them, the guard on the left motioned for the vehicle to stop.

Walter stopped the camper but did not turn off the engine. "What do you want?" he shouted at the man.

"We want to search your whole car for hashish," said the man while wiggling with his head.

"We have no hashish. Which way to Benares?" Walter asked.



The man with mustache pointed down the road. Unexpectedly for everybody, Walter moved into first gear, floored the accelerator, and quickly shifted into second and then third gear, leaving the two men standing baffled next to the road. They had no weapons, and no telephone wires were connected to their hut at the road. The passengers in the camper, however, feared to be surrounded or shot at least.

“What are you doing? Why are you doing this?” someone in the bus yelled.

“Well, I do have my reason. It is securely hidden, but I did not want to take any risk,” Walter replied, relieved and smiling. Before they left Nepal, he had placed a quantity of black hash on top of the bus, somewhere inside the metal toolbox, under the tarp.

It took the group almost four full days for the trip to Benares, but everybody enjoyed the company and the luxury of traveling the way they did. They alternately cooked their food or ate in purely vegetarian restaurants, since this part of the country did not offer anything else. With good luck and their experience, they found peaceful lodgings each night. Once in a while, during rest stops in the countryside, Anthony and Walter performed with flute and guitar for amazed villagers.

Varanasi, also commonly known as Benares, is considered a holy place by three major religions: the Hindus, the Buddhists, and the Jains. According to legend, the city was founded by the Hindu deity Lord Shiva around five thousand years ago, although most place its age at only three thousand years. Whatever it may have been, when the couples from Frankfurt and New York City entered town, they immediately became immersed in the energy, vitality, and activity of this vibrant and very alive place. Not only local residents populated this large space of land, but also scholars, students, pilgrims, holy people, sadhus, gurus, and many tourists contributed to the mind-boggling experience of being there.

The yellow Volkswagen moved slowly through the ancient scenes and modern traffic, the passengers looking for a place to stay. Nobody could provide any tips or recommendation for this location. At the end of the day, they all agreed on a private place that rented rooms. Anthony and Alexi rented a room; Walter and Hilde decided to sleep in the bus, which they parked in the front of the building. This time, the layover could not be considered peaceful in terms of noise. Indian music—spiritual and popular film tunes—was played throughout the day and night, basically never stopping, adding to the high-energy atmosphere of the town.

The most significant experience, however, was the spectacle at the Burning Ghats, where bodies of the deceased were cremated twenty-four hours a day. Located on the Ganges, the Ghats could be reached by steps that led all the way to the water. On solid concrete squares, workers would place a pile of wood, and when the time arrived, the corpse next in line, wrapped in yellow or orange materials, would be laid on top of the wood. Workers would then light the wood with oils until a large blaze shot up to the sky. A few hours later, ashes and flowers could be scattered into the river.

Attuned to their temporary new neighborhood, the two couples and Fritzzi relished the time in “the center of the earth”—according to Hindu cosmology—and with each other.

Because of specific time constraints and places to see on their list, Anthony and Alexi would take the train from Benares to the east coast, to get there quickly, and would then travel to Goa by various methods. They promised to stay in touch and perhaps meet again.

Walter, Hilde, and Fritzzi now faced one thousand kilometers on their itinerary, crossing half of the country by heading southwest. Except in New Delhi, they had encountered only two-lane roads. All major highways, motorways, and thoroughfares that crisscrossed the country had only two lanes, which needed to be shared with 95 percent truck and bus traffic and the rest animals and people. It was extremely rare to see a limousine on government business or taxis near cities. The average condition of the road surface was acceptable. The process of sharing the road, however, could be tedious and treacherous. All traffic moved on the left side of the road, as in England. Over time, most street surfaces had curved in the middle so the traversable part became rounded. When a large object such as a truck or bus approached, their smaller vehicle had to slow down and avoid the oncoming traffic. Many times, they needed to drive off the highway completely to avoid collision.

Life happened on and next to the highway. Herds of cows, water buffaloes, goats, monkeys, and poultry passed over and moved on the streets. People tended to be more careful, but many times not when it counted most. Remarkable sights on a daily basis kept the long journey for Hilde and Walter exciting. A flock of huge Indian king vultures or white-rump vultures sitting at the roadside, taking a break, or ripping dead meat out of a carcass reminded them of a savanna in Africa. It was wonderful to see children with a couple of submerged water buffaloes in a pond or sometimes an elephant on duty, pushing a whole tree in front of it.

## **Journey through the interior of India**

It never stopped. Walter realized that this was what he needed to see and to be OK with it. He let go of the wish to experience the holy man on a bed of nails or the miracles he had read about in Yogananda's book. This journey through the interior of India, grueling because of the heat, dust, mosquitoes, food, and road conditions, fulfilled his desire for phenomena.

He could have continued driving, but eventually the yellow camp-mobile team made it all the way to the city at the sea, Bombay.

They parked curbside on a residential street in the neighborhood of the Gateway of India, which appeared to be very peaceful, but they knew it would not be so forever. The location provided a certain security from streetlights at night and, after a little time, familiarity with a few residents.

Being in a fairly wealthy city and in the state of Maharashtra gave them a lot to see and do. Since the Arabian Sea essentially surrounded the city, restaurants prepared plenty of seafood in their local cuisine, which covered a range from mild to very spicy. Hilde and Walter used the opportunity to drive on roads with multiple lanes to see Nariman Point, Girgaum Chowpatti, Juhu Beach, and Marine Drive.

December approached. The companions still faced four hundred miles of travel straight south, through elevated plains, to reach the legendary state of Goa. On the second morning after they began this section of the trip, the Volkswagen's starter did not stir. Walter tried a few tricks, but nothing helped get it going. Fortunately, the vehicle was parked close to a little mound, to which Walter pushed the bus. The decline made it roll by itself, and when Hilde engaged a gear, the engine started. In their owner's manual, Walter found an address of an authorized repair shop in Panaji, the capital city of Goa.

On an afternoon they arrived, quite relieved, at the deserted industrial complex where the auto shop was. One of the technicians removed the starter and diagnosed that it could be repaired easily if a certain part were replaced. The shop owner contacted a distributor in Bombay and found out that the spare part would be available within three days.

The three travelers discovered themselves trapped in a safe but somewhat odd locality for tourists, who preferred the white beaches of Goa; they had to live between wrecked vehicles and dreary factory buildings. Only Fritz loved to roam around rusted car parts and crevices between

collapsed building parts, and constantly discovered something to chase. At night, a guard watched over the premises, but in the daytime, because it was the weekend, Walter and Hilde essentially owned it.

The couple discovered Panaji by walking. They found a cluster of concrete buildings with capricious balconies and red-tiled roofs, bleached-clean churches, and a riverside promenade with red-roofed houses built in Latin style. Restaurant menus listed many seafood delicacies, with rice, coconut milk, and paste as the main ingredients. Rice with fish curry—the staple diet in Goa—could be obtained everywhere. The state had been influenced by Hindu origins, but the Portuguese colonization that lasted 450 years left its mark in architecture, culture, language, and religion. It was one reason to be in Goa for the Christmas holidays: the large Christian population. A third holiday, which followed the weekend, granted additional time off from the everyday life of a transient tourist.

The tiny spare part for the starter arrived the next day with a courier, and after inserting it, the technician installed the starter back in the bus. It kicked off without stuttering, and the three drove out of the former factory complex in a southern direction. The Volkswagen interior was clean. Provisions of rice, canned foods, candles, mosquito coils, as well as the gas bottle, had been replenished, and the travelers looked forward to the last stretch and to finding a long-term accommodation close to the beach.

They crossed the Mandovi River via the old bridge and followed their lead on a road close to the coast, getting occasional glimpses of the Arabian Sea through the jungle, some rice patties surrounded by high coconut-palm trees. A Portuguese church would appear through overgrown vegetation on a crossroad as they stopped for a moment to admire the sight. Hilde and Walter smelled and listened to the tranquil environment and felt its relaxing effect on body and soul. They kept on driving for thirty minutes without any traffic, except for an occasional oxcart or cowherd on the streets. People they passed looked at the bus and waved with smiling faces.

In Margao, they turned west again, to reach the ocean, and arrived in Colva Beach, where the roads turned into alleys from which tracks diverted toward the beach. A small building that seemed to be a grocery store appeared in the bush, as did a chapel farther on.

Walter stopped the car and said, “Let's turn in here,” as he slowly advanced on a barely visible path between primarily coconut palms and other dense jungle growth.

The Volkswagen slowly passed houses with open yard areas in front and on the sides. Children played in the dirt. Pigs and dogs chased each other, and in between was an adult woman or teenager.

“What do you think about this one?” Hilde asked and Walter stopped the bus before a colonial-style house and turned off the engine.

All three left the vehicle and carefully approached the building with rain-washed ochre-yellow walls and grey window and door panels. Fritzi immediately began chasing a pig. Since they did not notice anybody, Walter walked up three steps to the entrance and knocked on the door. A middle-aged woman with black hair combed straight back into a ponytail opened the door and looked at the two foreigners smiling at her. A girl about twelve years old also appeared from inside the house. Suddenly dogs howled loudly in the background. A black-brown ball rolled across the dirt floor next to water supply’s rock walls. Fritzi could be seen running away from a much smaller black dog chasing her.

Walter ran behind the dogs and yelled, “Fritzi, Fritzi, come back.”

At some point, the dog from the house realized that the intruder had been driven out far enough, and Walter found Fritzi panting under a palm tree with her tongue hanging out and her tail between her legs.

When he arrived back at the house, Hilde smiled and said, “We could rent their living room with a bed in it. There is an opening toward the rest of the house, but no door in it. They would conceal it with a blanket or bed sheet. What do you think?”

Walter thought for a moment and replied, “I do not know how Fritzi will get along with the black dog and also how this door issue will work out, but we could try it.”

He maneuvered the bus carefully between palm trees, the well, the outhouse, and the home into a perfect spot that did not disturb the view for the inhabitants in the house, but was in sight from the veranda. Next day, the couple made one more trip to Margao where they purchased a kerosene stove.

In the house lived mother Maria; the grandfather; Maria's husband, who was a fisherman; and two kids, teenager Benedita, who could speak English very well, and the son with big eyes.

The dwelling and its surroundings contained remarkable features that the visitors had never experienced before. The well, which provided clean groundwater, was encircled by a waist-high wall of stones. Water could be lifted by rope and bucket, and it served as a shower

and laundry as well. The outhouse, however, not only served as a restroom, but also functioned as sewage-treatment facility. To utilize it, a person climbed on top of a concrete rectangle and then squatted. When Walter used it the first time, to his bewilderment a long, round snout with two little holes in it reached awfully close to his behind. The pig it belonged to squealed loudly as if saying, "Come on, let go, I do not want to wait all day long." Sometimes two squealing pigs shared the feast. It took a while to get accustomed to this feature.

The Arabian Sea, with its dark-green, obscured waters, looked inviting after months of touring inland. There was no traffic, no noise except from the dogs and pigs, no tourists that could create any issues. A handful of backpack travelers rented rooms or whole houses in the neighborhood, and sometimes one would stop at the house with the yellow camper in front of it and chat with Walter or Hilde. Occasionally a spontaneous jam session occurred. Walter enjoyed playing guitar on the front porch, which extended from their room.

One day, beautiful Elizabeth from France walked by. She said hello and then, "Why don't you play for me sometime?"

"OK, I'll keep it in mind," Walter replied. Elizabeth's very black, curly, long hair and her energetic, fresh attitude attracted Walter. In addition, her physique appeared to be immaculate. Somewhat smaller than Walter, she showed white teeth between red lips when she laughed.

After breakfast, Walter liked to put some pieces of hash in the large front pocket of his white cotton shirt, and then stroll down the path to the beach, where he asked visitors if they wanted to buy some. He did this not for money, but to meet and talk to people and out of curiosity about what had happened in the rest of the world. During the conversations on the beach, he always learned something or gathered information for things to do and visit in India or other countries. Walter loved the mornings, when the air felt cleanest and the light of the sun had not yet reached its strongest brightness. A breeze cooled his body, and he felt as if he were in paradise.

Most afternoons, an enormous exhibition of the local fishing industry took place. It started when large boats driven by rowing men slowly approached the beach area in front of the village. Starting far out in the water, two strings from two different boats were hauled to the beach. Swimmers pulled them out of the water. The strings were attached to thick ropes, which in turn were connected to the net floating in the ocean. The whole village helped, standing in a

long line, to pull in the net from two sides. When the net slowly slipped onto the beach, the catch inside became evident. Sometimes a ton of mackerels glittered and jumped on the sand.

Women, children, and everybody else put them in containers or just a towel. Besides the mackerels, the fishermen caught some large tuna, small sharks, lobsters, and shrimps. Many times Hilde and Walter observed the show or helped with the ropes. At the end, they purchased some fresh fish or shrimp and walked back to the house to prepare it on the kerosene stove—usually with a lot of garlic, tomatoes, and rice. Occasionally Maria or one of the kids surprised the tenants with a delicious bowl of their local curry.

December 24 appeared to be an ordinary day. Hilde and Walter looked forward to accompanying family members to their local church the next day. A traveler returning from the beach walked by and asked, “Did you see it? It is unbelievable!”

“See what?” Walter asked.

“There is this thing in the sky; you have to go down to the beach to believe it.”

The couple from Frankfurt stopped their meal preparations and walked to the beach. When Walter and Hilde stepped out of the palm trees and looked up at the blue afternoon sky without a single cloud, they noticed a trapezoidal shape lingering high over Colva Beach. It glistened brightly, as if illuminated by the sun, but the setting sun could not cause a reflection because of its angle. People stood around the beach, gawking in the air, mystified.

Walter could not help himself and asked a local resident, “Is Jesus returning, or perhaps the virgin mother?”

The woman pulled up her shoulders and did not say anything.

The event lasted hours. When the sky slowly turned dark, they returned home to finish cooking. The next day the phenomenon did not appear again.

Walter visited a couple of vacationers who rented rooms in the small side street down the path. He dropped in on them with his guitar in his hand and Nepalese hash in his front pocket. When they had all settled in, made fresh tea, and smoked a joint, they started playing spontaneously.

It gave Walter a lot of pleasure to communicate with strangers by playing music continuously for a long time. At some point, he felt a hand on his shoulder and noticed Elizabeth sit down on a pillow. She smiled at him again. After another hour, the session slowly wound down. They both left the room and walked to a house. Elizabeth said, “This is where I live,” and

went into an entrance that led right to her room, where, other than some pillows on the floor, a large bed took most of the space.

“Play for me,” she said. Walter sat down on a little stool next to her bed.

She disappeared, and he tuned the twelve-string guitar. It took a while but also stimulated him to shift into a meditative state. When he started to play, Elizabeth returned in a red, silky nightgown with thin straps. She stretched out on the bed and closed her eyes. He played the guitar while sometimes looking at the shape of her beautiful body, which shimmered through the thin silk gown in the dim light. Her curly black hair was nestled around her exotic, classical-shaped facial features, which reflected excitement, while her black eyelashes appeared to tremble. Shadows created by the candlelight played with her naked shoulders and dark nipples that stuck out through the red material. It was a sight he never forgot, because he stopped playing after a while and left — something, he later wished he had not done.

After an abundance of rest and tranquility, sunny, healthy beach days with wholesome food, and smiling people, Walter and Hilde took a little trip alongside the coastal area of Goa. The plan included returning to Maria's house and spending more time in Colva Beach. By driving north, they passed Calangute Beach, the most-developed tourist location, and then made their way to Arambol via Anjuna and Vagator. All three places included small fishing villages where the locals rented rooms to visitors and provided food in small shacks at the beach or between the coconut trees in the jungle. Besides the beautiful beach in Arambol, a freshwater lake and a banyan tree in the midst of the jungle were attractive spots to visit.

This trip stirred their travel energy again, and they decided to continue their comprehensive expedition. After exchanging addresses and hugs with people, one splendid morning the Germans left Colva Beach on a tour that would temporarily run farther south along the coast and then turn east for a visit to the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary in the state of Karnataka. Then they would head toward the city of Mysore.

Back on the road, the excitement and awareness of absorbing India returned. By frequently witnessing transforming environments and people, their flexibility enhanced naturally because it connected to survival mechanisms and delivered life in the moment without time for thought. Driving down what appeared to be an endless road to an unknown destination generated a unique pleasure.



The explorers headed for the part of the park where the Bhadra Reservoir formed a large lake. They located a spot near the lake with a pier for a small tourist cruise boat and view of the lake. Some foreigners camped out in tents or merely with a blanket under the stars.

A tall, blond young man approached the camper and said hello. His hair reached all the way to his waist, and he used a *lunggi* to cover the lower part of his body. Around his neck, he wore an image of the god Shiva. His blue eyes looked clear and friendly, and he spoke English with a Scandinavian accent. Hilde invited him for a homemade dinner sometime later, which the stranger, named Lars, gratefully accepted. From time to time during the journey, a friendly single traveler would be attracted by something the couple had or displayed and would join them for a while, with their approval. These single people always happened to be men, which caused Walter to stay attentive while they were around. Repeatedly the guest appeared to be like an Indian sadhu, a wandering monk without funds but with a brass bowl. It was easy and enjoyable to have someone like Lars—dressed in a piece of cloth, looking clean and healthy, and with a kind, inconspicuous manner—around the mobile home.

Given the appealing environment in the wildlife sanctuary, they lingered a few more days at the lake. Hilde wanted to take the opportunity to hike through an area not far from where the bus was parked; it was a good chance to see some elephants roaming the forest. Lars decided to join her for the trek, which made it easy for Walter to stay behind.

He walked to the pier to find out when the next trip on the little boat departed. A group of Indian tourists had already gathered at the site and assured him the vessel would leave soon. Consequently, Walter found himself sitting between some native families who enjoyed a boating trip on the lake with him. As the ship was about to cross the middle of the water, a herd of approximately twenty large and small elephants stepped out of the brush and strolled toward the shore on the opposite side. Everybody on board, including Walter, became very excited. He had never seen wild elephants before. As the whole group animatedly observed the rare sight, a movement in his peripheral vision attracted Walter's attention. Through the thicket on the side where the boat departed from and where the yellow bus was parked, he noticed two shapes moving about. Meanwhile the boat slowly retreated under reduced power from its viewing location while at the same time passing by the shoreline where two people walked through the brush. To his surprise, Walter recognized the outback pedestrians as Hilde and Lars.

## Dravida

Next on the agenda was the capitol city of Bangalore, where they stayed overnight before going on to Mysore. Four full days of driving transported Hilde, Walter, and Fritz to the exquisite City of Palaces with all its glory, including southern Indian colors, spices, heat, and a very nice government guesthouse.

The guesthouse had been built between a reservoir and a public park on a gated estate, with plenty of trees to provide enough shade to cool down fatigued travelers after the day's heat on the road. The building itself had been constructed during the colonial period, with colonnades along two sides in well-maintained, elegant colors of ivory. As they toured the property with a friendly manager, they found out that all the rooms were currently vacant. Walter and Hilde looked at each other, and then Hilde said they would like to rent a room for a couple of nights. Large beds made out of hardwood with bedposts included full mosquito netting, clean sheets, and ceiling fans. The opportunity was irresistible to the travelers, also because of the nominal nightly rate.

The couple spent the night between thick cotton sheets on top of large, soft pillows and enjoyed relaxed morning lovemaking with each other. Walter and Hilde fed the dog and then prepared their breakfast in the camper, but ate it while sitting on the veranda in front of their room.

As they were about to finish their porridge, the housekeeper, or *aya*, walked around the corner of the building. Leading an old man with a white beard and turban by the hand toward them, she apologized for the interruption. The *aya* introduced Baba, the deaf-mute seer or clairvoyant who could convey a significant message through notations on a piece of paper. When the partners agreed to a reading, Baba took Hilde's right hand, touched it lightly between both of his hands, and then let go of it again. He then did the same with Walter's left hand. After that, he scribbled a few words on a small piece of notebook paper and showed it to Hilde.

The notes specified the following predictions for the couple: while driving back to a house, Hilde would become pregnant; she would live until the age of eight-six, and Walter would stay alive until eighty-eight. Everybody giggled and smiled, and then Baba left with a few rupees.

With Fritzi on a leash, the couple walked into town to discover the charms of this elevated city and see talents such as weaving, sandalwood carving, and bronze work. Mysore had also been the cultural capital of Karnataka. Besides the impressive Mysore Palace, or Ambavilas Palace, the amazing and most exciting part for Walter once again happened by merely walking down a street and experiencing the people in their local clothing rich in color, the vibrant life, and the enormous amount of traffic on the streets.

During their peaceful stay in Mysore's government guesthouse, Hilde and Walter appreciated the exotic environment and historical magnificence of Mysore and at the same time planned the immediate future. In her notes, Hilde had discovered an entry related to tea. Nilgiri black tea kind grew not far away in the hills of the Nilgiris District in the state of Tamil Nadu. The teammates bid farewell to the few employees of the guesthouse and hit the road again.

By the end of the day, the Volkswagen started to climb into higher elevations, where at some point the Germans spotted their first tea plantation with immaculately trimmed and meticulously placed tea plants. Dark-green, shiny leaves spread a sense of health and abundance. After securing shelter under trees in a plantation, Walter, Hilde, and Fritzi took a long walk. In the local grocery store, they obtained fresh vegetables that Hilde cooked in a satisfying rice dish using local spices.

During the night, everybody relished the cool air of the area, where the highest point reached eighty-six hundred feet. Two Englishmen had discovered the mountainous region, also called Blue Mountains, only in the beginning of the eighteenth century after previous attempts had failed to discover "the existence of a tableland possessing a European climate," according to the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*. Grateful to have made the detour into the much cooler and wetter climate than the surrounding plains, the two stocked up on black tea, drinking water, rice, and additional fresh vegetables, to prepare for a lengthy stretch along the coast in the state of Kerala.

When the companions arrived in the city of Kollam at the banks of the Astamudi Lake on the Arabian Sea, three full days had elapsed. It felt good to see water again, which this particular Kerala region had plenty. The Kerala Backwaters, a chain of brackish lagoons, as well as lakes ran parallel to the coast, interconnected for 105 kilometers.

Because of the high humidity and large number of mosquitoes, the friends did not linger. They continued on to the capital city of the state, Trivandrum, an ancient city dating back to

1000 BC. Spending a few nights near the famous Kovalam Beach fulfilled their wish to be by the sea, though it did not match Colva Beach in Goa, because of dark-colored sand and shallow waters that stretched for hundreds of yards into the sea. Walter and Hilde visited the notable Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple where the Laksha Deepam Festival was celebrated every sixth year, most recently the year before they had arrived. Once again, the stopover in this town enriched and educated the visitors, who also appreciated the local cuisine of Kerala with its multiple uses of the coconut, which grew plentifully throughout the area. For thousands of years, the state had been visited by foreign sailors and tradespeople who had left their mark in an adapted version as a blend of indigenous and foreign dishes.

The voyagers nurtured the idea of going all the way to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). They heard about a train and ferry connection over the Gulf of Mannar, between the Bay of Bengal and the Laccadive Sea. To find out if it would be possible, they left Trivandrum in their bus to cross the border into Tamil Nadu, using a route that curled around the southernmost tip of the subcontinent. In two days, they made it to the island of Pamban and the town of Rameshwaram, which was connected by a long bridge to the continent. The town also offered the only land/water connection from India to the island of Ceylon.

A couple of events happened after their arrival in Rameshwaram, the only town on Pamban Island, which Hindus consider one of the holiest places in India. The two had no difficulty locating the perfect parking spot for them—across the terminus railway station, which linked major cities in the north with this part of the country. The area adjacent to the station opened onto a marketplace with various shops and restaurants. The hedge where Walter arranged the bus provided cover on the sliding-door side against curious onlookers, securing some privacy on this very public spot.

When Hilde returned from a walk, she smiled and said, “We could go to Ceylon in three or five days. There are seats available, but they do not ship any vehicles.”

Later that day Walter and Hilde booked their spaces for the first departure, in three days. They walked through Rameshwaram and caught first glimpse of the famous Ramanathaswamy Temple. While passing through a residential area, they realized that the attention they caused within the local population did not really justify the walk. About thirty people, most of them children, accumulated around them in a nonthreatening way. In front of a building, a man who appeared to be trying to help in the situation addressed them in English.

“Why don't you step in here for a moment,” he said, pointing to a house with a wooden entrance gate.

Walter, Hilde, and dog followed the man inside, to the small courtyard of a two-story building. Several people sat on chairs and benches, and the man introduced his family members to them. He asked questions about where they came from and how their trip through his country was. The Germans also mentioned where they wanted to go and that their bus was parked at the train station. When the host revealed that his name was Chakshan, the visitors introduced themselves and Fritz. Fresh, sweet chai from the kitchen arrived. The tête-à-tête continued for some time as everybody became friendlier. Chakshan explained that he worked for the local branch of a bank. He also said he wanted to visit them at their Volkswagen because he fancied showing them something.

When the guests asked, “What do you want to show us?” he replied, “You will see.” Walter found it odd that he did not smile.

As a matter of fact, he never smiled. Thus, all four returned to the bus; interestingly enough nobody gathered around or followed them anymore. Chakshan took the front passenger seat while Hilde sat on the bench in the back, keeping Fritz under control.

Again, Walter asked, “Where are we going?”

The host again replied only, “You will see.”

They left the houses and huts of Rameshwaram behind. A straight road led through sand dunes with an occasional glimpse of the sea, sometimes on the right side, other times on the left.

Walter thought, *What am I doing here, driving through nowhere with a stranger, leaving this perfect parking spot behind? I do not understand why even bother.*

Once the road ended in sand, with water extending to the horizon on the left and right, Chakshan got out of the bus and said, “Let's walk,” then started walking on the sand.

The Germans tried to keep up with him, the wind blowing from all directions, Walter's trepidations intensifying.

When he looked at Hilde's face, he could not find any assurance whatsoever and almost said, “Stop now,” just when the man said, “This is it. You will not find it anywhere else. Two oceans joining together right here.”

Yet again, the man did not smile. Silently the party walked back to the Volkswagen, where Hilde took the driver's seat and drove back to Chakshan's house. Before they said good-

bye to each other, the man offered that his new friends could leave the bus in his courtyard while they went to Ceylon. The tourists accepted the offer and told him that they would drop it off the next day.

Before the excursion kicked off and the train to Colombo left the station, Walter obtained an oval packet wrapped in newspaper and secured with white, thin strings. Inside was fish curry he had bought from a vendor on the platform. In a sudden rush to make it to the train, the couple had forgotten to get provisions for the night. Hilde, the lucky one, had avoided making the same mistake. Walter already felt hungry when they sat in a packed compartment waiting for the train to depart. He tolerated the feeling for a few hours. Then he cut the strings, carefully opened the packaging, and used his fingers, as the Indians did, to gobble the rice with thick, brown paste, which included small parts of mackerels, fish bones, and god knows what. Fatigue made him fall asleep for some moments, despite the uncomfortably hard seat, as the train advanced through the night.

The rest of Walter's trip to Ceylon stayed in a hazy sphere of his memory. He developed acute symptoms of diarrhea, sweating, and high temperature, and remembered that wherever they went, the food had been prepared with coconut oil. He could not eat or smell this type of oil anymore, but all available food appeared to be saturated with it. Throughout their visit on the large island, he felt sick. He stayed in hotel rooms in bed or lay between trees in the shadows near a beach, unable to move or enjoy the opportunity to discover Ceylon. The environment appeared to be steamier and hotter than southern India. The couple took buses and visited beautiful beaches in all colors of sand with lush vegetation and barely any tourists in sight. Hilde tried whatever possible to help Walter in this situation.

When they returned to Rameshwaram, they faced a big surprise. Masi Maha Sivarathiri festival was in full swing, and thousands of pilgrims swept the small town. After they retrieved their mobile home, it became a challenge to move to the spot where they had stayed before. The whole area had been taken over by families or groups of people who arrived to celebrate and perform rituals during the very important Hindu festival. Walter managed to insert the yellow bus between worshippers. Focused on the religious reasons for their presence in the park, nobody objected or even looked at the bus or the foreigners. Once Walter found the spot at the hedge and everybody got settled, it turned out to be a happening comparable to an outdoor rock-and-roll festival. Since Walter still felt somewhat under the weather, he rested in the shade of trees or in

the bus while Indian music sounded from every direction for twenty-four hours a day. On the exact day of the festival, the attendees flocked toward the Ramanathaswamy Temple, where the situation became frenzied. People got hurt from the force of the masses.

After the festival's climax, matters calmed down, and people left town again. Walter, who began to feel better, and Hilde discussed the next step of their journey: to the ancient and prestigious city of Madurai.

In Madurai, the very lively, active Meenakshi Temple offered an opportunity to enter deep into its labyrinthine inside. The complex housed fourteen magnificent *Gopurams*, or towers, including two golden *Gopurams* for the main deities that were elaborately sculpted and painted. When the pair entered, they moved along with the perpetual flow of visitors through the passages and hallways. Neither knew where to turn or aim at. The air turned hotter and more humid; the faint available light originated exclusively from candles and oil burners. For the unaccustomed observer, the atmosphere within the labyrinth of walkways emitted an undertone of extraordinary obscurity—especially because it seemed as if nobody moved to a specific final destination point. Here and there were a few additional lights, a reddish-colored paint spot on a stone or on the wall, a nook where nobody entered, and then suddenly an orifice, where it became unmistakably obvious that this was it.

The three-foot-high, rounded rock was coated with everything imaginable in regards to temple offerings. Mostly red liquids and oils as well as white matter were splashed all over it. Walter stood still, looking at it, and then had the intense impression that a particular spot on the stone was pulsating. It became a very strong sensation that did not pass but lingered. People pushed and moved in front of him, he could feel the excitement increasing inside the cavernous hall, and then Hilde took his hand and they moved on.

Madurai at that time presented all that a globetrotter may have wanted to see, purchase, touch, observe, investigate, and experience in the course of a visit. The city, more than twenty-five hundred years old, the cultural center of Tamil Nadu, was referred to as the Athens of the East. Walter and Hilde took it all in to the fullest and then boarded the Volkswagen camping bus with Fritzi and continued their journey via Tiruchirappalli to Pondicherry, a trip of more than three hundred kilometers.

They knew from reports about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in relation to a place near Pondicherry called Auroville. Both of them had read magazine articles that described Auroville

as an attempt to build a new type of alternative city, a spiritual community where everybody would be welcomed. Neither of them had had direct experience with or connections to spiritual organizations of any kind before, but something about this place attracted them powerfully. Of course, they knew that Sri Aurobindo had passed away a long time ago, in 1950, but not the Mother, who had founded the experimental *universal township*. When they arrived in Auroville, they learned that the Mother had died about three months earlier. Hilde and Walter visited her casket, covered with flowers.

The city's administration organized guided tours in Auroville and Pondicherry to introduce various enterprises that belonged to and worked for the Sri Aurobindo Society. A weaving mill, a paper mill, and a wood-processing factory had up to five hundred employees each. Smaller businesses sold jewelry, paper products, and clothing, as well as fabrics. It appeared as if the Aurobindo Auroville organization was the largest employer in the city. Pondicherry's history included a period when the French and Dutch had fought each other for the territory, and when the British took over the country, they permitted the French to keep their settlements. It took decades until Pondicherry could be integrated into the Indian republic. This period left a remarkable French flair in the town, which had two sides—the French quarter and the Indian quarter, White Town and Black Town.

Walter and Hilde were very interested in Auroville, and it was easy to be admitted and introduced to a group of residents in the experimental area. Walter admired the architecture of the already-completed structures, as well as the planned and under-construction buildings. Hilde and he connected with a French couple of their age with two kids who lived in a wooden structure with a lot of light, as well as a pleasant breeze that blew through it. They talked to them for a long time about how they came to move there, how it was to live there, and whether it would be possible to join the group. The French pair introduced them to other people and walked them through the developed part of the complex. The foundation and the drawings of the Matrimandir, the future central point and place of meditation in the community, seemed from another world. Most of all, Walter was so touched by the charisma of the residents that he wanted to stay there himself. The obvious peace they seemed to enjoy inside themselves reflected in their eyes and demeanors. He wanted the same experience.

When the visitors asked the administrative office person about a potential long-term stay within the Ashram, the conversation turned to what they had brought with them to India: the



yellow camping bus. Auroville's organization would not be willing or able to pay the import tax. That answered all questions Walter and Hilde might have had at that time.

With some sadness, but also knowing about this peace in humans, the two prepared their departure for the next day. Walter visited the bookstore in Pondicherry and bought a hardcover version of Sri Aurobindo's book *Synthesis of Yoga*, his principle work on integral yoga, and *The Mother*, a brief but important devotional and metaphysical essay.

Since they were on the same coast as the neighboring city of Madras, Walter and Hilde went there to have closer look. With its loud colors and noises, millions of people hustling, and the temperature and humidity rising by the day, it did not feel like a place to hang around.

After deliberating their location, the time of the year, and distances to cover, they in effect said, "So long, southern India, until next time."

Crossing three states to reach New Delhi again involved more than two thousand kilometers. The couple had not been in Agra yet, and included this must-see location in their travel plans. The two drivers exchanged responsibilities at the wheel, and their patient dog that had grown quite a bit and looked more and more like an Afghan Baluchi, stayed in the back of the bus. They covered the distance in less than two weeks, very glad to reach and roll into the place where one of the most famous buildings of the world had been erected in the sixteenth century.

To catch sight of the Taj Mahal actually in real life turned it into reality, which meant for Walter it lost a tad of its ethereal image relayed in pictures. The monument was awesome, majestic, and beautiful to look at, with an extreme amount of detailed work beyond description. A large number of Indian and international tourists moved through the hallways, down into the tombs where the two lovers Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal had been laid to rest. Hilde and Walter found it astonishing to observe this symbol of love in its dimensions and profoundness.

Within half a day of driving from Agra, the convenient park area in New Delhi, where they had stopped before, received them back. The Germans shared the large area only with one other mobile home. When Walter and Hilde woke up the next morning, they noticed freshness in the air before sunrise—which had not occurred during the previous visit. It served as notice that the seasons changed slightly in this part of the world. During the day, the temperatures rose back to everlasting sizzling. They used the opportunity to rest after the long trip from Madras and

went into town a few times to enjoy a good cup of coffee and find souvenirs to take home for friends.

One lazy afternoon, during the hottest part of the day, when they were resting inside the bus with all doors open, Walter, who had smoked a joint of black Nepalese, laid in the pop-up top cot with his eyes closed. Suddenly he felt a breeze coming through the mosquito-net window at the top and realized he was not lying in the cot alone. Recently Walter had begun reading the paperback he had bought in Pondicherry, a thin book about the Mother with additional advice from her in meditations and prayers. Lying in the cot now, he became aware of the Mother looking at him closely at that moment. Very gently and cherishing, a silent communication happened between her and Walter, leaving him in a state of bliss, as well as with the knowledge that he needed to continue his studies of the literature from Auroville. It was a very intimate experience that Walter did not mention to Hilde.

## Approaching Territory

One reason to begin their trip home at this time was that their tourist visas expired soon. If desired, they could have requested an extension, but it felt right to leave. To face the hot period in most parts of the country, followed by the monsoon season, made it easy to maneuver out of the capital, onto the road heading west. Walter had experienced what he hoped for and some more: the miracles of daily life in India, how people survived their daily struggle in apparent chaos under harsh conditions, were sufficient.

When the sightseers and their Afghan Baluchi crossed the border back into Pakistan, it felt for a moment as if they were leaving home, and the promise to return crossed Walter's mind and heart. Rejuvenated and with the inevitable awareness of the daily driving routine, alternating the steering duty of the bus frequently, Hilde and Walter passed through Pakistan without any issues. Anticipating the perfect time of departure from Peshawar, the couple conquered the Khyber Pass once again by merging themselves into a convoy of trucks and other vehicles. They arrived late in Kabul that day, stopping at the same hotel they had spent a whole month at before. This time it appeared almost empty; the yellow bus occupied the only parking spot in front of it. The temperatures were cool during that night, which made the travelers pull out the warm bedcover and keep on an extra layer of clothing. Once again, the time in the city evolved in a style that a voyager could only love. Walter and Hilde took time to feel comfortable before resuming their route to the West. All through the mountainous region of west Afghanistan and eastern Persia, the couple maintained a routine to cover a particular number of kilometers per day.

Back in Tehran and almost alone in the gated tourist compound, the couple made sure to enjoy some of the luxury the town had to offer. They took Fritz to a veterinarian hospital, where she received vaccinations and, most important of all, documents that could be produced in the event of questions at future borders. Seizing the opportunity to see the Caspian Sea, they followed a winding highway going north through rough terrain and reached the coastline within the day. What they discovered did not really impress them in terms of beauty or charm; there were some wooded areas that looked like the forests in Germany, but the sea itself was disappointing.

As they drove west along the coast, the duo decided to rest at a grocery store near some large trees that supplied plenty of shade for the bus to cool off. To stretch their legs, they began to walk together for a few steps when Walter noticed a group of young men following them, talking like loudmouths in their language. Walter could hear the smacking of lips, and then they threw a pebble. The pair turned on their heels and walked quickly back to the bus. Walter, in the driver's seat, started the engine, and engaged the reverse gear and then the first to move carefully from the spot they were parked.

What happened in the next few seconds reflected the kind of area they were. As the bus rolled slowly over the gravel toward the road, one of the men opened the sliding door, which made a specific gliding sound that had occurred countless times, especially in India.

Walter hit the brakes, jumped out of the vehicle, turned to the right side where the guy who had opened the door stood and gave him what he considered a martial arts punch to the left cheek. The man's head jolted to the right. Then Walter quickly jumped back into the bus and accelerated onto the road. When he looked at his right hand on the steering wheel, he could not believe what he saw. Not thinking, and in a split second, he reflexively used his left hand to flip his right thumb, which had been dislocated on top of his right hand, in reverse of its original position.

Taking it day by day, discovering tourist attractions and ancient ruins on the long trip through Turkey, they enjoyed this part of the trip with the same intensity as the first time. After they left Anatolia behind, they could sense familiar terrain in the distance. With their dog, they delighted in the panorama of the Mediterranean Sea again and took advantage of it as soon as they arrived in Mersin to drive along the coast up to Antalya. In some places, they stayed for a couple of nights, appreciating the healthy, fresh seafood or ancient places to visit by themselves because the tourist season had not started yet. In Athens, the team stopped and visited Aris again, who invited them to stay a few days in the little cottage. He was preparing for the upcoming tourist season and expected an improved business.

The transit through Yugoslavia went swiftly, and one day in Austria, Walter and Hilde stopped for an afternoon rest in a beautiful valley with a stream running through it and many trees. The early summer's sunlight was strong enough that the couple took off their shoes and let their feet hang in the water. When they got up, Walter gazed at Hilde and saw how beautiful she looked, so full of life and with an exciting energy. He took her hand as they walked slowly over

the steppingstones in the water to the bus. A gentle wind moved through the trees, which made the fresh, green leaves perform a shadow play on the vehicle and the environment. Fritzzi rested on a mat under a tree while the couple stepped through the sliding door and sat down on the upright bench. They kissed for a long time and then extended the kissing by undressing. Hilde embraced Walter on that bench with the green corduroy cover when he entered her by kneeling in front. They loved each other very passionately, and Walter thanked her deeply for being there.

Neither of them had any idea what would happen at the stop at the border with Germany. Nevertheless, the customs agents did not object to the dog or to the merchandise inside the bus, which had accumulated during thirteen months of visiting very interesting destinations. Fabrics, saris, cotton clothing in colors and plain, wall covers, small rugs, pictures, paintings, artifacts—every nook and corner had been stuffed with something. The contents of the bus were reminiscent of a hippie head shop without the smoking paraphernalia.

On a nice, sunny day, the globetrotters drove their vehicle into Westendstrasse in Frankfurt, walked up the three flights of stairs to their old apartment, and rang the bell.

## Transition

Nobody knew what to do. The fact that Hilde and Walter had moved into the small living room of the apartment made no difference. They had lived in smaller quarters for a long time. It was just sad to see Fritzi lying on the seats self-made from laminated wood, with the blue corduroy-covered mattresses, up on the third floor with no place to run and chase leaves or other dogs.

Hilde decided she needed time off from being together constantly. She departed noncommittally to clear her head on an anthroposophy-oriented farm in another state. At this time, Walter did not sense a major change in their relationship but felt a general unease about where the situation might develop. He spread out his imports inside the room, which looked like an Eastern fashion boutique, and called friends and people he knew to spread the word that he had returned with some interesting products to sell. Fritzi and he went to the nearby Grueneburgpark, where she could run and roll around in green grass. He met Irene and Gerhard, Helmut and Percy, and slowly accustomed himself to the new living arrangements. Erzebet and Gaspar had welcomed the returning travelers with delight and open arms. Walter appreciated the fact that he had something to come back to.

The yellow Volkswagen bus sold for almost the same amount the couple paid for it. With half the money from the sale, plus the profit from the merchandise in his room, Walter had no immediate reason to be concerned about work and income. The issue that made it difficult for him to enjoy being home again manifested itself in the environment and the city: a lot of noise, the square rooms everybody lived in, very few green spots, the food, and the limited possibilities of what to do. He realized his sensibility had heightened.

When Hilde returned from her country visit, he told her he wanted to move to the country. Her reaction was filled with indifference; she said she still did not know what to do. Her trip to the organic vegetables and fruits co-op had been informative, but her mind was still ambiguous. Hilde also said she had stopped taking the birth-control pill to cleanse her body and let it recuperate after many years of taking it. The couple let things rest for the moment and accepted the situation.

Hilde reapplied for a copywriter position with the same company where she had worked before, and the firm accepted her at once. Walter received a phone call from Percy, who wanted

to take an extended vacation. Her job as a switchboard operator and administrative assistant in a large travel agency became available, and the company was looking for a replacement. Walter went for an interview, passed the typing test, and the travel agency hired him while Percy went on her vacation. This opportunity could not have arrived at a better time for Walter.

Weeks passed. Life seemed to stabilize for the partners and their dog in the third-floor apartment. Summertime pampered everybody with pleasantly warm weather, and extensive outdoor activities on weekends added to a general feeling of happiness. Walter bought a used Citroën 2CV, which improved his mobility and range of endeavors. At home, it was never dull, with roommates and many issues to talk about, politically, socially, and psychologically. Music to listen to and movies to watch enabled all four of them and Fritz to live a good life in the small apartment.

One day, as Walter and Hilde talked about the future, she suddenly said, "OK, you know what? Let's do it, let's move to the country. I think I may be pregnant, and this could be the right thing to do. We can search for a farmhouse and then see what happens."

Walter's face must have expressed what he felt inside at that moment. The smile he displayed contorted his appearance so much that Hilde asked, "Are you OK?"

He replied, "I am so very happy," and then they hugged for a long time.

A few days later, Hilde's pregnancy was positively confirmed by a self-test and an examination by the physician. Thus, a new plan came into reality. The future parents counted all their available funds. When they knew what might be possible, they informed their closest friends. Their relationships with all of them had been quite intimate, more or less communal, and they already shared feelings. Hilde and Walter invited them to participate in their future project in any way they wanted.

Gerhard's occupation as a traveling salesman provided him with detailed knowledge of the provincial northern part of the state, where it might be possible to obtain property at an affordable price. On weekends and holidays, the actual search began by driving around the countryside with newspaper ads and notations.

Patience, mutual reassurances, Gerhard's information and vehicle, as well as a reminder from Hilde's slightly curving belly made the quest real, determined, and effective. By midsummer, they had located, viewed, and liked a half-timbered house on two-and-a-half acres in a hamlet of 350 souls seventy-five miles north of Frankfurt with the county seat nearby. They

enjoyed the initial excitement. The sheer joy of having found adequate acreage and the thoughts of what to do with it, generated a new energy level.

Negotiations with the owner's family representative commenced. They met him in his newly built house and in the old kitchen of the property, which had stood vacant for a few years. It was still untouched and fully furnished, including tableware, cutlery, beddings, and furniture in all five rooms, all of which was included in the sale amount. The proceedings took on a very personal and emotional undercurrent. Mr. Schmidt had been born in the house and resided within the municipality, where he operated the local egg factory. He sat at the old table in the kitchen with Hilde, Gerhard, and Walter and exhibited a crafty, provincial attitude when it came to the sales amount, but soon agreed to a more beneficial approach for both parties that enabled a compromise.

The date with a notary was set. Then, all of a sudden, a problem arose. When the homebuyers appeared at Mr. Schmidt's house to sign the contract, the egg-factory owner confessed that his mother did not want to sell the house anymore. Walter and Hilde reacted with bewilderment since on the previous weekend, they had already been on the property to mow the grass and clear one of the rooms. Even Percy had been there, and they all reveled in the space like little children. Gerhard would not accept this move. The following week, he went to the village of Hohenhausen and paid the real owner, Schmidt's mother, a visit to talk it over. On his return to Frankfurt, he reported that much emotion had been involved. In addition to the mother's feelings, a rumor had started in the village that the people from Frankfurt planned to open a discotheque on the property.

With the emotions and gossip handled, the whole team visited the sole tavern in the hamlet, and that settled the issue. The mother was persuaded to approve the sale, and after adjournment of some weeks, both parties signed the contract. By the end of November, Walter had moved into the house first and for good.

Erzebet went with him for a few days to help set up things and most of all take care of the very pregnant Fritzi. The first night, as soon as it became dark outside, Fritzi began working like a dog and, as cool as only an Afghani could be, gave birth to her first litter of pups. They were healthy and placed in a wooden basket on the kitchen floor.

During the first two weeks, violent storms raced through the hamlet on the north side of the low mountain. Being alone with himself, Fritzi, and her litter of five, Walter took his first



baby steps on his way to becoming an alternative farmer. By early evenings, he was pooped, his joints hurting from the initial groundwork of composting: six inches of greeneries, two inches of manure, then add some lime and soil and top it off with another layer of greeneries. He hunted for manure, and the next-door farmer neighbor promised to supply a cartful once his next cow-barn cleaning took place.

The half-timbered house had been built almost one hundred years earlier using a traditional framework method, which utilized mortise and shank joints where the frames are exposed and painted. The lattice panels had been filled with clay, and the structure appeared to be in sound condition. A barn stood next to the house, separated by a narrow passage with a door. Attached to the very end of the barn, a cubicle built into the barn wall accommodated the pit latrine, the only toilet on the property. One of the major projects to be done was to create a water closet inside the house, which included putting a septic tank in the ground.

Sometimes on weekends, the entire crew plus friends arrived to work, and everybody slept in one room on mattresses covered with Indian fabrics. Gerhard moved into the house using a rental truck from Frankfurt, which they also used to pick up an old, beautiful kitchen stove in town that provided an additional heat source in the house.

The stove looked smaller than Walter expected, but the chief chimneysweeper said, “When it shows its red face, it will get quite warm in the kitchen.”

Walter's parents also visited on a weekend. They had kept in touch during the years, and when they learned that Walter would soon be a father, their interest in their son appeared to improve. Lisa and Friedrich Herzog had difficulty understanding or accepting the India trip and subsequent move to a little village in northern Hessen. When they arrived in his new used Peugeot, they brought a lot of flour, grains, sugar, birdseed, and Walter's old bicycle in the trunk.

Hilde continued to live and work in Frankfurt during the week and came to the new domicile on most weekends with Gerhard or someone else. Occasionally she did not make the trip. She looked pretty and healthy with the growing child in her rounding belly. During the weekend visits, she slept with Walter in his room under the rabbit fur. Their relationship was subtly changing. Hilde displayed an increased seriousness and determination; Walter felt as though he was embarking on an experimental mission by leaving the big city, with all its downsides, to begin a new and healthier life in a way only a few had tried before. He knew of

other individuals and groups in the area who were trying to make a living from the land, and he perceived that as a rather exclusive club.

Alone with the Fritzzi and her puppies during the week, Walter rose early, tried to accomplish as much as possible during the day, and then went to bed early, physically drained. During this period, he began to read the Mother's writings, in which he discovered simple but helpful daily meditation instructions that he used before sleeping. Later he opened Sri Arobindo's *Synthesis of Yoga* and started on a comprehensive excursion to follow the true path to divine consciousness. Walter did not understand the direct meaning of all the expressions, but he quickly realized that behind the many words was a system of thought that provoked an internal flow of energy and understanding of the mind process.

When Gerhard moved into the house full time, Walter relocated into one of the rooms upstairs. He obtained a used living room heating oven and placed mattresses on the floor for a temporary bed. Soon he realized that while the clay panels filling the house's framework might have been sufficient a century ago, the current heat of the oven, however, vanished almost as quickly as it was generated. The solution for this problem arrived one day in the paint store in town where he discovered thin, foam polystyrene rolls that could be used as a wallpaper layer under the final wall covering. He decorated both the ceiling and the walls with this material, and from then on, his new room stayed as warm and cozy as in any contemporary building. This was a big step forward for Walter because soon the temperatures dropped well below zero and would stay that way for a long time.

Gerhard soon realized that he could not make the change of residence and environment as rapidly as he originally thought. He had grown up in the eastern part of Berlin, took refuge in the western part of Germany, where he moved to Frankfurt. Gerhard had been there for a long time before he met Irene. He liked the nightlife in the city, spent long hours in a club playing chess for money, and maintained his relationship with Irene, who, being a city girl, would not be moving away from Frankfurt. All that affected Gerhard's plan more than he had first comprehended. He took the first step and then gradually increased his presence on the farm by being there regularly on weekends, adding a few days here and there. Sometimes he arrived with Irene, most of the time alone.

Since he was familiar with the area before they bought the farm, he also knew precisely where to go on a weekend night: the discotheque about fifteen miles to the east in another

medieval-looking, pretty county seat town. From there he picked up occasionally a good-looking and agreeable young country girl who spent the night with him in his new country home. At first Walter refrained from going with him, but later he joined Gerhard and enjoyed being in another place for a change. It also gave him an idea of what was available in town in case a need surfaced. To enhance his bond with the farm, Gerhard asked Walter to keep one of the male dog puppies that he liked and had named Flecki. Hilde and Walter were in the process of giving away the adolescent litter, which demanded a lot of attention and energy and caused damage on the property. Fritzi's pregnancy had been an accident, instigated by her and a horny little half-breed from the neighborhood.

With respect to Gaspar, it became obvious that while his intentions for a move to the country had been honest at first, at least rhetorically, in practice it appeared as if he enjoyed the now emptier Westendstrasse apartment too much.

Walter now owned two guitars and a sitar he had bought in New Delhi. He found out that Gerhard also strummed guitars, and they had some very nice jam sessions. Gerhard took days off his work and together with Walter installed a system of shelves and workspace in the kitchen. Cutting the panels by hand required a lot of time, but when they were done, the job generated a very rewarding feeling in both of the hobby carpenters. For the workspace, they used an old table with a thick plate that they cut to fit. The walls and ceiling of the kitchen were covered in the same insulating method as Walter's room, and looked and felt warm and homey in fresh white paint when the stove showed its red face.

Sometimes Walter did not leave his room on Sundays because he fasted and enjoyed being alone. He appreciated being on his own and realized how valuable a time it could be.

The winter moved ahead, activities slowed down, and people in the house relaxed. On Christmas Eve, Gaspar and Erzebet arrived, together with a friend from Munich—Jutta. Gerhard, Irene, and Walter had already been there for a few days. Hilde did not spend the holidays at the house. She visited her parents, as she usually did during Christmas.

Despite the harmonious jam sessions of the past and their shared work, an argument evolved between Gerhard and Walter with the result that Gerhard said he wanted to move back to Frankfurt. The two had expressed what they did not like in the other during daily life in the village. Gerhard told Walter it was too demanding for him to be there and then left without taking any of his possessions. The episode triggered a thought process in Walter, as well as

initial doubts that he might have taken on something that was too big for him. The whole dispute centered around where one's space and authority ended and how and when to do things. As time went by and Gerhard did not return to pick up any of his stuff, it indicated that it might only be a reassessment period.

For Walter it sent a message about his life purpose and his energy to go for it, his temporary solitariness, and specifically the issue of future survival funding. He also knew that Hilde would join him to start her new life with their child in the country.

Walter in his seclusion thought, *Why not try something different tonight and check out the disco? Let me see what it has to offer.*

He had been a disco lover ever since he stepped into one for the first time, and he liked to dance. When Walter met Hilde and the two became a couple, the opportunities to dance decreased because they went to clubs only occasionally. That night, he got into the car and drove twenty miles on the county road to Bransfeld. The disco, on the second floor of a building, appeared almost empty. On one side, next to the windows, a group of people sat drinking and talking at a few tables. The music sounded loud and recent as far as Walter knew at the time—British, American rock and roll and top forty styles. Nobody was on the dance floor, where silvery metal plates had been screwed into the ground and colored lights moved from the ceiling.

Since Walter had smoked a joint before he entered the club, he ordered a bottle of beer to moisturize his dry throat and lit a cigarette at an empty table. Naturally, everybody in the room had noticed him arrive and sit down. A stranger heading for the only open disco in town on a Wednesday night provoked curiosity. Suddenly Walter recognized one of the people sitting at the table in a group of four girls. He had met Bettina once briefly when she stayed with Gerhard at the farm for a night.

Before long, she came over to his table and asked, “How are you doing? I know you from the farmhouse.”

She had long legs that made her look tall. She was a brunette with curly hair and big, brown eyes that looked friendly and directly into his eyes. She also had a very sexy body.

“I am just fine, Bettina. Would you like to dance with me?”

They danced a couple of songs in freestyle. When the music changed into a slow tune, they advanced closer to each other in a light embrace and moved gently from side to side. Walter felt a carefree squeeze in her embrace and then inside his pants as well—a tickle of excitement

he had not experienced for a while. The dancing couple rubbed their chests against each other's. He moved his right hand up and down her spine and then rested it on the lower back to enforce the pressure.

Bettina smiled at him, opening her full lips, and asked, "What are you doing later?"

Walter smiled back and replied, "I'll drive home to my village—you want to join me?"

She followed him back to the house in her own vehicle. He decided to use Gerhard's abandoned room and bed because of the heating situation and so they could listen to some music. They undressed, went quickly under the comforter, and immediately kissed and felt for each other. She had extremely soft skin and firm flesh. Bettina stayed until the next day and then left with her car.

The next weekend, when Hilde arrived with Gerhard, her looks showed her condition and a beauty that Walter had not noticed before. She was vibrant and healthy-looking, and Walter thought, *she becomes more delightful the larger her belly grows.*

The baby inside her had developed and showed strength by punching against Hilde's abdominal wall with visible moving bumps. From the Organization of Single Mothers, Hilde had picked up a used baby carriage and three cases of baby clothes and announced that she would stop working and move into the house within the next three weeks. The news made Walter realize that many changes would happen soon. Seeing Gerhard again also meant change; Gerhard said that he had thought about what occurred, offered an apology, and decided to stay in the country more often.

Hilde's presence in the house would bring their original plan into realization, and that made Walter very excited. It also appeared that both of them or their relationship had changed, rendering it less personal but more profound. When the parents-to-be had talked about it in the past, they agreed not to marry and take a conventional path, but to make an effort to parent in an alternative, more companionable approach.

To make the home more urbane, a large concrete septic tank plus connecting pipes had been laid in the ground just in time before frost could interfere. With good luck and availability, one of Percy's friends arrived, installed all the copper pipe connections for the kitchen, and set up the toilet, sink, and bathtub in the assigned room next door. He also hooked up the new used washing machine to the system. Once they turned on the running water, it seemed to Walter as if

a miracle had occurred. Having had only the outhouse for months, luxury descended on the farmhouse.

## Alternative Course

Hilde worked nonstop whenever she appeared, and then retired to her room. The couple went to town together, shopping for groceries or the never-ending requirements of tools, supplies, spare parts, organic fertilizer, fruit bushes, paint, and dog food. They adapted and enjoyed a few local specialties, such as the inexpensive camembert cheese that could be eaten with oil, vinegar, some onion bits, salt, and pepper. Bakeries produced a delicate kind of rye bread, which Walter liked with butter and homemade plum jam.

One day, as she worked like a horse, Hilde told Walter to scrub the corridor. He declined because two people were already cleaning the kitchen floor. She stayed grouchy all day long; her mother wanted to know if the dogs were gone and if Walter had a job. After five hours of scooping dirt, he did not feel like scrubbing but regretted that they seemed unable to talk to each other about anything. To ease his own concerns about income and future, as well as to show Hilde and her mother that he exerted himself, Walter paid a visit to the unemployment office in the county seat to list himself as unemployed and receive some benefits.

A lot of activity occurred in reference to their friends and potential cohabitants. Percy sent a letter reporting that she had visited a commune of Ananda Marga in Bavaria, a self-realization and personal-development group whose leader spent time in prison for allegedly conspiring to murder other members of the group.

Gaspar remained on the farm for a few days, mainly to fix his aging Citroën GS. On his previous visit, he had persuaded Percy to write down one of his stories for the duration of his stay. On each occasion, he left the place in a mess and did not even ask whether he could add something to the household budget or buy any food. He also conveyed that he had been in a financial drought for some time and could not put anything in the communal money pool that month. Gerhard was also experiencing a financial crisis, which included outstanding debt from the past for which his sales job provided insufficient income to pay back and at the same time maintain his current expenses.

From time to time, Walter went to Frankfurt to pick up an item they could use after the birth, such as a braided wood basket that had been used as cradle a few times before and to which wheels and a pole for a canopy could be attached. After one of these trips, a team in two vehicles made their way from Frankfurt back to the farm, loaded with carpets, dogs, dog food,

lots of detergent, and people. Hilde appeared to settle down and chill out to a certain extent. She again looked directly at Walter while talking, as if something changed in her that allowed her to tolerate him again. Gerhard dropped Irene off at the airport, where she flew to New York City. He said that was OK with him, that he felt somewhat liberated after she left and could now concentrate more on the country project.

Walter enjoyed his visits to the city; so much happened there. He picked up wallpaper on sale at a large department store, and then went to see a movie for the first time in months. After the show, he walked down to the second level of the Frankfurter Hauptwache subway station. He wanted to see and feel the scenery of the city, look at the kiosk with ads and information about what went on.

Hilde's round, stretched belly broadcasted the imminent joyful arrival of an additional housemate. She dressed in self-made woolen trousers or jeans that stretched at the waist. It had been cold, sunny, and windy recently, and the dogs enjoyed excursions into the surrounding woods, running, hiding in the bushes, and jumping onto frozen puddles, making clinking sounds on the ice.

The cultural and political atmosphere in the nonmainstream environment was shifting slowly and noticeably. Those who might have been stone throwing, hooded activists two or three years earlier now looked to other ways to bring about change. The women's liberation movement gained in voice and strength, and some men also tried to look inside themselves for the first time. Teachers and techniques of Eastern cultures to achieve self-realization counted more and more followers.

Gaspar and Erzebet volunteered in the Frankfurt university surroundings where a group of people published a weekly news information service. Whenever Walter met them in the country or in the Westendstrasse apartment, he learned in depth about the latest scandals and movements on the political scene. He maintained his routine of meditation before sleeping and his studies of Aurobindo's book.

One night, an emergency phone call came from Gaspar in Frankfurt who was feeling helpless and overextended taking care of Erzebet. Recently she had been on the edge, and nobody knew exactly what caused it. Her status as a refugee in Germany, the course of studies that might have reached an impasse, her worries about sufficient income, her relationship with Gaspar, the generally strained international political situation, as well as the always-present



fascistic elements in the German society—one or all could have been issues. She had not slept or eaten for days and looked very frail and skinny, which made Gaspar extremely concerned about her. Her inability to make decisions and her anxieties about the future prompted him to ask for help and for Hilde to come to Frankfurt. After the two women talked, he wanted to see what Hilde thought about bringing Erzebet to the country. During the next few days, she improved somewhat.

When everybody went to Frankfurt for the final move of Hilde's belongings and Walter opened the apartment door, Erzebet stood in the doorway with wide-open eyes and a grimace on her face. When she saw Walter enter, she moved her hands to her mouth, and when he said, “Hello, Erzebet,” she began sobbing without tears. Her petite, skinny body quivered from emotional surges.

She turned away from Walter toward the wall and yelled, “Oh god, oh god.”

Walter was shocked, and Gaspar and Hilde next to him started talking to Erzebet. They tried to calm her by assuring her that they all were friends and she could trust them.

Erzebet, unable to control her emotions or to think anything coherent, said, “Last night I killed the child; everything is finished.”

Gaspar tried with humor and in Hungarian to explain the real situation. His efforts appeared to cause a gradual improvement in Erzebet, but no smile appeared on her lips; a dull gaze in her eyes and a constricted mouth indicated that the mayhem within her continued. When the friend with a truck arrived next day, despite her objections that “nothing makes any sense,” Erzebet moved temporarily, together with a dresser, cartons, stove, bags, and a stainless-steel sink, into the country house.

She improved significantly in this environment, especially with the help of some homeopathic medications prescribed by an anthroposophical physician.

Shortly thereafter, when everything settled down again, Walter and Hilde realized that out of the six originally active members of the group, only three were left. Percy decided to join an Ananda Marga group as soon as her travel agency job ended.

During the time when Charlie Chaplin was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was shot by his nephew, Walter noticed flies appear in his room and birds chirping all over the village. When he looked over the fields, he spotted many raised skylarks standing in the sky.

Walter met with the representative of a private health-insurance company in the farmhouse kitchen, with Hilde attending as well. As the director of the state headquarters in Frankfurt, the friendly man needed to fill the position of an agent for the district where Walter lived. Having the meeting at Walter's place had the advantage for the director, who could gain a valuable impression of the job applicant's situation, and for Walter, who had the convenience of not having to travel to Frankfurt. An instant sympathy developed on both sides. The visitor noticed Hilde's belly and considered Walter's obligation to find work almost immediately. Walter sensed that the man's interests included more than pure profit seeking, which permitted a straightforward and positive conversation. Walter met the prerequisites for the job, agreed to the conditions of a potential work contract, and filled out and sent his application back to Frankfurt. Soon he was hired to start training in a few weeks. The opportunity seemed perfect because after the initial training in Frankfurt, his work involved traveling within a fifty-kilometer radius of his home to visit customers.

Even though spring had started, it hailed so hard during a beautiful walk through the woods with the dogs and everybody else that the ice stayed on the ground. The next two days, the sunshine appeared so promising that the team decided to start building a garden fence by purchasing posts in a nearby village. The actual embedding of the poles had to wait for another day due to a heavy snowstorm.

Hilde's due date arrived; her suitcase stood ready.

Easter holidays resulted in a full house. Gaspar came with two women, Erzebet and his aunt from Hungary. Jutta from Munich brought along her young, classical-guitar-playing boyfriend. Erzebet still careened in and out of madness, saying her presence in the farmhouse would not be proper because she took too much energy out of it. Whenever she left the room, long and impetuous discussions occurred about how to treat mentally challenged people. Walter was shocked to learn Gaspar's position that he vehemently defended committing people immediately in such situations; he did not feel comfortable enough to help someone alone by himself. Walter, of course reminded of his own experience some years ago, could not defend a committal. Jutta knew that Gaspar had a girlfriend and implied that Erzebet knew about it instinctively, causing the continuation of her calamity. Hilde said he should not tell Erzebet, and then another discussion would start about whether or not to tell.

The rich, eventful holidays came to an end with an ambience of contentment in the house and in Walter. People slowly left, went on their own ways. Gerhard and Jutta remained at the house, along with the expectant couple. April Fools' Day arrived along with sunshine. When Hilde and Walter got out of bed late, they were able to sit on the bench in front of the house, enjoying the warmth on their bodies. They watched the traffic on the country road pass by for a while. Huge basalt rock transporters went through the village, coming from or going to the quarry nearby and raising a lot of dust and noise. Cigarette-delivery trucks, urgent medical-supply vans, plumber and bricklayer crews in Volkswagen buses, midsize livestock wagons all passed by on the road.

During the first half of the next night, Walter observed that Hilde was quite fidgety next to him in the bed. At four o'clock in the morning, she felt indications of faint contractions. At six o'clock, Walter took her to the hospital in Gerhard's car. The nurse assigned a two-bed, first-class room to her because of a crowded childbed station.

“Now please say good-bye to each other, and you undress but do not unpack your suitcase,” the nurse said to Hilde and told Walter he should call around noon.

At noon, there were no developments, and he was told to call back at four o'clock. Gerhard had to leave, and no backup vehicle was available. Jutta and Walter made their way by foot along the edge of the forest and then cross-country for about three miles, passing the youth hostel and train station, and then they stopped at the flower shop and bought a link cactus with red blossoms. They arrived with some delay at Hilde's room in the hospital, where they found her still radiant looking, with a thick belly under the white bedcover. She had just concluded her third nap after being examined by the midwife, who found that the cervix had not opened yet. They waited for stronger contractions, and then visiting hours ended. Hilde looked very beautiful in bed while combing her black hair and walked her visitors out of the room to the station door.

Later that night Hilde gave birth to a healthy baby girl. The following day in the afternoon, Walter crossed the forest and fields again and saw his daughter for the first time. The maternity ward nurse drew the curtain behind the window in the middle of the long corridor and held the baby in her arms. For two minutes, Walter could admire the new little human with black hair and wonderfully perfect fingernails. No wrinkles, shrivels, or other external flaws—just perfection, with dark eyes already looking around. Walter thought she smiled at him, and then his turn at the window ended.

## New Life

Several days later, Gaspar, Erzebet, and Walter sat at the kitchen table having breakfast, when Hilde opened the door and walked in with the baby wrapped in her arms. The emergency unit had dropped her off at the doorsteps. For the past days, Walter had heated the mother and daughter's room continuously to generate a comfortable temperature for the moment they would arrive. The new parents agreed on the names Magda Lisel for the girl. From then on, the daily routine in the alternative country dwelling changed considerably.

A number of months before the exciting event, Walter's parents asked him to come to Frankfurt and attend with them the funeral of Hannchen's husband, Klaus. Walter knew Hannchen, one of Friedrich's nieces, as well as her husband and little son. The Herzog family had visited before. Hannchen felt very close to Walter's father, who appeared to be her only direct ancestor. Walter liked her a lot because of her age and beauty and admired where and how she lived. Klaus had been a successful businessperson who had founded his own private bank in Heidelberg. The family lived in a large mansion inside a park that surrounded the estate located in the Odenwald area, a very pretty, desirable piece of nature to live in. With no previous warning signs, Klaus had died suddenly of a heart attack.

After the funeral, Hannchen invited Walter to visit again because she wanted to give him something he could use—Klaus had left a lot of custom-made clothes that he might be able to wear. Walter took advantage of the invitation and went back to the Odenwald residence, leaving with several bags of the finest silk shirts, suits, jackets, trousers, and some accessories. His body being slimmer than Klaus's and somewhat taller, the suits, jackets, and trouser needed to be altered. Walter went to Flederbach with items he liked and let a tailor do the alterations. As a result, he owned several suits of highest quality and many silk shirts in various colors, plus the appropriate ties to match.

The clothes came in handy when his new job as district agent for the health insurance company began. The first four weeks of training took place at the Frankfurt headquarters. When Walter's training started, he looked around in the room and felt immediately misplaced. Between the other trainees in their designed and blow-dried haircuts and the large cars in the parking lot, he thought of himself as a foreigner. However, nobody else appeared to see him that way when he simply showed up in his new outfit, which seemed to do the work for him. He could see some

sense in the services the company sold to their clients, which enabled him to participate in the sessions and continue with the training. During the weeks in Frankfurt, he stayed at the Westendstrasse apartment and sometimes went out with Gaspar or visited Irene, who had moved into a new apartment after her relationship with Gerhard ended.

The weekend days in Hohenhausen with Hilde and Magda had a special quality because he needed to catch up with what had been going on and get used to the little baby and the demands of the situation. Because of excellent weather, the small family dared to go on little excursions and visited friends nearby or Hilde's parents.

After Walter successfully completed the month of instruction, he drove home with a metal index-card box that contained the client list of his district. He soon started to make appointments by phone or stopped by customers' locations when he happened to be in their neighborhoods. He did not find the work difficult or demanding. The weekly meetings in some provincial restaurant, when agents had to report to the district manager or sometimes the director, were awkward when he had nothing to report, no deals closed.

As it developed, the dream of alternative living off the land took a dramatic turn into reality for the group of people and the couple with a child. Hilde, breastfeeding Magda around the clock, did not get a lot of sleep. Whenever Walter returned from his travels through the district, he took over duties as much as he could. The washing machine turned into a blessed apparatus and operated daily, sometimes twice, because little Magda only wore cotton diapers.

One day a white van drove slowly along the entire length of the property, and then backed up again to the spot where Walter stood near the fence, tending the dogs.

Two men got out of the vehicle and approached him. "Is this your house? We have to look around on your property; we are from the police in Flederbach."

It turned out that they had come to search for a stolen garbage can—or so they said. "How much did you pay for the house?" they asked. "Is it yours? Are you from a music band?" They asked the questions while scrutinizing the barn and its contents of ancient hay with mildew and Gerhard's old electric organ.

When Walter later talked to the neighbors about the incident, they laughed and shook their heads, saying, "This cannot be true."

A week later, police in uniform arrived from town with an arrest warrant for Gerhard. He happened to be present at the time. When he reviewed the warrant, it turned out to be for an unpaid

parking ticket of ten deutsche mark, an amount that had meanwhile increased to thirty because of the fees. Gerhard had to borrow the cash from Hilde, and then the police drove him in the green cop car to the post office, where he paid the parking ticket and the officers released him. It seemed as if someone had put pressure on the strangers from the big city.

At the time in Germany, an urban guerilla group by the name of Bewegung 2. Juni, which had been active since the early seventies, was once again using kidnapping and bank robbery as methods for revenge and an outlet for their frustrations with the German government. Police were on high alert and checked everybody and anything, which may have been a reason for these bizarre occurrences at the house.

Walter visited addresses and people out of his metal customer container. He sold upgrades for health insurances to farmers and self-employed physicians. He drove across his district in the white Citroën 2CV throughout the summer, wearing lightweight suits that did half the work for him, because he looked handsome and dapper wearing them with his short haircut.

On the farm, Hilde took on an additional mission besides being a mother: cultivation and maintenance of the garden. Initially crops of strawberries, peas, lettuce, radishes, and herbs supplemented and enriched the meals in the kitchen. The team completed the fencing job to secure the garden and then expanded their work by cutting thin spruces in the wood with permission of their neighbor. The estate's inventory also included an old tractor with a long tractor-trailer, which enabled them to transport full-grown spruce trees from the forest two miles away to the meadow next to the house and garden. Gerhard and Walter removed the branches and used the trunks as horizontal bars between poles for the long part of the meadow.

Everybody had pots and planters on their windowsills for months, where they cultivated first sprouts and then young, vulnerable plants. Walter and Gerhard planted hemp seed, hoping one day to be able to smoke their own weed. Hilde took care of some more precious vegetable plants that needed warmth. The hobby gardeners encountered all kinds of complications that could prevent a successful harvest. From snails to bugs, and from dogs to mice and spiders, all occurrences posed new challenges to overcome. At the same time, they made for an exciting time for everybody involved, which developed a feeling of family, community, and unity.

Hilde's and especially Magda's arrival in the house, improved their contact and relationships with the rest of the village. Particularly, their connection with their immediate two neighbor families turned from friendly to friendship and intimacy. Everybody knew each other,

and the kids did not hesitate to visit. It became routine that Walter and Hilde went to the neighbors for knitting evenings. He began a project of his own design. After initial help from Hilde, Walter worked at it for months. It became a cardigan made from lamb's wool in natural color, which looked like a coat of mail, and when completed reached almost to his knees.

The basic intention of Hohenhausen did not change with arrival of a child and a reduced active group but its appearance did. The crew inspected the stable at the end of the barn, which had several partitions, and with advice from neighbors and other information, bought two goats and two sheep. One neighbor had said they would not have to cut the grass of the large meadow anymore because the animals would take care of it. Throughout summer and into fall, everybody in the house stayed busy with various projects.

Walter visited his customers, attended the weekly meeting with the health insurance people, and once a month went to Frankfurt to the headquarters for an update seminar. Gerhard continued with his job as a traveling salesman, while Hilde thrived in her roles as mother and farmer woman. They also heard about other groups in the farther vicinity of the county they resided in.

When Christmas arrived, Hilde went once again to her parents with Magda and her new blue Citroën 2CV. Gerhard had a date with Irene, who felt alone in Frankfurt. Gaspar and Erzebet came to the country to spend the days with Walter and look after the animals. Erzebet discovered a bond with the goats. She also prepared wonderfully tasting dishes from the preserved delicacies of the garden. For Walter, this friendship generated joy—to be with two friends in a warm place and with good food and be able to talk about anything or nothing at all.

Gaspar had brought the most recent book by the Peruvian-born, American author Carlos Castaneda, *Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan*. While they sat around in the kitchen, he read from the book aloud, and then Walter and he began to translate the text into German. It provided a lot of fun and insight because they discussed the text as they translated. The message in the book had meaning to both men. They would have tried peyote right then and there, especially with a guide as experienced as the character Don Juan. Both of them could not understand how unwise Castaneda had acted during and after his experiences with the drug. On the farm, it became habit to translate chapters of the author's books, and back in Frankfurt, Gaspar obtained a small peyote specimen at the farmers' market.

The following summer began brilliantly, with hot weather. Everybody placed plenty of seeds of their likings in pots and other containers and waited to see what would come out of them. Another extensive and possibly final project stood pending on everyone's mind. Necessary measurements were obtained and noted, calls to suppliers made, the money counted, and the course of action discussed. They planned to take out the kitchen wall into the small bedroom in front of Gerhard's room, then remove the framework panels facing the garden and replace them with double-glass panes. It would create more light and a sense of spaciousness. Gerhard received a reasonable quote from a glass-processing factory in the district and submitted the dimensions of all sections.

When the team knew how long the glass factory needed to produce this custom order, they broadcasted an invitation to all friends in the city to participate in the much-anticipated event. On a weekend when most individuals were available, a crowd of ten gathered at the house, marked their spaces for where to sleep later, and went to work.

In the crowd was an old friend from early Westendstrasse time, accompanied by another friend. Markus, a law student, had been a longtime pal before Hilde and Walter went to India. He participated in countless sessions in Frankfurt. Markus arrived with Dagmar, whom he had met recently. She had short, blond hair and very blue eyes and looked intensely at Walter when they were introduced to each other.

She said, "You know, Walter, I may be related to you."

Surprised, he asked why, and she explained that in her ancestry was another Herzog, who had been born in the same area where Walter's father came from.

"We have to investigate someday," Walter said, and then everybody organized tools to use and went to work.

The troop of weekend workers achieved the panel demolition and removal of the kitchen wall and debris by Sunday afternoon. Then they all got together and enjoyed a last drink before heading back into the city. Dagmar left her phone number with Walter for future reference.

Because of the fantastic weather, the house crew did not need to cover the gaps in the framework immediately. They appreciated the feeling of open air for a while before Walter and Gerhard protected the wall with strong plastic foil.

Many appeared during the summer. Lisa and Friedrich Herzog arrived one a Sunday with the trunk full of supplies from the warehouse in Frankfurt's harbor. Even Lisa appeared to relax a



bit and smiled here and there while carrying Magda in her arms. Friedrich asked a series of questions about the ongoing construction and Walter's work status, but did not show any further concern. Walter recognized just the opposite. For the first time in his life, he thought his father was proud of him. Friedrich seemed satisfied, perhaps relieved with what he saw and patted Walter's shoulder—something he had never done before.

This encounter happened to be the last time they would see each other.

A few weeks later, Lisa called the farm and told Walter, “Your father passed away last night. I now have to arrange the funeral.”

Friedrich left this world during sleep, lying in his separate, small bedroom, which Lisa had made him sleep in because of his never-ending snoring at night. She said she heard two deep breaths, almost like moaning, and then there had been silence. Later when she looked into Friedrich's bedroom, she found him dead. After the phone call, Walter realized that he felt nothing exceptional when he heard the news from his mother, only surprise, acceptance, and the realization that he did not own any black clothes for the funeral.

Lisa's father had purchased a family lot in Frankfurt's main cemetery, where she decided to bury her husband. Walter arrived in a blue suit at the cemetery chapel. The space was filled with people Walter did not recognize. He sat next to his mother and listened to a nondenominational sermonizer who delivered a general passage speech that sounded accurate and fitting for the occasion. The closed casket lay on a pedestal, surrounded by flowers and foliage. At the end of the sermon, when music began to play, to Walter's surprise, the casket lowered magically into the floor and disappeared; it almost triggered a grin on his face, but he controlled the urge.

Lisa Herzog told her son to pick up his father's car, a Peugeot 204. She did not want to deal with it and told him to do with it whatever he wanted. For a moment, he thought about keeping it for himself, but then decided against it. When Markus heard about it, he called and asked whether Walter would sell it to him, and they came to an agreement.

During his next visit to Frankfurt for the sales meeting, Walter called Dagmar, and they met for dinner in a Spanish restaurant. She worked in an advertising agency and appeared happy to see him. He appreciated the opportunity to meet someone who seemed interested in him. Walter felt immediate intimacy with her—something in her features and expressions, the way she talked and was open with him attracted him, as did her body. The clarity in her eyes and her

fast mind made it easy for him to enjoy the dinner with her. Later, it felt natural to accept Dagmar's invitation to come and see her apartment.

She rented a one-bedroom apartment near downtown. The living room walls were covered with colorful pictures and family portraits. They talked about their families and tried to establish a connection between them but could not isolate any.

Sitting on Dagmar's sofa with a glass of red wine, they suddenly began kissing each other passionately. Dagmar moved a leg over Walter's. It encouraged him to place his hand on her upper thigh, covered by pantyhose. She moved over, on top of his lap, and he put his right hand through the pantyhose elastic to reach her sensitive parts. She groaned while removing his belt and trying to unzip his zipper, which did not work. They had to interrupt the session, got up from the sofa, and both undressed quickly. The exposed bodies embraced while standing and slowly went down on the carpet. When the couple recovered again, they took a shower together and went to bed, where they made love in a more refined way.

The next day, Walter drove back to Hohenhausen to tend to the load of Magda diapers, chop more wood for the kitchen stove, and shop groceries in Flederbach. Hilde had found out where the other alternative communities in their vicinity were. The following weekend, the small family loaded a Citroën with the baby carriage and food and made their way south over country roads. They drove through beautifully green valleys, deep woods, and small villages. From her notes, Hilde gave Walter driving instructions to their first stop.

A structure on a hill within a flat valley stood almost invisible because of the bushes and trees around it, and the couple had to make a few U-turns and detours before they advanced up the hill toward a building. The unique house had been built decades ago by a man guided by anthroposophy. He used solid basalt pieces and placed them in an octagon shape, held together by cement.

Here they met for the first time Egon, Andrea, and her two children, Katja and Lukas. They had no running water or electricity. They had to fetch every drop at a nearby well or in the village. When it turned dark, Egon and Andrea lighted candles and usually went to sleep early. As it turned out, both of them were multitalented individuals who used their abilities for whatever was possible at a given time. From playing music in the city streets to selling natural material by mail, this team had no income other than what they produced themselves. The two couples exchanged a lot of information. Egon knew many people in the alternative country scene

all the way to the Odenwald area. He also mentioned a community that worked as a music group with acoustic instruments, performing their own songs.

After a few hours, Walter and Hilde, with Magda sleeping in the back of the car, went toward their second destination, the Neudorfer Hof. Completely isolated in the forest between two villages, this property could be reached via a winding road from which a dirt road branched off and led along a huge clearing with a meadow. The couple slowly drove toward the forester's house. They noticed a number of people busy with something on part of the meadow, which had been converted into a field. Hilde sat on a bench in front of the house and let Magda suck a substantial quantity of liquid food from her tits.

A man and woman, both with long, blond hair, came up the few steps onto the narrow veranda where Walter and Hilde waited, and the man said with a smile, "Hi, my name is Kurt, nice to meet you. And who are you?"

The woman with a very long mane and one pigtail introduced herself as Ulrike. After the formalities and explanations, Kurt invited them into the house for a cup of coffee. He told the visitors that Ulrike and he rented the property from the local prince and owner of the woods in this particular area. He had been an art student at the renowned Staedel Institute Frankfurt and dropped out to do art in and with nature. About eight to ten people lived in the house and on the property at that time. They kept many goats, some sheep, and two horses, as well as a large peacock. On the field that Hilde and Walter had noticed, people were planting various kinds of vegetables during their first summer on the land. The commune had lived in the former forester's building for about eight months. Adjacent to the barn and stable, which were attached to the house, were some additional utility rooms, one of which contained two large ovens built into the wall. One of the group members, Knut, had begun experimenting with baking bread in the ovens.

Walter sensed honest kindheartedness in the hosts. He asked if they could come back some other time to talk more and invited Kurt and Ulrike to Hohenhausen.

Back in their house, a routine established itself between Hilde and Walter: Hilde occasionally went upstairs to Walter's room, or he would spend a night in the mother and child's room. There had been subtle, permeating changes to their relationship since they had moved to the country and Magda had arrived. From a refined and regulated partnership, it had evolved into an enterprise that Walter sometimes did not feel so comfortable with any more. Their interactions revolved all around what, how, and when to do things. They made justifications and

compromises to achieve accord in the house. Their occasional sex reflected the external condition between them—a mechanical act without much passion or love. Therefore, to Walter's disbelief, Hilde told him she was pregnant again. There was never any hesitation about having the baby.

At this point Walter could no longer express what he really felt for Hilde. He began to enjoy being away from the house. Meet up with Dagmar for a few days to have satisfactory sex and be appreciated—until Dagmar asked why he did not move in with her. That was not what he wanted, and he felt increasingly guilty. Walter talked about his job becoming more difficult in relation to production. He confessed that he had been fed up with it for a while but intended to hang in and do it as long as it lasted. Then he met with the director for a frank conversation. They separated with mutual understanding and respect, because interestingly enough, the director had talked about his life, saying he had been a member of the Masonic Lodge for a long time and the insurance business took only some interest in his life. Walter went back to the unemployment office to register, feeling relieved, as if he had done his duty and could enjoy life again.

It had been evident to the whole team that they could not prevent Fritzi from becoming pregnant again, and nobody thought about spaying her. Instead, Hilde arranged a planned conception with a purebred, longhaired, large Afghan male dog. The impregnation took place at the proper time, with the dog and his owner visiting the farm. It was an immediate success. Two months later Fritzi gave birth to her second healthy litter of five. The adolescent males and females now looked like traditional Afghan dogs, and the question arose about what to do with them.

Walter had the idea to take one female to Frankfurt and show her around to friends and interested people. As usual, he stayed in the Westendstrasse apartment. On a Sunday, he went to Grueneburgpark with the dog to let her run and to go for a walk himself. As he enjoyed her running on the big main meadow in the typical fast pace of greyhounds, he walked by a bench on which an attractive woman in a beautiful summer dress and a little girl sat.

“Can I pet the dog?” asked the perhaps five-year-old in a fresh voice, and the woman asked, “What is it—an Afghan?”

Walter stopped in front of the park bench. He explained that the mother came from Afghanistan and called the dog to come over to the bench so the girl could pet her.

The woman, in designer dress, looked extremely neat and cultivated. She said, “Please sit down for a moment and let them play. Agnes likes dogs so much. My name is Manuela. What is yours?”

Walter sat next to her on the bench, and they began talking about traveling, country living, and work. She mentioned that she had been a model but was currently not working and that she lived across the park. With her hand, she pointed to the nearby Gruenburgweg.

“What are you doing tonight?” she asked very openly.

Walter said he had no plans.

“Why don't you come over for dinner? You can bring the dog along if you like.”

Walter accepted the invitation of this gorgeous, young woman. Certainly surprised by it, he looked forward to meeting this woman and took a shower before he left for the ten-minute walk to her apartment. He rang the bell for the condominium on the first floor of a beautiful, old, renovated Westend apartment house. The buzzer sounded almost immediately. Agnes waited at the apartment door. She instantly took the dog in her arms, and the two began running around the large apartment until Manuela called her to sit at the dinner table.

She had prepared various delicious dishes and set a tasteful dinner table. The three sat down and enjoyed lively conversations with occasional interruptions from dog and child activities. When they finished, the grownups drank espresso, and Manuela told her daughter to get ready for bed. The dog rested in the living room on a large, thick carpet, and Walter sat on a modern corner couch while waiting for Manuela to return from her daughter's room.

When she came back, she had changed into a light, colorful negligee of delicate material that revealed her long, beautiful legs. She walked through the room to light a candle on the mantelpiece and then approached the sofa on which Walter sat. Her robe slipped off her shoulders as if by its own doing, and he could see her flawless, tall body, including the stunning breasts that showed no sign of giving in to the law of gravity. They were pear-shaped, and while Walter caressed both of them, he could feel their firmness. He had risen from the sofa and was kissing her softly on the neck, while his right hand fondled the hidden treasure inside the black slip she still wore.

She put her hand in front of her mouth. “My daughter—we have to be discreet.”

Even a cushion could not muffle all her sounds. The dog got up from the floor and licked Walter's back while he drove into her and finished with a loud exhale and then laughter.

Back in Hohenhausen, he relaxed from his escapade in the big city by going for a walk in the woods with Fritzi and Flecki. Hohenhausen incorporated wide-open spaces as well as deep forest. Recently, there had been reports of killed chickens and unrest in specific henhouses in the village. Rumors spread in the village that the two dogs, or at least one of them, had been involved, that he had been seen roaming around, doing no good. An official complaint had never come to any of the group members' attention. As the three walked now, Walter enjoyed the cooler weather of the countryside, compared to the sweltering, humid heat in Frankfurt.

They strolled on a path through densely overgrown shrubs in the shadows of the deciduous trees. The dogs and he heard twigs breaking and something running away quickly. Immediately, both pooches leaped to a fast dash, barking madly.

Walter screamed, "Stop, come back, Fritzi, Flecki!" But he knew they would not; they never did when chasing something.

He ran through the brush as fast as he could, hearing only one dog barking distantly and a snarling sound. As he approached a somewhat open space going downhill, he recognized Fritzi in the distance, scampering in a circle and barking. Flecki stood with his head down close over something, brandishing it. When Walter came closer, he did not trust his eyes because he had never seen such an egregious scene in real life.

Flecki, his teeth sunken into the neck of a young roebuck that made guttural sounds. The poor animal was jerking its feet while lying on the side. A ghastly sight. Walter's brain raced, thinking what to do. He impulsively looked around, noticed a midsize broken branch, snatched it, and hit the roebuck once, twice, three times on the head, until it did not move anymore. Then he yelled at Flecki, who growled at him but ran away quickly, hiding in the bushes, with Fritzi behind him disappearing into the woods.

When Walter arrived dog-less and breathless back at the house, he quickly explained to Gerhard what happened. They concocted a plan, put a blanket into the back of the Citroën and drove slowly in the direction of the disaster, as far as they could. They walked with the blanket to the scene and wrapped the animal, then carried it to the car and drove back home. The whole team sat around the kitchen table, feverishly wondering what to do with the deer. Hilde had the idea to contact Kurt, who had mentioned that a guy he knew worked as a butcher. The plan's resolution included skinning and gutting the animal and filleting it as soon as possible, and later

eating it. After Hilde talked to Kurt, she contacted Sheik, who agreed to come to Hohenhausen the next day with his knife set and do the task.

When he arrived, Walter thought, *Well, this guy truly found his proper line of work.* A very dark, long mane covered his head, and he had four-day-old stubble. He appeared to miss an eye patch, an effect caused by drooping eyelids and his habit of avoiding looking directly at people. Somewhat morosely, he demanded help to hang the animal from the stable door with strings and nails. Then he began his work like a surgeon, and all present were impressed with how skillfully he opened the cadaver, separated the thick skin from the flesh, and then pulled the whole shebang down and off the naked deer. Walter got paper and pen to write down Sheik's instructions for treating the hide for further use.

The team decided to have a party the next weekend and meanwhile handled various animal parts differently to conserve them until then. Gaspar and Erzebet arrived a day earlier because Erzebet wanted to prepare a few specialties. She and Hilde shared the task of cooking the deer meat; multiple recipes were available. Ulrike and Kurt came with another member of the Neudorfer Hof group, as well as the butcher Sheik and his friend, and Egon and Andrea with her two children from their outpost.

All guests settled at the large, old, wooden kitchen table alongside the antique bench with its storage compartments underneath and a backrest. Walter felt very satisfied to see that. He had not expected that an event so rich and festive would arise from the brutal hunting accident in the forest. The party was a success and an opportunity to get more acquainted with each other, to share experiences and find out how to help each other with different projects.

## Perception

Ever since Walter could remember, he felt he was unlike anyone else he met. Originally, this memory stemmed from the time of his parents' first move to another town. As a consequence, he endured an endless pain that never entirely receded. It turned into something out of his control to find the root of the pain, why he suffered even when there was no external reason for it.

Walter's desire not to hurt anymore and to discover the cause of the pain became intrinsic to him. From a young age, he had the ability to see behind any facade or games people played. He did not perceive it as a gift, but as an inability to be like everybody else. Walter wanted nothing more than to have a family, live a simple life, and be happy. He never accomplished that in a conventional way and accepted his depressed temperament as just being him.

With time, Walter even forgot this condition until someone asked him directly, “Why are you so depressed?”

Stunned, but at the same time recognizing truth, he let it inside, and in his way and through any opportunity, worked with it. During his travels and meditation periods, he felt free of pain. Therapy attracted Walter's attention for the first time through the AA commune that the Austrian Otto Muehl cofounded and participated in. His commune, Aktionsanalytische Organization, became a topic in the media because of its unorthodox methods of liberating suppressed individuals by practicing free, collective sex and abolishing private property. At the same time, primal scream therapy by American Arthur Janov gained international attention.

Walter hoped to find a method for himself someday that would cure him once and for all through an extreme but all-encompassing procedure. He imagined that he would only need to perform the primal scream—or whatever method—once, although profoundly, and then everything would be all right.



## Internal Affairs

Gaspar, Gerhard, and Walter talked in the kitchen. Everyone had agreed it might be a good time for change in Walter and Hilde's life, Walter having enjoyed his recent affairs with other women. All three, in their own way and time, had conversations with Hilde about looking for a boyfriend or lover to experience something new, to open up her relationship with Walter and become more flexible. She also was told of his experiences in the Bransfeld disco and involvements with other women in Frankfurt. It may not have been the best time for her to hear these encouragements and news. Her belly showed the pregnancy state, but Hilde's robust disposition enabled her to take it all in stride, and see it as another alternative experiment and play along.

For the time being, summer continued with an unusual number of hot days. It forced the hobby farmers to water the garden on a daily basis. That could take up to two or more hours. Some of Walter's cannabis sativa specimen had already reached his own height and had many dark-green leaves. Everybody fought the battle against snails on the cabbage.

A new visitor arrived in company of Kurt from Neudorfer Hof. Bert was a tall, blond, blue-eyed young man whose father owned a large, rare horse ranch where they also provided natural impregnation of mares by purebred stallions. Bert had grown up about twenty miles from Hohenhausen. He knew everything that happened in the area and was an excellent source of information and advice.

A letter from Anthony in Boston arrived with greetings and an update. He told Walter he had enrolled into the Boston School of Music and moved to the city. He also asked whether Walter would like to receive some pure LSD, clean lysergic acid diethylamide, which he had and some of which he would happily send to him. Even though Walter's initial experience with the drug resulted in a major breakdown, further tests with it after that first dramatic episode, however, did not cause any recurrence of madness. He replied to Anthony that he looked forward to receiving it.

The summer sustained its lovely nature, the framework double-glass window inserts had been delivered by the glass factory, and the team completed installation of the individual pieces with wooden strips and insulation paste. The overall appearance and atmosphere in the kitchen

and dining space improved dramatically with the increased sense of space and more light. Visiting family members and friends praised the group's work.

Walter's mother did not come to the farm any longer because her driver—his father—had died, but Walter and Hilde went to see her occasionally in Frankfurt. She had relocated into an apartment building with subsidized rent for retired people. Each time they met, she appeared to be happy to see Magda. Lisa Herzog took the child into her arms and rocked her. Whenever she talked to Walter privately, however, she expressed concern about Hilde's growing belly and his unemployed status. Walter told her not to worry, that everything would be all right, but he felt guilty saying it.

When harvest time arrived, he cut nearly thirty hemp plants, some of them eight feet tall, and hung them up to dry in the attic. This process took a very long time because the weather turned; it started to rain a lot, and the humidity prevented the leaves from drying. Walter had no information regarding male and female plants or flowers and buds. He felt satisfied with the amount of leaves he had gained from his land.

Shortly after reaping season, Gerhard gave notice that he had to return to Frankfurt permanently because of his inability to sustain essential income for himself in Hohenhausen. Nobody liked the news, including Gerhard, but reality for him pointed that way. He moved all his furniture out of the house, promising to visit often, and Hilde and Walter assured him that he could return any time he wanted. A chapter in the history of the small community closed and gave way for new events to come.

It did not take long before Egon and Andrea paid a visit and brought along Silke. A mother of a two-year-old boy and pregnant again with her second child, Silke wished to relocate into the area, separating from an interrupted relationship with the father of the children. He belonged to a music group that was modestly popular on the alternative country scene. When she visited her friends, who knew of the potential vacancy in Hilde and Walter's house, they all dropped in to find out whether it would be an option for Silke to get the space and join the small family in Hohenhausen.

Hilde and Walter discussed the visit. She appeared to be a nice woman who needed some help, and her demeanor had a quality different from the usual visitor in Hohenhausen. Spending a long time with the traveling music group, even performing in it, had implanted lightness in her.

A major benefit having her in the house would be the presence of another child. They decided to try it, and soon Silke and little Florian became the newest additions in Hohenhausen.

The character of the house changed immediately into a more emotional and sensitive environment. Walter liked Silke's courage to go forward with her life alone and take responsibility for the kids. She also possessed an attractiveness that went beyond her physique. Sometimes she appeared as if she directed psychic powers, and other times utter nonsense came out of her. Little Florian could walk already and looked at the world through his large, blue eyes with fear. Magda developed more and more into a proper playmate. Silke liked to wear long, colorful Indian or Afghan dresses that gave the household an exotic touch. Soon she became a pleasant pillar of their community.

Kurt organized a big event at Neudorfer Hof for all to celebrate. They slaughtered a pig and a sheep and cooked them to perfection in the stone oven. Knut had been busy in his bakery for hours preparing different kind of pizzas. Tables were set up on the lawn, and people seated themselves. A rustic binge began and lasted through the night until dawn. The crew from Hohenhausen left in a happy mood around midnight. Hilde promised to arrange another feast in the near future.

Silke located a physician and a midwife in Flederbach who agreed to assist with her intended home birth when the time came. Gaspar arrived to visit for some days. Walter and he drove to the disco in Bransfeld, where they danced with some pretty girls. Later, Gaspar asked the girls to drive back with them to Hohenhausen for some more fun. Hauke and Wilma agreed to follow in their own car. Everybody gathered in the kitchen to smoke a few joints and have a bottle of wine or two. When they became tired, all four of them went to Walter's room with the large custom-made bed. The two couples spent the night next to each other. Walter made love to young, pretty, brunette Hauke, who enjoyed the experience; the next morning she looked at him with warm, brown, encouraging eyes before she and Wilma left. All four promised each other to meet again.

Gaspar had a new book that he opened during breakfast and introduced to Walter, *Factotum* by Charles Bukowski. The novel by the German-born, American poet and novelist turned into the next hobby translation project. Both interpreters had fun for many hours with this story. It reflected their own experiences in life. The author used a simple narrative style without morality, just the truth.

For a long while, Gaspar held something back, but then confessed that he had fallen in love. Deeply in love, lovesick for two weeks, he had come to Hohenhausen to clear his mind and perhaps find out what had been going on with him recently. The source of his infatuation lived in Bad Homburg, which Walter knew very well; she was a twenty-year-old social-work student who Gaspar had met at a music concert. Gaspar talked about his current emotional condition and Walter listened.

Another letter from Boston, Massachusetts, had been delivered to the mailbox. Walter fingered it carefully and noticed its lightweight padding. Anthony reported that all had been going according to his plan, that he enjoyed his first semester at the music school. He also gave instructions on how to use the padded contents of his letter. On strips of blotting paper were small dots of something that had been dropped onto it, approximately fifty spots. Each dot contained dried, pure, and powerful LSD 25. The sheer quantity surprised Walter.

Gaspar thought it could be a way out of his ongoing misery, and he said, "Let's do one tonight."

The old bench in the kitchen with its closable compartments below the seating area and a comfortable, slanted backrest had become a favorite place to relax. It offered a vantage point for seeing through the windows into the garden and the rest of nature behind the house. Walter and others cherished the time spent in that position. When Magda grew up and began to walk, sit, and play on her own, father watched his little girl through the glass as she sat with her blanket and cushions outside on the cobblestones. The duck family that they had obtained would come by and approach Magda, who would roll onto her side and then get up on her feet to stroke a duck. She did in a distinctive way along its body and then neck. When Magda finished the caressing motion, she embraced the neck with one little hand. The duck would become still and rigid as if it had turned into wood, and Magda could sit on it like on a rocking horse.

Walter had bought a used Marshall amplifier and electric guitar that he sometimes played in the barn on full volume. It produced a rough and raunchy sound that he loved. As he worked on the electric guitar one Sunday afternoon in the barn's somewhat insulated space, he heard his name called. When Walter turned off the amp and walked outside, he could not believe his eyes: there was his old and intimate friend Andreas standing in front of the wooden fence. Walter had not seen him for years. It was an odd moment to face him with his styled, blow-dried hair. A new Citroën SM with a blond-haired woman inside parked on the other side of the road. Walter

invited them for tea, and they talked. Andreas had won an election to the German House of Representatives and married the woman in the car, a journalist for a network radio station in Frankfurt. Last time the two had met, Andreas came to Westendstrasse in his old Volkswagen Beetle to announce his success. One of the privileges he received was free first-class travel on trains. Walter was amazed to find out how much money representatives made. He felt envious and later wrote a song about his friend.

Another big surprise materialized in form of a telephone call from Madeleine, his ex-girlfriend from a long time ago. She had talked to his mother in Frankfurt to get the number. They chatted for a long time on the phone, and Walter invited Madeleine to come visit. When she arrived a few days later, she appeared to be the same Madeleine he knew before—without any emotional substance. It felt good and at the same time unfamiliar. She remained for dinner and later a glass of wine in the kitchen. After Walter's assurance that it would be completely acceptable to Hilde, she stayed the night. So it happened that Walter slept with the woman he'd had his first important relationship with, ten years later and next to each other. They shared the same bed under separate covers and talked for most of the night.

The season gradually changed to autumn, with falling leaves and strong wind gusts. Walter lit a wood fire in the stove in his room to reduce the sudden coolness. As he stood at the window, looking outside onto the empty, winding village road while waiting for the larger wood pieces to catch sparks from the kindling, he noticed an old Mercedes pull up. The car made a left turn into the small side street opposite the house and then parked behind the two Citroëns. To his big surprise, he watched Bert approach the house, open the front gate and the front door, then knock on the door of Hilde's room. There were voices, then the door closed and then nothing. Next morning when Walter got up, the Mercedes was gone.

## The Becoming of an Author

Since they had started the search for a house in the country, Walter had kept a diary. Almost daily, he typed a few lines or sometimes a whole page on his Olympia typewriter, which he had bought with some of his confirmation money when he was fourteen years old. As autumn changed into early winter and suddenly he had a lot of time available, Walter decided to write a book. Literally, he determined to use the diary manuscript and transcribe it by hand onto white paper. As winter swung into full gear, Walter's hair grew long and curly again. A modest beard appeared on his chin and cheeks. When the laundry was done and hung on the clothesline outside in the meadow between two poles, he retreated to his nicely heated room. With some black tea with cinnamon and milk, the pipe filled with hemp tobacco, he worked on the painstaking task. Using liquid ink pens and writing in block letters, Walter wrote slowly but continuously. As time went by, he added sketches, song texts, pictures, and submissions from other people.

He went for a visit to another group and specifically to one individual who had been in Hohenhausen during one of the parties. Volker had rented a big, old house with other people about thirty miles to the east. They sustained a vegetable garden; their alternative emphasis rested on a spiritual approach and nobody cultivated fields or kept animals. Some of the members had been in the East. Walter noticed Shiva posters on walls, incense burning, and tarot cards in the middle of a very large living room filled with mattresses and thick cushions. He liked the environment and peoples a lot and became an occasional visitor. He very much appreciated the fact that most of the times he visited, other guests and especially female visitors were present. Walter felt genuinely happy there. He began to believe he was somewhat exceptional, one of them—especially since he began writing and identified with it. The act of writing gave him a previously unknown satisfaction.

On a Friday night, he called Volker to ask whether it would be proper to show up. Volker said it would be perfect because a troupe of visitors from southern Germany had arrived, and he would fit right in. Walter made sure that everything in his house was secured and prepared because Hilde had left earlier to visit her parents with Magda. He took the Citroën 2CV and headed east again. At Volker's house, an exclusive party had already begun. People sat or lay all over the large living-room floor; soft music sounded from the stereo. A small circle gathered around a copper tray in one part of the room drawing from the tarot deck. As soon as Walter

entered the room, he noticed a young, short girl with long, wavy, brown hair and attractive features. Soon they were talking to each other. Christel had arrived with a group of five from the Bavarian countryside near Nuremberg who drove through the land to visit other people interested in a similar way of life. Soon Christel and Walter hugged each other and exchanged a first, delicate kiss. The host family prepared a delicious vegetarian meal, and their visitors added something to the dinner table on the living-room floor. Walter donated a bottle of wine, and everyone sat down to enjoy the food, drink, and company.

Hilde had revealed weeks earlier that Bert was her nightly visitor. Walter laughed about it secretly and joked around with Gerhard and Gaspar that Hilde had found a lover. Gratefully, Walter was able to accept the fact that another man slept with his partner without him feeling jealous. He perceived that the situation presented no danger to him in any way, that nothing had been taken away, and that it represented a step forward in his personal development. Hence, for him to indulge in the company of friendly, like-minded individuals with healthy food, good wine, and agreeable women did not cause any guilt feelings or remorse. During this period, he began to enjoy his role in the alternative society.

The feast ended slowly; all participants left for their homes or rooms within the building. Walter found himself the only one remaining, together with Christel, in the living room. After a few moments of total silence, when they could hear the sound of distant car tires on asphalt, they moved closer to each other on the carpet and looked into each other's eyes for a while. Christel had light-brown eyes with some black spots in them and an enthusiastic smile that invited Walter. He caressed her cheek, and she bent her head sideward, pressing his hand between her cheek and shoulder. While he slowly got to his knees, with both hands he pulled her sweater and shirt over her head and then looked at her again. She got up on her knees and moved toward him. They touched with their bodies, from the top to the knees. Walter quickly removed his shirt so he could feel her soft breasts against his chest and hugged her gently, while she opened his belt, unbuttoned the front of his pants, and stripped it down to his knees. Walter dropped down on his back, removed the pants, and reached for her. Christel lay on top of him kissing, while he caressed her back.

Back at Hohenhausen, a knock on his door and Hilde's voice asking, "Can I come in?" pulled Walter out of his concentration. He interrupted a pen stroke on the page he worked on and replied, "Of course."

To a certain degree, it was odd that she would knock on his door, but considering their relationship at that point, not really. The two had not slept together for months.

Hesitantly, Hilde entered and said rather uneasily, moving from one foot to the other, "You know, I have wanted to ask you something for some time. It is about the kids. What I want to know is whether you will also take care of them, and how far are you willing to go?"

Walter was bewildered; he had just finished a loaded pipe of hemp tobacco, which was working in his head. "I don't understand," he said. "What do you mean?"

At this moment, he looked at her fully and noticed panic in her eyes that he had never seen before in all their time together.

"I just need to know how willing you are and how far your commitment goes," she said while pointing at her swollen belly.

Walter did not say anything for a while. He tried to comprehend the circumstances, evaluate the reasons why Hilde would ask such questions, but he did not find an answer. All he knew was that he did the whole lot to the best of his abilities. Holding up his open hands, he replied, "Hilde, I don't know what to tell you."

Then Walter noticed a straightening of Hilde's back and a tightening of her shoulders as she turned and left the room. He remained confounded in his chair for a long time, unable to move or to think clearly, until he felt coolness sinking into the room.

A few mornings later, he noticed that Hilde's blue Citroën had not returned from a visit to the Neudorfer Hof and only Silke with Florian roamed around in the kitchen.

Walter asked her, "Do you know what happened to Hilde?"

She said, "Um, I do not know what happened. She went to visit Kurt last night and took Magda with her."

Walter became aware of a constricting sensation inside his breast and adrenaline racing to his brain. *No good indications*, he knew instinctively; something had happened that would be discovered in the future. The news presented itself via Hilde when she returned around noon the next day. She immediately disappeared into her room and then took a shower in the bathroom next to the kitchen.

Walter had Magda on his lap on the big bench, feeling very nervous.



When Hilde finally entered the kitchen and took a seat with some tea in front of her, she said, "I stayed with Kurt for the last two days. It may be more serious. Bert was like a friend and son, but now I feel shaken inside."

"OK, what can I do, or what shall we do?" Walter asked.

"I don't know, nothing at this point," she replied. "Nothing will change right now. I live here and Kurt down there at the Neudorfer. I also do not know how serious it is for him; he just separated from Ulrike."

Hilde reached over the kitchen table and caressed his cheek, looking at him through her brown eyes with, he thought, compassion. This he had not anticipated when he encouraged her some weeks ago to have some fun. Silke must have seen or felt something, because when she came into the kitchen sometime later and looked into Walter's eyes, she hugged him for a little while.

"I don't understand it, but there is nothing you can do," she said, her voice full of compassion.

Walter went up to his room and smoked a pipe. A few weeks passed. In reality, nothing changed except that some nights Hilde received a visit from Kurt, who left again before Walter got up. What hurt Walter was the noise from her room, where the new lovers made love and Hilde used her voice to let it all out. The screams and reverberations of passion made their way through two doors and up to the second floor, where Walter lay in his bed, his body stiffened and unable to sleep. During the days after those visits, his nerves relaxed, and later he could not tell anymore what felt better—when Hilde visited Kurt or when he visited her.

None of it had anything to do with enjoyment. He felt fortunate, however, to have friends not too far away at Volker's place. There he met Gerlinde Kirsch, who instantly became a friend and confidant. Gerlinde had been one of Volker's networks for some time. They went to the same university in Marburg, where she studied sociology. She had just delivered her degree dissertation, which included an essay about recent history, from the political left to the alternative movement, in Germany. Gerlinde traveled a great deal all over the country to meet with individuals and groups and find out how and why they decided to move together to distant locations in the countryside.

She visited Walter in Hohenhausen and stayed overnight sometimes; she even met with Hilde on occasion. Her relationship with Walter remained friendly but nonsexual. They slept

together in his bed, and Walter tried every time, but she refused to have intercourse with him for reasons Walter could accept. Gerlinde's abstinence turned their meetings into thought and experience exchanges that he never experienced before. It made him happy for a while not to be alone, to have someone with an interest in him, even if the interest had a strong non-personal aspect to it. Walter visited Gerlinde at her small apartment in a provincial town not far from Volker's house. They had coffee and cake together in a coffee house. He spent time with a good-looking, intelligent woman in a café during daytime hours in obvious pain. Walter experienced a strong feeling of being a Bohemian, which neutralized his pain temporarily.

Gaspar, Percy, Hilde, and Egon had given Walter poems, letters, and sketches that he included in his handwritten manuscript. Gerlinde gave Walter permission to use her dissertation as a preface to his book.

He had been in contact with people from the Information Service in Frankfurt. They published a weekly political news and commentary collection from their offices in a converted factory complex near the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University. The collective also owned and operated offset printing presses, which transferred an inked image from a plate to a rubber blanket, then to the printing surface. The technique enabled the production of a book with the type of Walter's material. He spent two weeks in Frankfurt, staying with Gaspar in the Westendstrasse, to help produce the rubber blankets in the print shop. To see his work come to life was an exciting period for him.

Gaspar had been involved with the Information Service for a long time. His new girlfriend, Klara, and he and Walter visited people and places in the city. They went to concerts and enjoyed each other's company. Walter felt special in his role as author and book publisher. He appreciated the time away from country life and his issues with Hilde. After Walter's part of the printing job ended, he drove back to Hohenhausen to wait for the book printing and binding process to be completed so he could pick up the finished product.

When he entered the house and walked into the kitchen, Silke, Hilde, Florian, and Kurt sat at the table having coffee. For an instant blood went to Walter's head, and he felt his heart pumping, but he recovered as he unpacked a few groceries from his bag and put them on the shelves and in the refrigerator. There had been silence in the kitchen since he entered, even though everybody said hello to each other.

Hilde got up and announced, “I am going to clean some vegetables for dinner—any requests for tonight?”

Nobody said anything, and she muttered, “OK, then I’ll go ahead and do the ground meat.”

Walter went to the kitchen table and said, “Hello, Silke. Hi Kurt, how are you all doing?”

Silke replied with OK. Kurt appeared to be thinking for a while and then said, “I am good too. How are you?”

This quick exchange appeared to release pressure in the kitchen air because Walter suddenly heard church bells ringing that he had not heard before. Kurt began telling stories from life on the Neudorfer Hof and did not stop talking, drinking one glass of wine and then another. Walter excused himself and left the kitchen. He needed to light the stove in his room and could not endure these endless yarns. However, a major breakthrough had been accomplished by all present, bridging a very sensitive situation to which nobody had looked forward.

Life in the house continued as before. Walter had more time on his hands since the book writing was done, and he felt a little lost and bored. He played the guitars, sang, and recorded his songs onto cassettes again. He went with Fritzzi for walks and shopping in Flederbach. One night, he heard knocking on his door, and Silke entered the room.

She said, “I think the time has come, the contractions started.”

Walter, Florian, and Silke were the only ones in the house. Hilde had left the afternoon before to see her boyfriend, Kurt. Therefore, Walter happened to become the assistant during Silke's home birth. He called the midwife on the phone around 1:00 a.m., and she told him to measure the time between contractions. During the next two hours, the labor pains came in shorter intervals, and Walter called the midwife again. She told him she would be there in thirty minutes. When the midwife arrived, she had plenty of time to arrange necessary tools and aids for her work. Walter and she added a rubber sheet under the regular sheet on the bed, to protect the mattresses. Silke walked back and forth and up and down the stairs. Occasionally she breathed very deeply.

Little Florian scrambled up the stairs crying. He had been awakened by all the noise and looked for his mom. Silke carried him around a little bit and then Walter took him back to bed. The water broke an hour later, and then Walter witnessed for the first time the miracle of birth. Given that this was her second child and with firm assistance from the midwife, Silke delivered a

girl quickly and without difficulty. When the baby lay in Silke's arms, breathing on her own, the room in the old farmhouse filled with an air of massive clarity, a delicate atmosphere, which had not been present before.

Suddenly there were three kids in the house and another one almost there. With an emphasis on childcare, daily routines and adjustments settled in after the initial bliss and excitement triggered by the newborn. Load upon load of cotton diapers, first in the washing machine and afterward in freezing temperatures on the clothesline outside. A noticeable smell of baby powder, drying laundry, preparation of milk in bottles, and baby poop floated through the building. Walter felt as if he was at the wrong place at an improper time. He could not keep up in his mind with his better-equipped roommates. The situation between Hilde and him did not amend. She disappeared for a night or two, returned and looked very happy and very beautiful. When Walter asked, she had no answers. He visited Neudorfer Hof occasionally, but Kurt's endless, oblivious storytelling became extremely boring and difficult to accept for Walter.

He appreciated an invitation from Gaspar and Karla to join them on a short car trip to Rome, Italy, where they wanted to visit friends. Walter packed his bag and the acoustic guitar, but before he left, Silke used her newly arrived hair-cutting kit to cut off his hair and shave his head bald. He had requested the dramatic exterior change because inside he felt he needed a metamorphosis. Leaving his car behind, he took a bus from Flederbach to Frankfurt and arrived in Westendstrasse, from where the trio left the next day. Walter had to wear a knit stocking cap because of his sensitivity to every air draft.

Back in Hohenhausen, just in time for the holidays, Walter saw the weekend issue of a major Frankfurt newspaper on the kitchen table. It featured a special one-page report on the alternative scene in the area. Kurt, Hilde, and he had been mentioned, and their story told by the reporter. It felt very strange to see his name in the press. He did not know what to make of it, but he could feel how it expanded his ego. The Christmas holidays that year in Hohenhausen passed with sober spirits, and for unknown reasons, nobody cared to decorate a tree.

After the holidays, Walter received a telephone call from the print shop that his book was ready for pick up. Very happy to hear this, he returned to the city. His car filled with cartons of packaged books, he immediately went through the list of bookstores that potentially could sell it for him. Politically left bookstores, health-food stores, and women's bookstores accepted a

number of copies and put them on the shelves. It felt very good to be out there; Walter had had no idea whether anybody would accept this type of self-published printed material.

He placed an ad in an alternative magazine to introduce his book and its availability by mail order. At the same time, he sent free copies to various important people on the scene and to certain friends he had not seen for a long time. Very curious about the overall response and potential sales of the book, he experienced pleasant surprises. Essentially, all the cash he had invested returned to level the balance; he did not lose money. The book did not become a bestseller; nevertheless, he felt an affinity with what he had done the past six months, and it continued to keep him busy. Almost every week Walter drove to Frankfurt to check the shelves in stores. He had never encountered this type of satisfaction before. Often ecstatic, he enjoyed every minute of it, made many new acquaintances mingling in and around the scene.

Whenever he left the house and knew where he would be, Walter left a number where he could be reached. The second home birth could happen at any time. One Tuesday he left and visited Manuela, the beautiful mother and ex-model who still warmed up for him. She was alone at home. As they lay naked on the sofa in the anteroom, Manuela told him that she had had surgery on her breasts, belly, and thighs. He could not see a single scar or evidence; to him, her body looked flawless.

She prepared a salad and appetizers and then proposed they go to Cooky's club at the Hauptwache. Walter drove in his Citroën downtown and parked in a garage. The couple walked the few steps together to the club and down the steep flight of stairs into the basement below a cinema. As soon as they entered the disco, Manuela went straight to the bar and asked Walter what he would like to drink. He asked for a beer, and when the bartender handed it to him, Manuela told him that this was on Cooky, the owner and her friend. Then she said, "See you later," and disappeared behind the bar.

Walter did not see her again that night. He also did not know where to spend the night, but that did not matter. Earlier that night he had taken one of Anthony's little dried drops of lysergic acid diethylamide, and the world had become his miraculous friend. He put his beer bottle on a table and made his way onto the dance floor. The best popular dance music, delivered with the most sophisticated equipment available, made Walter dance in tune with the beats and sounds. For some hours, he simply moved; then he remembered the bottle of beer, but he could not find it anymore. Early morning had arrived. Walter picked up his car and drove to the

university area, thinking he might be able to have a drink at the club he went to with Hilde on their first night. Luckily, he arrived just in time to get the last serving before closure and then had to vacate the club.

Many people stood in front of the entrance not knowing what to do, waiting for someone to suggest something. Walter listened to some folks talking about how to get home. He offered them a ride, and when they reached their destination in east Frankfurt, they invited him to join them for a final nightcap. The roommates also had some fine hash to smoke that extended Walter's stay at their place into the late-morning hours.

Later that day, as he rested in the Westendstrasse apartment, the call came in that Hilde's labor had started, and Hilde asked him to come back. He left Frankfurt during rush hour, and when he reached Hohenhausen, he saw an ambulance standing in front of the house and a group of people around the entrance door: Silke, Kurt, a woman he did not know, and 2 men in uniform.

As he approached the gate, Hilde exited the house, noticed him, and said, "There you are. Are you coming with me, or who is going?"

A very awkward moment occurred when Kurt and Walter looked at each other, started toward the ambulance, stopped and backed off again, and then did the same again, until Walter said, "You go."

Kurt went with Hilde to the hospital. Silke explained to Walter that earlier the midwife had measured Hilde's blood pressure and did not like what she saw. She became concerned enough to call the ambulance for childbirth under medical supervision.

Without further complications, Hilde delivered a healthy baby boy she named Johannes. Lots of excitement developed in the old framework house with new life and interesting arrangements. Where Kurt had been previously more discreet, he suddenly spent a lot of time with Hilde in Hohenhausen. Since consciousness and sensitivity had never been Kurt's strength, Walter had to raise the issue, telling Kurt that he did not really own the house he was visiting. Kurt backed off and from then on visited only briefly and in the company of one of his subordinates from the Neudorfer Hof. Hilde spent most of the time in Hohenhausen, and now and then, it looked as if things had returned to a previous state. When the temperatures turned pleasant, the team planned a party to welcome their new housemate and the new season.

## Cyclic Devastation

During this period, Walter lost his primary purpose. Two driving forces within him dictated his external life: to express the creativity he had accessed and not to feel the depression underlying all his actions. With a mixture of emotions and self-delusion, the result of Walter's decisions became self-destructive conduct. In the beginning, his transformation did not show through his actions. His friends might have realized the extravagances he allowed himself. Nobody suspected he was going through a trauma he could not handle. In addition, he did not tell anybody that he had already consumed half the contents from Anthony's gift letter.

Once, in the course of the baby shower, Walter let Gaspar know he had taken a hit of LSD, and Gaspar said, "Wow, let me have one, too. That is a great idea, to use it without other people knowing that you did."

A new plan took shape in Walter's mind. He wanted to produce one large summer party with all his friends and everybody they knew. The idea included having a music group perform in the meadow behind the house, him singing his songs publicly for the first time, and inviting the whole village. The print shop in Frankfurt printed a small poster he designed to announce the event. He also ordered a sound-mixing console that he could use to perform his songs. Walter still needed a microphone, but hoped to use one from the band. The purchases eliminated his cash. In a magazine, he noticed an announcement for a three-day open-air festival in Zurich, Switzerland, for acoustic music groups. He imagined that he would show up there, perform with his new sound mixer, and play guitar as he sang his songs.

On the last page of his book, Walter had included a personal ad, searching for a woman. It contained a truthful account of his situation, with descriptions of himself and his ideal partner. One of the people who ordered the book by mail replied to the ad. A very sweetly written letter arrived one day in Hohenhausen, asking him to visit Karin at a place in southern Germany. Since he had written and posted this ad in a desperate move to find someone who sensed an attraction to him, he decided to look up Karin sometime soon. In the back of his mind, he thought he could combine the visit to Karin with the festival in Zurich.

Out of nowhere, someone he knew very well arrived on the doorsteps of the house. A healthy-looking but almost toothless Frankie stood in front of Walter.

The two friends hugged each other, and Walter asked, “What are you doing here? What's up?”

Frankie told him that he had been in and out of rehab and was clean for several weeks at the time. Walter invited him to stay in one of the vacant rooms under certain conditions, and Frankie thanked him gratefully. He had acquired many manual skills over the years. Within one week, he had built temporary scaffolding out of dead trees from the forest and placed it on the house wall facing the barn. Then he completely plastered the upper part of the wall, which needed it badly.

Walter nourished the idea that heroin addiction could be treated with LSD. He offered a hit of his stash to Frankie while they were driving through the most beautiful forest in the area to reach Bransfeld. In the middle of this dense forest, Walter stopped the car on the road and turned off the light. The next village was a distance of about five miles. Total darkness and silence surrounded the two for some minutes. Nobody made a movement or said anything. Slowly, the dark and quiet forest came alive. Tiny lights danced between the trees, branches creaked, an occasional owl called, and a gentle night breeze stirred. The stars above enlightened the scene of the two friends in an old Citroën 2CV. They did not talk for twenty minutes. Walter started the engine to get them on their way to an open-air festival outside town in a former gravel pit.

The drug had kicked into full gear when they arrived. They looked at about four hundred people at the bottom of the pit, dancing and swinging to the beat. A favorite local band played on top of the edge, about a hundred feet high. Since the two had come from a direction that was level with the band's location, they slowly approached the area.

Frankie said, “Hey, listen, I want to go down there, see you later,” and left Walter, who moved carefully forward.

Near the band, Walter noticed a few maracas lying on the ground. He took a pair and gently began to rattle them. He had been observing the performing band and noticed that the drummer immediately moved his head in his direction. Walter smiled and showed the instrument and his ability to play with the band. Two acquaintances appeared from the dark and smiled at him. Wilma and Hauke positioned themselves on either side of Walter, and then all three started to sway in rhythm while Walter shook the maracas.

When the band ended the song, the folks in the sand pit clapped and screamed. The music group left the edge of the pit for a break. The break music sounded like “Sympathy For the



Devil” by the Rolling Stones. Walter carefully moved to the small, empty drummer's seat and sat down on it. Huge loudspeakers were transmitting the music over the public address system from the left and right. He hit the drums a few times with a stick, the crowd below noticed him and started shouting and clapping their hands. He noticed a microphone dangling in front of him that obviously had not been turned off before the group left their equipment.

He hit the drums again and screamed a loud “yeah, yeah” into the microphone. That triggered a thunderous “yeah, yeah” from the masses down below.

After a few more repetitions, Walter lost track of the Rolling Stones in the background, and his drum solo and outcries were out of sync. The audience lost interest. He heard some whistles, which reminded him of where he sat and what had happened.

Later in the car, both started to laugh wildly, and Frankie said, “First I did not recognize that you were the one on the drums, but then I couldn't believe it. You sure gave it to them. You had your performance of the night.”

Frankie began to disappear for days and then return in bad shape following relapses. Walter gave him notice. When it happened again, he told Frankie to leave the house for good.

In Walter's mind, preparations for the big summer event in Hohenhausen were running ahead full speed. At the same time, Wilma, whom he had met at the disco in Bransfeld, visited him in the house. Over a weekend, the couple became more intimate with each other. Since there were no additional people in Walter's room when they went to bed, it turned into an enjoyable encounter. He discovered her young, tight body to the fullest and studied her dark-blue eyes. Walter thought he detected an awakened interest in them, which encouraged him to spend more time with her.

Recently, he had noticed that his book sales in stores had slowed to a trickle, and he befriended the idea of selling it in person at a flea market. Acquaintances that went to the weekly market in Frankfurt every Saturday offered to place his book on their table while they sold honey, bread, and other organic products. Very early, before sunrise, Wilma and Walter loaded a box of books and Walter's twelve-string guitar into the Citroën and made their way on country roads through the awakening scenery. With help of a thermos full of fresh coffee and some hemp hash joints, two hours later the two found themselves sitting next to the River Main, along with almost a mile of more people and their tables and booths.

When flea market visitors discovered the black-and-white cover picture of the book next to bread and honey, they asked, “What is this? Oh, you are the author. What is it about? Very interesting. Now I have met my first author in person.”

Walter felt important and privileged as he sold a modest number of copies. The ones he sold, he signed and dedicated to the buyers, and in doing so, everybody had a lot of fun. Later in the afternoon, he gathered enough courage to play the guitar and sing his songs for the first time with a donation box in front of him. Walter realized that it took a lot of energy, and luckily, one of the table hosts had a bottle of wine that he shared with Walter and Wilma. All day long, she gazed admiringly up at him with her blue eyes, they hugged and kissed, and she pressed his hands. The flea market experience left him elated and at the same time tired. When the couple arrived back at the farm, Wilma spent Sunday with him as well. Walter noticed that she had absorbed the situation and constellations among the people in the house and might have contemplated where she would fit in.

The city of Flederbach arranged its own flea market in town. The Hohenhausen commune reserved a space, and then everybody, including Kurt next to Hilde, sat at a long table on a cobblestone lane. They sold all kinds of stuff, from homemade bread, honey, pastries, cheeses, and used clothes, to Walter's book.

As Walter sat on his spot, feeling alone again without Wilma, a man passed by and asked, “Where are you from?”

“Hohenhausen,” Walter replied.

The man responding in a clarifying tone, “No, I mean your looks and all, your dark skin. Shouldn't you be in a warmer climate?”

Walter could not figure out or ask what the person meant since he had moved on already. His voice did not carry any malicious or aggressive undertone, as many Nazis in the area might have. It was a simple ascertainment of an unpretentious man in a provincial district town, and Walter could never forget. Meanwhile, Hilde appeared to be spending more time on the Neudorfer Hof than in Hohenhausen. Walter felt the gaping hole inside and the connected pain that the absence of his kids and Hilde left in him. Especially with Johannes, he had not been able to bond because as soon as she became mobile again after his birth, Hilde spent a lot of time away.

Slowly the biggest event in Walter's history on the farm approached. He had no indication whether there would be any music band, who would attend, or how to buy a bottle of beer—because he had no more money. When the Saturday arrived, Walter was in his bed, wearing his sunglasses, with the bedcover up to his chin. He did not want to see anybody or feel his fear, anxiety, pain, or anything else. He had automatically dropped another one of his little friends on blotting paper, courtesy of Anthony from Boston.

As time advanced to afternoon and evening, occasionally one of his friends would come into his room and ask, “When are you coming? Everybody is waiting for you.”

Walter would say, “I’ll come out later.”

When Hilde returned from Neudorfer to attend and help at the event, she used somewhat stronger language than the previous visitors, “You cannot do this. You have to come downstairs. This is your party.”

Eventually, he dressed and slowly walked down the stairs into the kitchen, where butcher Sheik stood with a bottle of wine in his hand and said, “I want to hear you sing. Where is your guitar?”

“I am not singing tonight,” Walter replied and looked out of the window onto the meadow where, in the dark, a large bonfire lit up the area.

“I want to hear you sing, you coward,” Sheik said and pushed Walter with one hand and then grabbed him with both and threw him into the empty dining area. Walter bounced against a wall and then fell to the ground, got up from the floor, and walked outside toward the fire, ignoring the drunk. There he noticed neighbors gathered on chairs and benches, some smiling at him and others looking away timidly. Gerhard mingled with the guests on the lawn. Then Walter walked quickly back into the house. He felt unable to be among people, cut off from all channels of communication. Afraid to show his real self publicly, Walter was unaware that he hurt enormously underneath the emotional effect of the drug. Without hope or trust of anyone present, and unable to ask for help, the enormity of his sense of loss and aloneness could not be shared with anyone.

After a sleepless night, Walter walked down the stairs late the next morning and met Gerhard who was just about to leave and return to Frankfurt.

“Please come and visit me when you are in Frankfurt. I want to show you something you might appreciate,” Gerhard said and then left.

In the kitchen, Hilde was preparing the children for her trip south to Neudorfer Hof.

The two were unable to talk to each other, but Hilde managed to utter, "If you want, you can always visit."

Walter stayed in the house for two days, cleaned up as well as he could, and avoided Silke and her kids. She might have been doing the same with him, because they only met briefly in the hallway without talking to each other.

During the third night, his jealousy and continuous thoughts about Hilde and Kurt enjoying the night together in bed next to each other did not stop. Before sunrise, he got into his car and drove south, not really knowing why and where he went. Halfway between Hohenhausen and the Neudorfer Hof, he used a smaller, winding, but shorter route through a protected valley, which contained only one village.

As Walter took the scenic route and reached a clearing with a hill and dense bushes, he stopped the car. He felt like an Indian pathfinder or Mexican medicine man on a mission to discover an important place or sign that could help him put an end to his misery. Walking gradually, very carefully and aware, slowly over the pasture up the hill, he observed many signs and places that could have meant something or nothing. Nature itself appeared to assist in his confusion; the excursion left him in a satisfactory state of mind. He walked back to the car and drove to the sleeping Neudorfer Hof.

Walter opened the entrance door and crept silently up the stairs to the third floor. He knew to which cubicle room to go. Very carefully, he opened the door and saw Hilde and Kurt sleeping next to each other in a bed. Walter moved one step toward the bed, and at that moment, Hilde woke up and mumbled something while raising her upper torso toward him. He punched a hook to the left side of her chin. Without witnessing the result, he left the room and went down the stairs to his car.

He drove to Frankfurt and hung out in the Westendstrasse for a while. Gaspar had to leave; he did not know Walter's stories at that time. Walter waited until night and then called Gerhard, who had come home from work.

Gerhard said, "OK, come over and stay here if you promise that you will go with me to a place where they can help you tomorrow."

The next morning both of them drove in Walter's car over the Autobahn toward Bad Homburg, then took an exit that led to another small town with a large hospital surrounded by

forest and meadows. During the drive, Gerhard frequently told Walter to stop the car, because he was afraid for his life. Walter would not listen; he drove fast and irately. He also did not hand over the keys to his vehicle when Gerhard attempted to drop him off. They entered the hospital building together into what appeared to be a reception area. Gerhard told the nurse they had an appointment with a doctor. Once that had been confirmed, Gerhard said good-bye, and Walter waited in a room. A female physician conducted a brief interview with him and then assigned him to a station. Walter inspected his appointed room and noticed that he had to share it with another person.

An early dinner had already been prepared in the common dining area. Walter sat down at a table and ate a few bites. He got up, left the open station and the building, went to his car, and drove back to Frankfurt. He stayed for a few hours at his destination, the disco at the university. After midnight, Walter departed from Bockenheim, taking the most direct route over country roads on his way to Hohenhausen. Beyond the last suburb of Frankfurt, while going north and approaching the next town, the road went downhill. Walter reached a juncture with a sharp right turn where he had to slow down. At that instant, he saw it.

A large black spot was positioned in the floodlight of a used-car lot. Something polished, sparkling in the middle of the night. He stopped his car and made a complete U-turn to inspect it. When he approached the lot, encircled with little flags fluttering on strings in the night wind, he identified the source of his attraction: a two-door Citroën Traction Avant coupe, possibly from the early 1950s, in mint condition, parked between the other common vehicles.

Walter walked around the black miracle on wheels, shining, blinking, and attracting him in the summer night. He put his hand on the driver's-side door handle, and it opened. Surprised, but considering it a good sign, he looked inside, and awe struck him. Both seat benches, front and back, were spotless, red with beige leather edges. He carefully moved onto the front bench behind the wheel and reviewed buttons and controls on the black, vertical dashboard. He turned a lever, and a light started to blink, which impressed Walter so much that he felt like a little child visiting the circus for the first time. At that moment, it seemed as if he stepped from a nightmare into a reality where deep wishes were answered.

Satisfied with his checkup, he exited the car and walked around it. He marveled at the exceptional exterior condition of the vehicle, its rims and tires, the stretched engine compartment with split hoods, which sported manual rubber releases. He turned the trunk handle, and it

opened. Without hesitation, he walked back to his own car, which parked on the side of the road. He opened the back door and selected a few items, such as the large wheel wrench and the first-aid kit, to move them to the Avant. Walter had no question in his mind about why and what he was doing.

As he turned around to go back to his white Citroën, a police car pulled up at the curb with flashing blue lights. Two uniformed cops exited the patrol car, walking toward him.

“What are you doing here? Are you trying to steal the car? You are under arrest.”

Walter had to turn around. The officers put handcuffs around his wrists and made him sit in the back of their vehicle. At the local police station, they led him to an empty lockup. He lay down on the metal cot and rested peacefully, glad that somebody was taking care of him and happy he had found something beautiful.

It did not take too long; Walter must have slept for a while. A cop opened the cell door and directed him to an interview room. Officials had already confirmed his identity, and they took his statement and account of what had occurred for the record. The sheriff advised him that a complaint of attempted car theft would be filed against him. They let him leave the station and offered him a ride to his car, still parked at the curb near the crime scene.

The used-car sales office, with an attached auto shop, opened its doors as the cops dropped off Walter in front of the enterprise. Walter walked into the office where he received a harsh and icy reception. Personnel had seen him exiting the patrol car and now knew who had entered the property. Walter began talking to them by apologizing first and then explained that he fell in love with the black vehicle. He said he wanted to buy it. This announcement created a long silence in the sales office.

At last, the owner referred to the price. Walter said, “OK, I'll take it and will pay cash for it. I also want stereo equipment installed.”

For Walter, his plan of action developed in his mind as he went from moment to moment; he had not planned anything. After he selected a brand and configuration of the stereo, he walked back to the curb and started his old car to drive back home to the farm.

Nobody appeared to be in the house when he arrived there in the afternoon. The banks had closed already. He could not do much except search for the house deed and be prepared. Walter also made a telephone call to Denmark. Lisa from New York, whom he had met a long time ago, moved to Denmark, married her boyfriend, and gave birth to her first child. When

Hilde became pregnant, she and Walter had visited Lisa in their house on the small island of Langeland, across from Kiel, Germany. They shared common interests because of how and where they lived. Lisa and her boyfriend, Lars, lived on farm in a commune type of cooperative and wanted to integrate into the local society. It had been a good time to visit them. Walter liked the idea of visiting again, especially in his new acquisition, which is why he called Lisa in Denmark. She said it would be OK for him to visit for a while.

First, he had to take care of transportation. After a good night's sleep in the empty house, he woke up, not knowing what had happened to all the residents. It appeared strange, but more pressing matters at hand prompted him to take care of his own business by visiting a bank in Flederbach. He selected a bank where he did not have any accounts, interviewed with the manager of the small branch, and within thirty minutes received the money he needed for the Avant, plus a little extra for living expenses. No thoughts went through Walter's mind about the fact that the bank would want the money back; he simply followed his inner plan. A day later, the auto shop told him that the stereo had been installed, and he could pick up the car.

Elated, happy, and on a roll, Walter drove his old, white Citroën south for about forty miles and turned into the used-car lot. The mechanics let him sit on the red velvet cloth of the front seat. He inserted a cassette into the player and briefly reveled in the full, clear sound that came from the system. The owner counted the cash and shook his head. He had never experienced anything comparable to this deal. Walter arranged that he could leave the white car until later or until they were able to sell it. He slowly seated himself again behind the large steering wheel of the Avant, turned on the engine and listened to the sound of the simple, large engine. It looked and resonated like a boat's motor humming away.

Walter stepped on the clutch pedal and carefully moved into reverse gear to back out of its position on the lot and drive onto the street. Everything worked as it should have. When he left town behind, he increased the speed somewhat to feel the vehicle move under him. Then he turned on the music and went to heaven—until he arrived in Hohenhausen and saw Hilde's blue Citroën across the street in her usual parking spot.

“What did you do?” she said. “Oh my god, you are crazy. Bring it back return the money! How will you ever be able to pay for it? This is beyond belief.”

## The Road to Dead End

On and on she went. Walter felt uncomfortable having to encounter this side of Hilde to spoil his fun, but he looked at her and realized that she had transformed into a stranger with a distorted face. The couple had not seen each other since the party, which had not turned out well.

Hilde also said, “I thought you were in the hospital and receiving help—why are you not?”

Walter left the house and went for a walk alone; Fritzi had been taken to Neudorfer Hof. Hilde was gone when Walter returned. He did not mind; instead, he made himself a pipe with hemp tobacco and went through the mail on his desk. There he located the letter from Karin, who lived near Trier in southern Germany. He also saw the magazine page with the Zurich folk festival information.

Walter began to prepare for a long trip. The Avant trunk was almost full with items that included the sound mixer, two guitars, and his sheep-wool comforter. He also loaded the glove department with his favorite cassettes of music. Certainly, Walter did not forget the significantly reduced bag of hemp tobacco and the envelope with leftover LSD.

Not too early in the morning of the next day, he left the farm, Hohenhausen, and essentially his life as he had known it behind. Via the main road to Bransfeld and onto the Autobahn in a northern direction, he accelerated the antique, black monster to the customary 140 kilometers per hour. He listened to the engine but heard no suspicious sounds. Walter concentrated on the road handling and checked if the steering wheel shook slightly, but it did not. It started to rain, occasionally heavily. The windshield wipers were not up to speed but managed the downpours.

Just as he passed the Autobahn exits to Hannover, he suddenly heard a bursting noise, and then the entire carriage shook and rattled. He quickly turned onto the emergency lane. When he exited the car and went around to the right side, he saw the reason for the tumult: a flat tire.

Something he had learned over the years— have always a large wheel wrench in the car—helped him solve the issue. Wet and breathless, he continued the trip without further interruptions until he reached the port city of Kiel late in the evening. He found a perfect parking space near the harbor area from where the ferry to Langeland left. The first night in his new



beloved possession, Walter spent on the red backseat, where he could almost stretch out completely. Covered by the sheep-wool comforter, he slept in exhaustion.

When the early traffic noise and blowing horns of ships awakened him, he knew immediately where he was camped out and what he had to do. Walter put his bed cover back in the trunk of his marvel, seated himself behind the wheel, and turned the small key. Nothing. No clicking sound, no movement whatsoever. He tried the little he knew, but the engine did not start. Scanning the area, he noticed two large men cleaning the parking lot where he had camped out. Walter approached them to ask for help pushing the vehicle, and they agreed. Within a few yards, the engine picked up and hummed comfortingly.

Walter drove to the ferry station house and bought a ticket for him and the vehicle, with the engine still running. He made sure to move the car into the proper lane for departure some hours later. Then he turned the engine off and searched for a place to have breakfast.

Langeland, a small Danish island located between the Great Belt and Bay of Kiel, had always been a three-hour ferry ride away. The ship that Walter and his Avant boarded arrived before noon in Bagenkop. The sun burned away the cloud layer that had hovered over the area. It felt fresh and warm as he carefully pulled up the ramp onto Danish soil. To his pleasant surprise, the starter worked on the first attempt. At the tourist information pavilion, where they also exchanged money, he noticed that the generator light on the dashboard did not fade out.

Driving along narrow roads, sometimes by the side of the sea, between marshlands, waterways, medieval churches and chapels, Stone Age settlements, and evidence of Vikings' old burial mounds, Walter did not worry about mechanical or other issues. The windows rolled down, he breathed the brackish smelling sea air and enjoyed small houses, which reminded him of Tolkien's fantasy story *The Hobbit*. Occasionally asking for directions, he eventually arrived at a rather large one-story building, in part encircled by an expansive atrium and some utility structures. There was no answer when he knocked at the front door. He went around the building, assuming that someone would be in the garden and was right. Walter saw Lisa with her long, black, curly hair and a little child sitting next to her between some plants.

He approached the salad area of the garden and said, "Hi, Lisa. How are you?"

She came up from her bent-over position and smiled. "Welcome back, Walter. There you are. So happy to see you. How was your trip?"

He said, "Why don't you have a look at it," pointing toward the other side of the building.

“Let me first introduce to you the others. They are all over the area here.”

She yelled, “Hey guys, come here, look who is here.”

Suddenly, six people, four of them children, surrounded the visitor and Lisa, who introduced Walter to everybody. She also mentioned that Lars and the other men worked at different places and would come home later. Then the whole group went together into the courtyard, and Walter heard “oohs” and “aahs” from the crowd. They all packed into the Avant, giggling and laughing aloud.

Lisa managed to charm the crowd away from the vehicle and walked with Walter through the hallway into the huge kitchen with the very long table. Right behind the entrance door on the left side, she showed Walter a space that would be his room: a cubicle-like, narrow space with a window on one side and the door on the other. The width of the stall did not extend much more than the door's width plus a wooden separation wall. A sleeping berth had been attached to the wall. Lisa mentioned that currently they had a couple of friends visiting who stayed in the other available rooms. Six adults and four children lived on the farm.

Late in the afternoon, the whole team arrived home. Someone started cooking, and Walter helped cut vegetables. At the extra-long, wooden table with the whole crew present, Walter noticed how serious and resolute some of the members appeared to be. They talked Danish, which he did not understand, and anyone who addressed him had to use English because nobody spoke German. Walter also noticed that Lisa's husband, Lars, had not displayed the same favorable reception and openness he had during the earlier visit, with Hilde. Meanwhile, Lars and Lisa had married, and with their second child on its way, the project of living in the local community had turned into a reality.

Walter had truthfully told anybody who wanted to know about him that he had arrived with little money but wanted to help wherever he could. After dinner, almost all rolled their own cigarettes. Tobacco products and alcohol had always been expensive in Denmark. Hence, he was pleasantly surprised when someone offered him his pouch.

There were a few parties in the house and after a few drinks, his presence on the farm and on Langeland did not stick out so much anymore. Walter appreciated any party because it would allow him to play and sing some of his songs and smoke cigarettes and an occasional joint. He had to use his own stash very economically because he could not afford to buy anything. The last

money he spent had been for a mechanic, who fixed the starter but pointed out that Walter might need a new generator, which he could not pay for.

A pleasurable event for Walter occurred when he invited the visiting couple from the USA to take a ride with him and listen to music on the stereo. They smoked a joint of very nice hash, mixed with tobacco, and took a cold bottle of wine along in the car. Walter, sitting at the wheel, inserted a Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young cassette while the passengers took their seats in the back of the car. All windows down, he slowly chauffeured the large black car through the dark landscape of the midsummer night. An occasional appearance of the full moon from behind the clouds provided a full view of the sea. When they reached a spot where the road ended, Walter turned off the engine, and all three listened to the music while watching the spectacle of nature. After the cassette ended, they observed in silence and later went back to the ranch.

The couple with Walter declared, "We shall always remember this beautiful ride with you. Thank you very much."

Lisa maintained a considerate attitude toward Walter. However, he realized that even between her and him was a lingering separation. He offered his help in the garden and in the house and kitchen, but besides occasional dish washing, nobody seemed to have use for him. During the next weekend party, he took one of his remaining few LSD dots and went back to the source of all that occurred. As an outlandish misfit visitor, observing the spectacle of alternative Danish provincial behavior between relatively young adults, he saw his isolation more clearly than ever. That night, he stopped trying to be of value to any of his hosts and instead began his personal discovery of the neighborhood.

With the Avant almost out of gasoline, Walter used one of the bicycles on the farm. He drove and walked through the most beautiful small settlements he had ever seen. The clear sunlight of these days emphasized the loveliness of cottage-style, cultivated dwellings with roofs thatched with reed. Most of them displayed small strips of flower gardens at the front and sides and a larger vegetable garden in the back. Doors and window shutters had been freshly painted with green, blue, yellow, and red. Large trees rose between the few houses, as well as on both sides of the roads.

During one of his daily trips through the hamlets, Walter realized he never saw a human being while he was there. He stopped in front of a house that he especially liked because of its pleasant energy, went to the entrance, and pressed the door handle. The door opened, and Walter

called, "Hello, hello," but nobody replied. He stepped inside and wandered through the house without knowing why he did it, except he simply loved everything about the house's exterior and interior. He studied framed pictures and little semiprecious stones or delicate table lamps, sometimes rearranging the position of an item, and then came to the kitchen. He noticed a heap of dirty dishes and washed them, dried them with a towel, and placed them neatly on top of the kitchen sink. Then he left the house and roamed some more through a wooded area until hunger made him return to the farmhouse to eat some bread with butter and cheese.

At night, he could not fall asleep because of too much energy. Walter went into the large laundry and bathroom area where someone had created a small paddling pool out of painted concrete for the kids. He cleaned the whole space inch by inch with a lot of water, using a hose. After he finished the job, he had the feeling he had done the commune a favor. It gave him the sense of being helpful in some way, and he felt as if he had cleaned himself.

Nobody ever said anything to him about his activities. The continuous summer weather delivered wonderful days, during which he could go to the sea, swim a little, or lie on the narrow beach. In the house, he faced a society of involved couples. When sometimes a blonde and blue-eyed Viking woman appeared for a visit and Walter attempted to demonstrate his interest, she soon let him know that somebody else waited for her elsewhere.

He held on to his daily routine, walking or driving the bicycle, discovering new gems of houses. One day he again entered a beautiful house he would have liked very much for himself. A few dishes waited to be cleaned. Just as he finished them, he noticed through the window someone approaching the house. The door opened, and a man stood in the doorway, looking at him speechless.

"Do not worry, I did not take anything. I only cleaned the dishes, and I do apologize for entering your house," Walter said and walked by the stunned man.

Within the week, Lars told him to leave. They gave Walter some money for gasoline and ferry and told him to hit the road. Lisa attempted to talk with him but became overwhelmed with emotion. "How could you do such a thing, breaking into other people's homes?"

Since Walter did not know why he did anything recently and did not break in anywhere, he gratefully accepted the money and departed.

He succeeded in making it back to Germany. As he entered the Autobahn in Kiel and, he heard the engine revving up without transmitting any power to the transmission. Playing around

with the tempo, Walter realized that something was wrong with the clutch, intermittently transmitting force and then sliding without doing so. This added another mechanical issue to his antique vehicle. During the trip south, Walter tried saving every penny he had from his friends in Langeland. He did not stop before Hannover to refuel and use a restroom at the gas station. The generator light came on and then went off again, the clutch did not provide full transmission power, he was hungry, and he had another three hundred kilometers to drive before reaching Hohenhausen.

Handling the Avant now felt more like hard labor combined with tension than like a thrill ride. Several times during the trip, Walter thought that the journey had ended. Especially when he reached the mountainous stretch of the Autobahn south of Kassel, about a hundred kilometers north of his exit, it appeared as if the automobile would not make it up the hills.

Physically and mentally strained to the limit, he arrived in Hohenhausen in the middle of the night. The house was empty. He found breadcrumbs in a bin. Searching for something edible, he discovered oatmeal, pickles, and some cans of sardines and corned beef.

Walter also noticed a half-full bottle of red wine, which he knocked back while puffing on a hemp tobacco pipe. When he went upstairs into his room, he saw a stack of envelopes on his desk. Glancing at them, Walter recognized bills and a reminder from the bank to start paying back the loan. Lonely, tired, miserable, he fell asleep to wake again early in the morning.

His first thought had to do with Germersheim in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate and Zurich, Switzerland. Karin's letter showed an address in Germersheim, but no phone number. Walter did not feel as if he could wait for an answer from Karin by mail. He decided to leave the house as soon as possible, before anybody else could interfere with his plan. He dressed quickly in his usual travel outfit—the cotton jacket in light yellow, blue, and white stripes with many pockets and his faded jeans. The vehicle stood where he had left it. All the stuff from his previous trip filled the trunk. He only needed to turn the key and hope the starter would work.

Luckily, it did work. Walter found himself on the road again when he decided to pop his second-to-last LSD hit. Since he had nothing to drink, he let it dissolve on his tongue. Within thirty minutes, Walter entered the world of here and now. There were no issues or feelings of misery, pure chemically induced presence with acute focus. He did not suffer any hunger either, which enabled him to drive farther south on the Autobahn.

Walter outsmarted the disabled starter at an Autobahn service station by asking people to push his car. With a lot of skill and patience, he doctored the malfunctioning clutch in situations where he needed it most. The dead generator he outsmarted by obtaining a used battery from another service station. All of it in twenty-four hours without sleep or food. Then, in the early morning hours, he rolled into Gernersheim and found a parking spot next to what appeared to be a recreational park near the River Rhein, somewhat outside of town. Walter pulled the bed cover out of the trunk and rolled himself up on the rear seat, where he fell asleep instantly.

The sleep did not last long because of persistent knocking on the window above his head. With sleepy eyes but immediately wide awake, not sure what was going on, he noticed one person staring down at him and another standing in the background.

“Hey, what are you doing? Do you need any help? Can we do something for you?” Seedy questions from a very seedy character directed at him.

He opened the window a bit and told the guy with wild eyes and a gold chain around his neck, “I am tired, please leave me alone. Thanks.”

Reluctantly, the two sinister types strolled away, sometimes looking back at the car. Walter knew he had to be careful with them. He heard his stomach growl and felt a sharp sensation of hunger. It made him move into a sitting position, look out the windows, and consider his options. He knew the car would not move an inch without starter and electricity, as well as a clutch, which needed repair. The longer he considered, the hungrier he felt. It drove him out of the Avant, which he locked with his key, and then walked toward town. Not many people roamed the streets at that time.

He took the first opportunity to ask a young man if he knew where the welfare office was. The man did not. It took two more attempts before Walter knew where he had to go. The office had not yet opened for the day. When it finally did, Walter explained to an agent that he had no money and needed something to eat. He filled out a form, signed it, and received about four dollars in cash. They also told him he could find an unemployment office nearby. First, however, Walter went into the next open bakery and coffee shop to buy a cup of coffee and a doughnut with the money. After the purchase, he had no more.

This experience was Walter's first encounter with hunger devoid of satisfaction, and he did not like it. Quite the opposite, it created a force in him that affected his brain more than anything else he'd ever encountered. Concentrating on one issue, he quickly went to the

unemployment office, where they could not help him with cash but gave vague advice: in the harbor area, he might find a day-labor job. When Walter walked to the exit of the German unemployment office, he noticed that the American forces also had an office in the same building. There he unsuccessfully asked for work as well. He even tried to apply for refuge in the USA, but they did not take him seriously and sent him away.

After these efforts, the hunger returned. Walter had an idea. He walked for twenty minutes back to the car to get the twelve-string guitar. In the car, he smoked the last bits and pieces of the previous summer's hemp harvest, which gave him a little lift. As he walked back to town, he noticed a water tap sticking out of a house wall, which worked when he turned it on. He put his head underneath the cool running water and drank a few gulps. As he continued walking with his dripping wet hair, a car in the familiar colors of green and white with a blue bulb on the roof stopped next to him.

“What are you doing here, and where are you going?” said a cop from inside the patrol car.

Walter explained his intentions, and the cop said, “Sit in the back of the car. We need to check you out.”

Walter got in. They drove to a police station where he had to wait in the general reception room while the officers used his identification for further inspection. When one of them told him to follow him into a room, Walter sat down at a table, where another man in plain clothes already sat.

“We see here that recently you were arrested for attempted car theft. Why are you here now?”

“I bought the car, and I would like to sing some of my songs for the people in Germersheim and perhaps make some money. Why don't you contact my friend Andreas von Mauler? He is a state secretary in the interior ministry.”

The officers left the room, and after a while, one came back with his ID card and said, “You can go now, but do not beg for money in our town—we shall arrest you.”

Walter could hardly understand what the person told him because all he wanted was food. Swiftly he stepped out of the station and made his way back into the direction they had come from. After two hours, he once again entered the old town and found the square he remembered

and felt comfortable with performing in public. The shadows had extended, he did not need to stand in the hot afternoon sun.

By the time Walter was halfway through his first song, he realized how the energy drained out of him as he used his voice. He stopped singing but continued playing guitar. An old woman emerged from an alley on the other side of the square. Painfully slowly, she made her way in his direction. Old age had shrunken her frame. She walked bent over on a cane and tried to stay in the shadow of buildings, but kept aiming steadily toward Walter. When she reached him, she did not look at him directly but placed a couple of coins in his open guitar case. She did not say a word. The only person Walter encountered on that plaza before hunger and thirst ceased his performance.

The next twenty-four hours remained blurry in Walter's memory. He had no idea what to do and forgot why he came to this town. He remembered some visitors at his base camp in the Avant. With their help, he survived the ensuing occurrences. People realized he needed food, water, anything to maintain his physical condition. Regular pedestrians left a bag of potato chips, half a bottle of water, and some chocolate. The two lowlife characters who had knocked on his window the first morning, however, appeared occasionally, like vultures tracking a dying animal. They left nothing else with Walter except additional concern. He spent most of the time on the backseat and tried to relax.

At noon the next day, by pure force of hunger, he cleaned himself up as well as he could and dressed in his cleanest shirt and pair of faded jeans. Walter made his way into town with only one thought in his brain: "I need food!" As he passed through a narrow street, he noticed an open restaurant serving German food for lunch. Instinctively, he went inside, walked through the busy dining area, and sat at a table. The table had been prepared with white cloth and silverware. When the waiter approached him, Walter asked for the menu. The room contained a bar on one side and large windows overlooking the street on the other. About five tables were occupied, as was the bar area. Walter studied the menu carefully in front of him and selected the pork escalope with French fries and salad. He added a large glass of draft beer to drink.

The waiter left with his order and returned shortly with the beer. Walter drank gratefully from the glass and almost emptied it with one gulp. Some people looked at him and smiled. When the entrée arrived and the waiter placed it onto the table, Walter made sure to cut the meat in small pieces and took only one French fry at a time. He gobbled from the salad occasionally in



small quantities. Walter made sure to get the most out of it. When he finished the last fragment of food, he emptied the glass of beer. The waiter came back, asked whether he wanted anything else, and when Walter said “No thanks,” placed the bill on the table.

Walter said, “Excuse me. I need to tell you something. I do not have any money. Please ask the owner if I can work for what I consumed, clean the dishes or something. He can also call the police—I do not care.”

Within two minutes, a man arrived at the table, looking very angry, and said, “Get out of here!” while pointing with his extended arm toward the door. The man quickly went back to behind the bar.

Walter got up and walked to the exit. When he moved through the thick curtain that covered the exit in a half circle, he noticed movement in his peripheral vision. He glanced over his shoulder and saw the man who had told him to leave. The guy had a long kitchen knife in his hand and wild eyes and was advancing toward him. Walter quickly pushed the door open and jumped down the two steps into the lane. It might have saved his life. As he jumped, he could feel the air pressure on his back, generated by the power of the upward stab of the knife.

Unsteady on his legs because of the additional adrenaline rush, but appreciating the feeling in his stomach, Walter made his way back to the car. As he came closer to the parking spot, he noticed from a distance that the trunk door stood somewhat ajar; he did not remember leaving it open that way. When Walter looked inside the trunk, he saw to his dismay that the guitar and the sound mixer had been taken; at the same time, he knew who had done it.

Once again, he went back to town, this time negotiating his way to the police station where the cops had taken him before. He filed a police report in writing regarding the missing valuables from his car, describing the people he knew took the goods. Then he returned to his camp. During this time, Walter had been overwhelmed by extreme paranoia. While his hunger was relieved briefly, he became aware of the perils in this place but had no idea what else to do. He forgot the option to ask for help. Walter may not have known whom to ask. Instead, he used his last dried chemical blob.

Throughout the night, Walter experienced the space without fear and perceived himself disconnected from anything he had known before. At one point in the trip, he remembered his daughter, Magda, and then he rested his head against the closed car window and all of a sudden shouted from deep within, “Magda, Magda, Magda!”

Two police officers arrived very early in the morning as the drug subsided and asked him to get into the patrol car. Responsively, Walter left the black monster. He had just gone through a stage of thinking about the festival in Zurich, wondering if he would ever get there in time. He thought the police investigation had been successful, and they had finally found out who he was. They picked him up to give him a lift to Zurich, where he would be able to sing in front of a large crowd. Excitedly, he seated himself in the back of the patrol car but did not talk to the officers, who did not talk to him. As the vehicle proceeded onto the Autobahn first and then continued on a federal highway, he was assured that the trip would end in Zurich.

Only when the police vehicle stopped after about an hour in front of a building with certain characteristics did he begin to doubt that he would ever reach Zurich on this journey. Large glass doors opened into a wide hall with a reception area. Elevators were on one side, and people in white coats were walking around. A particular, familiar smell of cleaning solutions dissolved Walter's final hope into reality.

Only after a week could he accept it. Initially, he was very thankful for the thinly sliced pieces of bread with processed cheese and cold cuts and watered-down peppermint tea. He also accepted the all-numbing drugs they gave him.

Quickly he reduced their quantity by saving them under his tongue and spitting them out again. These drugs blocked thought, emotion, and basic human conduct. When Walter discovered a weekly attendance list for a Sunday church service, he put his name down, and they allowed him to leave the station to go to a nearby chapel on the hospital premises. He sat between fellow locked-in beings and took the songbook in front of him while the organ reverberated. For the first time since his confirmation, he wholeheartedly sang a religious hymn as the tears streamed down his cheeks. They were triggered by the flood of emotions that arose from profound depth within.

## Resurrection

Shortly thereafter, Walter received visitors. One of the staff members led him into a part of the station that had been closed off by a large glass door. In front of it, he saw Hilde and Erzebet standing next to each other. Erzebet carried a little boy on her arms: Johannes. The toddler smiled at him widely, and the grownups smiled at him and waved their hands. It was one of the most real and beautiful sights he had ever encountered. Hilde had permission to enter the visitor's room, where they talked for some time. Walter indicated that he wanted to get out of the place as soon as possible. Hilde carefully advised him to take it easy. But by the end of the week, Erzebet returned in Hilde's blue Citroën to pick him up and drop him off in Hohenhausen.

The season had begun to change already. Sometimes it could become cool at night. Silke had moved away with her children, back to her husband. Instead of her, Walter met Egon and Andrea, who had moved into the house with their two children, Katja and Lukas. They occupied two rooms, including the one on the second floor where Silke's baby had been born. The couple tried to expand their materials mailing business from the house in Hohenhausen. Small squares of fabric cut out of large pieces and pasted onto paper could be found everywhere. Combined with their children, they took over the building. Walter did not mind, except for the noise sometimes. Hilde made an agreement with them to pay some rent.

In any case, the situation in the house did not create a major issue, as everything else in Walter's life did. The two most important questions were: what to do with the bank's claim and how could he survive. He did not ask himself, but Hilde, who visited occasionally to see how things were going. She investigated and contacted the female psychiatrist in the clinic that Walter had left after a few hours. The physician agreed to send a written statement, confirming that Walter left the hospital after he had been committed while certifiably insane. A lawyer told her that with this statement, the bank had no case against him to collect any money. Hilde also encouraged Walter to visit the welfare office in Flederbach, where he might receive some cash.

What he enjoyed during this time at his home in the country were the moments when the early autumn sun came through the thick cloud layer, and he could sit on a chair or on the bench in front of the house. He would close his eyes and let the sun shine on his body. Other than that, he did not care for anything, let alone making plans or actively preparing for his survival. The very dark gray space in which he lived did not authorize moments of happiness.

Hilde went to the welfare office with Walter, made sure he filled out an application, and drove him back to Hohenhausen. She also mentioned that the small room in the Westendstrasse would be available for him in case he wanted to move back to Frankfurt; Gaspar would not mind living with him for a while.

The thought of being back in a city made Walter shiver, and he stayed on in Hohenhausen with the family and kids who treated him with respect and let him be as he needed to be. After some time, he received a letter from the bank, stating that under the given circumstances, they would not go to court. They wanted to use the value of the Avant, and he needed to tell them what happened to it. He also received an extremely small amount of cash he could pick up at the welfare office. Very slowly, reality trickled down into him to a place of recognition, and Walter considered the idea of a move to Frankfurt and the options it would provide for him.

On a dreary day, Hilde took Walter to Frankfurt. His alternative lifestyle experience concluded.

Gaspar, who had retained the Westendstrasse apartment for some time already, welcomed Walter with friendliness but aloofness. When Walter entered the kitchen and the room next to it, he experienced a déjà vu episode: many memories passing in front of his eyes. A foam mattress with cover and Indian-style spread lay on the floor. When he pulled down the old blind in front of the window, he could still see the watercolor painting of a sun over the blue ocean that he had painted some years ago.

For weeks, he spent most of the time on top of the mattress, watching the ceiling. He left the apartment only to buy necessary supplies to survive. Gaspar and he occasionally talked about his social life, did he have any plans, and whether he looked for jobs. Since Walter was able to pay his share of the rent, Gaspar could not push him too much.

Many of the visitors said hello to Walter, and sometimes he would sit with all of them at the red kitchen table next to his room. He listened to their conversations about what went on in the city and the world. Raimund, who worked at the Information Service and had also visited Hohenhausen, developed an interest in Walter's well-being. He persuaded him sporadically to go for a walk in Grueneburgpark with him. They talked about depression and other mental issues, therapy methods, and the will to face these matters. The most pleasant distraction for Walter happened when Klara, Gaspar's new and much younger girlfriend, spent time in the apartment.

The couple was going through a period of love, and Walter could feel the excitement of it a little bit. He enjoyed the views and energy of a younger person.

When the first snow fell on the city, Erzebet called to ask Walter if he would cover for her job as a dishwasher in the Argentinian steakhouse for a month. She needed to take a vacation and prepare for her final exams at the university. He said yes, walked to Grosse Bockenheimer Strasse next day, and introduced himself during a brief interview. The manager of the restaurant accepted him as Erzebet's replacement and told him to be at work 3:00 p.m. in two days.

Before Walter had left the farm, he found a blue plastic windbreaker with cotton lining halfway hanging off the water barrel in the back of the house. It had been drenched in rainwater but was in good condition. The jacket became his companion during this phase. He wore it everywhere and showed up in it for his first shift as dishwasher. The shifts lasted until 11:00 p.m. and sometimes until midnight. He fed the dishwashing machine with continuously incoming tableware and made sure that the waiters had sufficient supply to set the tables in the restaurant.

Besides the job itself, an additional benefit was the free food he could consume on his break. It helped him add a few pounds that he had lost during the previous episode. After work, he usually walked immediately back to the apartment, but sometimes, before his day off, he went across the street into Kleine Bockenheimer Strasse. In the bar next to the disco and the Jazzkeller, he would have a beer or two. One of these nights, he was sitting at the counter when a pretty woman seated herself next to him on a vacant stool. They began chatting about this and that, and Walter thought about leaving because he had been in the bar for some time. He asked the woman if she wanted to go home with him.

To his big surprise, she asked a counter question: "Would you like to join me at my home? I have to take care of a child."

Walter said yes, and both of them walked to her car and then drove for about thirty minutes to a large suburban housing development. She rented a two-bedroom apartment. They had had a straightforward agreement from the start and developed it into straightforward sex on the floor. They were kissing and fondling on the couch in the living room and then slipped down to the carpet, which caused Walter to scuff his knees, and he came quickly. The woman asked him if he could do it again, which he did, and then they went into the bedroom and slept together in the erstwhile matrimonial bed.

Next morning he took the train back into the city because the woman needed to attend to her child, who had not awakened yet, and then go to work. Walter on his day off felt sorry for the woman and an empty loneliness inside of him. Back in the apartment, Klara, who sometimes stayed with Gaspar for a few days, had invited a friend of hers over. Hedda and Klara both lived in Bad Homburg, where they went to high school together, and kept the friendship going by meeting up frequently. They talked a lot about the bygone times. None of their classmates had made any decisive changes to their lives yet, besides going to work or to study. Hedda grew lots of curly hair in a kind of afro look, but was white and had an extroverted attitude with a loud voice. It fascinated Walter to listen to the women talk, discussing their lives and what they would do in the future.

They all spent time together in the kitchen, and one night, when Klara and Gaspar went to his room to sleep, Hedda and Walter sat at the table. He had not felt any attraction to her; it just felt good not to be alone for a change. She mentioned that she had to catch the last train to Bad Homburg and needed to leave soon. Walter casually said she could stay in his room and share the mattress if she wanted. It had been obvious during their dialogue that she wanted him to ask this question. He stayed unemotional when she accepted his offer. Walter brushed his teeth and when he came into his room, Hedda already had positioned herself on one side of the mattress. They talked for a while about Bad Homburg; he mentioned that he had gone through a rough time recently and then turned the light off.

Sometime after they had both said good night to each other, Hedda very coyly asked whether she could hug him a little bit. He said yes, and they immediately pressed each other's bodies. She kissed him, they played with their tongues and lips, and he felt how he hardened and pushed against her bush. She backed off and told him that she had never done it, that she had been too afraid about getting pregnant. Walter told her that was OK, no need to do anything. However, Hedda yearned to try, and she carefully enfolded his tail in one hand to feel and play with it. He kissed her large, soft breasts and belly.

They were rubbing and gliding a bit on each other, and then she asked him, "Would you carefully stick it in just a little bit and let me feel it?"

He obliged and rolled on top of her and tenderly pushed into her. With it halfway inside, Hedda pushed him back again, and then both refrained from further explorations that night.

The earnings from the dishwashing job enabled Walter to pay the rent for another month and to buy food. Meanwhile Gaspar began training to be a snowplow driver for a company that operated a fleet of small plows. They worked on residential properties that subscribed to their service. He told Walter that in the future there might be openings for additional drivers.

One of the visitors to Westendstrasse was a woman who was affiliated with the Information Service for some time. She also mingled in the alternative political scene, as well as the women's liberation movement. She visited Gaspar on an issue regarding the news service and met Walter at home, his dishwashing engagement ended. Melanie possessed a gentle presence, and Walter sensed that she had gone through issues on her own. He instantly recognized that she might have been through depressions or relationship dramas. Most of all, she expressed an interest in Walter's situation. They talked with each other. Before she left, she invited him for tea the next day at her apartment, which she shared with other women.

Walter felt honored to be invited because he had acquired a great deal of respect for the women of the movement in Frankfurt. In its beginnings, it had been a grassroots action group. It occasionally appeared loud and vulgar, but in time had modified behaviors within the alternative society. He asked Melanie many questions that she happily answered. Her descriptions of the man's role given by nature included his way of peeing into a toilet bowl standing up. This technique caused odor and stains, and additionally, most men did not raise the toilet seat before doing their business. This assessment impressed Walter very deeply. He had a strong urge to become more women friendly, let go of old patterns, be softer, and show feelings as a man. From that day on, he consciously started to sit down on a toilet seat while peeing, and later it came naturally to him.

One night, Melanie called to ask whether she could visit him, and of course, he agreed. The two spent time on his foam mattress with candlelight, just talking, hugging, and feeling each other. Walter found out she had been in a long relationship that ended recently, and the breakup jolted her security and self-image. She felt very hurt, which affected her relation to life. Before they fell asleep, they hugged one more time. Both of them were happy to have one another for the night. A few days later, Walter visited her again, and they had sex, but it did not feel right. It did not have intensity, and he thought it would be better to let go of a connection that included so much need and hurt on both sides. He went back to his foam mattress, his own world of loss and pain, embarrassment, guilt, and depression.

## Margaretha

Hedda visited again and invited him to join her in Bad Homburg for the weekend, which would distract Walter from his misery. The next day, he walked to the train station and took a train to Bad Homburg and then a bus close to the area where Hedda and her roommate, Margaretha, lived. The two-bedroom apartment had been leased by Margaretha's mother. When she moved out with her new fiancé, the daughter had kept it.

When Walter arrived, Hedda stood at the stove, preparing dinner. He noticed that she seemed very happy to see him and tried her best with the food. They sat down at the kitchen table and had their dinner by candlelight with a bottle of wine. During their conversation about work, future, and life, Walter realized that she liked him a lot and waited for his approval whenever she introduced an opinion. His slightest indecision would immediately trigger a storm of questions from her. He sensed that this could turn into a drama quickly. Since he did not really feel physical attraction, but liked her as a friend, he knew their relationship would not last long.

The winter showed its full strength and dumped a lot of snow on the city. Gaspar mentioned to Walter that now they needed additional snowplow drivers. One night during heavy snowfall, Walter joined him to drive to the depot. He had only prepared by reading the instruction manual, but never attended the training. It backfired during his first night. When the snowplow malfunctioned, and he could not see through the windshield where he drove anymore, Walter dropped it off and never returned. Being at home in the warm apartment felt better than on the seat of a snowplow that did not work.

The Westendstrasse boys received an invitation via Klara to come to Margaretha's birthday party in Bad Homburg. They arrived in Gaspar's Volkswagen Variant at the apartment where Walter had been before. Margaretha was celebrating her twentieth birthday and had invited her entire high school class, as well as some other friends. Walter was excited because he had not been to a party for some time, especially with people significantly younger. When they entered the apartment, the event appeared to be in full swing, and most of the guests seemed intoxicated. Walter found a chair he could sit on and watch the scene while nibbling on a bottle of beer. Occasionally Hedda or Klara came by to exchange a few words with faces red from excitement and booze.



A wonderful sight in the kitchen attracted his attention. Packed as it was with many people for various reasons of food and drink, he noticed a tall, blond woman with long legs in blue jeans. She stood in the entrance of the kitchen, talking to someone. What drew Walter's complete alertness was contained in her jeans while she had her back to him: the most beautiful, perfectly shaped bottom he had ever seen. At some point, Hedda introduced her roommate Margaretha. Walter took the opportunity to congratulate her and realized that he was looking at the woman with blond hair who had her back turned to him. A miracle was about to happen, but Walter had no premonition.

Occasionally he reviewed newspapers' help-wanted listings but never spotted any fitting opportunity for him. Time passed; the season affected people, longing for a glimpse of sunshine on their skin and a dip in an ocean with palm trees lining the beachfront. Everybody knew they still had months of freezing temperatures in front of them. The carnival period increased activities with organized parties, costume balls, and parades in the street. Many liked to drink a lot of alcohol during this time, to escape for a moment from the harsh conditions and have some fun.

The Bad Homburg high school class that Klara, Hedda, and Margaretha went to organized a party in a popular pub of their town. Walter had been invited as well. He enjoyed watching the people. When he had had enough of it and the idea of spending a night with intoxicated Hedda did not appeal to him, he slowly walked toward the exit. For some reason, he took one more look toward the crowd, lingering a moment between exit and street. He knew he had to walk to the train station, wait for the next train, ride thirty minutes to Frankfurt, and then be alone in the empty Westendstrasse apartment.

As he was about to step outside, he noticed Margaretha approaching with a smile, all dressed up in her green military parka and, it appeared, ready to leave also. Walter had never said more than five words to her before when he met her once or twice while visiting Hedda in their shared apartment.

Margaretha stopped in front of him, looked him in his eyes, and quietly asked, "Would you like to walk home with me?"

He looked back into her light-blue eyes and smiled while nodding his head. Walter almost replied no to Margaretha's question, before realizing that he had already nodded yes with his head. His concern was about walking through the cold with someone he did not know and

then having to walk all the way back to the train station after receiving a “thank you for your company.”

In the dark, the couple marched next to each other, trying to avoid hidden puddles of water beneath the snow, which created hazardous ice spots next to curbs. Margaretha occasionally held on to Walter's shoulder or quickly grabbed his hand. At one point, they began to hold each other's hand continuously. They talked little on their way to the small housing project.

At the entrance to the building, Margaretha asked, “Would you like to come in?”

Walter nodded again without saying anything. He tried to stay in the moment, which seemed to be the best he could do. When the two entered the dark apartment, he realized he did not even need to try. The moment continued without him. The flat had one issue during the cold season: each room and the kitchen needed to be heated separately by ovens or the stove, and all of them had to be maintained manually. When they went into Margaretha's ice-cold room, she immediately began to collect kindling in the kitchen, cubes of fire-lighting material, and matches. They looked at each other after the large pieces of firewood caught fire from the kindling and began burning in a strong blaze.

She asked him, “Would you like to stay with me tonight?”

This time he used his voice and said, “Yes.”

Both quickly undressed. Walter caught a glimpse of her slim body that was breathtaking. With goose bumps on most of their body parts, they laid stiffly next to each other under a piece of duvet. Slowly, the fire created warmth around the bed, and feeling crept into the extremities of the twosome.

When the shivering and chattering of teeth subsided, Margaretha said, “Let's cuddle up.”

Very gently, they embraced each other by lying on their sides. Walter, being in the moment, could not believe what was happening. He felt peace inside of him that he had forgotten existed. After a while, when warmth took over completely, comfort spread under the duvet. The couple gave each other a quick, very first innocent kiss on the lips, followed by a second and third one. They hugged each other with a little more strength. Walter, very happy, did nothing to encourage any move whatsoever. He stayed completely passive, in a state of bliss. Margaretha asked for permission to caress him, and he nodded into the hollow of her neck. He felt that she had an almost skinny frame with small breasts and very long, beautiful legs. After an initial

eruption of passion by both of them, she told him that she had never made love to a man before, that she was very afraid of a pregnancy.

As Walter experienced pure love pouring from his heart, he felt no urgency to do anything and simply went with her moves and suggestions. When she wanted to feel him, he let her stroke it, and she moved her hand along the length of it. He caressed her small, wonderful behind and moved his right hand along her hips to the front, where he found her pubic hair. Slowly, he went to her sacred area as she fondled him. She made a sound and pressed harder.

“Please come into me for just a little bit,” she said.

Without objection, he moved his body up a little to reach her. In slow motion, while rubbing the area with his head, he tenderly tried to insert it into her. Both of them were still lying on their sides. He pushed his pelvis forward and felt that he was inside of her. Margaretha's body stiffened, she made another sound and then pushed him away from her. Somewhat sweaty now, both of them rested under the comforter and giggled.

“You don't mind, do you?” she asked.

“Not at all,” Walter replied.

The unfamiliar lovers did not sleep much during their first night together. Margaretha encouraged the feeling exercise a few more times, and Walter happily complied without wanting or needing anything else.

When they got out of bed the next morning, he did not feel sleepy and did not mind the thirty-minute walk to the train station. Margaretha went off to run errands in Bad Homburg.

Back home in Frankfurt, he wondered if he should call her or wait until she called him. As it happened, some days neither called, but then again the next day was full of excitement and suspense. In the course of their next few encounters in person, trust, an increasing intensity of love, and a germinating relationship established itself. The sweetest of feelings grew stronger as they went along, and the only disturbance occurred one morning in the Bad Homburg apartment.

Hedda, Margaretha, and Walter ran into each other during an awkward moment. Hedda had not been aware of the change until then. Later, she made somewhat of a scene with her roommate, but whatever could be said did not change any facts.

The effect on Walter of getting to know Margaretha showed in many ways. His energy level increased to a higher frequency. He woke up in the mornings, still without a job and not really knowing how to pay the next rent, but it was much easier to accept. Someone else existed

who cared for him and perhaps would like to share some time with him. Margaretha's light and sunny personality included energy of the same quality. Combined with her temperament, intelligence, and a wholesome sense of humor, it gave Walter juice that had been drained from him. When he looked at her, and she returned his gaze, they interconnected like day and night, black and white. He felt that the age difference included complementary assets for both of them. Where she could enlighten him by her sheer youth, he could console and advise her before any hasty decision or redundant turbulence.

Margaretha went to the public College for Social Work with the goal of getting her diploma in two years. She grew up with a brother of almost the same age and did not know her father; her mother separated from him when the children were little. Her mother had provided for them until recently, when she moved to Berlin. It became obvious to Walter that Margaretha suffered from deep emotional wounds incurred in past family dramas. She also had a delicate physical constitution with low immune defenses, which added extra sympathy to his affection for her. He gladly introduced the farmhouse in Hohenhausen to her when they had a chance to drive there with Gaspar and Klara on a weekend. It provided him a lot of satisfaction to take care of her after her stressful week in school and then catching a bad cold. He filled the stove in his old room with its large bed and entertained her with self-cooked food and fluids that, together with the quiet in the house, improved her physical well-being.

Skepticism regarding their relationship came from Gaspar and Klara, who said, "I knew it; I had wished so much for Hedda."

With time, their qualms softened and then disappeared when they noticed the trust between the two.

The distance between where they lived presented an obstacle, but it posed one that enhanced the uniqueness of their situation and created appreciation of the time they could spend with each other.

As Margaretha continued with her education, Walter resumed examining the newspaper ads for job opportunities and one day saw an announcement from an investment firm. It caught his attention because of the prominent American company name and the job description, which included exactly what he had done before his trip to India. He prepared the required documents for the written application and sent it by mail to the hiring corporation. Within a week, he went to a job interview he had been invited to. A friendly manager conducted the meeting with him in

a casual atmosphere inside the wire room, where the actual work place would be. A few days later, he received a phone call from the company, and they offered the wire operator position to him.

## Part 2

Patty Smith and her band performed in Wiesbaden. Margaretha wanted to see them desperately. Standing next to her in the midst of the mostly female audience, Walter tried to get into the groove as well as he could. Margaretha screamed the words to the music for “Because the Night” while waving her fists, and then dancing like a madwoman to “Dancing Barefoot”.

It was Friday night, with the whole weekend in front of them, and the couple enjoyed the time together. He thought that Margaretha might have loved it even more without him, since it was not really his kind of music and group. The atmosphere in the concert hall had been wonderful.

On Saturday, they took his Volkswagen to the country and stopped by at Neudorfer Hof. Walter wanted to see his kids and Fritz, chat with Hilde, and then spend the night in Hohenhausen. He and Hilde maintained a firm, friendly, modified relationship. Recently, they were considering selling the property they owned together. Neudorfer Hof had a strong gypsy, alternative, clownish, artsy atmosphere, combined with farm animals, whole wheat, and anthroposophical organic gardening. Knut had fine-tuned his bakery craft to a point where he produced delicious, nourishing bread out of organic whole-wheat flour and delivered it twice a week to various health-food stores in Frankfurt.

For Walter, seeing Magda and Johannes was both joyful and painful at the same time. A large part of what he thought he was felt like a slacker who had failed badly. To see his children in these contexts caused him to shudder secretly. The solidity and profoundness of his bond with Hilde enabled him to deal with the facts sporadically, and she made sure the kids visited him in Frankfurt as well. When they talked about the house in Hohenhausen, they concluded that the time to sell had almost arrived. A current resident at the Neudorfer Hof, however, wanted to rent it, to see how it would be for him as an independent farmer. He wanted to begin with his horse and a few goats and sheep, which could be accommodated in the stable. They agreed to this arrangement, which enabled them to keep the property some time longer.

Margaretha, who had no issues in reference to Walter's children, always became a little timid when faced with his past. When they were in his car alone again, she told him that she loved children and would like to work with them in the future. However, she could not imagine

having one of her own. The couple spent another peaceful night and a day on his farm and loved each other whenever it felt right.

Slowly the seasons changed again; out of spring came early summer. Walter went to work in the investment company, located in walking distance from where he lived. The job enabled him to save a little money for something nice he wanted to buy or do. After working there for more than a year, he thought it was time to get a raise and asked about it. The management did increase his salary a little bit, but not by what Walter had expected. He started looking for something else.

His lover continued with the College for Social Work, where the written tests were easy for her. Periodically, students had to complete a practical, hands-on period in selected government institutions or charitable organizations in the private sector. Margaretha applied for a semester at the Free School in Frankfurt where Antje worked.

In their free time, Walter and Margaretha went swimming naked at the former gravel pit filled with cold, green water in a forest area near Frankfurt. They drove to a popular, inexpensive restaurant near Hanau to experience gastronomic specialties, which they usually did not eat. Margaretha tried to live and eat healthy by turning more and more to vegetarian food, whereas Walter did not mind a piece of meat.

On a hot Sunday, after they had spent the previous day together, Walter stayed in the Westendstrasse apartment alone because Gaspar and Klara had left to visit friends. He tried to avoid the heat outside and had all windows open.

When the afternoon arrived, he called Margaretha and when she picked up the phone, said, "Hi, what are you doing? I thought about you."

"I tried to do some homework, but it is really hot. I am lying on my bed doing nothing. Hedda is not here either," she replied.

"Shall I come over, just for a little bit?" Walter asked.

"Sure, if you want to, but it's a long drive for a little bit."

He went down the three flights of stairs and headed his Variant to the Autobahn and then into the inner city of Bad Homburg. When Walter arrived at Margaretha's doorsteps, she opened the door, dressed in her light, flowery robe, and hugged him. They went to her room where the windows stood open wide. She lay down on her bed while Walter undressed and put himself next to her. They immediately began to fondle, kiss, and hug each other. Walter turned his sweetheart

around and she pulled her behind up in the air. He got up, moved into position, and slowly entered *the root of Heaven and Earth*. She quickly grabbed a pillow to hold in front of her face because she screamed with lust while she pressed her perfect body against his pushing part. He moved and moved, and she screamed and sighed into the pillow. At the end, both joined together in the *Song of the Joyous*.

One night, she picked Walter up from work. He had been happy to see her, but then something in her appearance caught his attention and immediately made him concerned.

Margaretha told him, "Walter, you know what? I am late with my period. It should have come two days ago and did not start today."

"The shops are still open. Let's go to the pharmacy and buy a pregnancy test," he replied.

The test instructions said to use it in the morning. Next morning, Margaretha exited the bathroom and went to the big window of the balcony door in the kitchen. She turned around and said with solemn voice and a pasty color in her face, "It indicates that I am pregnant. I am not getting a baby that is for sure."

Walter involuntarily relaxed when he heard her statement. He felt relieved and wanted to help and be available for her as much as he could. Certainly, he felt responsible and guilty that the situation came about. During the next week, Margaretha made an appointment with the gynecologist who confirmed in fact that she was expectant. She knew it would be very tedious, problematic, and in her situation most likely impossible to be approved for a legal abortion in Germany. Margaretha also did not want to do the trip to the Netherlands, where many German women went during these years.

At the end of the desperate search for a practical solution, her strong identification with the women's liberation movement became the deciding influence. Margaretha used all connections within her circle of friends and contacted various organized women's groups in Frankfurt to get advice and help. Within a week, she had a first introductory meeting and then an appointment with a team of women who performed abortions in private apartments.

Margaretha insisted that Walter could accompany her to the appointment to support her. When the time arrived, the couple took his car to the address and then walked four flights of stairs up to the old Westend apartment building. Four young, friendly women waited for them. They did not provide any details about their qualifications or degrees with reference to the planned intervention, but did explain in detail what to expect. It did not sound reassuring in any



way, but their demeanor and obvious personal compassion encouraged Margaretha. She decided to go through with it.

The women placed their tools on sterilized material on the floor of the room and explained at the same time what they intended do with them. First, they would use metal sticks, which looked like knitting needles in increasing diameter, to dilate the cervix. When the proper width had been achieved, they would pull and secure the uterus up front with a forceps, which had hooks to lock the uterus in place. For the final stage, they planned to use the vacuum aspiration method to remove the uterine contents through the cervix. The apparatus for this procedure appeared to be homemade and looked like a combination of a bicycle pump attached to a round Cheese Plate Cover.

Out of the pump came rubber tubes, which led into the cannula, the device that would be inserted into the uterus. By using the pump, a vacuum could be created to empty the uterine contents. The women did not want to apply any local anesthetic or anesthetic at all. At the end of the intervention, they wanted to inject a medication that would help close the cervix again and stop any potential bleeding. One of them told Margaretha to undress and lay down on the blanket on the floor. They handed her a piece of rubber to bite on. Walter sat next to her.

The scene had a very tragic quality to it—his girlfriend lying naked on a piece of blanket on the floor, her legs spread wide open. The second woman slowly inserted a large metal speculum into the vagina. Another woman sterilized the first cervical dilator with a liquid and then bent over to insert it into Margaretha. As soon as the dilator touched the cervix, Margaretha screamed aloud, and the hand Walter held clamped together. The increasingly painful torture continued for approximately an hour but felt like an eternity.

Margaretha's sweat rolled down her skin, staining the blanket. Intermittently, before they inserted another, larger dilator, she begged them to stop the procedure. She could not take it anymore. The women waited for some time, let her rest, and talked to her. They convinced her that she was a brave woman and that it would be soon all over.

Once they introduced the cannula and launched the pumping operation, Margaretha shouted nonstop. Pressing hands, her body shook back and forth as red fluid and matter went through the tubes into the glass container. Once it was over, one of the women gave her the injection, and then they let her rest on the hard floor. Walter, who lay next to her, wanted to hug

her, but she pushed him away and cried very loud and deeply for some minutes. The team of women left the room to give the couple time to recover.

After another thirty minutes, Margaretha asked quietly, "Where are you?"

## Life Goes On

With good luck and perfect timing, the couple booked flights for a vacation to the USA. Margaretha had recovered from her horror experience with surprising promptness. After the event, Walter took care of her for a few days in the Westendstrasse apartment. Soon she went back to Bad Homburg, back to her life, without any physical complications. A homeopathic practitioner in Frankfurt helped her with remedies and healing sessions to support the immune system and prevent possible traumatic side effects of the intervention. Before any major changes in her life, leaving her birthplace, the apartment she grew up in, her environment and friends in Bad Homburg, their vacation break appeared as a blessing. Walter helped out with the ticket purchase and trip planning. Before the departure, he also bought a Super 8 movie camera to shoot the occasion and later show to friends.

It was Margaretha's first visit to America. Walter had always kept a connection to Anthony in Boston. The two friends had sent each other cassette tapes containing audio letters, descriptions of what went on in their lives; Anthony recorded a lot of music with him playing the electric piano.

The travel plan included the trip from Frankfurt via Iceland to New York City, where Anthony would pick them up at the airport.

When the couple arrived at Kennedy airport, Alexi turned up in Anthony's company as well. It had been many years since Walter had seen these friends in the middle of India. Alexi had found a new boyfriend, and her second wedding had been scheduled.

They all looked forward to a camping and canoe trip in Maine. First, they all drove back into Manhattan, dropped off Alexi, and then went to the Bronx, where Anthony had grown up. They went to his parents' home, a condominium they owned in a redbrick, high-rise building. Anthony's mother, Darlene, had prepared a home-cooked dinner, which externalized her friendliness and warmth. As soon as the guests entered her apartment, she made them feel comfortable and at home. Husband and father, Al, arrived after work, and then the whole family sat down at the table, which almost could not handle the weight of all the good food. Walter felt a sting of jealousy when he compared his family home to what he experienced there. Love had been turned on, the parents were proud to accommodate foreign visitors, and Anthony feasted on

his mother's generosity and the presence of an old friend from long ago. Before they left for their trip north, Darlene told Walter to come back any time.

The weather could not have been more picture-perfect —except on the freeway, when it suddenly started to rain hard, but then the sun came out again as if nothing had happened. At the very last inhabited hamlet near the Allagash Waterway State Park, the team stocked up one more time with anything they might need and proceeded to the rental shop for canoes outside town. They decided to go with a robust aluminum canoe, lightweight and with space enough for three people plus equipment. They put the canoe on top of the truck and secured it. Half of it rested on the cab and protruded into the air.

Once, when a black bear crossed the road in front of them, everybody yelled out with excitement. After a long drive, the crew arrived at the lake's edge. For a moment, everyone looked around, taking in the vista of the dark, very still water in front of them and the lakeshores on either side in the distance. They heard nothing but stillness. Walter and Anthony lifted the canoe off the truck, set it into the water, and secured it with a rope. Guide Anthony gave brief instructions on how to handle the paddles and keep directions, and then they said good-bye to the truck and off they went without getting wet. As soon as the canoe had gone about half a mile, each one once again became very quiet.

Not the lightest breeze rippled the water, which looked as if it had been enchanted into a mirror reflecting the few clouds slowly moving along. They wanted to reach a specific location before sunset and became aware of the time advancing into afternoon hours. They noticed the increasing cloud mass and the color of it. Anthony suggested that it might be better to step up the paddling and reach the first campsite before the rain. The air turned cooler. With their combined efforts, the campers reached the shoreline. A raw wooden picnic table, fireplace, ridgepole, and privy welcomed them. Hurriedly, the three tried to beat the rain and raise the tent and safeguard any equipment that should not stay outside during the rain. Then they built a fire to cook their first dinner. The team cooked freeze-dried beef stew under a tarp over the ridgepole while a first shower came down. They also drank a bottle of wine out of tin cups. The vacationers enjoyed a happy first night near the campfire, which they kept going despite the rain.

Everybody made sure to stow away safely all edibles in a bag, which they lifted high up into the air with a cord over a tree branch. Black bears and raccoons were easily attracted by food in the area. Other common wildlife sightings included bald eagles, osprey, loons, duck

families, and American coots. The tent had appropriate space for the three in sleeping bags. Next morning, the sun rose from behind the trees and filled the campsite with warmth and energy. It dried the tent, tarp, and clothing quickly. The friends enjoyed hot coffee with cereal and a few bits of sweet cake from the last shop. A routine developed, to cover all the details of equipment, safety, and food preparation. Everybody found a specific assignment to take care of.

The canoeists went to the water again and paddled for two or three hours. They reached the point of deviation from the main waterway, moving north and upward, to the next higher level of their planned route. It meant that they had to haul the canoe for distances along the low-level water stream. Sometimes they had to heave it over rocks and, trickling water, up a hill to the next level of the water system. Once they accomplished the portages, the rewards were compelling: sitting in the gliding canoe again, looking at an even more beautiful vista than before. When they first heard and then saw a cascade with medium decline and water level, adrenaline flowed through their veins. They needed to decide whether to carry the canoe or dare to go down the brief rapids. Excitement ruled for them by choosing to go down the rapids. Everyone got wet, and the aluminum body scratched over rocks, but the paddlers came out of it safely. Reaching the shore to dry and investigate the quiet forest with its pine, spruce, maple, birch, and oak trees, the trio left the canoe behind. The hikers followed an old trail inland for about a mile. Suddenly they arrived at a clearing with a small basin where they discovered something that looked out of place, bizarre. An antique steam engine had been left behind in the woods a long time ago. It rusted along with moss-covered parts and green overgrowth.

As they adapted to being outside in the elements for twenty-four hours a day and feelings of awe and exhilaration decreased, the individuals became more aware of each other. Margaretha looked forward to starting her new position with the Free School in Frankfurt and confirmed her commitment to new responsibilities, working with young children in an alternative environment. As Walter looked closely at her physique, for a moment he felt overcome with sorrow about what had happened with her own personal child experience. She had cut her hair short in a way that gave her a boyish appearance, and sometimes when she gazed at him with her blue eyes, he sensed the deep pain within. Occasionally, when she took off protective clothing and wore her bikini, he could see bones in places he had never noticed before. It seemed to him that since they had landed in New York City, Margaretha had regressed into a timid fourteen- or fifteen-year-

old girl. Walter did not mention it and there had not really been an opportunity for conversations like that.

He spoke about his new job in the bank and confessed that he might have made a mistake to take the job only for some more money. The atmosphere in the bank building made him miserable. People went to work every day with the feeling of safety, which money could provide, but were not aware of the little details, of life passing by. Anthony listened to his friends and tried to understand their issues. He literally came from a different world and level of experience, which enabled him to be much more easy-going. His issues were the asthma that caused him to carry an inhaler in his pocket at all times and the necessity to earn money. He found his life's fulfilling pursuit in the world of music and had expressed himself creatively with an instrument at a young age. For Walter, that seemed to be an admirable situation.

After they mounted another incline into the next stream level by pulling, carrying, and pushing the canoe up the waterless stretch, they entered an area where the valley narrowed gradually into a river and then ended in the most beautiful fashion, with a medium-sized waterfall and forest on both sides of the stream. First, the campers secured their spot at a campsite for the night. They had not met anyone else on their trip. Then they took off their clothes and headed into the waterfall. The cool downpour refreshed and cleaned their sweaty bodies. The location they had arrived at was also the point of return. Their plan was to stay there for a day and then head back to the landing spot.

Anthony disappeared into the forest, while Margaretha and Walter climbed up the steep embankment and then walked slowly along the edge naked. Walter, who walked behind his girlfriend, realized they had not been together since they left Germany.

He said, "Hi Margaretha, what do you think?"

When she turned around, she noticed his erection.

"Well, OK, we could do it right here. Let's find a soft spot."

They looked around and noticed a green patch of moss between two trees, next to the riverbank.

She sat down on the moss and said, "Oh, it itches. But it is OK, come." She extended her hands toward him standing over her and pulled him down.

She recognized there was no need for any foreplay.

"Be careful, please," she said and opened her legs.

She made a thin sound and looked around, across the river. Walter checked the side of the forest. With nobody in sight, he began to move within her, and they both enjoyed the brief moment.

Margaretha sincerely wanted to experience the Big Apple. For that reason, it fit into her personal agenda that the wilderness encounter ended, even though she enjoyed every bit of it. When they arrived at Anthony's apartment in Boston, he invited a few friends for a good-bye party, and they enjoyed one more night together.

The visitors took a train from Boston, in which they could appreciate three different states pass by the window before arriving at Central Station. Walter purchased their first subway tokens and asked for directions to the Bronx. He had been in contact with Alexi, who told him that she and her boyfriend, Alki, were very much looking forward to receiving the travelers from Germany and had given him their address. The couple rented a two-bedroom apartment on the third floor in a predominantly Puerto Rican, Mediterranean neighborhood. Both of their families had emigrated from Greece, but Alexi had been born in New York City and Alki arrived there when he was still a baby.

Once the travelers emerged from the subway and observed the environment, they realized that not all of New York City was Manhattan. The apartment buildings of the neighborhood looked different from the Victorian style houses in Boston, more basic, and the streets appeared to be narrower, but that had no impact on Alexi's extremely warm welcome. She made sure the visitors instantly felt at home and at ease. Walter noticed that Margaretha's recently shy demeanor melted away as soon as she had hugged Alexi, and he really liked to see that. They had plenty of stories to tell, filling the years since their last meeting in India.

When Alki arrived, they all savored home cooking Greek style and talked about family and living in New York City and making it there. For Walter, it felt like a desirable place to be, compared with his situation in Germany. He sensed the vibration of an atmosphere that resonated in pop culture and especially music.

Margaretha could hardly wait until the next morning to get out of the house and roam the streets. Walter prepared the movie camera with new film while adoring his girlfriend's excitement. There was perkiness in their steps when the Germans exited the subway station near the World Trade Center and walked down to Battery Park to catch a glimpse of the water and the

Statue of Liberty. Lovely sunshine increased the pleasure of their first day as tourists in Manhattan.



## Homeland

Back in Germany, Walter operated the mainframe computer at the bank. Margaretha moved to Sachsenhausen, the famous part in Frankfurt with lots of apple wine restaurants. Antje rented a former workshop that had been converted into a loft-like space. It consisted of one large room with a partition for the toilet without shower, and now she shared it with Margaretha. When Walter visited for the first time, he found the two girls on their own sides of the space, each of them stationed on a foam mattress on the floor. There were a few wooden boxes for clothing along the walls and some large cushions on the floor. It certainly did not appear comfortable or cozy, and the atmosphere had a frosty ambience to it.

Walter himself had been looking at the newspapers for some time to see whether he could find an apartment. In the weekend issue, he noticed an ad that sounded interesting because of the flat's location nearby Westendstrasse. When he called the number, he reached the current resident of the apartment. As they talked about work and employers, they realized that both worked in the same bank and building. Walter walked over to the place and inspected the two-bedroom flat. He liked that it had a solid and complete quality. He moved into it, his first domicile rented by him alone.

Meanwhile, the person who rented the house in Hohenhausen bought his own farm in the next village. Hilde and Walter decided at this point to sell it. They found a buyer within a few weeks, and one day Walter walked with a lot of cash in his pockets through Frankfurt. He invested it wisely with the company he had worked for previously. The farmhouse sale freed up furniture he could use in his new apartment. Especially the bed, the nice wooden table, and the closet fit perfectly in one of the two rooms. Everything pointed in the direction of a perfect situation. Walter was working a secure job and living in his own, nice apartment, as well as a young, pretty girlfriend.

Margaretha spent a lot of time at Walter's place. She used the facilities to take a full bath or do the laundry. There were initial adjustments in her new surroundings having to do with the lack of privacy. Time and tolerance cleared the atmosphere, and ultimately she got along well with Antje. Walter revived the connection with his mother and visited her on occasion. To supplement her retirement income, she had to work part time in the flower shop of the main train station.

Walter bought a color TV. Margaretha and he lay in his bed to watch *Miami Vice* or *Dynasty*, and the next morning she went to work from his house. This could have continued for a long time had not thoughts begun to surface in Walter's mind, concerns about how to get out of it all. How to stop having to work every day? How to do something autonomous that would facilitate an income from work he liked to do? He started to feel unhappy for no obvious reason. First, it felt boring to be in the bank and work long hours with something, he never saw and could not touch, and with people, he could not really relate.

Consequently, his relationship with Margaretha began to change when she spent more time in her own place and other people. In the back of his mind, from the beginning of their relationship, he had always been mindful of the age difference. He knew he did not want to share her with any other man, especially since he had been her first real physical lover. Walter noticed other men looking at her, and eventually she would become curious about it and would try. This he did not intend to experience, but the thought had an inevitable taste to it. Nothing had happened, and there was no real threat anywhere, but once the disquieting thoughts started, they stayed in the background noise at all times.

He thought help was on its way when he heard about a physician, an internist with alternative approach, who allegedly did not hesitate when patients asked for help. Particularly in situations where they wanted to get out of work-related stress, which created a variety of psychosomatic illnesses, depression, or other feelings of ill-being. He made an appointment to see the doctor and talked openly with him about his job—the kind of work environment, the alienation at the workplace, and the effects it all had on his personal life. He asked the doctor straightforwardly whether he could help him to have some time for himself. To Walter's surprise and big relief, the physician did not hesitate for a moment to fill out the required form, which certified that he could not work due to psychosomatic symptoms. Walter left the practice feeling liberated, a free man, and ready to do whatever he wanted to without showing up every morning at a place he did not want to be.

This perfect, harmonious situation lasted just about three months before Walter felt bored again. Sometimes twice a day he took long walks or bicycle rides in Grueneburgpark, but the gain in terms of increased energy and change of mood never lasted long. He had everything he ever imagined in one place at his disposal—a nice apartment, a loving girlfriend, his own transportation, lots of recorded music and time to listen to it, and money. Twice a month he went

to the health insurance office and received a bundle of cash. He then placed the money into his antique closet from Hohenhausen and watched as the pile grew on the shelf.

Margaretha asked Walter for her brother Rudi whether he might consider having a roommate. Rudi needed a place to live in Frankfurt because he also wanted to attend the College for Social Work and work part time. Walter knew Rudi as a nice person. He was a year or two younger than his sister was and very organized and responsible. Walter mulled over the variation in his lifestyle and agreed to a trial. Once his new roommate moved in and Walter experienced the situation for a while, he began to enjoy it. He realized that Rudi was a quiet individual with a calm temperament who provided distraction from his boredom and company at the breakfast table, at least on weekends. When Margaretha stayed at the apartment, it felt like a little family gathering. The only interruptions in this temporary peaceful life of Walter's were his girlfriend's susceptibilities in a variety of external and internal body parts. She went to the homeopathic healer at least once a month, where she received not only homeopathic medicine to build up her immune system but also treatments for her back.

Anthony let him know that he completed Music College and wanted to travel Europe for some time. Walter replied that he looked forward to meeting him any time he wanted to be in Germany. When Anthony arrived, he asked to play in some clubs and bars that had a piano available. Very happy to have a visitor, Walter drove around town with him to investigate options to perform and make a little money.

When the musician found out about one of the last open-air festivals of the year, he asked Walter if he wanted to visit it. He stuffed the old red-and-blue tent, which his parents bought many years ago, into the back of the Variant. Off they went to northern Germany again, to the small town of Gunderstadt, where the festival was being held. They found a suitable parking spot, not far from the main stage, and assembled the tent next to the car. Anthony arranged with the festival promoters to play occasionally piano on a stage between sets of different bands. The friends could be seen on the festival grounds at different locations, playing some blues tunes together. Walter used his twelve-string guitar, and Anthony played his transverse flute and a percussion instrument. The event was a lot of fun and an extraordinary experience. Walter did not like Anthony leaving Frankfurt, but his friend had further plans and contacts in Barcelona, Spain, that he wanted to pursue and perhaps start a new life in that country.

## Far East and back

Back in the apartment, faced with him and the daily routine, Walter fell into a mental hole that on occasion turned black and morose. Until one day, when all of a sudden he got an idea. He went to a bookstore where he bought a travel guide for the most favorite countries in the Far East, specifically Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. He studied, compared, and prepared, before he decided to leave for a year or more.

Soon, Walter went to a travel agency, booked, and paid for a one-way flight to Bangkok. When he reviewed the ticket voucher of Aeroflot Russian Airlines at home, he noticed that the travel agent had also given him a return ticket valid for one year, for the price of one way. Walter did not mind, but found it peculiar. It had not been his intention to return to Frankfurt from Bangkok.

He arranged with roommate Rudi that he would keep the apartment for a year by himself and notified the health insurance to stop his claim. Margaretha reacted with sadness, but she knew as well as Walter that he needed to do something with himself. One of her admirable qualities had always been to wish the best for the other, to be able to let go of something she might have wanted for herself. At this time, she let go of Walter, wished him a safe trip, and told him that she loved him. That broke his heart.

He boarded the Russian plane to Moscow with sorrow. During the flight, the temperature in the cabin turned so cold that a crust of ice accumulated around the air vents, and the air conditioners kept blowing steaming ice-cold air into the cabin space. Nobody said or did anything. In Moscow, he spent hours in the transit terminal after passing through a chain of security checks. On the second leg of his flight to Bangkok, the same situation happened again with the air-conditioning, and no blankets on board.

When Walter walked through the arrival terminal in Bangkok, it was quite a shock from below-freezing temperatures to the tropical heat inside the building without any air-conditioning. He went through customs and passport control, received a permit for three months, and moved slowly among the masses of people and activities.

From his travel guide, he had some names and references for a first hotel in town. While driving in an air-conditioned bus, it began to rain. A heavy downpour converted dry roads to slow-moving rivers. Since Walter arrived from a place of "I need to get out of here now," he had

skipped the travel guide pages about weather, seasons, and monsoon time of year. From the downtown bus depot, he took a taxi that dropped him off across the street from the hotel. As he crossed the street with his backpack, the warm rainwater drenched him and everything else he possessed. The Nikon camera from Frankfurt he had luckily protected in a waterproof case.

The inexpensive budget hotel had a security gate on the first-floor level. Every guest received a key to get to the elevator behind the gate. After the flight, no sleep, and most of all the extreme temperature changes, Walter felt confined in his room, which offered a bleak view from the window onto backsides of buildings and alleys. He took a shower, changed his clothing, and took the elevator downstairs to walk on the street.

When he stepped outside the building, the early night air of Bangkok smothered his body from scalp to the skin on the bottom of his feet in the leather sandals. He could not breathe freely, and his brain appeared to be elsewhere. As per some fuzzy instructions from the security guard of the hotel, Walter strolled in a general direction. He hoped to find a place for dinner and see what else the neighborhood offered. After a few minutes, he passed by the first establishment that looked like a bar from the outside, but in reality offered contact with women who sat on bar stools and at some tables. One of the women waved at him and tried to induce Walter to enter. She came outside and pulled at his hand, but he needed something to eat and drink at that time.

He continued walking along a stretch of the road where many street vendors served deep-fried menu items, rice, noodles, and vegetables from their mobile carts or in niches between buildings. When he passed the entrance of a larger hotel, a crowd of door attendants pleaded with him to enter the bar area, from where he could hear loud music. The men promised him he would meet beautiful women. After another short distance, the road widened, and he could see rows of tables that had been placed on the median. Walter liked a more quiet area, where he selected a restaurant and sat down. He ordered soup and rice with a chicken dish.

When the waiter returned with his soup and Walter took his first spoonful, he felt the inside of his mouth explode and his tongue burn like it never had before, with the exception of some places in central India. Tears rolled down his cheeks, and sweat trickled along his back and armpits. *What have I done?* he thought in desperation, but nobody answered. He emptied the bottle of lukewarm Chinese beer and waited for the soup to cool down, hoping it would lessen the assault on his gustatory nerves. After the waiter served another bottle of rather cooler beer and time passed, Walter managed to eat half of the soup bowl contents and some chicken rice.

The idea of going back to his room and staying there alone did not appeal to him. He walked back by the hotel with the loud music and entered. A very large room that featured an endless bar area and many tables. The place was packed with Western male tourists and local women of any age. Deafening pop music from the audio system created a background where conversation could only be done by yelling short, incomplete sentences at each other. Walter had never seen a richer selection of young, pretty women in relation to the number of males present. Only a few of the women looked like professionals, which had an additional thrilling effect.

When he approached the bar to order a drink, a spot became available where three women sat next to each other. All of them turned around more or less inconspicuously to inspect the new arrival. While Walter waited for the drink, one of the women began to yell at him. He moved his ear to her mouth and could only imagine she wanted to know where he came from. During the next thirty minutes or less, a rudimentary exchange of information allowed Walter to go back to his room with a pretty and to some extent motherly Thai woman. The security guard let them enter behind the gate, and up they went to his room, where he naturally wanted to know how much she wanted. She only smiled and indicated she would leave it up to him.

Walter was prepared for a situation like that. He asked to see her health certificate, and she produced one, which appeared to be OK. From previous exchanges, he assumed she came from a village where she had a child back with her family. It did not really matter at this point. He undressed himself, placed a condom on the bed stand, and waited for her to return from the shower. When she came out, she had a bed sheet wrapped around her and asked him whether he wanted a massage. Walter said yes. The woman climbed on top of the bed and started slowly moving up and down his spine while standing on him with her full weight. When he decided it was enough, he indicated it to the woman. She laid herself down next to him, still wrapped tightly in the bed sheet, and said or did nothing.

Walter's brain had not had any rest for thirty hours. He began to doubt that he had selected the right person for the job. Slowly, he unpacked her, hugged and kissed her. When he felt his member was ready, he protected it with a condom. The act itself did not last long, as neither of them enjoyed it. He turned the light back on, which the woman had previously turned off, and asked her to leave. She did not want to leave for some reason he did not understand, but he could not take her presence in the room any longer. Walter did not like it, but through misunderstanding the arrangements and procedure and most of all, the language barrier, distrust

settled in. Walter did not want to share the night with her. With a lot of resistance, she finally left. He immediately made sure nothing of value, including all the traveler's checks, had been touched.

After he turned off the air-conditioning, which had reduced the temperature to Russian Aeroflot standards, he passed out for a good stretch.

Abruptly, he woke up and for moments could not figure out what had happened to him. Why did he lay on a bed inside a shabby, steamy room where a dim light source penetrated the curtains from the outside? Walter got up, turned on the air-conditioning, and parted the drapes a bit. He eyeballed a dark-gray sky covered with clouds that moved rapidly. Humid, moldy air seeped through the discolored windowpanes. Walter quickly took a shower to clean off the residues of the night's activities and sweat, then dressed and went downstairs in the elevator.

Inside a nearby coffee shop, he studied the travel guide again while sipping on instant coffee and eating a piece of peculiar pastry. In his mind, he had no intention of lingering in the city for an extended stay, but he needed time to arrive mentally and physically before deciding what to do next.

Hoping to breathe some fresh air, he took a bus to the Chao Phraya River area and walked around to observe the bustles. A wise idea was to board one of the hundreds of water taxis with their long drive shafts sticking out from the engines. When he noticed the golden roofs of Wat Phra Kaew Complex from the middle of the river, he got off the taxi at its next stop. The quantity of Buddha statues, including the Emerald Buddha, and the richness of their decorations in gold could be seen on the outside of Ubosot. Walter felt comfortable being around so many monks of all ages in their orange and red clothing and was happy to visit the temple. It gave meaning to the sightseeing trip of the day.

As he walked back aimlessly in the general direction of where he came from, he passed a large bus terminal. Spontaneously, he purchased a ticket for the trip to the city of Chiang Mai. The bus left Bangkok early for the five-hundred-mile trip north, and he had to get up even earlier to make it to the depot. This time Walter appreciated the air-conditioning of the bus very much. The outside temperature throughout the day did not drop from a steady humid 104 degrees.

Chiang Mai sounded mysterious and to some extent more adventurous than another beachfront town or island. Walter had read about the Golden Triangle, a large area that overlaps the mountains of four countries in Southeast Asia: Burma, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. It had

been one of the most extensive opium-producing areas of Asia and the world since the 1920s. The road conditions and the traffic around larger and smaller cities and hamlets reminded him of India, where most life happened on the main thoroughfares. Throughout the day, monsoon downpours provided local, temporary flooding and inundated road sections. The bus driver managed to reach Chiang Mai at an acceptable time but in darkness, which became Walter's first impression: a city without a lot of light.

An extra trip in a motor rickshaw transported him to budget hotels the travel guide recommended. After the third hotel, they came to a one where the entryway had been closed already. The rickshaw driver used his horn, and Walter knocked against the metallic sliding gate until a night person finally opened a small door in the gate. Once he inspected the facility, a room, and negotiated the price, Walter let the rickshaw leave and surrendered to what lay ahead. The place reminded him of an American motel without the cars. His space, a very basic chamber with single bed, table and chair, toilet, and shower, appeared OK for the moment. Completely exhausted, he undressed and went to bed. Just before he fell asleep, it felt as if something raced over most parts of his body. It was not a rat or mouse; the thing did not make any sound; but next day Walter remembered the whirring sensation as it happened.

When he awakened, all major areas on his back, front, and legs were covered with red, thick rashes, which had a particular pattern in their locations and arrangements. Walter became furious at himself, not because he selected the hotel, but because he did not use the powder in his backpack before he went to bed. He had left Germany well prepared with medications, ointments, and bandages, as well as a specific powder against bed bugs. The recommended application was to dispense it on the mattress below the sheet. For the next two days, Walter stayed isolated in his bed and only occasionally left for food. He had a high temperature, and the infected areas burned and itched at the same time. An antibiotic lotion helped with the symptoms. Eventually, he began to feel better and walked around the neighborhood.

A collection of pictures had been pinned onto the wall in the lounge. They displayed people hiking in single line through a jungle area with light backpacks, sitting at a campfire with natives, eating from metal plates in local structures. When Walter inquired about the pictures, he learned that a group of local guides organized hiking trips of various lengths through the hills and jungle in isolated areas north of the city. Walter became excited about the idea and booked a four-day trip at the hotel desk, which included overnight stays at villages of different tribes.



Two mornings later, a group of seven gathered in the driveway of the hotel. The young, athletic-looking guide greeted them and instructed the hikers in a few basic rules in limited English. He also explained that he would carry food for the entire group. Two couples, one from the USA, and a variety of single Europeans signed up for the trek in the hills of northern Thailand. A truck transported the group about thirty miles outside Chiang Mai and dropped them off near the first ascent into the hill area. It had been raining in the morning, and it rained on and off during the first part of the day. Walter wore a thin poncho to cover his body and the backpack, but the temperature and humidity, combined with the vinyl poncho, caused his skin to bloat. It felt better to walk without protection through the warm rain in a sauna-like environment. The group strolled in stretched-out formation on barely visible footpaths through the green brush. No breeze eased the walk through the thick air. Any luggage felt like a burden. Walter carried his Nikon along and made sure to keep it safe.

After a few hours walking, with one break, they reached the first hill tribe village where the guide announced lunchtime. Located on an incline, the individual bamboo structures stood secured on wooden poles with small verandas. The trekking group rested slightly away from any home, but they still sat on what could be called a village square. In this settlement, the locals provided no food for the visitors. With the help of other people, the guide prepared beef stew with rice on a campfire. While they waited, some attempted to communicate with the villagers. Walter unpacked his camera and attached the large zoom lens. From a distance, he wanted to take portrait pictures of distinct, colorful, and exotic indigenous people discreetly.

Until the trekking guide concluded the meal break, very little interaction transpired between the group members. People tried to become comfortable with their gear, shoe wear, the weight on their backs, the pace, and the weather. Walter envied an American who wore ordinary running sneakers and did not worry about water and mud. His leather boots represented a potential issue if they could not dry out.

Walter tried to determine whether the only available female would be up for something. He had competitors and quickly realized that her being the only woman in his age group meant she had signed up for the hike to experience nature and people, not to start a flirtation. After lunch, the guide kept on pushing the group for almost three hours. When the leader stopped for a brief rest, he announced that they were almost there, perhaps one or two more hours to the next village.

The trekkers quietly infiltrated an area that became only visible when they almost stumbled into it. Various bamboo structures rested between large trees, the last daylight penetrating through the leafy space between jungle floor and blue sky. The hikers gathered around their guide, who placed his large, heavy backpack on the ground. He pointed to one of the larger buildings and explained that two rooms in it were reserved for the group, with mats and blankets available inside. Dinner would be prepared within the hour.

Everybody hurried to select and prepare thin futon mats for the night and freshen up as best they could near a water source that trickled from a split bamboo tube, and then they congregated in and around the indicated dinner spot. Food arrived in two large bowls—one with rice, the other with stir-fried vegetables—which were placed on the floor. Every person took a metal plate, filled it up, and sat down wherever they wanted. Boiled, then cooled water had been prepared to quench the thirst of many tired hikers, who after dinner quickly retired to their sleeping quarters to rest their aching muscles and bones. It was not long before Walter dropped into deep sleep.

When he was awakened by jungle sounds, movements around him, hushed voices, and rattling metal buckets, instant adrenaline pumped through his body and made him aware of his situation. He felt pain everywhere in his body. Familiar-looking bodies began moving around in the room where four of them were staying the night. Walter did not want to advertise his own physical condition. He began to shift his legs up and down and then raise his upper body very slowly. He managed to stand on both feet and gingerly walked outside to put on his leather boots. Thin instant coffee, some oatmeal mixed with milk powder, and purified water had to suffice for breakfast while sitting on the stairs of a veranda.

Walter thought he heard a few muffled exclamations of pain when the trekkers loaded their gear onto backs that did not want to be loaded. After an hour in the jungle, all pains were forgotten, the limbs and joints in working condition to experience the increasing beauty of almost untouched forest. In the afternoon, their route along a ridge close to the narrow, gurgling stream offered a reward for their efforts. About twenty yards down the steep bank was a wide space in the stream where the hikers could spend extended time off and enjoy refreshing baths in the cool, waist-high water. Most of them used the opportunity for a deep cleaning. As Walter paused for a moment to observe the scenery and the people frolicking in the stream, he noticed

again how some talked to each other because they had someone to talk to, while most of the singles like him kept to themselves.

It made him think of where he came from—the friends, places, and most of all Margaretha. What was she doing at this moment? He considered moving down the bank and taking a dip with some soap in his hand. The pain he felt in his heart made him linger a little while longer.

*I need to call her*, he thought. *I need to know what she is doing. I miss her.* However, within fifteen minutes, because of how clean and refreshed he now felt, Walter forgot about Frankfurt and everything else.

The group reassembled and started the second portion of their day's trip. They would reach their outermost village north of Bangkok, spend the night there, and then begin the return. Their activities in the stream had opened up the participants a bit and brought individuals together as a group, which enabled frequent conversations.

The team arrived at the village before dusk. They noticed a more simplified architecture with open spaces, but building materials were predominantly of dark-stained hardwood. The structure in which the group spent the night had two levels without walls and just a few steps connecting the spaces. It created a feeling of being in the forest while staying inside a house with roof. The hosts prepared dinner, even used some chicken to enrich the rice base, and presented a large pot of boiled *bai toey* with cashew nuts and fruits.

After dusk, as the group gathering slowly broke up, individuals took care of personal hygiene, and bedding, people were soon lying on their mats. The moon and some candles provided enough light for the whole space, which ended in the semidarkness of the jungle. When Walter was lying down with his hands crossed beneath his head, to his big surprise, a visitor arrived at his bedstead.

It was the tour guide, who quietly asked, “Would you like some opium?”

Walter nodded without thinking. Another person appeared from nowhere with a long, delicately ornate opium pipe that Walter had seen only in pictures. His opium experiences boiled down to a single gift he received from a friendly Afghan man for medicinal purposes.

The tour guide disappeared, and a serious-looking elderly man with long, gray hair and a beard like Ho Chi Minh, kneeled next to Walter. He signaled Walter to relax and turn onto his side. The pipe had been filled with a ball of poppy tears, and the old man lighted a wooden stick

with a candle. He extended the mouthpiece to Walter's lips, and Walter began to suck on it while the man held the burning wood piece over the pipe.

After Walter took four deep, long drags, the old man left, and his guest retreated into the realm of no issues in mental and physical wellness. Time did not exist in this space. It surprised Walter mildly when he felt a hand on his shoulder and noticed his host with the pipe in his hand kneeling next to him as if he had never left. He gestured with the pipe questioningly, and Walter slowly turned toward him again. His still form rested on his back, and his mind wanted to embrace and monitor every single moment of the unexpected and free experience.

After that, Walter never saw his benefactor again. Even though his eyelids were closed during the subsequent pain-free hours, he did not shut an eye. The almost-full moon illuminated the section of the visible sky from his position, as well as a partial vista of the dark forest. Since Walter did not feel anything that could distract him, he began time travel into the here and now. Fully aware of where his being existed at any moment, he decided when to open his eyes to view more moonshine or when to close them to witness his inner light. All through the real time of Walter's last night in the hills of northern Thailand, he stayed fully conscious. No dreams, epiphany, or spiritual revelations disrupted the presence. When the first rooster crowed, Walter realized that the dream was starting again.

The group made their return trek at a good pace. A truck picked them up as soon as they reached the first hill station. The drive to the hotel took another hour. Everybody smiled when they dismounted from the vehicle, shook hands, and went their ways. The single woman and another traveler who stayed at the same hotel as Walter arranged to meet for dinner after cleaning up.

Before he went to the neighborhood restaurant, Walter quickly walked to a rental place for motorbikes and rented one. He felt he needed to be mobile to see more of the country.

At the restaurant, he noticed the woman sitting alone at a table and after he took a seat himself, they ordered dinner and began talking. She said she had been in Australia before and thought about continuing to Malaysia. As the two exchanged further detailed information, Walter tried to ascertain whether there might be a gap in her story, an opportunity for him to fit in. He did not find this option in the brief encounter and decided to move on alone.

Walter said good-bye to the woman, cranked the bike's engine, and drove down a road he had never been on until he reached a large space with a park on one side. In the light of a few

electric streetlamps, he noticed small booths and some people standing around the park entrance. He stopped his bike, walked toward the scene of action, and sat down on a bench overlooking the place. Walter did not have to wait long before a beautiful, petite young girl in jeans walked to his bench and sat down next to him. They attempted to begin a conversation, but language issues minimized the talk to very few short exchanges. He understood that the girl wanted to accompany him to his hotel, and he did not mind this interruption of loneliness.

In his modest room, Walter undressed and laid his sore body on the bed while the pretty Thai girl left all her clothes on. He found that odd but did not further think about it because she might have wanted to get undressed. She did not waste time and went down to him. Like a pro, she took him into her mouth. This had not been his intention; he wanted to feel her from the inside. She continued with such finesse to work his part that he temporarily let go of the thought of making love to her and enjoyed the initiative. Walter came explosively into her mouth; she then looked up at him smiling. The woman lay down next to him and cuddled up. He caressed her and tried to open her jeans belt, but she circumvented all attempts with her hand.

When Walter tried again and she repeated the defense mechanism, he asked, “What is the matter?”

She shyly smiled at him and replied, “Me, not woman.”

His skin rash had slowly healed, with remaining boils occasionally itching madly. His body ached from the external muscles to the synovial joints. Walter felt betrayed, disappointed, very lonely, and somewhat nauseated after the boy-woman left his hotel chamber. He had asked him to leave after discovering the truth of his gender. The transvestite left with little resistance. Walter could not fall asleep. He felt as shitty as he had throughout the cruel abortion incident in Frankfurt.

He knew that the public telephone company maintained a phone exchange in downtown Chiang Mai. It operated twenty-four hours a day, connecting long-distance and international calls. No other option existed; his hotel did not have a phone at all.

Strong feelings of homesickness provoked Walter to call Margaretha. He needed to hear her voice and find out whether everything was OK with her. The night guard let him out of the gate. Walter drove through the big city's dark and empty streets. Eventually, he located the phone exchange on the second floor of a nondescript building. He placed the call order with a

receptionist and then waited with other people in a room. The phone call had to be relayed manually by several operators in different cities. The receptionist finally summoned him.

Walter stepped into the booth where the black wall phone rang. When he picked up the receiver, he heard it ringing and then a muted voice on the other end said, "Hello, who is this?"

"Antje, this is Walter. Can I speak to Margaretha please?"

"She is sleeping. Can you call back tomorrow? And it is very late here."

Deflated and sad, he gave up and returned to his room. After a few hours of restless sleep, he woke to a bright, hot day and decided to use it for a trip on the bike to the countryside. The main road from his neighborhood turned into a major highway, which Walter took, passing by miles and miles of paddy fields. About half of them had been flooded with water to promote growth of the new rice plants. In the distance, Walter saw the mountains and paddies, which were incorporated as terraces. The still water in nearby paddies reflected white clouds and the sun. He accelerated the bike as fast as he dared without losing the cap on his head. Whenever he stopped to rest or to take a picture of the wide plain, he felt the heat and humidity swamp his body; his perspiration increased instantly.

In the course of the day's excursion, he made up his mind. He thought to himself, *what am I doing here? Taking pictures of sick people and walking through warm rain in the jungle. It is so hot I can hardly breathe. I do not like it when my body feels wet permanently - covered by a sweaty film at all times. I want to go home.*

When he arrived back in town that day, he returned the bike, then walked downtown and placed another call. Again, he could not speak with his girlfriend because she had not arrived home yet. He told Antje he was booking a flight back home and would be back in Frankfurt within days.

Aeroflot Bangkok accepted the free return ticket without any problem. Walter made a reservation for a flight leaving in two days.

Early in the morning, he took a taxi to the bus depot and from there, the bus to Bangkok International Airport. After ten hours of flight time with a layover in Moscow, he was back in Frankfurt.

## The Beloved

The plane landed on a nice, fresh, sunny morning on Rhein-Main. He took the bus to the train station and from there, a taxi to his old apartment. A tired Rudi opened the door with disbelief. Explanations and apologies had to be given, but the roommate's nonaggressive, mild personality made it easy for Walter to show up again so soon. He just moved his stuff into his room.

As the two friends ate breakfast together, Walter reported about his trip, and Rudi told him that nothing new had occurred during his absence. He had not seen his sister and believed she was OK. When Walter dialed Margaretha's number, he felt very nervous and excited. She picked up the phone, and when he heard her voice, he melted.

Later that day, they met again in her studio space. At the beginning of the reunion, after they hugged and kissed intimately and gently, Margaretha appeared a bit hesitant and uneasy to see her boyfriend all of a sudden sitting next to her in the shared space with Antje. Walter told her he had missed her very much.

Sensing a tentativeness she had never displayed before, he asked directly, "Have you been seeing someone else? Did you sleep with another guy?"

She fidgeted for some time and then started to cry. "The new coworker, we are together for many hours a day. He likes me a lot and tried and tried. We spent a night together but did not make love, only almost."

Walter swallowed but kept his cool. What did he expect? It would not have been fair to make a scene. He told Margaretha that it was OK and that he really wanted to see her.

After that meeting, it took Walter weeks to contain his growing jealousy. It had already started in the jungle of Thailand, mixed within the bundle of emotions that caused him to return. The seed of a dormant but tenacious issue in him began once again to germinate under the surface. Externally another very happy period began between the two lovers. Margaretha introduced him to her work environment. He met people who meant a lot to her. He also met Antje's father, a founding member of the Free School. A few years older than Walter, he was an architect, lived, and worked in an apartment near Margaretha's studio. An instant spark of recognition occurred between the two men. Walter had not met anybody for a long time with charisma.

Margaretha went through a period of many activities. Most of them were connected to her work, which took time away from him to meet with her. Early summer arrived; the whole school went on a trip to an island in the North Sea. Walter had to curb his possessiveness when he encountered that cutting feeling in his heart.

He went to the unemployment office in Frankfurt to register and receive benefits and health insurance coverage. Financially he remained in excellent condition because he had used very few of the traveler's checks in Thailand and remained mobile.

Walter met with his new friend Olof at Olof's office apartment to talk about life and ongoing issues. Since the location was close to popular pubs and restaurants, the two went to a favorite alternative-scene hangout and had dinner and drinks. Walter mentioned that he would love to own a place like that. He remembered the time in Oklahoma City when Hilde and he were part of the People's Workshop. Olof said he could picture himself becoming an innkeeper instead of performing design work endlessly. The two men promised each other to look for a suitable object sometime.

One night Walter's phone rang. When he looked at the alarm clock, he saw that it had just turned three o'clock in the morning. He picked up the receiver and heard Margaretha in her crying voice.

“Can you please come over? I am in so much pain around my lower back area. It started hours ago, and I do not know what else to do.”

Walter quickly dressed and drove very fast through the empty streets of sleeping Frankfurt to reach Sachsenhausen within ten minutes. Antje spent time elsewhere, the reason why his girlfriend was alone. When he opened the studio door, a dim light next to her mattress on the floor shed some light on her thin, convoluted body under the sheet. Margaretha felt sticky from sweating profusely; the sheet she laid on showed wet spots.

He made tea and tried to calm her by talking. “Should we go to the emergency room or wait until morning?”

She preferred to wait; the pain had eased a bit. Early in the morning, the couple went to a hospital where an initial diagnosis by the physician resulted in a referral to the nephrology department. After waiting for a long time, X rays were taken, from which the nephrologist could ascertain that Margaretha had a kidney stone that blocked her ureter. In the meantime, her facial color had changed from regular to yellowish.



The physicians met to discuss her case and decided to remove the stone. They used a tool, which they inserted through the ureter, and tried to pull out the stone. Walter stayed with her in surgery during the procedure. Sometimes Margaretha screamed with pain and pressed his hand, while he watched the monitor to follow the path of the wire inside her. It reached the clearly visible stone and then moved slowly through the ureter on a sling. During this phase, Walter needed to leave the room because he felt as if he would collapse and faint under his heavy protective gear. As soon as the small item had been removed from Margaretha's body and laid in a metal plate, Walter took his girlfriend home to his apartment. She stayed there for almost a week, during which he realized how much he liked taking care of her.

The couple grew stronger together than before and spent more time in each other's company. Walter used condoms after his return from Thailand, but Margaretha preferred to feel him without the rubber, and he did not mind practicing heightened awareness. They enjoyed a harmonious part of summer, Margaretha continuously mindful about her independence and own space. She moved slowly back into the room she shared with Antje.

As his girlfriend retreated to her own life and work, Walter again faced emptiness. By now, it had a familiar feel and presence in his life. He continued with his routine of Grueneburgpark walks and bought himself a book on the I Ching oracle. In the country outside the city, he cut himself some yarrow plants. Walter needed fifty stalks, which he cleaned at home. Forty-nine of them were necessary for an accurate attempt to gain insight into a question or situation. Whenever he asked the oracle, the answers Walter received from the I Ching related always to patience and the wise use of it.

Sometimes Hilde came by the apartment in Frankfurt to drop off Magda and Johannes for a day or two. He liked seeing the children very much and at the same time felt a crushing weight of guilt, which hampered his ability to fully enjoy their presence and show his love—unless he took them for a walk or to a café for some ice cream. Very rarely, he talked to his mother on the phone or visited; their relationship had been at a low level since the incident some years ago.

Then the horrifying occurred. Margaretha showed up one night at his apartment door with a very serious face.

## Repeat

“I believe I am pregnant,” she said, then broke out in tears and sat down on the big bed.

“How could it happen?”

Walter choked and said, “I am sure nothing went inside you. I always pulled it out on time.”

It might have been the rare event that sperm had been present in the preseminal fluid. Once the gynecologist confirmed her condition, it did not really matter. This time the couple took time to discuss, ponder, and decide. Margaretha gave Walter the opportunity to voice his opinion about what to do and did not decide on her own. Deep down his view and wish reflected what he knew. He did not want to ruin her future by pinning her down. Her fragile constitution and life expectations at that time did not include a child. Margaretha seemed tentative about what to do and waited until Walter was absolutely sure to have an abortion. She agreed to get a referral from her physician for a supervised procedure in a hospital. Margaretha disappeared for three days—she preferred to be alone this time—and when Walter saw her again, she looked pale but seemed relieved.

The emotional pain of the abortion manifested itself for both in different ways. Walter fell into a depression and spent more time lying on his bed during the daytime, while Margaretha looked for options to heal.

She asked him one day, “Would you like to do a massage training course with me? Antje told me about a couple who will begin a class soon; they are experienced therapists. It will take place on four separate weekends.”

He said yes because he could not think of anything better to do to get out of the house. Especially since Margaretha's proposal involved therapy, Walter had a sudden strong interest. Often, when he remained for hours at a time in the dark cloud above his head, he asked himself how long a human being could endure something like that. Without actual need, emergency, or crisis of any kind, the extreme misery within refused to go away by itself. He knew he had to do something to get out of it.

When the first massage training weekend arrived, the couple drove in Walter's car to nearby Taunus Mountains. When they entered the trainings room, they were greeted by a friendly man and a woman with blond hair, blue eyes, and unusual names, Sunito and Bijou.

They dressed in red and orange clothes, wore long necklaces of wooden beads with a small, round picture, framed in wood, attached. Margaretha had told Walter that the trainers had been in India with the guru everybody knew about, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. She also told him that Antje planned to leave for India to see the same guru. Antje had met the trainers at a center in Frankfurt and told Margaretha about the upcoming training.

When Walter went to India, he never heard about this particular guru. All he knew he read in the news magazines and through some television reports. There were stories of a few celebrities who went to see him and had a good time. One of the news items, however, had caught Walter's attention. It was the report by a German journalist who had been sent to investigate the activities in the guru's Ashram and turned into one of his followers. Walter also remembered the scary picture on the cover of a prominent news magazine of a man with very long hair and beard, wide-eyed, hands stretched out over a group of people sitting on the floor naked. It left Walter with unease—partly attraction, partly fear.

The massage trainer couple introduced their technique as neo-Reichian, part of bioenergetics analysis developed by Alexander Lowen. It was a body psychotherapy that originated from the work of Sigmund Freud and was later refined by Wilhelm Reich, author of *Character Analysis* and many other books.

The group sat in a circle on the floor of a large, empty room and introduced each other by stating their names and whatever information they wanted to share. Interestingly, the majority were women. As the instructors directed, the group members closed their eyes, breathed into the abdominal area, and tried to feel their bellies move up and down. They stood up, walked in a circle, and, when the trainer said stop, closed their eyes and felt what was going on in their bodies. They danced to loud music, and when the music stopped, looked into the neighbor's eyes, and felt what was going on inside as they kept eye contact with the other person.

Numerous short exercises followed until at one point Sunito said, "Now, let's do the Kundalini. Who has done it before?"

Only two people knew what Kundalini meant. The instructors explained that they wanted the group to experience a meditation technique from the Ashram in Poona. It had four different stages, all sustained by music from a cassette tape and with closed eyes: shaking the body, dancing, sitting still, and then lying down on the floor without music. Each part lasted fifteen minutes.

During most of the exercises and the meditation, Walter realized that he did the best he could, but his interest was more with anybody else than with what went on inside him. Every so often, he peeked involuntarily, to see where he stood on the floor, whether he had sufficient space to dance without bumping into a fellow participant. Keeping an eye on Margaretha was more important than observing his insides.

The group event ended for the night officially, those who wanted to go home left the location. Most of them stayed at the school building and had a light self-made dinner in the break room. Since Margaretha did not want to leave, Walter prepared his place for the night on one of the available mats.

Next morning's schedule began at 6:00 a.m. When Walter became aware of stirring all around him, he thought that he had not slept at all. It seemed that he had listened to the sounds in the group room for hours, the shifting, coughing, breathing of people. Margaretha's mat lay next to his, but she seemed so far away, he could have been in Thailand. When all items were cleared and stowed away, off the floor, Sunito explained what would happen next. He called it "The Dynamic Meditation," which sounded promising. But if Walter had known what was coming toward him, he might have left the room to have breakfast elsewhere.

The trainer described five stages of a meditation technique accompanied by taped music. The first stage was chaotically breathing through the nose, the second becoming very mad—screaming, shouting, crying, jumping, shaking, dancing, singing, laughing, no holding back of anything. Then the third stage: with raised arms, jumping up and down shouting the mantra, "Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!" as deeply as possible. It was followed by the sudden stage four: Stop! Freeze wherever you are. Do not move. The fifth stage was to celebrate through dance. All stages were clearly separated by different percussion rhythms or music.

When the group reached stage three and Walter went through the first minute of the exercise, jumping with raised arms, he thought he would die right there. An excruciating pain went through both his thighs, bringing tears to his closed eyes. He had to stop jumping for a moment and then continue in a more tentative way. He managed to go through the stage by alternating resting and jumping. Drenched in sweat, with shaking legs, he went through the freeze stage and then the dance phase, which turned into a walking-on-eggshells segment. During breakfast at the shared table, no one talked and some of their faces were pale.

Once again, all participants sat in a circle and reported about their adventures so far. An occasional roar of laughter went through the building. Relieved, proud future massage therapists discovered that they were not the only ones who had suffered during the Dynamic Meditation.

During this first weekend and the following sessions, they learned the technique and its psychologically therapeutic effects in self-awareness and on their own bodies. Starting with the feet, they slowly worked their way up to the head, the most sensitive part. For Walter, a fundamental and extremely interesting fact of the massage application was that less of it could mean more, referring to a stroke, a movement, or a simple touch on or with the body. In situations where people worked on a practice partner, specifically on their hands, the slightest movement of a joint could trigger a catharsis—release of stored emotions, pain of the past freed by the gentle touch of another person. It frequently occurred that the whole group interrupted what they were doing and gathered around an individual who was going through a traumatic experience of the past. They listened, shared the pain, and by doing so, stimulated healing.

On the third weekend, it was Walter's turn.

When a tender stroke by a partner triggered an enormous surge of revolting, painful emotions, Walter began to scream and cry so much that Bijou approached the mat he lay on and said, “Let it go, let it all out.”

Walter unconsciously intensified his shouts and outcries.

Bijou suddenly declared, “Walter, you need to stop. You hear me? You need to stop; I am not willing to go there.”

Somewhat thankful but also perplexed, he tried to calm down and wondered what was wrong with him. Where and why did she not want to go there? He never found out, but assumed Bijou was not prepared to handle his issue.

Margaretha fell in love with the trainers. Obviously, Walter noticed every step of it. She made it absolutely apparent by being overjoyed whenever she mentioned them. It did not have the quality of romantic love, more like a little girl adoring her parents, but he mentally noted it and observed. After the last segment of the training, a troupe of new massage therapists went out into the world to trade sessions or even work on someone from the outside.

In Walter's world, things began to happen again. First, Antje had become Kavita in Poona, and when she returned, Kavita wore only red clothing and the necklace. During the massage training, many of the members had talked about India, the guru, and visiting the

Ashram, and some even began to wear textile colors that ranged remarkably across the orange spectrum. Margaretha became a frequent visitor at Walter's apartment, arriving with large bags full of white T-shirts, pants, and other stuff. She used his washing machine to dye them red or purple or some color in between. He did not mind her visiting and using the machine, but as a result, most of his white clothes turned slightly pink when he used the machine after her.

## Red Zone

It had been an exciting experience to be together with many people for an extended time. Walter became friends with some. They met for coffee, or someone cooked a meal. Some weeks passed, and the energy he had received from the group experience disintegrated into the usual day-to-day routine. Going for walks in the park or lying on the bed, staring at the ceiling, trying to be patient, as the I Ching told him to be.

One very annoying development turned out to be the Sunday's events that Margaretha and Kavita attended together. These were the days he usually spent with his girlfriend. Now the two women disappeared into what they called "The Center" in Bockenheim, one of the Indian guru's branches in Frankfurt. They participated in an open house kind of affair with meditation and tea drinking. Walter became even more depressed as he felt his girlfriend slip away from him while he cooked in his own miserable juices.

He liked eating at a particular Chinese restaurant, which he remembered on one of those Sundays. There was nothing to do in the big city on a lazy Sunday afternoon, when the world appeared to be at a total standstill.

He thought, *Let me have lunch at the Chinese and see.*

The choice of lunch location included the thought that perhaps he would be able to catch a glimpse of what they were doing at the Bockenheim Center. The restaurant was right next to the backyard entrance of the guru's place.

Walter seated himself at a table behind the curtain right next to one of the windows and seemed to be the only guest in the restaurant. The spot gave him a covered but clear view of the yard with the entrance door of the center. As his rice with chicken and almonds arrived, a group of people exited the door of the meditation place and gathered in the yard. Some took seats at a round table made from a large cable reel. Lo and behold, there she sat: Margaretha with a red face and what appeared to be still-wet hair. He observed her sitting in the hazy afternoon sun, drinking something out of a cup, and frolicking with people. All of them were clad in reddish outfits.

Walter did not meet with her that day. He went home, feeling lousy and scared.

Later that night, he said to himself, "Enough is enough! This is too absurd."

He needed to find out for himself. Why had he been scared, and what were they doing in the center? Next day, Monday, before noon, he walked the twenty-minute distance from his apartment to the narrow street in Bockenheim. Through the open gate of the courtyard, he came to the building's entrance door and saw flyers in a plastic container at the wall. Walter pulled one of the flyers out and viewed a schedule of events. He sat down on a chair at the round table and read the schedule very carefully. A three-day event was coming up in two weeks that caught his immediate attention: "Encounter with Ma Prem Purna."

In the reception area, downstairs in the basement, a friendly woman asked him how she could assist him. Walter told her he would like to try one of the events on the schedule and that one in particular attracted him. He asked the woman in red what she thought about it. His question triggered an energetic, informative, and rather lengthy response that made him quite excited.

The woman told him, "You are lucky, because the good therapists from Poona are traveling all over Europe and elsewhere. Don't you know, Bhagwan left India and is in the United States now? The therapist of the Encounter group is from Bavaria and has been with Bhagwan for a long time. It will be a great experience for you."

Walter signed up for a self-awareness group that would change his life.

Surprisingly enough, from the moment he filled out the application form to the time the Encounter experience began, an energy change occurred within him. It was as if his signature on the piece of paper triggered happiness and a sense of worth. When he met his girlfriend the next day and told her about his decision, he could see on her face that she had not expected anything like it.

Her jaw dropped for a moment, and then she swallowed and said, "Oh, I want to do this group as well."

That rather puzzled him, but he thought, *We might as well*. Momentums flipped back and forth, their dynamic forces transformed, and the couple ended up in Walter's bed. One more time, the two enjoyed each other very passionately—how compatible they were together during lovemaking.

The following two weeks became the most erotic period they had been blessed with. Walter used his Nikon to shoot rolls of black-and-white film, capturing Margaretha's immaculate, naked body in all imaginable erotic positions: standing up next to the window, lying



on his bed on the side, and with her legs spread wide apart. He used the zoom lens to shoot details of her pleasure zone from the front and back. Afterward, they became so horny again that they made love standing up. Margaretha enjoyed the act so much that she started to weep with pleasure.

They visited Olof and Kavita and went out for dinner, enjoyed a weekend at the gravel pit in the nude, and spent as much time together as they could. In due course, the two weeks passed, and on a Friday evening, Walter walked with his bag to the center in Bockenheim. He had packed a towel and a change of clothes.

A group of people was already gathered in the reception area, chatting animatedly while looking left and right to evaluate who would be in the group and what to think about it. After the administrative check-in procedure, a line of individuals filed into a large basement room with wooden parquet. It looked and smelled very clean. The crowd stood around, not knowing what to do, until the door opened again. A medium-sized, stocky woman in her mid-forties and two young men in her company walked into the room.

She said, "Undress, put all your clothes along the wall over there."

*Lo and behold!* Walter thought. *It's true what they wrote in the newspapers—it's happening nude.*

For a brief moment, he looked at and checked on Margaretha; a fleeting feeling of jealousy passed through his mind and then went away. He gazed around and saw all the naked bodies while trying to find a vacant spot in a circle, which formed under the direction of one of the two men. Once everybody was sitting with their naked butts on the parquet, it became quiet in the room. Walter recognized that a formidable number of people had signed up for the Encounter, and most of them were women.

The woman who had given the initial order to undress and the two men joined the round as well. "My name is Ma Prem Purna," the woman said. "We shall have a lot of fun together for the next three days."

After the initial introduction of herself and her two assistants, as well as the intention of the group, the participants had a chance to say their names and additional information if they wanted to. There were first exchanges of glimpses across the room, a smile or looking the other way. All of them had read or heard something about Encounter, but most had never participated in a group before. Purna explained the meaning of the word *encounter* as, "You have to

encounter yourself in your totality. You may feel sick because you will see animalism coming out. You could never have imagined that human beings can be such animals. But that animal is within you, just repressed. By repressing it, you cannot dissolve it.”

One could hear a pin drop to the floor, and the energy in the room turned almost icy as people tried to digest Purna's speech, realizing that this would not be a joke.

“Get up on your feet and dance like you have never danced before in your life, as if this will be the last time.”

Popular music flooded the room from enormous speakers, and the group members began dancing for their life. Walter felt uneasy but was still in a familiar milieu; he had always loved to dance. Although the setting was changed this time, he managed to shake off his anxiety.

The music stopped. “Find yourself a partner and stand opposite each other. Look into the eyes of your counterpart. Feel yourself in your body. Tell your partner how you feel. When you are done, let your partner tell you.”

And so on.

A variety of exercises followed in short succession. Then Purna said, “And now prepare the space for the Kundalini.”

There was a dinner break after the meditation, followed by an evening session. The group gathered again, naked, in the basement room and formed the circle. Nobody said anything. People started to look around; the atmosphere in the room appeared to condense. Walter could not avoid feeling very uncomfortable, as if he had done something wrong.

"Look at them," Purna said to one of her assistants condescendingly. “They are so full of fear, you can smell it. Come on people, who wants to say something?”

A large woman who had been breathing loudly and frequently for a while suddenly said, “I need to say something. This man across the room. He has been looking at me for a while now, and I do not like it. It feels unasked for, somehow disgusting. I want him to stop.”

Purna interrupted, “Why don't you address him directly? Go ahead and tell him.”

The large woman turned a little to someone unidentified at the moment and said, “I do not want you to look at me. Stop it.”

“Who are you talking to?” Purna asked.

The woman jumped up and ran through the space in the circle, pointing her finger at a man who smiled for no reason at all.

“Sit down and tell him again.”

Once the woman placed herself in front of the man, she looked at him, breathing very deeply with increasing speed. Her shoulders vibrated and her arms shook.

Suddenly she yelled at the top of her lungs. “Do not look at me. I hate you, I hate you,” many times until she ran out of breath and started to weep.

The tension in the room turned into a flood of raging emotions, where other people started to cry and wanted to say something, but Purna stopped the rising havoc. “Close your eyes, watch your breath go in and out, and feel yourself.”

After a while, she read from a book of the guru and then left the room. The group prepared for the night. Walter had no idea where Margaretha positioned her mat or whether she even spent the night in the room. He did not care; the events of the previous few hours set up enough emotional and mental material to ponder about and basically left him too exhausted to worry about anything. He laid himself down on the sheet-covered mattress, pulled a blanket on top of him, and fell asleep right away.

As with the massage training, the schedule of the day for the Encounter group began early, at 6:00 a.m. with the Dynamic. Walter was, to a certain degree, familiar with it but still not really comfortable jumping up and down and screaming at dawn. He went through the motions, took a shower together with many other naked bodies, and had muesli with herbal tea in the break room. Most people from the group were quiet, kind of dazed-looking after the shower, sitting at a table with their light breakfasts.

Purna began the morning session with a circle and asked whether anybody had anything to say.

Silence filled in the room for a while until a young man opened his mouth and said in a loud voice, “I do not like the smile of this guy over there; it looks false, as if it is not real. As a matter of fact, the whole person looks phony to me.”

Walter realized at this moment that the man was talking about him. He became wide awake.

Purna asked the man, “Does the smile, the person, remind you of somebody?”

After he thought for some time, the man's lips began to tremble and Walter thought he saw tears. He said, “He reminds me of my father, the son of a bitch.”

He began to knead intensely one of the pillows in the middle of the circle, his voice choking but steadily staring at Walter.

“I despise the smile. It makes me mad, and I could kill him.”

He began to hit the pillow so hard with his fists that an assistant had to reinforce it with a second one underneath it to soften the blows. The agitated man began to shout throaty sounds out of his mouth with clenched teeth. It took him almost an hour to get the issue out of his system and become friendly again toward Walter.

Meanwhile, a variety of individuals had been infected by the vile energy in the room. Some worked on their own issues with people from their past whom they did not like because of what they had done or not done to them. Purna and her two assistants had their hands full engaging with all of them. The majority of the group members observed quietly with serious faces.

“Listen up, people,” Purna said, “let's play a little—you will like it. Form a long line and sit very tightly behind each other. We are going to play train. You can put your hands on the shoulders of the person in front of you. You can caress the person, you can touch, and you can do whatever you like playing the choo-choo train.”

Cheerful music provided the background for the group, which, sitting one behind the other in a line, crossed the large room in its entirety. Walter felt very lucky to sit behind a woman he thought of as the most beautiful in the whole group. She had a very elegant appearance, and her body had fully developed curves, not large at all. When he took his lucky spot behind the woman and touched her sides with the insides of his thighs, he could feel how soft her skin was. She also still emanated a fresh odor despite all the sweating going on.

The line of people wavered to the sides and back and forth. The moment his member touched her lower back, it stiffened harder than it had been for a while. The head rubbed against her back, and he had the impulse to just lift her up a few inches and let her sit on it, to relieve the pressure. Walter suppressed the impulse but caressed the peachy skin softly and wherever he could reach with his hands. The choo-choo train game turned into somewhat of a torture session for him because of his large, painful member. He did not dare follow through with his animalistic appetite, and most of all, the woman in front of him did not show an inviting response; she might have been as afraid as he was.

Most of the troop left the center during lunch break, to walk in the sunshine for a while. When they assembled for the afternoon session, the room smelled fresh, and some flowers had been placed in a vase below the big Bhagwan picture on the wall. There was electricity in the room that had not been there before. It felt as if a cloud had been lifted to allow a more pleasant spirit to safeguard the atmosphere.

When everybody settled down and stopped the chatter and giggles, Purna pointed to the picture of her master and said, “Bhagwan is here with each and every one. He actually does the work. I only speak for him. So look around vigilantly and dare to ask or do what you wanted to since you arrived here.”

Before Walter collected his courage to do something he always wanted to do, the tall woman who had previously worked on issues gazed at him directly. “Can I come over to you, Walter? I want to ask you something.”

He nodded, and she shyly crawled through the middle of the ring and situated herself on her knees right in front of him.

“I really would like to make love to you. Would you do it with me?”

“Sure, yes,” he replied without thinking, and after gazing into his eyes for a long time, the woman grabbed his hand to pull him away from the circle.

Together they walked a few yards away. The woman picked a mat and placed it on the floor.

“How do you want to do it?” he asked her.

She did not say anything but pulled him down next to her, where they began kissing and fondling. Before the woman asked Walter, his idea had been to propose the same idea to the other woman from the choo-choo train session, but now it did not matter anymore. He felt his erection while he caressed the long, strong, and fleshy thighs of his partner. From the beginning of this therapeutic exercise, it was simply that: a practice. Even though he had an erection, he did not become emotionally involved. He went through the movements, and when she asked whether she could sit on him, he agreed. She positioned herself on top of him, doing it the way she wanted.

Both of them could not avoid the fact that they were not alone in the room. Now and then, one or both would view the scene in the room and recognize that a lot was going on behind their backs. No detail of it stayed in Walter's memory. Half an hour or more must have passed.

The woman on top of Walter realized that the deed did not include the usual vicissitudes of passion and that her partner had not climaxed.

The therapist called her group to order. "Let's get ready for the Kundalini upstairs in the meditation room."

Walter looked around the room. He did not recognize anything in particular but saw Margaretha getting up from the floor and dressing herself. The woman on top of him lifted herself off and smiled at him. The two hugged for a while, and then Walter put on his loose pants and T-shirt and proceeded to the first floor.

Walter got to sit on a wicker chair in the reception area. In front of him was a little desk with a framed black-and-white picture of the guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Walter's back was pointed in direction of the others, waiting. As he watched the picture for a while, his awareness focused on the image, and the noise and chatter disappeared into the background. Walter became conscious that his vision of Bhagwan's likeness in the image had altered. From the crisp, clear picture of a man with a gray beard, a cap on his head, and wearing some kind of ornamented garment, it transformed into a moving picture. A live version of the guru smiled at him, beckoning. When Walter gazed even deeper into the man's eyes, he saw nothing at all anymore. For an undetermined length of time, the observing Walter disappeared. When he resurfaced, a large amount of energy was going through his body and brain like a strong current, an unfamiliar force, which bordered on being uncomfortable but at the same time very welcome.

Walter realized that people had entered the meditation room for the Kundalini. He also knew that he wanted to become a disciple, one of Bhagwan's *Sannyasins*.

After dinner, when the members changed into fresh clothes and with the realization that the worst of the group must be over, Margaretha began the session by stepping out for the first time. She told Purna and the group that she did not like the previous event because of what happened with Walter and the tall woman.

"It was unfair, we came here as a couple with a relationship, and I had no intention of getting hurt like that," she said while tears started flooding her eyes.

Purna asked Walter, "Do you want to help her?"

Walter said, "Of course."

"You two, sit opposite each other, look into your eyes, and feel what is going on."

More tears came from Margaretha.

Then the situation changed into exclamations and escalated into her hitting a pillow while looking at Walter screaming, “I hate you so much.”

The session took an hour before she calmed down.

At the end, Purna asked both of them, “Do you want to continue your relationship or not?”

Margaretha said, “I do not know, but I think I want to go on with Walter.”

Walter knew he needed to end it. He did not want to continue a relationship that had caused suffering, and he said so.

Purna wrapped up her Encounter group with the words, “See you all very fresh in the morning for the Dynamic.”

Walter left the group room for a breath of fresh air in the courtyard and sat down on one of the benches. He rested there with his closed eyes, contemplating what had occurred during the previous forty-eight hours. He tried to comprehend the magnitude of it but could not. Walter did not remember a time in his life when he had undergone a comparable mixture of vital forces and events and at the same time felt calm and at peace.

Someone was sitting next to him on the bench, he realized after a while, and opened his eyes. She was the one who advised him initially when he came to the center the first time. During the two days in the group, he had noticed her serving food and taking care of a variety of duties. The woman told him her name was Tara.

“Well, how are you doing?” she asked smilingly in the warm, nightly summer breeze.

Walter did not know what to say. He put his left arm over her shoulder and moved closer to her.

“I want to take *Sannyas*,” came out of his mouth, and he started to cry.

Tara turned toward him and hugged him with both of her arms.

"Do you want to stay with me in my room tonight?"

He could not think of anything better to do than that. The two went to the second floor of the building, where she had a small room with a large mattress on the floor. Tara and Walter cuddled up very sweetly, and then he fell asleep instantly. When the alarm clock rang, she hugged him again very gently and smiled with her blue eyes sparkling. Walter tried to apologize for falling asleep, but she dismissed it and let him leave for the meditation room.

The remaining hours of the last Encounter session continued in mellow ambiance. Most of the attendees looked different. There were many faces in the room with clear eyes, their voices hoarse but smiling. The bags packed, people gathered outside in the reception area and courtyard to say good-bye to each other. Walter noticed his fantasy woman and understood then why she had not responded to his lustful conduct: she sat on a bench in the courtyard with the center's leader, holding hands. When she saw Walter looking at her, she smiled and waved at him.

The time immediately following Walter's Encounter experience evolved into active, vibrant weeks, during which he sometimes felt as if he were moving into the Garden of Eden. Nearly every morning before six, he drove to the Mada Center for the Dynamic Meditation. At night, he went back to do the Kundalini at seven. He met with Margaretha, who picked up some of her stuff in his apartment and made sure that he was OK. She also told him that she had spent time with one of Purna's assistants, who had become very infatuated with her. Walter thought that their new relationship felt increasingly lighter and friendlier.

When he told her that he wanted to take Sannyas, she became very serious. "Are you sure?" she asked with concern, but at the same time confessed that she had already filled out her own application.

Walter obtained a passport picture and dropped off his form at the center. There was a lot of talk about what recently had happened with Bhagwan. Apparently, he left Poona and the Ashram to fly to New Jersey in the United States. The gossip circled around the purchase of a large property in Oregon, known as the Big Muddy Ranch. Sannyasins were about to turn the ranch from an empty rural property into a city called Rajneeshpuram. Walter was not sure whether and where Bhagwan would get his Sannyas application, but center insiders assured him that the master would receive it and assign a new name to him as he had requested.

A waiting game began during which he went through many different emotional stages. What if the master declined him? Would *he* really look at his form and picture? What name will he get? And so on.

On the outside, Walter enjoyed the time of his life with frequent and variable intercourse. There always appeared to be a beautiful and willing Ma at the center who liked to share the bed in his apartment for a night. At home, he dyed any piece of clothing he owned that could be colored red. His roommate, Rudi, appeared astonished when he noticed all the activities and



different faces coming out of Walter's room. He had no objection whatsoever to his sister's and his roommate's transformations and stayed with sympathy in the background.

Then one night, with a firm grip, destiny seized another creature and would not let go any more.

## Chandra

As was customary on Friday nights at the Mada Center, after the Kundalini Meditation, the fun continued with an hour or two of dancing to popular music. That night the meditation room had been packed with fifteen or twenty naked meditators who got up from their blankets or cushions to get ready for the dancing. About an hour into the action, Walter suddenly noticed a woman he had seen before.

She had shoulder-length brunette hair, blue eyes, a slim upper torso and butt, and very muscular, impressive upper thighs. Occasionally, he had seen her briefly sitting in the courtyard after the evening meditation, smoking a cigarette, and then she disappeared. When Walter spotted her on the dance floor, she noticed him at the same instant. Both began orbiting each other while dancing.

For another hour, they danced with and around each other, like magnets spinning all over the place, sometimes attracting, sometimes repelling. Their bodies shimmered in the dim light of the meditation room as a result of profuse sweating. Walter could have danced the night away, but the event facilitator closed the session down for the night. Walter had not exchanged a word with his energetic dance partner.

Everybody hit the showers, and there was a lot of laughing, singing, and chatting going on while they washed themselves. He hoped very much to meet the mysterious woman outside. This time, as luck would have it, he found her sitting on a bench with a cigarette. He sat down next to her, lighted up himself, but said nothing.

They looked at each other through the darkness, illuminated by sparse light from a streetlamp. He could make out her sparkling eyes, and from then only those two eyes existed in his vision. It appeared to Walter as if the area around her face turned into a small movie screen as the expressions on it and her appearance changed frequently, from old to youthful, from austere to passionate and adoring. Suddenly, both of them jerked at the same time. Their bodies twitched and trembled as Walter and the woman gazed at each other, but nobody interrupted the stare. At last, she spoke, shivering in the night. "My name is Chandra."

He became aware of the *mala* around her neck, resting neatly on a silky red sweater. "Would you like to have dinner with me?" he asked without hesitation, hoping to gain some time together with her. "How about the Greek restaurant nearby?"

Chandra thought for a moment, still recovering from the previous experience and said, “OK.”

They gathered their belongings, went to Walter's Volkswagen parked around the corner, and drove for ten minutes to the restaurant.

He introduced himself and told her that he was impatiently waiting for a response from the master. She laughed aloud when she heard that. Walter noticed she had a squint, a gleam of silver in her look that added to her intensity.

Chandra told him that she currently stayed with a woman physician in a small town not far from Frankfurt, to serve a required practical residency with the homeopathic doctor for her studies. She said she studied medicine in Hamburg and was halfway through her second semester.

Time passed quickly in the restaurant; they drank a second glass of beer and smoked another cigarette, and then the waiter announced it would be closing time soon.

Walter asked her, “Do you want to come over to my place?”

“I knew you would ask that,” she replied. “Every man I meet here in the center asks the same question. But, yes, I would like to come to your place.”

At his apartment, they settled down in his room with a bottle of beer and talked for a while. Whenever they gazed at each other, the phenomenon of jerking bodies reoccurred. Sometimes the shaking became so intense, they just let it continue while they lay next to each other on the bed with their clothes on. It turned into a long process, interrupted by repeated twitches, to touch each other with their hands and get naked. When Chandra and Walter accomplished the deed and kissed for the first time, they needed to be careful not to collide with their teeth.

She had an athletic, trimmed body with small breasts and wide nipples. There was not a gram of fat on her, only muscles that Walter began kissing from the neck down. He kept on going down past the hair, massaging the huge thighs all the way down to a pair of exceptionally stiff feet. He asked her what she had been doing in the past. “Ice skating,” she whispered.

He smelled her musky sexual aroma, which intoxicated his senses as Chandra lifted her upper torso to grab his behind and turn him toward her. The couple started oral pleasures. When Walter could not take it any longer, he moved around into position to enter her sacred triangle.

Next morning, when they woke up and stretched lasciviously, she asked him if he would drive her to the closest railway station where she could catch a local train to her temporary domicile. In the car for the brief ride, she told Walter how the current work in the elderly physician's practice impressed her.

They did not exchange any phone numbers nor make further appointments, leaving it up to fate whether they would see each other again. Walter knew, however, that her obligations with the doctor would last another six weeks and expected to see her eventually at the Mada Center.

Returning to his apartment for breakfast, he felt as if he had lost his mind. There were two conflicting feelings in progress: one of them the forceful sexual attraction, the other a more concealed sentiment that was pure fear. Instinctively, he knew that a relationship with this woman could destroy him. He had felt that Chandra carried this power inherently within herself.

There had been no indication in the brief period he met her that she had an ability to love. Many brusque, direct responses that indicated her personality was drained of gentleness. It triggered an alert signal in his brain. Until the night before, Walter had never been so intimately confronted with a person of such caliber. On the other hand, he was happy with the current developments in his life. With his own activities in connection to what existence offered him. He would not have conceived it as possible a short while ago.

Walter did not meet Chandra for the next two days, but did receive a phone call from Kavita, who surprisingly wanted to get together with him. She came to his apartment and asked him if he wanted to take some portrait shots of her; she had seen some of his travel pictures, as well as his work with Margaretha. Of course, he said yes since taking pictures had been his special interest for some time. The two spent a few hours in his room, where he tried to create the proper lighting and positions to show Kavita at her best.

By the time the photo shoot ended, it was late, and since both were hungry, they walked together to the Chinese restaurant next to the Mada Center and had dinner. Certainly, many changes had occurred since the two had last seen each other. They caught up with her journey to India and sitting in front of a living master, how it felt to change names and wear orange-red-colored clothes all the time.

Walter realized that Kavita wanted to make sure that he was OK after his Encounter group and the separation from Margaretha. She took his hand, reaching over the table in the restaurant, and said, "I really like you. You are a good person."

Kavita's statement touched Walter. He had always respected her highly and thought only the best of her. She was someone with integrity and a lot of truth that could cut right through an issue. It had always been easy to forgive her tendencies toward mulishness.

"I would like to stay the night with you, is that OK?" she asked him and he agreed immediately. Physically Walter had never been attracted to Kavita, but he accepted her wish as an honor to comply with; it was like enjoying time with a sister.

"I wonder what name Bhagwan will give to you," she said when they had cuddled up in his bed. Shortly thereafter, they both fell asleep.

On the third night after the event with Chandra, Walter spotted her in the Kundalini Meditation crowd as soon as he entered the room. Like the first time, she sat outside on the bench after the meditation. Walter placed himself next to her, standing beside the bench because all the seats had been taken. She looked up at him and held his gaze for a few seconds, and then the identical phenomenon began to happen again as it had last time: trembling, jolting, and jerking of the entire body and a contraction of vision, which allowed seeing only a constrained area around her face and a fading peripheral view. Images of Chandra transformed into various appearances as old men, women, and characteristics resembling asceticism or gentleness.

By then, Walter had familiarized himself with the condition and could think while the show unfolded in front of his eyes. "You want to come to my place?" he asked.

"I have to be at the practice tomorrow morning," she said after a delay.

"I can take you there; I have time."

When the couple reached the apartment, Rudi opened the door for them and Walter introduced Chandra to him. They proceeded without delay into the kitchen for a dinner of sandwiches and beer. Almost relieved that Rudi was home, Walter enjoyed the time without further twitching. Simply sitting at the table and looking at Chandra from the side while she talked animatedly with Rudi about social work assured him that there might be a normal faculty within the woman.

As soon as the dishes had been cleared and everybody retreated to their rooms, however, the condition reoccurred. Walter and Chandra stood in the middle of his room, neither moving an inch. They gazed at each other while jerking. One expression Walter had recently heard a lot was *surrender*. Sannyasins used it frequently to describe situations where one had to let go of something or someone. It went through his mind now in his room, and suddenly, the experience

had no more connotations of something discomfoting. It actually represented a special event that could be enjoyed, a release or an exchange of energy comparable to continuous orgasms.

Once the two vibrating human beings succeeded in undressing and were stretched out on Walter's freshly dyed linen, he asked her, "Would you like to taste a bit of what I learned in my massage training?"

"Oh yes, how could you even ask such a question?" Chandra replied, smiling broadly.

Walter really enjoyed that moment, seeing her relax and smile. It moved a dial within him one more degree to being in love with her, after he had lost his wits already. As per instructions of the neo-Reichian technique he had learned, Walter worked his way down, starting at the head to relax her and ending at her feet, which had previously caught his attention. While he carried out the routine on her body, he was amazed at how sensitively Chandra reacted to his most gentle touches and pressures. He finished his session with her feet and looked at them from above, as he noticed their posture. They were pointing straight up at the ceiling and the toes toward her body. When he touched them, it felt as if he were fingering a pair of shoes from the outside. He began to work on them lightly but soon increased the pressure, feeling he had to crack something open. As he cradled one of the feet with both hands, tenderly shifting the ankle joint to enable some flexibility, Chandra's upper torso suddenly bolted into a sitting position, and she shouted aloud.

"Did I hurt you?"

"Yes and no, please continue, you are on track of something."

After a few more minutes, Walter ended the session and told her it needed to be continued. He was very much rewarded when he stretched out next to her and she opened her arms to hug and kiss him and then her legs to wrap them around his lower back.

She introduced him to the very friendly, wise, old female doctor at the homeopathic practice where she interned. Chandra thought her time spent there was the most interesting and valuable of her medical studies so far, and she did not want to miss a minute of it.

Before Walter left her, the two exchanged their phone numbers and promised each other to call when they wanted. He knew that a fresh relationship had begun to emerge, and his previous concerns were temporarily suspended.

As Walter continued to visit the Mada for the Dynamic in the morning and nearly every night to do the Kundalini, he never forgot to check for mail from the master in the USA. One

day, he discovered a color, high-gloss flyer in the reception announcing an event in Berlin called the Orange Connection Event. All the famous Sannyasins—names of therapists, musicians, and inner circle around Bhagwan—would be there in person; he had to go.

Walter asked Chandra whether she wanted to come along, but she needed to be with her doctor. He called Johann, an old friend, an artist painter who had visited Hohenhausen a few times, and asked if he could stay at his place for a couple of days, and Johann said yes. Walter took his Volkswagen on the long trip to Berlin and then to the huge, modern steel-and-glass Congress Centrum where the visitors were greeted by many red flags.

The closer he came to the location, the more people in red and orange walked on the streets. It turned into a sea of orange. Somendra, Teertha, and Veeresh were among several group leaders who participated. Chaitanya Hari and friends played music. Aneeta and Anubhava led Sufi dancing. Workshops and meditations were scheduled around the clock, including a talk show or two. They were the talk of town, and Walter met all of them.

The event turned into a forty-eight-hour affair. He could hardly wait to meet Teertha at last—for Walter, the representative of Bhagwan in absentia. Teertha had been on the cover of the news magazine, shown with a group of nude people. Once it was Walter's turn to participate in one of Teertha's short sessions, he managed to attract his attention.

Teertha came to him, sitting on the floor, and Walter asked him the only question that came to his mind: “Am I a good person?”

The therapist put his hand on Walter's head, smiled, and walked away. Walter felt as if god himself had blessed him.

Somendra did not impress him that much, but once he listened to the voices of Aneeta and Anubhava during their Sufi dance, shivers went down his spine, and tears rolled down his cheeks. He dissolved in bliss.

On a more worldly level, the most interesting individual for Walter was Veeresh. When he met him during one of his sessions, he got to know his approach, and later when Walter learned personal details about the therapist, he knew he had found a teacher.

## Getting Acquainted

Chandra originally came from the Mannheim Ludwigshafen area, about one hour south of Frankfurt. She asked Walter if he wanted to meet her father, who she planned to visit the next weekend.

In their previous meetings at his place, she talked in detail about her youth, growing up in poverty with an abusive father, and her mother divorcing him to marry someone else. The first few years, she was raised together with one older brother; when the parents separated, she decided to stay with her father in his Catholic household, despite his aggressive and commanding attitude. Chandra explained that she did it because she loved him and wanted to help out in a difficult situation. Her father married a woman who came with five children. During the next fifteen years, the two had another thirteen children together. Chandra, being the oldest of the crowd, took responsibility and looked after the younger siblings as long as she could. Her father saw in his first daughter talent as an ice skater and pushed her for years through a rigorous training routine that almost gave her a German championship and a contract with an ice show. At the last moment, however, she had had enough of the domestic violence, alcohol, and abuse. Chandra enrolled in a technical college and obtained an engineer's diploma, which did not suffice for her. Needing more challenges in her life and perhaps a status elevation, she managed, with some tricks and help, to enroll into the Hamburg University of Medicine.

While Walter listened to her stories, he began to understand a few issues about her behavior, the condition of her feet, and the size of her upper thighs. What affected him most was the situation she became an adult in and her depth of feelings for the family. He fell in love. He felt so strongly that he even asked her to marry him, but because their relationship was in such an early stage, neither took it too seriously.

Chandra had not been in Poona; she had taken Sannyas in the Hamburg Center. Like many others, the eternal suffering in her life and the lives of people she knew had motivated her to do so. Walter noticed a strong male energy in her personality, as if she had not yet discovered the female side within her. She had had many male friends and lovers but only one girlfriend. Once during a semester break, she had traveled alone in a Mercedes truck all the way to Afghanistan and financed the trip by exporting another diesel engine for sale, which had been attached beneath the truck.



Walter experienced a sensation of total support for her and looked forward to meeting the people she grew up with, including her father, who boxed as a hobby and at that time might have spawned about twenty-five children, including the ones born out of wedlock with different women. Walter thought Chandra felt embarrassed; certainly, she had never before introduced a boyfriend to the environment she came from. When the couple arrived in the suburb of Ludwigshafen on a cold, rainy November evening, Walter's expectation disappeared, and he only felt the strong bond to his girlfriend.

The large family, with eight children of different ages present, the mother, and her father were all extremely happy to see the daughter back home and welcomed her boyfriend with equal warmth. They sat at a long table, which had been extended through two of the small rooms in the government-subsidized building. Affection and regard were tangible in the air, and other than an occasional loud admonition by the parents to one of the smaller kids, Walter felt at home. The visitors spent the night upstairs in a cold bedroom but cuddled up to make it through the chilly night. The family asked some questions about the guru, mala, and red cloth. Their general respect for Chandra, however, outweighed any concerns.

Except for a few reports from celebrities who visited India and the Ashram and the magazine-reporter-turned-Sannyasin, the media as a whole treated Bhagwan's movement with suspicion, creating fear in the public. Walter had not talked to his mother about his latest involvements; he saved it for a later date. Without doubt, he did not see a way to relay any of it to her that she would approve of, a fact that most of the Sannyasins faced with their own families.

Margaretha called Walter excitedly to let him know that her mala and new name, Ma Prem Nirvesha, had arrived. Walter was happy for her but disappointed that his own letter had not yet come. She told him they had had a Sannyas celebration in the center on the previous weekend when Walter was away.

He had to wait another week until a call came in from the Mada Center leader, who told him that an envelope arrived, addressed to his name, from the United States. He raced to Bockenheim and ran into the center to catch the man before he left for the weekend. Walter opened the envelope. Inside was a document that had been signed by Bhagwan in his unusual handwriting and giving Walter his new Sannyas name, Swami Prem Has Mukh, or Joyful Love. Walter had become a proud, excited, new Sannyasin of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh.

The center leader tried to delay the ceremonial bestowal of the mala; he wanted to do it during the customary general celebration, together with other fresh Sannyasins, but Hasmukh begged him to do it right then. He did not want to wait any longer. Together with a few additional center workers, an impromptu festivity was quickly created. The center leader put the long, wooden-bead chain with the locket, which included Bhagwan's picture, slowly around Hasmukh's neck and then touched the middle of his forehead with a finger. That way, people of authority worked for the master by proxy. Tears of joy and bliss rolled down Hasmukh's cheeks; he had made it.

That night, Chandra and he went into the disco where Hasmukh had boogied already a decade ago. The two whirling, flying bodies in red on the dance floor were the center of attention. Afterward, the couple, in love with each other and with life, continued to celebrate in Hasmukh's bed. Two days later, when Chandra visited him again, they returned to the disco to repeat their celebrative ways of dancing, and as soon as they entered the basement location, the couple dominated the dance floor. The two Sannyasins danced nonstop for two hours and then rested to have a couple of beers.

Chandra told her boyfriend that she felt tired and wanted to go to sleep in his place. Hasmukh gave her the keys, and she left to walk the short distance while he stayed a little while longer to have another beer and dance. After half an hour of resting, he moved back onto the dance floor and let it all out: his joy at being a Sannyasin, his ability to move and rock to the beat and the effect of the beers he had consumed. When he felt satisfied, Hasmukh walked back to the seat where he had stowed away his brand-new, dark-red leather jacket, put it on, and then slowly made his way through the crowd toward the exit stairs.

As he almost reached the stairs, two men stood in his way, and he turned to step around them. One of them motioned to him, so he approached. The person yelled through the loud sound into his ear, "Who are you? What is this?" and pointed at him from head to toe.

Hasmukh shrugged his shoulders and shouted back, "I am a Sannyasin," and tried to pass through the two men.

At that moment the other man, who had not said anything yet, grabbed his mala and pulled strongly at it several times in a jerking motion. In reflex mode, Hasmukh punched the bloke as powerfully as he could in the face, hitting the side of the chin. Then he turned around,

sped up the steep staircase, opened the exit door, and began to run quickly across the parking lot to the icy sidewalk full of snow.

Soon he heard voices and running steps behind him some distance away, but closing in. At one point, he had to cross Bockenheimer Landstrasse to get to his apartment. On the other side of the street, he heard the running steps behind him very close, but he did not dare look around and lose time.

Suddenly he slipped, or his pursuer kicked a foot underneath him, and he fell down on the icy, snowy sidewalk. The initial collision was partially absorbed by the leather jacket, but when the first kicks struck, some of them went into his face and cheeks before he could protect his head. The strikes kept coming; Hasmukh began to scream as loud as he could, "Help, help me!" That fended off the attackers, who left him lying on the ground.

After a few moments, he hobbled around the corner to his home, dazed. Since he had no keys, Hasmukh rang the doorbell. The buzzer sounded. Chandra stood at his second-floor entrance naked and said, "Oh my god, what happened to you?"

Two blows had left their bloody marks, one on his right cheekbone and the other a cut on the base of his left nostril. He also had less serious lacerations on his elbows and hips. Hasmukh filed the incident away as another example of the prevalent intolerance in the country against anything and anybody who looked or seemed different.

Chandra's next semester was approaching. She completed the internship with the herbal doctor and thought about returning to her home and university in Hamburg. Hasmukh offered happily to chauffeur her to the northern city; he did not want to let her go yet. His interest in who she was, what she did, and where she lived, increased by the day. He wanted to know how she spent her days. According to her descriptions, she lived with a group of people, most of them Sannyasins, outside the city in a northern suburb.

On a cold and cloudy day, Hasmukh arrived at the physician's home and practice to pick up Chandra and her luggage for the long ride north. He loved the fact that he could be with her, do something for her, and be generous. On 500 kilometers of Autobahn, the couple took rest, food, drink, and talk stops every other hour, which doubled the regular driving time to almost ten hours. Hasmukh felt in no hurry, and Chandra hoped that a roommate had turned on the radiator in her room, as promised.

He parked at the final point of the long journey, the clock showed nearly 2:00 a.m. The last mile they had been driving quietly through small streets lined with snow-covered trees on both sides. As the couple quickly fetched some necessary luggage from the back of the station wagon, he expressed his surprise about the neighborhood.

“Here are many villas and estates on park like spreads,” Chandra explained through her teeth, shivering in the ice-cold temperature.

They opened a little gate and trudged over a narrow walkway covered in snow to a dark building. Hasmukh saw trees all over in the very still winter night. The couple reached the white wooden entrance door with a few small oval windows in the upper part, but door would not open. Chandra could not find her keys. She rang the bell a few times until a light went on inside and over the door. There was movement in the house. An almost naked young man opened the door and said, “Oh, here you are. We thought you would not show up any more. Welcome back home.”

In the house, the duo walked up a few stairs to a room, situated on the first floor, right next to the staircase. As Chandra opened the door, she said, “Shit, the heater is off, and a cat did its business in there.”

It must have been close to freezing, The two did not linger much longer, but put on warm underwear and laid down on the foam mattress embedded in the loft-like construction of the room's interior; the floor had been raised with a platform about four feet high.

It took another fifteen minutes, an electric heater, and intense hugging until the first warmth crept into their extremities. Hasmukh inserted one of his music cassettes into the player, and they listened to Black Uhuru while slowly stripping off their long johns and thermal shirts. Chandra and Hasmukh were wired from the trip and many cups of coffee they had consumed at rest stops.

When both felt comfortable again with the room temperature, Hasmukh rolled on top of her. Black Uhuru with its aggressive reggae beat generated the character for this session.

Soon, both of them were bathed in sweat, a blanket loosely hanging over Hasmukh's back. He moved and pushed to the rhythm from the player but sometimes followed another beat arising from the bodies on the foam mattress. She came again, shouting out, “Yes, yes, I love you.” He had never ever experienced anything like it.

At the end of the night, when they recognized the lighter grayness of dawn through the windows, both climaxed with a loud, exhaling, deep-throat outcry.

He opened his eyes again and viewed the room they were in by daylight and noticed it contained nothing but a rubber tree and the mattress. The lovers separated themselves slowly from underneath the bedcover, dressed quickly, and walked down the two steps from the loft level to open the door. They walked down a corridor into the kitchen, where a group of people sat at a large table, enjoying the last of the breakfast. Some talked, and others looked at a newspaper.

When the lovers entered the room, a noisy “Hello, Chandra, there you are, welcome home” began. Some of them got up to hug her and acknowledged Hasmukh as well with a brief hug or “Hello, and who are you?” One of them said, “We could hear you already last night,” and everybody started laughing aloud.

One of the people lived outside in the garden building and shared the kitchen of the main building with the others; he was not a Sannyasin. Chandra introduced Hasmukh to everybody and them to him. At that time, two couples and four singles lived in the eight-room villa, which had three stories and a basement. The basement contained an insulated room where meditations or sessions with a lot of noise could be held. The very large living room on the first floor served as a common room, also perfect for meditations or quieter group activities.

After their breakfast, Chandra took Hasmukh outside into the snow and showed him the estate, which was the size of a small park and had a pond. Next to it was a custom-made hardwood mini-pigsty inhabited by a pot-bellied pig. Very impressed, Hasmukh could only imagine how it would be to live there during the summertime.

After they cleaned up the mess the cat had left in Chandra's room, the couple took the car and drove into the city of Hamburg. It was Hasmukh's first time seeing the River Elbe, the large harbor area, and the beautiful downtown with Binnenalster, Aussenalster, where most of the water was frozen solid. Chandra needed to visit the university administration office, and Hasmukh spent some time in the local Dharmadeep Sannyas Center restaurant. He stayed another night in the villa with his lover and then returned to Frankfurt alone. The couple separated from each other, leaving doors and options open without making any plans for the future.

## Contemplation

Back in his home domain, Hasmukh paid a visit at Nirvesha and Kavita's, who he had not seen for a while. His ex-girlfriend had to leave for work when he arrived, but she hugged him warmly and promised to meet some time later.

Kavita and he talked over a pot of tea. He reported the latest developments in his life, and she told him that now everybody wanted to visit the United States because of the master himself soon being in Oregon. People were trying to find compatible partners to marry and obtain legal-resident status that way.

She also mentioned that Nirvesha now had at least two lovers who visited the loft occasionally, one of them the therapist assistant from the Encounter group, the other the massage course instructor Sunito. Kavita, with her unobstructed view of the matter, said she believed Nirvesha loved Sunito much more than the assistant. She could hear the difference in the sounds Nirvesha made when making love to the two different men.

*Very interesting, Hasmukh thought. Let's see what the future brings.*

When he left and reached his parked Volkswagen Variant station wagon, it would not move. He had turned the key to start the engine and engaged the reverse gear, but nothing happened. His loyal transportation did not move an inch; the clutch and gear drive were done. Hasmukh could not believe it, but it was true. He tried forward and reverse gears, second and third gears, but nothing worked, and it was time to face it. He took the streetcar back to the Westend and mulled over the situation.

Later that night, he called Chandra. She said, "You know what? Our family has used a specific car dealer for many years. Let me call my mother and tell her. She can talk to the man; maybe he has something attractive available. I shall call you back tomorrow."

The next day's news was not perfect, but having a reliable source for a used car appealed to him. The dealer offered a recent-model Opel Kadett station wagon for a price Hasmukh could afford and would drive it to Frankfurt if he were interested. He agreed to the deal, and two days later, a friendly man delivered a dark-green metallic car to his doorstep, which made him mobile again. He needed wheels because of his next long-distance journey.

When Hasmukh drove to the Mada Center for the Kundalini, he saw a few new leaflets laid out in the reception area. One of them announced the start of a therapist-training program

with Swami Anand Veeresh, whom he had met in Berlin. When Hasmukh read the detailed description of the program for the training over two years, his heart began to throb. The goal of becoming a therapist himself, sounded like something he always wanted to be. He filled out an application form, sent it by mail to The Hague in the Netherlands, and prepared himself for his first workshop, a forty-eight-hour marathon Encounter group at Veeresh's school.

Hasmukh, a brand-new Sannyasin with a new mala and a new used car, left on a Friday morning. His intention was to drive all the way to The Hague, passing Bonn and Cologne, through the Ruhrpott, and then crossing Holland from one side of the small country all the way to the other, where the first training class was being held.

What Hasmukh knew about Veeresh came from other Sannyasins and some literature, such as the flyer that had initially caught his attention. He heard that Veeresh had been a heroin addict during his youth in New York City. Only when he joined the Phoenix House drug rehabilitation program could he kick the habit, and then he moved to London, where he became a therapist himself, and leading personal-growth workshops. Later, as a Sannyasin in Poona, Bhagwan encouraged him and his partner, Ma Yoga Sudha, to run Encounter groups.

People talked about these groups. They mentioned characteristics of toughness and honesty. Additional rumors floated around that the use of alcohol and frequent sexual intercourse with different partners was encouraged and part of the therapy.

From the outside, the building Hasmukh had an address for looked like an abandoned small-business complex of red brick, with two stories and masked windows.

The difference in temperature from the outside and the interior was immense, as in a sauna. People were everywhere in the hallways. He asked around for a reception area and came to large room where people in red sat at a long table. They accepted his money and reviewed a list to find his name. He signed a form for insurance reasons, declared that he had no mental issues or infectious diseases, and then was told to hurry up and get comfortable in loose clothes; the first session would start in a few minutes.

When the long table had been removed from the room and all participants assembled, it did not appear large at all anymore. Hasmukh estimated about one hundred people were there, none of whom he recognized. The available space grew sparse.

A series of contact exercises were followed by the Kundalini and dinner. After a brief break, Veeresh appeared with a few assistants and addressed the attendees in one of his

unmistakably unique lectures about love, truth, and the master Bhagwan. The following sessions covered many hours with intervals of brief breaks, when people could consume beer or other available liquids. It became obvious that most in the group had reached a mental limit sometime during the early morning. Permission was granted to take a mat and go to sleep.

People quickly took care of hygienic measures and tried to locate an appropriate, quiet place. To Hasmukh it seemed as if only a moment had passed when the noisy invitation to clear the space and get ready for the Dynamic Meditation interrupted the sleeping intermission. First, he felt anger and pain everywhere in his body, but he threw himself into the meditation as he had never done before and suddenly enjoyed the cruel jumping part because there was no pain anymore.

He realized that the group meetings did not have an explicit agenda, structure, or goal. Participants were encouraged to share emotional reactions, such as anger, fear, warmth, or envy that arose in response to their fellow participants' actions and statements. The emphasis was on sharing emotions, as opposed to judgments or conclusions. Most of all, the techniques used served to decrease any resistance to whatever occurred, to allow surrender. The second night when time for a brief rest was granted, a woman asked Hasmukh if he wanted to share a mat with her, and he did. Both of them fell asleep as soon as their bodies lay down.

Another day of intense and unpredictable affairs began, in which different group leaders suggested ways of pursuing a person's problems, using techniques taken from gestalt, psychodrama, primal, bioenergetics, and other methods.

Hasmukh left the building on Sunday afternoon. He felt happy to get away alive. He was thoroughly shaken, emotionally and physically, during his long trip from The Hague to Hamburg.

Late at night, he arrived in the northern town, just outside the city limits. As before, he parked the car in front of the wooden fence that enclosed one part of the property. When he reached the entrance door of the house, it opened. He walked up the few stairs and then knocked on Chandra room's door. She opened the door naked; they fell into each other's arms and hugged for a long time. At the end of their embrace, she noticed he had tears in his eyes and wept.

“It was so very hard in the group. Am I hard?” he asked. During the rest of the night, only a small part of him stood hard.



Hasmukh spent two more days with his girlfriend before returning to Frankfurt. He felt as if his ego had been crushed. To spoil himself a little bit, he bought bright-red leather pants in a department store, as well as a cuddly red bathrobe and flowers for his room.

From Kavita he learned that Sunito and Bijou were offering a course for advanced massage training in Switzerland. He called Chandra and asked if she wanted to participate free of cost—he wanted to invite her. After some persuasion, she agreed, and the couple went to a small village in the mountains near Zurich for a few days, where they enjoyed the training group. To Hasmukh's surprise, the homeopathic healer who Nirvesha visited a lot was participating in the group as well. He and Chandra talked a lot about healing.

When he went for his second class with Veeresh in Holland, he had to drive to the coastal town of Egmond aan Zee, where the organization had bought an old, rundown four-story building close to the beach. Renovations to the house were in the beginning stages. Almost no heat, no hot water, and somber rooms were available for another forty-eight-hour marathon. During this weekend, Hasmukh began to doubt strongly that he had done the right thing by enrolling in the program. After all, he had his issues, but was never a drug addict or alcoholic.

The enthusiasm that piloted him through much of the first six months of his Sannyas life had motivated Hasmukh to pay for and enroll in a different weekend marathon with Veeresh before he had signed up for the therapist program. This group took place in the small Vidija Center near Augsburg, Bavaria, after he did his third weekend in Egmond aan Zee.

Hasmukh arrived from Frankfurt, where he had purchased a diamond stud earring, and his right earlobe contained one of the sterilized piercing earrings that the jeweler installed after piercing the lobe. In one of the group routines at Vidija on the first night of the forty-eight hours, partners had the assignment to make love to each other's ears. Participants could suck, lick, and stick their tongues inside the partner's ear canal. They could do whatever creative lovemaking idea that came up.

Hasmukh, fully aware of his right earlobe condition, tried his best to avoid contact with a partner's flickering tongue, but one of them succeeded in getting her lolling clapper all around and into his right ear. After the traditional brief rest in the wee hours, he could feel the pulsing begin and an occasional sting in his swelling earlobe. For Hasmukh, the Encounter group ended at that moment. On Monday morning, he went to a physician who was able to remove the piercing earring from his ear and treat the infection that stretched down into his cheekbone.

Considering the reality and financials of the therapist training, he decided to suspend his participation in it and felt good. His life was changing; he wanted to talk matters over with Chandra, so he made another long-distance trip to Hamburg.

All conversations with anybody he met inevitably circulated around Bhagwan directly or indirectly, about the individual's experience, feelings, relationship with the master, girlfriend or boyfriend in relation to the master. Life on the outside dramatically changed for Hasmukh even though he had never met the master in person. A Sannyas world opened for him in which people used a different language, motivated by ambitions and objectives more uncommon than normal peoples were. Externally, the disciples wanted to be in Oregon, and the mutual internal destination was to become enlightened. Hasmukh had yet to acquire a picture of this condition; all he had were phenomenal experiences, fleeting and changing, without any guarantees or safety nets.

The small commune of about ten people knew him by then; he had visited Chandra many times. There were situations that left impressions, and they had all talked to him before about his plans. Nevertheless, when he and Chandra approached the others and requested a group discussion to see if they would be willing to welcome him as a new resident in the house, he did not know what would come of it. The villa appeared to be occupied, and Chandra had not even a chair in her room. On the third floor, however, there was a small chamber, an attic space, tucked away between staircase and another room, which she used sometimes to study and type on a typewriter.

To the couple's surprise, none of the attendees at the meeting had any objection to Hasmukh personally, his energy or direct-action approach; the discussion focused on how to manage another person in the house. Everybody agreed to try it out and let him move in whenever he was ready.

Hasmukh and Chandra talked again alone and tested each other's views one more time. He thought she had opened up a lot since they met, though there were, unfortunately, some very rough edges she needed to work on—a hard shell with a hard core, so to speak. Hasmukh did not tell her these thoughts; he wanted to give her time and see how the relationship would progress. Chandra simply told him that she would love to have her boyfriend close to herself. Their physical attraction continued to stay very strong, with everlasting body vibrations, and no night or day went by when they did not have sex at least once.

When they first met, Chandra told him that she had never used any protection; she would never become pregnant. This knowledge, combined with what he thought was love for her, stimulated within Hasmukh an ambition to make her pregnant, to have a child with Chandra. Each month they were together, he hoped for the announcement, but it never came.

In good spirits, he left Hamburg again to return to his old home and begin organizing his move to another big city. Back in his apartment, it was bittersweet to see Rudi again and then say perhaps good-bye to him. The two of them had shared an eventful time together. Rudi asked whether Hasmukh wanted to sublease the apartment to him until he was sure about what came next and whether he wanted to live in Hamburg permanently.

Hasmukh enjoyed his time in Frankfurt, visited the Mada Center, met a Ma who had received the same name as he did, and ended up with her in his bed. Hasmukh took his time. He pondered and meditated about his next step, looked very closely at the person Chandra, who had such an effect on him. She had yet to show her loving side and was physically not immaculate at all. On her left cheekbone, she sported a scar from a knife wound, and her lips at times could appear swollen. In unpleasant moments, she curled her lips into an unforgiving sneer and walked away, not to be seen again for a day or two. Hasmukh did not like this image. It reminded him of his first impression of her, that she had the power to destroy him.

After almost two weeks of considerations, but also to enjoy the time in his home, he decided to take another plunge, the same way he had jumped into becoming a Sannyasin, because he knew there was nothing to lose. He called his girlfriend in Hamburg and told her he would leave that day.

He arrived in the village of Hoisbuettel a little later than usual, but learned that Chandra had not yet returned from the city. In the villa's kitchen, a few of the residents present invited Hasmukh to eat some leftover vegetables with rice and salad. He thanked them for the hospitality and gratefully sat down with Michael, who had kept his legal name when he took Sannyas, Stephan, who was not a Sannyasin but an old friend of Michael's; and beautiful Tanya, whose name meant Beloved Laughter. As the son of a local lawyer, Michael could initially provide the credentials to rent the property from the owners, who had moved to a warmer location. Stephan occupied the garden building for his studies and hobbies and also rented half the living room next to the kitchen, which could be divided into two parts by sliding doors. During the winter, he spent the nights in the main house. Tanya, in her early twenties, had returned from Poona not too

long ago. She expressed herself in perfect High German, and on first contact with her, one could only assume that she came from a wealthy, good home.

This was the first time Hasmukh spent time with anyone there without Chandra being present. His new roommates wanted to know details of how the two met and how the relationship was going so far. They also expressed their opinions about Chandra upon request. They said Chandra spent a lot of time away in the city to study and very often spent her nights there as well. Hasmukh knew she had maintained a friendly relationship with one of her fellow students for a long time; they studied together often, and she occasionally slept with him and spent the night at his place. Chandra had explained that they were friends of opportunity and necessity to help each other during the semester.

The community inside the villa certainly was a spiritual one, but the main purpose of their living together was to afford to rent a place like this. After the housemates had retired one after the other and Hasmukh suddenly sat in the kitchen by himself, he brushed his teeth and lay down on the mattress in Chandra's room but could not fall asleep. He did not understand why she was not at home, since they had talked in the morning and she knew he would be arriving. He also did not have a phone number to call.

The hours went by and it grew light again outside, a cold winter morning. After his restless night, Hasmukh felt awful. In the kitchen, he found a woman who had not been present the night before, Harshini, or Joyful. She came to him, looked into his eyes, and introduced herself in an energetic, fresh way, and then they hugged for a long time.

“Something is troubling you, right?” she asked him.

“Well, yes. Chandra did not come home last night, and I arrived yesterday. That is troubling for me.”

“You know, Hasmukh, I would not take it too seriously. She spends nights away frequently; it does not mean anything; give it a little more time.”

After Harshini's good-hearted words, he prepared himself muesli, had tea from a pot, and then went for a walk around the neighborhood. He waited until noon. When Chandra did not show up or even call, he left the house and walked to his car, from which he had not even removed his luggage. He drove onto the closest Autobahn entrance ramp after thirty minutes and showed up at Rudi's place seven hours later.

## Mêlée

Hasmukh felt very relieved. He was happy to be back, even though poor Rudi did not know what to say or make of it. The two friends had an opulent breakfast. Hasmukh thought, *I should have never left here*, and he was happy when Chandra did not call that first day. She also did not call the next day.

On the third day of his return from Hamburg, Rudi carried the phone with the long extension cord from his room to Hasmukh's and said, "She wants to talk to you."

He took the phone and said, "Yes?"

There was a moment silence on the other end, then, "Why did you leave? I only stayed at Volkmar's for the night."

"Did you sleep with him?"

"Well, yes. We were sleeping in one bed. He only has one bed; I have been sleeping there and with him many times."

"Then continue to do it. Good-bye," he said and hung up the phone.

That night, Hasmukh went with Rudi to a Thai restaurant and relished the spicy deliciousness of the food. It was part of their routine from the past. No phone calls came from Hamburg for almost one week.

He met with old friends Nirvesha and Kavita for tea at their place and found out that Kavita was preparing to leave for Oregon. Nirvesha spent time with her lovers and tried to save more money. Hasmukh learned for the first time about a new line of income for the women: performing in peep shows. She told him it was easy money; they would travel from city to city and spend some time in one place and then move on to the next. The most profitable part of it were private sessions, where the customers paid more money to view one girl only for them alone.

Hasmukh was fairly shocked at first when he heard what his little Margaretha had turned into within a short amount of time. After he got used to the idea, it did not sound as bad because he understood the point. Many girls wanted to see the master, and this option to make money to do so had arrived just in time.

He visited Hilde and the kids on Neudorfer Hof, where Magda prepared to begin her first school year very soon. He could not understand how Hilde managed the situation with now three kids and all the people around her. She had given birth to another baby girl with Kurt.

Remarkable changes in people's lives transpired all around Hasmukh, whereas he was going through a dormant stage of life. This pause in the action evaporated within two weeks. The phone rang on a midweek morning when a happy Frankfurter, Hasmukh, picked up the receiver and said, "Hello."

"I want you to come to Hamburg; I want you to be here. I am pregnant."

He swallowed and said nothing. Without thinking, he said into the telephone, "Abort it. I do not think I can be with you. I do not even know whether your pregnancy is with me."

He hung up the phone, and from that moment on, life started the engine again for Swami Prem Hasmukh.

He began to realize that Chandra's recent actions had offended him deeply. His reaction to her harsh conduct on the outside may have come from deep-rooted origins he remained unaware of.

She called again within a week, weeping on the phone and begging him, "Please come back to Hamburg, I need you."

She had never wept in front of him before. This brief phone conversation altered their relationship from purely physical to another level inside of him. Hasmukh, once again, said good-bye to Rudi, asked him to keep his fingers crossed but to leave the door for him open, and left his hometown again.

It was a cold but sunny winter afternoon when he arrived back in this affluent part of northern Germany and parked his Opel Kadett in front of the villa in a park. Chandra must have noticed his car from her bedroom window; she met him halfway along the narrow path between hills of snow, which had been shoveled by the residents of the house. The couple hugged for quite a while, and then Hasmukh looked at her and saw the agony she must have gone through. On Chandra's face, the extreme force of her determination to obtain a medical degree battled with the sudden condition of pregnancy and a quantity of spilled-over helplessness.

"Are you sure it is from me?" he asked meekly.

“Absolutely, this is the seventh week; I did not sleep with anybody else at that time.” Tears came out of her eyes, and they hugged again in the fresh air, even as both of them began to shiver.

After a pot of tea in the kitchen and a hearty welcome from some of the group, the couple went into her room and made love for the first time in a month. Afterward, Hasmukh invited her to have dinner at the Chinese restaurant nearby, and then the two spent their first official night together in the Sannyas villa.

With the residents group, the couple negotiated to use the mansard on the third floor, together with Chandra's room on the first, and would not have to pay much rent for it. Discussions about space in the villa—who would get which room—were not as easy as first assumed. The property was a hot item on the list of Sannyasins from Hamburg, but with time and many changes in the formation, a core of residents had emerged where they all got what they wanted.

For Hasmukh a time of adjustment began, and trips to the registry office, DMV, insurance office, and employment office kept him busy. Soon, however, he realized he needed something to do. Michael took some portrait pictures of Hasmukh, which he used to register with the film-extra agency in Hamburg. He had saved some of the nice suits and shirts he inherited years ago, which came in handy for looking good on close-ups. The film and advertising industries in Hamburg flourished; chances of getting an assignment here and there were realistic enough to try. In his favor, the season began slowly to shift into early spring, and there were days with some warmth in the air.

To be a Sannyasin in Germany at this time, given the country's recent history, may have been the same as having black skin, wearing a turban and kaftan, or emigrating from Turkey or Poland. The disciples of Bhagwan stuck out like colorful parrots in a cage of gray sparrows. Before Hasmukh came to Hamburg, he never realized how awkward it could be to always wear orange-red clothing and have the mala on a necklace made out of wooden beads around the neck. The looks, questions, and comments from ordinary people who had the courage to approach these flamboyant figures were sometimes uncomfortable and impossible to respond to. In essence, how could one explain events beyond words? Among themselves, a common understanding, encounter, something they had gone through, served as the foundation for relating to each other. There were specific expressions that described what occurred, with no further

explanation needed. The status quo occasionally promoted the idea that they were not only “the Beloveds,” but also the select few who had a huge advantage compared with the rest of the general public, a human being at the top who attained enlightenment.

Hasmukh knew he could not relate anything of importance in his life to his mother, and nothing changed in his social environment. Looking around, all his friends suddenly seemed to be wearing the same outfit that he did. Adding to the general confusion about this particular group of spiritual seekers, they did not obey any rules. There were no ten commandments, no diet regulations, no cleanliness guidelines, and no church on Sundays. It was not a religious belief system these people followed; they listened to a living, traditional, peaceful East Indian university professor who talked about enlightenment and the world.

Despite the fact that Hasmukh had visited India and searched there for something like a guru, master, or teacher almost a decade ago, this achievement happened in a way he would have never expected—in Germany and all of a sudden, during the deepest period of misery he had known, without any drug or alcohol dependency. One of the first intricacies he noticed within the teachings of Bhagwan and day-to-day life in the community was the realization that the master would not give a one-sided opinion about anything. In his entire world of words, one could always find exactly the opposite of what he said at another place and time. He made sure that nobody would be able to build a solid religion around his teachings.

When authorities began investigations of Sannyas structures, they could not find evidence of donation solicitations or brainwashing or hypnotizing of members. Affluent followers, however, were occasionally approached and called into an office to discuss whether they would like to hand over part or all of their money to the organization. Since Hasmukh did not belong to this category, they never invited him into any office for a special interview. Whatever enterprises the organization started were based on solid capitalistic principles and were successful. Nobody would be forced to do anything they did not want to do. All that occurred within the commune would be initiated to create more awareness, higher consciousness in the followers. Certainly, these creations stood in utter disparity with the foundations of the ordinary school and university teachings. On top of this revolutionary, though absolutely peaceful, approach, the underlying technique or way of life transmitted was to live it totally. When the master created his meditations, he designed them with the Western mind in view—to use the body fully in an active stage before sitting down relaxed, not thinking. The practice of making love as a way to



enlightenment attracted thousands of people from the West. Opening up in a safe environment, despite fear, anger, and depression, to communicate with another human with love and compassion was attractive draws.

In the Hoisbuettel commune, daily life looked red, but it was more down to earth than it might have sounded in the newspapers or on television. After a lot of shifting within the occupants' composition, Harshini moved out of the villa, together with her boyfriend. Chandra and Hasmukh were able to relocate into her much larger room with a view, next to the mansard. Michael found his lover and girlfriend, Saroja, or Lotus Flower. After a long period of dramatic encounters and trials, they, too, decided to move together into his room on the second floor. Shortly thereafter, Saroja also became pregnant. Now there were two expecting couples in the house who formed a strong base with purpose for the community. The third couple, Tanya and Gunnar, both slightly younger than the others, enjoyed their lovemaking and their trials and tribulations with jealousy and money. Stephan moved out of the garden building and living room. The community kept the living room for its real common purpose. Occasionally, they rented the space for a therapeutic group event, and when that happened, the residents enjoyed the increased energy in the house. There was never a night or day when one or the other pair could not be overheard during their most intimate moments.

Chandra quit smoking soon after she learned of her pregnancy, and by the time morning sickness set in, the harshness in her attitude, as a rule, disappeared, leaving room for a more gentle personality. The couple caught up on important facts of pre-birth preparation. Chandra went to scheduled physician's visits and found out what options existed in the area to organize a home birth.

In the course of some semester holidays, the couple drove to Cologne to see her mother, her brother, and some siblings from the second marriage of the mother. The visit also served as an opportunity to introduce Hasmukh to the family, whose members did not hesitate to ask many question regarding their membership in a sect. They were all very happy to see one another, and the visitors enjoyed their time in the city on the River Rhine.

On their return trip, they made a detour to Frankfurt. Rudi let them stay overnight in the old apartment, and the next day Hasmukh presented his latest girlfriend and future mother of his third child to his mother. There was no way of telling what she felt or thought about him in his

red clothes with wooden chain around his neck and with a new partner, but Hasmukh saw that she was glad to see them.

The Sannyasins paid a visit to the place where they first met each other and did the Kundalini together. Hasmukh asked Rudi to think about whether he wanted to take over the apartment and lease it as the main tenant, reimbursing him for the furnishings.

Chandra's awareness of the growing human in her belly awakened increased mindfulness of her whole body that had not been a priority before. Occasionally, after a meditation or group event in the villa, she approached Hasmukh with tears in her eyes and asked, "What have I done to me? What did they do to me in the past?"

Then it was time for him to hug and cradle her and be with her without asking questions. When she could or wanted, Chandra explained what had come up in her. Most of the memories related to her father and the many years of ice skating training, as well as the burden of responsibility for the young ones in the family. There were additional situations, which had to do with her father presenting her as a quasi-gift to business partners to perform sexual favors. She told him she once had sex with three men at the same time and enjoyed it. What stunned Hasmukh most was the fact that she always had unprotected sex. The group-sex situation impressed him and added to her irresistible crude attraction.

Chandra was a partner who never said no to sex and asked him directly for it on more occasions than he asked her. A strong energy field developed between the two, a space that left the door open for others to enjoy their love and comment on their issues.

Time during the weekdays passed for Hasmukh slowly when the sun did not shine and it rained a lot with nothing to do. Opportunely enough, he received two appointments for extra work. One job was in a photo studio, where the photographer created a picture for an advertising agency customer; it was little work plus food for good money. The second assignment was at an antique villa in the country, where a production company shooting a movie needed almost fifty extras dressed in historical costumes. Roles as a movie extra usually paid much less for more time than did ads, and they consisted primarily of waiting.

As very much hoped for, summer arrived, and things turned toward the better in every way. Chandra's belly started to show where it had not before. Saroja had expanded in her size for some time already, and it was a pleasure to see two happy women sit at the large wooden table outside on the lawn, chatting with each other.

## Small, Red Family

His pregnant girlfriend and Hasmukh went to a group together, where they taught breathing techniques during labor and dealing with pain in the course of childbirth. Chandra had set her mind on delivering her baby at home and found a solid, trust-inspiring, very experienced midwife who would be available when the time arrived. A routine ultrasound sonogram revealed that the couple would have a boy.

The child picked his arrival date in mid-September. Some residents spent the night at home and occasionally peeked into the room on the third floor. The queen-size bed had been cleared of everything except the sheet and a silicone cover underneath. After midnight, when the labor pains began, someone called the midwife, who appeared two hours later, after checking the intervals of the rising pain over the phone. Chandra had been laboring several hours without a single request for anything. Sporadically Hasmukh would lie down next to her, participate in the breathing action, and give some commands while she held on to his hand.

When the contractions became really intense, the midwife shouted, "Push, push!" Suddenly Chandra flipped from her back to her knees and hands, panting like a dog.

Hasmukh yelled, "Turn around, turn around, we can't see anything," because her head was pointing in the direction where he and the midwife stood. Only minutes after she turned her extended vagina to them, the head of the baby became visible, like a foreign object protruding from her core. Two more pushes and a loud scream accompanied the newborn's soft drop from his safe environment onto the bed sheet, followed soon by a discreet complaint with a croaky voice.

A very happy couple united with the healthy baby boy, who only suffered a minor hematoma on the skull while traveling through the birth canal. The parents decided on Frieder for his name, to signify a peaceful life for him.

Presence of innocent new life filled the villa in Hoisbuettel with an astonishing energy, which was duplicated two months later, when Saroja gave birth to a girl.

Chandra tried to combine her university lecture schedule with a feeding roster for Frieder, while she gave him as much nourishment through her breasts as she could. Hasmukh watched over the baby whenever the mother had to be away.

A new resident moved into the garden building. It took a while until the completely assembled commune met Yogesh, an orthopedic surgeon who owned his own practice in town. He used his new home as retreat dwelling, to overcome the separation worries from his child and wife. Recently, he had admitted to her that he maintained a relationship with another man, whom he loved. He also suffered under tremendous pressures to fulfill his financial obligations in the highly indebted medical practice. Yogesh received a lot of support from the community in the house as he went through his personal issues.

His and Chandra's common interest in medical subjects, and the fact the couple had a child, led to him also befriending Hasmukh, who was in the same age group as Yogesh. They all talked about what they were doing and planning. When Yogesh found out that Hasmukh had completed massage training, he offered that Hasmukh could work in his practice as a massage therapist. Suddenly Hasmukh had a part-time position in a busy orthopedic practice where he could arrange his own schedule with the doctor's staff. Whenever sessions were booked for him and he arrived at the doctor's office, he could be seen in a white lab coat disappearing into small consulting cubicles. One of the female assistants who booked appointments for him and administered the accounting part became very friendly with him. She wanted to know a lot about Sannyas, what it meant for Hasmukh, since she knew that her boss had joined a sect not too long ago.

All through the next long winter, the couple was involved in their strong small family bond within the larger community. For a while, Hasmukh enjoyed relief from the eternal fear of loss and jealousy because there were clearly no opportunities for infidelity. The young parents dropped off a Sannyas application form with Frieder's picture on it in the Dharmadeep Center. They thought that if Frieder did not like his Sannyas name later, he could always fall back on his legal name. Some weeks later, the reply arrived from Rajneeshpuram with the baby's new name, Parmesh, or Godliness.

Rudi in Frankfurt called to let him know that he would be able to take possession of the apartment and pay the amount Hasmukh requested. This turn of events enabled the practical execution of a plan the couple had been pondering for months: to leave Hamburg for a semester, take off and travel to warmer regions. In May, Hasmukh searched the newspapers for a used, customized truck with basic camping equipment. He found an old black Mercedes that had a

built-in bed and stove. When the happy Sannyasin couple completed all their preparations, they left the city in the north.

The vehicle did not drive as fast as a Volkswagen bus, but with some patience and adaptation, they found themselves on the Autobahn heading south toward the destination of La Gomera, Canary Islands. First, they said hello to Frankfurt and then went to Mannheim and Cologne to visit all the parents and introduce the youngest family member to them. After an affectionate time with the relatives, the black bus made its way through Switzerland and France into Spain. Hasmukh and Chandra alternated at the steering wheel.

They knew that Anthony, who had moved to Barcelona, would be waiting for them in the city by the Mediterranean Sea. The reunion of the two friends, as well as the meeting of Chandra and Anthony, turned into delightful days. The weather in Barcelona, however, stayed behind what should have been normal for the time of the year, and the parents could not actually visit the nightspots Anthony went to professionally play the piano.

They decided to depart and continue on their route farther west along the Spanish coast, where they stopped in many beautiful little towns and cities such as Tarragona, Cartagena, and Malaga. The couple took the opportunity to visit the sovereign British Overseas Territory Gibraltar since the Spanish government had partially opened the border between the two regions. On to the nearby port city of Cadiz went the travelers, where they waited a few days until they could get a spot for their truck on the ferry to Santa Cruz de Tenerife. The boat trip lasted thirty hours during which Chandra, Hasmukh, and Parmesh were able to rest in a cabin when they were not too seasick.

The large boat berthed in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, and the black customized truck made its way along the eastern coast of the island to Playa de las Américas. From there, the couple with baby, made sure that the next ferry from Los Cristianos to San Sebastián de la Gomera had space available for their home on wheels. It took another four hours before they landed on the destination island, which triggered memories in Hasmukh from some years ago, when he had arrived in town with Margaretha and Antje.

Their plan called for exploration of the northeastern part beyond the city and staying within driving distance for supplies. It could turn into a tricky undertaking, venturing onto unpaved side roads with tight turns and steep declines followed rapidly by climbs. Hasmukh at the steering wheel discovered a rocky road not far behind San Sebastián that turned right and

down toward the coastline. It ended in an area at sea level where large rocks instead of sand created the beachfront. There were very few, tiny spots of sandy beach on Gomera. In the distance at one end of the rock beach stood an old, abandoned building with a wall around it and closed gates, which could have been a small factory. The couple considered the pros and cons of the site and decided to try it for a while. They were the only campers in the area, which is what they wanted.

Hasmukh had transferred the excellent audio equipment from his Opel to the bus, including the boom box under the seat. With truck doors open, the couple routinely did the Kundalini at night. The active segments of it had to be done staying in one spot because of the surface of the beach.

The weather on this side of the isle stayed continuously on the cooler side with a lot of wind, a reason for the campers to begin their discovery of the entire island by vehicle. They passed through the densely wooded region in the upper parts where almost-permanent clouds and mist had helped develop a laurel rain forest. They took a room in a small guesthouse on the high-plains area where the temperatures were very pleasant. After enjoying the luxury for the night, they continued their trip down the *barrancos*—deep ravines—into the Valle Gran Rey area. Here were budget tourists mostly from the European continent who took rooms primarily in private homes. On the stretch of town that covered the coastline, one could find a few select spots of sandy beach, restaurants, guesthouses, and other businesses.

The family investigated the narrow area for an appropriate place to park their mobile home for the duration of their stay. They decided to drop anchor on a piece of land that had been leveled and stripped of rocks. People told them that one part of it, where rocks were still piled high, had been previously used as garbage dump. They shared the rather large area with one other vehicle, a couple from Berlin. It took almost two weeks before their new neighbors became curious enough to find out what the people in red and a baby were doing every night behind their truck. Playing loud music and then sitting between the rocks with their eyes closed. The four began talking, sometimes invited each other for lunch or dinner at their vehicles, and after a while became good friends. The man cut Hasmukh's hair with scissors and a comb in such a way that Hasmukh thought it the best haircut ever.

All through the next weeks and months, the visitors from Germany enjoyed their residence between the rocks on the site of a previous garbage dump right by the sea. Water could

be accessed by carefully maneuvering beyond an opening in the large rock formation and then wading into the Mediterranean by avoiding smaller rocks sticking out of a modest sand beach. When the couple did not use the gas stove in the truck to prepare fresh vegetables from village shops, they went out for dinner to one of the local beachfront restaurants where they could eat seafood caught by local fishermen, including freshly grilled tuna steaks and the day's catch, *cazuela*, an herb-heavy fish stew, and cress soup. At some point, the engaging couple from Berlin had to leave for the big city but left their addresses with Hasmukh and Chandra. Their camping spot between the rocks was filled within days by other travelers who arrived in mobile homes.

The departure of the friends became a reminder of how quickly time passed; their own return trip was coming up before long. The young parents made good use of the remaining agenda and traveled one more time around the island to see all points of interest: Garajonay National Park; Los Organos; slender cliffs that rose up out of the sea; Pillars, which looked very similar to organ pipes; the remains of vast lava masses of a once-powerful volcano. Since Chandra's studies at the university would start soon, the Sannyas family booked the two ferries to the European mainland, enjoyed one more time the luxury of a long boat ride and a cabin, and then began the trip of almost three thousand kilometers to northern Germany.

Coincidentally, their former room in the Hoisbuettel villa community was available when the tourists knocked on the front door of Parmesh's birthplace. The child had reveled in the attention and availability of both parents for a long time and had grown into a healthy one-year-old during the trip. To keep it that way, the couple searched for an apartment in the city that would accommodate the mother's studies with her continuous breastfeeding and presence at home. Hasmukh wanted to take care of the child when Chandra had to leave and work as a taxi driver when he could. He began to study for the license, which included memorizing many street names and routes.

They stumbled onto a brand-new two-bedroom apartment behind the university hospital, which they could not afford but wanted to try and to see. It was conveniently located for many of Chandra's lectures; she simply had to cross the small side street, and she would be on the university grounds. Along with the location and being the first tenants in the apartment, the place included floor heating, large windows from floor to ceiling, and a raised patio overlooking the street. After the lease was signed and the couple moved in with their few belongings, Hasmukh

and Chandra's first undertaking in the truck was to obtain a number of young, fast-growing pine trees. Hasmukh planted the small trees in the soil of the patio hill so that with time, they might grow into a hedge. The living room had a lot of space, and since the new tenants had no intentions of purchasing additional furniture, it created a perfect dance and meditation floor. While one of them did the Kundalini, the other took care of Parmesh in the other room. In the new kitchen with dishwasher, the couple cooked their daily meals with whatever they knew to prepare. As it happened before in Frankfurt, Hasmukh flunked his first attempt for the Hamburg taxi-driver license and had to repeat the test a second time. He passed and then looked for a contractor and owner of taxis. Meanwhile the first cold spell hit the north during which the couple used their floor heater system for the first time and were delighted to have it. They also made contact with other Sannyasins in the neighborhood who had small children. Soon a baby-sitter network was established, which turned into an arrangement of friends who visited each other and took care of their kids upon request.

One night, during the last, quiet phase of the Kundalini, Chandra heard noises in the apartment above. Footsteps, opening and closing of doors, voices talking—all of which indicated someone was looking at the residence or preparing to move in. The moving truck appeared a few days later, and on a subsequent evening, the doorbell rang. The man in blue suit and tie introduced himself as the new and second tenant of the building. His serious demeanor immediately made his neighbors in red realize that they had to be careful. Their only point of contact with him would be the shared laundry machine in the basement.

Hasmukh found a taxi owner of six cabs nearby and began to work his first shifts on weekend days. The take-home pay was modest, but an occasional tip added to the total. The first weekends were exciting for him, getting to know the city and meeting all the different people. Hamburg, as the second-largest city in Germany, had about one million more residents than Frankfurt and was the third-largest port city in Europe. To pick up or take people to the extensive red-light district became an additional thrill because he never knew who would get into the cab and in what condition. Generally, the passengers from the Reeperbahn were never miserly with their tips.

The empty apartment next to theirs became suddenly occupied. Hasmukh experienced a surprise one day when he came home from a shopping trip. The most beautiful customized Mercedes convertible was parked next to his spot behind the building where he parked his Opel



Kadett. The neighbor, he learned quickly, was a working girl, and the fantastic vehicle belonged to her boyfriend and pimp. Over a period of months, a variety of the classiest, sporty Mercedes models took the spot next to the Opel.

During the week when Chandra went to study, Hasmukh took care of Parmesh and played the role of homemaker. Since he took care of grocery and food shopping mostly and paid the bills, he realized that the household's modest income would not cover money for nutritious food and basic treats of cheese or meats. One day, Hasmukh took a clear plastic bag full of different cheeses from the deli department and shoved it into his shirt under his jacket before him and Parmesh, who sat in the shopping cart in front of him, reached the cash register.

This was the moment he began his career as a thief. It turned into a habit to supplement the family's needs for food and other small items by pocketing them—especially the endless demand for expensive diapers, which he met by squeezing the bulky packets beneath the hollow under his arm. Near the checkout, he made sure to position himself in such a way that the cashier would not notice the bulge under his jacket. During the coming days, weeks, and months, with Parmesh in the stroller, he occasionally visited the downtown department stores to search for missing items in the household. It could be winter clothing for the growing child, a warm, long coat for Chandra, or a jacket for himself. He became skilled at browsing through the racks, locating specific items in the proper size without a security tag, and scouting the camera positions on a floor. He preferred to go on his procurement trips at the beginning of the week and before noon, when very few customers roamed the shops. After questioning a salesperson, nobody would care to look any further at the man with a child in the stroller. When Chandra found out how all the treats and useful objects were obtained, she smiled and hugged her man, calling him “my hero.”

## Celebrations

In the meantime, on the Big Muddy Ranch in Oregon, Sannyasins and their master Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh had laid foundations for a city they called Rajneeshpuram. The ranch transformed from an empty rural property into a city of up to seven thousand people, complete with a typical urban infrastructure of fire department, police, restaurants, malls, townhouses, a forty-two-hundred-foot airstrip, a public transport system using buses, a sewage reclamation plant, and a reservoir. Several times a year, large festivals took place, with thousands of visitors streaming into Wasco County by bus or airplane from Portland. Interested and able people could worship or join self-awareness group programs for money as long as they could afford it and had a valid visa or US residency. Worshipping meant living and working on The Ranch. As well as paying for it. American Sannyasins were in high demand as marriage collaborators for foreign disciples to obtain permanent residency. Disciples from Hamburg were going to and returning from their visits in Oregon.

Hasmukh and Chandra in the fancy two-bedroom apartment behind the university hospital in Eppendorf, Hamburg, wanted nothing more than to travel with Parmesh to Rajneeshpuram and finally meet the master in person. Be a part of the astonishing excitement and activities in the commune. They counted their cash funds, while Hasmukh sold the black truck and asked Rudi in Frankfurt if he could pay his last settlement installment for the apartment. Chandra worked her own accounting and produced some money. Altogether, it enabled them to book a flight to Portland for both. By chance, they met a couple in the Dharmadeep Center from southern Germany. Nimisha and Sarango with a small baby were looking for a place to live. Since they appeared to be sweet and easygoing, Hasmukh and Chandra rented the second bedroom to them.

As they waited for the departure to Oregon within a month, the two performed their daily routines. Hasmukh met with Sannyas women and their kids in a nearby park. Parmesh, who had begun to walk, played with children his own age. Every now and then, a group of them would spent time with him in the apartment during his baby-sitting duty. Other times, he could drop off Parmesh with someone else and drive taxi or have time alone with Chandra. Their relationship appeared to be solid and unclouded, the daily chores in the home mostly done by Hasmukh, who liked it when his family appreciated what he prepared for dinner. The mates were blessed with a

healthy, active sex life; almost no day or night passed by without sex. Chandra's desire and energy enabled a satisfactory copulation at any time it seemed opportune. Sometimes she would hug Hasmukh in the kitchen, and the pair would disappear for a moment onto the bed; there were very few nights Hasmukh could not give it to her due to his or her tiredness. Then one day, egregious news and guidelines from Oregon arrived directly from the master.

Before having sex in any way, Sannyasins had been instructed to first decontaminate the genital areas with a liquid and then wear latex gloves and condoms while doing it. Bhagwan knew that his disciples enjoyed rich and frequent sex lives, with many of the Sannyasins having numerous partners. His directive to safeguard his people arrived before the worldwide pandemic of AIDS and HIV. For years, his followers practiced safe sex, and he probably saved many lives. In reality, couples who stayed with one sexual partner, tried gloves and decontamination procedures for a while, and then refrained from using them.

After a year of being a devotee, this condition integrated itself naturally and fully into Hasmukh's life. From the moment, the picture of Bhagwan began moving in front of him in the Mada Center of Frankfurt and he wanted to take Sannyas, to sitting in a taxi in Hamburg with his red outfit and mala around his neck. Being Bhagwan's devotee had seemed an effortless enterprise. He had come from deep gray to a shiny red, his being transformed from cloaked to radiant. Hasmukh did not think and worry, but did his part of what needed to be done for the small family to survive. There were plenty of realizations and visualizations but also many questions he wanted to ask. All of them were answered in due time. He trusted the master, and he trusted his partner and himself.

Finally, the plane took off from Hamburg Fuhlsbüttel to Amsterdam, Holland, and then to Portland, Oregon, via Atlanta. Little Parmesh spent most of the time on one of his parents' laps and adjusted to the long journey by sleeping a lot. The trio arrived at Portland International Airport, where Hasmukh and Chandra were immediately overwhelmed by what they saw in the arrival terminal: a sea of people dressed in orange and red.

New arrivals had two options for proceeding to Rajneeshpuram—bus or plane. Parmesh's parents decided to take the plane. Bhagwan's Sannyasin had purchased some used two-engine turboprop planes. Their cabins were prepared for approximately thirty passengers, with two rows of comfortable seats facing each other from each side of the aircraft. Before landing, after a forty-five-minute flight, on an airstrip in the midst of nowhere, the pilot circled once over the

area, which incorporated the actual town. The disciples on board were able to see the tent city below, glimmering in the glare and heat of the sun. It had been erected for visitors from all over the world who wanted to attend the five-day summer festival.

Once the luggage had been retrieved from the plane, the group of new arrivals made their way to a bus that took them to the next stop. It was hot and dusty as the former school bus bounced over the red dirt road and then stopped at a lowered bar across the road for what turned out to be the decontamination station. A woman, Ma, entered the bus. Everybody recognized immediately the strong German accent as she attempted to silence the crowd inside the bus for her announcement. To Hasmukh, she looked amazing, like an athlete with a trained, tanned body, wearing a tiny turquoise-colored bikini that revealed more than covered anything. Tall and blond, with blue eyes and large, upright breasts, as well as a complimentary butt, she broadcasted her directions in a loud voice. All visitors had to go through the same procedure: Clean the genital areas with disinfection wipes and read the instructions before having sex. Sufficient materials, including condoms, would be provided in the tents.

Someone less surrendered might have thought that after almost twenty-four hours on the road, this whole process and interruption of the journey felt like torture, considering the 104-degree heat and then having to enter a small cubicle to rub the sexual organs with some burning solution. But within the group of followers, no objection could be heard. The excitement to be so close, to finally reach the destination and experience the master, subdued any other emotion. At another stop a few hundred yards farther, they checked in, with names and reservation verification. They also received maps and instructions on how to find their tents. The separated luggage had been sniffed by dogs.

Finally, the bus rolled onto a paved road and accelerated somewhat. One could see a building or structure here and there. People in red were walking, bicycling, or driving other buses, trucks, and agricultural machinery. At some point, the newcomers crested a hill and were able to look into the distance. Everybody erupted in oohs and aahs when they spotted the tent city and its enormous dimensions. All tents were the same size and rectangular shape, more than six feet high in the center, and resting on wooden platforms. The Hamburg family found their tent empty. Inside were sleeping mats, blankets, and utensils for six. They joined the other Sannyasins, about ten thousand of them, and began to experience a period of extreme exhilaration.

Daily life in town offered anything a spiritually inclined urban person from the West might have wished. If the seat one got for the daily *Satsang* was very far away from the master on the stage, there was another opportunity to see him up close during his drive-by in the afternoon. Everybody lined up on the road and Bhagwan eventually appeared in one of his numerous Rolls-Royce limousines or convertibles. He would drive very slowly, sitting in the back of the car, waving and occasionally stopping, handing out small gifts to children or saying a few words to someone along the way. If any of his disciples caught a glimpse, or thought to have caught a glimpse from him directly, they would stand in awe with closed eyes, some of them weeping. When it happened to Hasmukh, he felt something inside he could not describe. All he knew and sensed was gratefulness and peace.

Hasmukh and Chandra were married spiritually in the airport lounge, with some witnesses, a service, nice clothes, and a glass of champagne, but no promises. It happened in a maze of emotions to have some fun—and why not? They had never married legally. The festival coordinators offered various types of wedding ceremonies for different amounts of money to celebrate divinely.

During the day and sometimes at night, children could be placed in a special quiet area of town at a baby-sitting and kindergarten service. That way the parents were able to enjoy a late *Satsang* or the disco downtown. A wooden square in the shape of a small stadium had been built, and the space inside served as dance floor. For several hours, people could dance their hearts out and have a couple of beers. Chandra and Hasmukh went there whenever they wanted, and someone watched over Parmesh. On hot days, Sannyasins could take advantage of the cool water in a lake reservoir, which was equipped with wooden constructions for a food area and swimming platforms in the middle of the lake. During the week of the festival, a Japanese Sannyasin drowned in the lake, and rumors were passed around that Bhagwan declared him enlightened.

There were always rumors and gossip spreading throughout the commune, such as who might have made it—become enlightened or almost. Certain Indian terms, such as *bodhisattva*, were assigned to specific people to indicate a stage of enlightenment. Hasmukh had his doubts whether this was something Bhagwan created, since it did not fit into his teachings.

On the night before their departure back to Hamburg, the couple once more visited the large, corralled, wooden disco dance floor in downtown Rajneeshpuram. Music, delivered by a

superb sound system, included current pop dance music, and most guests were on the dance floor continuously. While dancing and during breaks to catch their breath and have something to drink, using body language, looks, glances, smiles, and dancing with an individual spontaneously, minds automatically selected and weeded out potential mates for the night. At every disco in the world, the same patterns, a common process existed. On their last night in Rajneeshpuram, the encouraging atmosphere motivated Hasmukh and Chandra, to find someone other to spend it with than the one from the night before.

The disco closed down for the night. Hasmukh found himself walking next to a sweet, appetizing young woman along a dirt road in the tent town. The temperature dropped dramatically at night, as it does in deserts and high plains. He could smell the aromatic odor of woodchips, which had been spread everywhere between the tents and walkways to avoid mud baths in case of rain. When the couple, like many other couples trying to find their destination in this huge city, finally arrived at the woman's tent, she apologetically asked him, "I hope you do not mind tent mates?"

Without further delay, Hasmukh and his date crawled into the dark interior and fumbled their way, first on top and then inside her sleeping bag. Both were fully clothed, and after only a few minutes, it became clear to him that there would be no passionate lovemaking during this night. He could hear the tent mates turning and coughing close to him and all of a sudden felt completely exhausted. The temporary couple hugged and was friendly with each other until the woman fell asleep soon.

Hasmukh tried to do likewise but could not. One hour, two hours passed, and then he peeled himself out of the sleeping bag, found his shoes, and left the tent. He had been thinking about Chandra, where she might have ended up and whether she had taken little Parmesh on her night out. As he walked the long route in direction of his own tent through the quiet city, the moon providing some light, he once again enjoyed the powerful smell of woodchips. Then anxiety set in, a fear he had not experienced for a long time.

Eventually, he came to the area that looked familiar to him, the way some tents were assembled, and he walked slowly to what he thought was his tent to listen from the outside whether there were any noises. Nothing. He could not hear a sound from anywhere. When Hasmukh carefully opened the canvas cover to slide inside the tent, he immediately noticed in

the dim moonlight that Parmesh was the only person in it, sleeping peacefully. His father could not believe it. What had she done? Why did she leave the child alone?

Adrenaline began to pump through his system; not an iota of tiredness was left. He exited the tent and began walking around the circle of tents in the neighborhood, listening for Chandra's voice somewhere. He tried for an hour or more; in the meantime, late night had turned into early morning, and the initial surge of anger and jealousy wore off, enabling him to lie down for a bit on his own mat. He must have fallen asleep because the sudden noise of the canvas flap awakened him. Chandra smiled at him but then stopped grinning when she noticed his face and felt his rigid body and silence.

This situation concluded their stay in the master's city, and the atmosphere between them remained grim and silent even when they reached the departure terminal at Portland International. Once again, passengers in red commanded the panorama. The couple from Hamburg and their son sat on a row of seats near restrooms and other facilities, watching their fellow Sannyasins pass by. Sporadically, the parents looked at each other, and Hasmukh could see Chandra's face twisted from the pain inside of her. Early in the morning, she had tried to explain what had occurred the previous night, something about a massage that a swami had offered her in his tent, but Hasmukh did not want to hear anything about it. Their wait was several hours. The emotions in both of them had reached a boiling point, and something had to give. They gazed at each other one more time, sitting next to each other. They began hugging, and then she said, "Let's go into the baby changing room, shall we?"

Exhausted Parmesh had been sleeping for some time. They carried him carefully the few steps to the small cubicle next to the restrooms and closed the door behind them. Chandra placed the child cautiously on the retractable change stand and then asked, "How should we do it?"

"Turn around and lean over."

There was no other way. They quickly stripped down their pants. Hasmukh had a condom available and made sure to pull it up securely all the way. She had not much space to lean forward because of Parmesh in front of her, but it was enough for him to find the entrance into her and push forward. Chandra squeezed her mouth shut with one hand, trying to avoid awakening the child, as he ambushed her with all he had. It felt extremely and deliciously lustful to do it this way. When both came simultaneously, Chandra screamed, and Parmesh began crying as well. She had to calm him down and assure the boy that his father had not hurt her.

## Chicago

One day after they had returned, the boyfriend of their neighbor in the downstairs apartment next door approached Hasmukh when he parked his Opel next to one of the pretty Mercedes vehicles. "Hey listen, I wanted to ask you something. You belong to this sect, right, the Bhagwan cult?"

"I am a Sannyasin, yes."

"Would you give me your necklace for good money? I could use it."

"And why is that?"

"I have some issues with the IRS; they might take away all my cars if I don't tell them what I did with the money I owe them. My lawyer had an idea. I would state that I donated everything to the cult and appear as one of you. I would give you enough to buy yourself a new, nice car."

Hasmukh did not say anything for a while, and then replied, "I do not think that I would do it."

"OK, let me know if you change your mind," the neighbor said.

A few days later, the couple in red once again heard their neighbor's screams and noises, which sounded as if her pimp were smacking her around. When they met her on the staircase, she wore large sunglasses to hide her black-and-blue eyes and did not want to talk to them as she usually did.

Life behind the university hospital continued without financial pressures for a good while, with Nimisha and Sarango and their baby in the household. For Chandra, the end of her academic studies became a reality as she faced the final year of intense cramming and many tests. She had had a girlfriend from the beginning of her time in Hamburg who also studied medicine and then became a Sannyasin with the name Udgata, or Exalted. The two turned into a work team, a cramming unit, and sat either at Udgata's place or in the basement of their apartment building many hours almost every day.

An issue came up one day when the upstairs neighbor, the serious man in suits, used the laundry machine in the basement and heard voices coming from the storage units around the corner. These units were cubicles separated by wooden slats, and when he saw the two women in red sitting on the floor in one of the cubicles, surrounded by a large number of thick books, it



must have looked quite peculiar. Occasionally, Chandra or both of the women did the Kundalini with a little tape player in front of the laundry machine and perhaps prevented the man from using it for half an hour, or he might have heard the music from downstairs in the cellar.

Simultaneously with her extreme exam-preparation schedule, Chandra befriended a female research physician at the hospital. The doctor, who also lived on the same street behind the hospital, suggested to Chandra that a professor she knew might have a research position available for three months the next summer, after her finals. This project had the potential to merit a desired doctor's degree; the research location would be in Chicago. This development sparked, once again, feverish activity in the family, prompting Hasmukh to increase the number of his taxi-driving days and Parmesh's time with various sitters at home or even in the Dharmadeep Center.

After a merciless quarter and the probability that Chandra had passed all required tests, two events occurred. The owner of the apartment building gave notice to the couple to vacate the apartment, and at the same time, the small family needed to fly to Chicago for the liver-research program. The reason for the notice was overfilling the apartment without permission. It all became a perfect match of circumstances, the acceptance in Chicago, Chandra's relationship with Edelgard, her colleague and sponsor.

Dr. Kroell from Germany, in Chicago on a guest professorship at the University of Chicago, picked the couple up from O'Hare International Airport in his Mercedes station wagon. He and his family welcomed the folks from Hamburg with a Chicago-style pizza dinner, then dropped Chandra, Hasmukh, and Parmesh off at their new domicile, a brick building near campus where guest lecturers and other research staff lived. The doctor's program covered the rent for three months. Edelgard was unable to join the welcome party but stayed in an apartment on the campus as well. They all met the next day to be familiarized with the new environment and research lab.

The primary reason Dr. Kroell had gone to Chicago for his liver project was that in the United States, researchers could use larger animals than rats only. Any positive outcome of the research would be translated for the human environment it effected. When the group visited the laboratories of this particular program, the guests from Hamburg saw that it contained many pigs of all sizes, available for experiments.

The building in which Chandra, Hasmukh, and Parmesh made their new home faced the east side of Midway Plaisance, an impressive park area 220 yards wide and a mile long. It offered an excellent opportunity for the morning jog, which Hasmukh took advantage of on a daily basis. The family's small one-bedroom apartment on the third floor of six contained everything they needed for housekeeping. All they needed to do was go to the grocery store and fill up the fridge. As big surprise, when they met with Edelgard the next morning, she had prepared an initial basket of edibles for the new arrivals. The Kroell family told Hasmukh that whenever he wanted, they could use him as a handyman around the house for odd jobs. The circumstances appeared to be perfect, and the late spring weather played along as well.

When Chandra disappeared into the medical building, Hasmukh faced the homemaking situation and shopped for a used car. The best deal he could get was a huge beat-up Chevrolet station wagon, which carried them where they needed to go. Sometimes on beautiful weekends, they drove into Indiana to the Dunes National Lakeshore, and Edelgard came along.

Hasmukh fixed some windows in the Kroell residence, and after the couple located a proper kindergarten for Parmesh, he found a job in a church office as the priest's administrative assistant. The job did not last very long because the man of god had issues, and Hasmukh was just one of many who tried their luck working for him.

As time progressed, the couple realized they needed more money to be able to stay for at least six months and fly to Oregon again for the fall festival. They met a small group of Sannyasins on the north side of Chicago who were extremely friendly and colorful. A gay couple and a large Ma became their friends in the foreign country.

Experiments in the lab progressed satisfactorily, with the research group trying to find an effective method of re-growing destroyed liver cells. Any outcome for Chandra meant a record in her resume. The family, however, encountered a level of poverty they had not experienced together before. They were able to eat and drink sufficiently, but purchases of any other item needed to be reassessed at least once or twice. Both parents loved clothes, and their red outfits had begun to show their age. For summer and beyond, it would have been so wonderful to obtain some new things.

Occasionally, they visited a particular shopping center in Gary, Indiana, on their way to the lakeside dunes park. One day, they went again to explore and look at nice clothing. With Parmesh on her arm, Chandra and Hasmukh went first into the men's store and then had a good

look in the women's department. That day and in both departments, they found amazing articles: shirts, a belt, shorts, and long pants, something for the child in red, and a nice thin jacket for Chandra. When they were done and heading toward the exit, almost at the automatic sliding door, they heard a voice next to them, "Would you please come with me?"

A female security officer pointed the way, and the stunned parents found themselves standing in an ice-cold back office while several staff members produced the items they had been carefully selected from underneath the outfits they wore.

The handcuffed duo, with a child on their laps, were driven to a Gary police station, placed together in an ice-cold cell, and later fingerprinted and processed. Luckily, Edelgard picked up the phone for their one free call, and two hours later, a friend of hers posted bail and picked them up in Gary. After this horrible and embarrassing incident, they had to pay the bail amount and hired a lawyer, to whom they gave all the money they had saved. When their day in court arrived, they were glad to have a good defense. The judge handed out a probation sentence; their record would be erased after a few years.

Only a few weeks of free rental were left in the staff building at Midway Plaisance after the research assignment concluded. The family on their own and broke, desired to stay on for a while and make it to Rajneeshpuram again. Hasmukh happened to be lucky. He found a job as a microfilm operator for a company that produced greeting cards out of recycled paper. Chandra learned from the other Sannyasins that a lucrative way to make money was to offer massages from home. Many of Bhagwan's disciples made their income that way. She came up with the idea to start her own operation and talked it over with Hasmukh, who did not want to hear about it, her enlisting in the ranks of the developing adult industry. After many intense discussions, he agreed to give it a shot during a trial weekend.

They borrowed a massage table from their friend in North Chicago and set it up in the small living room, then placed an ad in the weekend issue of the proper newspaper. Very hot weather lingered in the city during this period; people went to the lake to cool off, and the phone did not ring a lot, although, intermittently a call came in. Chandra set up the appointment, and then father and son took the stroller and Chevy to be out of the apartment. Without any incident and slow call volume, Chandra was proud to present a respectable amount for that first working Saturday. The next day the same happened, and from then on, the parents became a focused team.

Sometimes, Parmesh spent a day in kindergarten when Hasmukh had time off work. He would stay at home and hide in the bedroom when a customer arrived or leave before he came up the elevator. On one occasion, the masseuse faced a critical situation. Her boyfriend had been outside for the hour and thought that everything was over, but when he returned and approached the apartment door, he could hear that the session continued in overtime. A male voice said, "Oh yes, baby, come on, that feels good, yes, yes." And so on.

Hasmukh made another round outside the building. When he returned this time, the customer had left and Chandra looked concerned. "This black man could not come. He had a long, thick prick, and he wanted to touch me all over. I became afraid at some point. When he was done, he left and did not pay."

The Germans located a one-bedroom apartment on the north side between Montrose Avenue and Irving Park Road, close to their Sannyasin friends. The flat was located on the first floor of a two-story building and had large windows facing in to a small courtyard. From there Chandra began her full-time enterprise as a masseuse, and Hasmukh commuted every day twenty minutes south to his job at the microfiche scanner. He developed friendships with some of his coworkers and invited them for a party at the massage parlor/apartment. The massage table hidden away, the couple and Parmesh enjoyed the company of ordinary people who became their friends for a while.

As summer slowly turned and the long, hot days became shorter and cooler, the Sannyasins sent their application forms to Oregon and booked a flight to Portland. With sufficient money coming in and no reason to worry about the immediate future, they enjoyed the time near Lake Michigan. Hasmukh relished Reuben or pastrami sandwiches for lunch and an occasional beef hot dog in their neighborhood. He also liked the time on weekends when he and Parmesh had to leave the apartment because of Chandra's occupation and they could run around the lakefront beach park while playing with a ball.

Departure day for Portland arrived. They made sure to carry warm clothing in their luggage. The previous time they had arrived at the airport for the summer festival, Sannyasins dominated the scene. This time in the terminal, they saw almost no red-clad individuals, and their only option for getting to the ranch was to take the Rajneesh bus. Certainly, the couple kept track and were informed of anything in the public news and through the gossip channels of the followers. They recalled reports of buses full of homeless people that arrived day and night in

Rajneeshpuram. These collection vehicles were perhaps not really sent to take care of people in need for charitable reasons. They may have been an effort to inflate the number of voters for the group's candidates. After a year of peace, natives in the Oregon County had begun an intense legal and physical fight against any expansion of the Rajneesh enterprise. The reception hotel in Portland had been bombed by a radical Islamic group.

When Hasmukh, Chandra, and Parmesh flew to Oregon for the fall festival to see the master, Bhagwan had entered a silent phase and only spoke occasionally during press conferences. It was cold in Rajneeshpuram, and the mood had changed dramatically. New arrivals faced two pieces of breaking news: Ma Anand Sheela and fifteen to twenty other top officials had abruptly left Rajneeshpuram, and do not eat the salad provided with the lunch and dinner boxes. By way of the gossip channels, the visiting Sannyasins found out what later was confirmed in the public media.

There were no more drive-by sightings of the master; the highlights of their stay were the up-close encounters with Bhagwan when he exited the press conference room, walking past toward the waiting Rolls-Royce. Twice the couple got tickets for this event during their trip. When the master passed by Hasmukh, on both occasions Hasmukh's impression of Bhagwan was that of having met with an alien being. The Bhagwan's body, about one foot shorter than his, very slowly and fluidly moved along the line of his disciples, his hands in Namaste greeting position in front of his face, Him flowing by like a cobra swaying, and his eyes glittering below the embroidered headpiece. It was the closest Hasmukh would ever be to Bhagwan.

Public opinion buttons were pushed by the number of Rolls-Royces in the garage and the wonderful, ever-changing decorated robes and jewelry Bhagwan owned and wore. Nobody understood but his followers. With serious faces, the worshipping fellow disciples dressed for the cold temperatures and did not talk to anyone from the outside.

Back in Chicago one evening, Chandra and Hasmukh could not believe what they witnessed on their small color TV: Bhagwan, in one of his robes and handcuffs, walking on what appeared to be an airport tarmac, accompanied by two law-enforcement officials. He was indicted on thirty-five counts in Multnomah County, Oregon. Charges included immigration violations and making false statements on his visa application. Bhagwan agreed to pay \$400,000 in fines. He was deported from the United States.

## Another Community in Hamburg

Undoubtedly, the world inside the massage parlor/apartment on Chicago's North Side had been shaken. Parmesh's parents, however, at no time believed that the master had been involved in any of the criminal allegations—wiretapping, attempted murder, and mass poisonings—that were presented by federal law enforcement and Oregon state attorneys.

Before their departure back to Germany, the three drove downtown to the Water Tower Place and went on a shopping spree, as well visited the Vidal Sassoon salon, where Chandra and Hasmukh both got new haircuts.

Back in Hamburg, Hasmukh coincidentally ran into Nirvesha on Eppendorfer Landstrasse; she had moved to the north some time ago. The two ex-partners and friends quickly exchanged personal news and updated the current status of their affairs. When Nirvesha heard that the family needed a place to live, she suggested trying the owner of the villa she lived in. Waldemar, who had purchased the old three-story residence years ago, was very much interested in everything alternative, spiritual, and New Age, and rented most of the house to younger people. Nirvesha mentioned that in the second-floor apartment where she lived, one room might be available.

Chandra and Hasmukh, who had temporarily found shelter in Hoisbuettel with the remaining commune members, made an appointment with the aging Waldemar, who received them with friendliness. Added to the family's advantage was Chandra's status of being almost a doctor with degree and their interesting lifestyle, which attracted Waldemar. He offered them the room facing Hallerstrasse, with a shared kitchen and living room, as well as a rare and beautiful winter garden. Besides Nirvesha, who spent most of the time on the road to make money in peep shows, there was one more tenant on the second floor. A very young first-year student dwelled in a space that was the size of his loft bed. He may have been Waldemar's protégé, which was dubious; he studied mathematics and had no interest in anything spiritual.

So the family once again moved to a new home, located in a convenient part of town. Because of the modest space available, Hasmukh had the idea of building a loft bed and using the space below it for racks and shelves. At one of his few handyman jobs, he managed to build the large loft space out of solid pine wood within a week, including a ladder to climb up to the second level.

Chandra now faced a lot of free time because she had almost completed her education and could take care of Parmesh more frequently. When she began her final study chapter for the oral examination, the couple found a kindergarten for their son. Hasmukh grew tired of driving taxi all the time. He changed careers, becoming an independent messenger with his Opel Kadett. He joined one of the services in the city, they installed a radio in his vehicle, and off he went on weekdays onto the roads of Hamburg and surrounding areas.

When Hasmukh updated his pictures with the extras agency, they called him occasionally for a job. His best assignment happened when director Arthur Penn, with actors Gene Hackman and Matt Dillon, shot part of their movie *Target* in Hamburg. Hasmukh could be the stand in for Matt. It meant more money, a longer assignment, and food like all the production company staff got. He was fascinated by Gene Hackman, who needed to try out at least once the scene where he jumped from Landungsbruecken Bridge into the ice-cold water of Hamburg's harbor in freezing November weather. The Lord Mayor gave Gene the key to the city, which included an honorary citizenship.

One day Hasmukh got up with a fever and a red, itchy rash on his face, scalp, chest, and back. Initially it resembled insect bites, but then small, liquid-filled blisters developed, broke open, and then crusted over—chickenpox. His temperature remained high, he could not move around, and his physical appearance changed dramatically. This disease lingered for two weeks straight, during which he was essentially helpless; his food had to be furnished by Chandra. He realized that taking care of a sick person was evidently not one of the future doctor's strengths. He barely saw her, and when she appeared, he could see cold disgust and repulsion in her eyes whenever she looked at him. In the end, Hasmukh recovered with scars all over his body that disappeared gradually. He did not ask Chandra where she had been most of the time the previous weeks.

The loft bed in their room had an elevation of somewhat more than six feet. Every night the family of three climbed up and down the precipitous steps without the help of a railing. One night, in the middle of it, Hasmukh, who sometimes dreamed heavily but very rarely sleepwalked, slid face down the ladder and hit the ground with his face, his head popping back. When he recovered enough to get up from the floor and walk to the bathroom next door to view the damage, he could hear voices: “Oh my god, what happened?” “Is he OK?” “Are you OK?”

He had bleeding abrasions on his shoulder, right hip and leg, and face, and he had suffered a significant detachment in the neck area, which he miraculously had not broken. Hasmukh needed a few days to recuperate from this incident, and he did; but he felt as if the living situation in the villa had suffered a crack.

Chandra and Hasmukh came together one more time to prepare the content of a weekend self-awareness group, for which they rented the large first-floor living room from Waldemar. The room covered almost the entire area of the building and had only Waldemar's modest quarters next to it. Hasmukh took a few days off from his courier business, and the couple spent many hours in their living room developing the program after Parmesh went to bed. The idea was to “travel” to various countries during the weekend course by using music from those countries and to express feelings using body movement and dance. It took them a long time to obtain suitable sound tracks, from European countries to African and South American nations, but with the help of many friends, the therapist team felt confident they had sufficient material for the group. The couple prepared a script and timetable for the course and rehearsed by dancing themselves through the complete set of two-day sessions.

When they “arrived” in Africa and started to dance the freestyle *kpanlogo* for some time, they entered an unknown domain of their past lives unexpectedly. Suddenly, both knew who they had been many lifetimes before in Africa and with whom. The partners looked at each other through old, brown eyes and witnessed their black skins and the clothing they wore. Hasmukh and Chandra danced through the living room with the rhythms of drums and a mixture of African vocal chants. The past-life travelers moved low to the ground, with bent knees and bent back, using frequently sexually suggestive motions in their bodies' pelvic areas. Deep beyond time and space, the couple encountered raw sorts of sexual desire they had never before experienced that demanded instantaneous fulfillment. The partners had sex on the carpet of the living room and while doing so, felt as if there was a campfire next to them.

Nirvesha and a friend catered the food, Hasmukh rented a large TV set to show two music-related movies during the sessions, and a friend from Nigeria assisted them during the African countries' sessions. When the Sunday afternoon arrived, most individuals in the modest group confirmed that they had enjoyed the course very much. When Chandra and Hasmukh asked the Dharmadeep leader if they could hold a *Satsang* with their group music on Sunday



night, they received permission to do so, and the whole place went crazy while dancing to the African rhythms.

One of the weekend group participants, a cute, mellow, insecure young man with blond hair and blue eyes and a frame of considerable height, attracted Chandra's fancy. She invited him for dinner, first asking Hasmukh because he was the one preparing food that evening. The trio and Parmesh sat together at the kitchen table, enjoying the chef's garlic shrimp in rich cream sauce with rice and salad. Parmesh tried animatedly to catch the visitor's attention and play with him before going to bed. Needless to say, Hasmukh's sensory antennas were finely tuned during the proceedings in the kitchen and later in the living room, where the party continued with talk and a glass of wine. He sensed that something was going on beyond his control, and he did not like it. He also perceived that the visitor's friendliness and eager questions directed to him were testing and scheming.

When Chandra suddenly asked him if it would be OK with him that the young man spent the night with her in their bed while Hasmukh slept on the mattress in the living room, he told her she could do whatever she wanted but that he did not like it a bit. Chandra and the young man, being in some type of connection, hugged Hasmukh before disappearing together to join Parmesh in the loft bed. Despite the fact that Hasmukh knew the guest was no rival, he spent an almost sleepless night alone in front of Nirvesha's door in the parlor. Chandra thanked him the next day for being so understanding and tolerant, kissed him smilingly, and said, "You are the best."

At the time, Hasmukh sensed that he was becoming part of an experiment, but he did not recognize the warning signs or recognize the premonition in his subconscious. He got up early most days, wrestled for jobs on the radio in his car, and tackled the Hamburg traffic as smartly as possible. He realized that it was dragging him and his vehicle down for little profit. Usually, when he arrived back home in the villa, walking the wide stairs up to the second floor, he could hear his partner upstairs on the third floor frolicking with the American street musician who rented a tiny attic room. This had been going on for weeks or months. Sometimes there was no noise from upstairs except Parmesh and his lingo. He had no clue whether something was going on between the two and did not ask her. When she realized he had come home, she welcomed him with a hug and a "Welcome home. How are you?" but anybody could see from his face that he felt like shit.

Generally, a meditation at home or the Kundalini at the center would clean his view and wipe the misery out of his system. Additionally, the Sannyasin organizations in Hamburg had opened two different discos in the city, and at least once or twice a week they presented a Sannyas night for disciples only. Someone had to stay with Parmesh at home. Often Chandra went alone because her partner was tired and stayed with their son; sometimes both of them went to a disco together and danced their hearts out. If Bhagwan followers wanted to worship, they could assist the staff in the discos. It was something Hasmukh liked to do—to get out of the house and be a bouncer for a night, listen to great music, meet nice women, and clean ashtrays.

A phase began during which Chandra went into the disco by herself, typically on Sannyas night at the location close to their house. Hasmukh at home, unable to sleep, would dress and drive through the night for ten, fifteen minutes to the locality with large windows, through which he could see what went on inside. He would park the car inconspicuously around the corner and position himself across the street from the disco, sometimes actually walking quickly past the windows to check the scene inside. He knew one particular male Sannyasin had an eye on Chandra, and she certainly liked him, because every woman liked the young, attractive hunk. Whenever Hasmukh saw him among the guests through the window, his fear increased, and he began to wonder whether this would be the night. Eventually, the night arrived when she did not return home, and he knew why. When Chandra came back the next day, she told him with whom she had spent the night and that it had been a disappointment. Hasmukh never told her about his terror inside, his jealousy pains, or his stalking habit, which increased the hurt when he detected competition, but calmed him when he saw that nothing was going on.

A change in these, for Hasmukh, increasingly harmful circumstances came unexpectedly from landlord Waldemar, who announced that he had new plans for the second-floor apartment in his villa. He asked the small family and Nirvesha to find another place to live. During the next few weeks, the parents talked to many people in the Dharmadeep, checked newspaper ads, and contemplated what to do. Chandra still needed to visit the university for her own research paper that she needed to complete for her doctor's degree. Hasmukh was ready to quit the courier service and switch to driving taxi again.

Whenever the partners talked about their future and he asked her what she wanted to do after she had earned her degree, she would say, “I do not really know, perhaps go back to Poona again and see Bhagwan.”

“Why don't you get a job in a hospital, continue your education, and become a specialist?”

“I do not think that is how I want to do it,” she would answer.

Hasmukh did not really like the idea of going to Poona to the Ashram; he had something of a premonition of what would happen there. It touched his primordial fear of being left alone. He preferred to stay in a familiar environment and take care of Parmesh and a household.

For the time being, the family moved to the small town of Wohltorf, about twenty miles east of the city. A physician Ma, who worked for a government health-care institution, owned a house with some property around it and shared the space with other Sannyasins for rent. She also had a daughter Parmesh's age, which sealed the deal. Hasmukh now found himself living in the country again with four adult women and two children.

What surprised him most was when he met one of the housemates for the first time. The tall, blond, athletic Ma who had stopped their bus for the decontamination procedure in Rajneeshpuram during the summer festival lived in the house; her name was Alka. The second female housemate, blond, slim, and younger Parichara, shared the room next to theirs. In addition, of course, was the landlord, Ma Punitam, who lived with her daughter on the first level, and welcomed the new residents. As in every apartment- and house-sharing community, there were confrontations and discussion, but it helped very much that all of the residents had acquired their initial experiences of living with others a long time ago.

The building had a vacant former shop or office space on the ground level with large display windows facing the street. With Punitam's permission, the couple would furnish and use the space as a massage studio. While Hasmukh commuted to the city for his taxi job, Chandra wanted to offer therapeutic massages in the studio. They bought a sign that could be peeled off a piece of plastic and affixed to the windows. It looked good and professional, and the waiting for customers began. To create some revenue, the pair offered autogenic training classes, which Hasmukh conducted. He had learned the self-hypnosis technique from a book and shared it in his groups. During his best times, he had up to six persons in a course. On top of his modest success with the training, he was able to quit smoking himself during one of his Kundalini meditations in the house.

It soon became obvious to Chandra and Hasmukh that their business would not generate money. After she had submitted her dissertation and received word that she would get her diploma soon, the couple made their final plans for their trip to see Bhagwan.

All through the years in Hamburg, Hasmukh and Hilde had been in contact. She visited the Sannyasins with the children sometimes, and once Magda and Johannes had stayed for a whole week, during which they all did many things together, such as going to the movie theater for the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. As they were communicating their plans for the coming summer, the idea arose of spending a vacation together in Crete, and the idea turned into reality.

Hasmukh's two families, including Hilde's third child, daughter Claudia, met in the charter flight terminal of Frankfurt's airport and jetted together to Heraklion International Airport, Greece. For the man in the group, a very exciting, happy time with his beloved ones began. The past had been left behind in Hamburg, the future was an idea formed day by day, and the moments on the stony beach near a small fishing village on the island were memorable.

Hilde and the three older kids took a room in a guesthouse/restaurant above the beach where the others camped in a tent right at the water's edge, between the stones. They all ate breakfast on the patio of the restaurant and spent the days outside in the sunshine and the water. When the group wanted to see or eat something different, everybody walked two miles, crossing a couple of hills, to the romantic village. A variety of small eateries was located around the inlet harbor, in which some fishing boats bobbed when they were not catching dinner for locals and tourists. Sometimes, other vacationers they had befriended joined the families at a table, which had to be extended by the host. Weeks passed quickly until the family from Frankfurt needed to return.

Hasmukh, Chandra, and Parmesh moved into the village, where they rented a tiny room, a hole in the wall with just enough space for two beds. The family liked the fact that they could utilize Hasmukh's tape player for their nightly Kundalini, which they did consistently.

Greece was experiencing a major heat wave that summer. When the Sannyasins concluded their happy vacation and traveled on to Athens, the temperatures in the afternoons became unbearable. Aris, an old friend, let them stay in one of the apartments he owned. They could not leave it during the day, remaining inside with the blinds down and black curtains in front of the windows. Only once did they go downtown to find and book a flight to Bombay.

Afterward they discovered that the public streetcar system had to shut down because of the iron tracks, which warped in the heat.

*Bhagwan on enlightenment: The whole thing is ridiculous because we are born enlightened, and to try for something that is already the case is the most absurd thing. If you already have it, you cannot achieve it. Enlightenment is your very nature. "The day I became enlightened" simply means the day I realized that there is nothing to achieve, there is nowhere to go, there is nothing to be done.—from the website Oshoworld.com*

*Eckhart Tolle: The word enlightenment conjures up the idea of some superhuman accomplishment, and the ego likes to keep it that way, but it is simply your natural state of felt oneness with Being. It is a state of connectedness with something immeasurable and indestructible, something that, almost paradoxically, is essentially you and yet is much greater than you. It is finding your true nature beyond name and form.*

## Poona

The events up to this point in what he thought of as his life allowed Hasmukh to gather knowledge of the contents he identified with. As the greater part of him: age, gender, name, education, good or bad events, situations, and so forth. Glimpses of what allowed these contents to exist, however, affected him more than the contents itself. When he took Sannyas, he did not comprehend that at all.

Walking into the Mada Center in Frankfurt and booking the Encounter group exhibited his yearning for more signs. Once he had sat in front of the master's picture after a Kundalini Meditation and later on marveled about what had occurred, it took almost two decades for him to receive a credible explanation.

When Neo took the red pill in the movie *The Matrix*, Morpheus advised him that there would be no way back. The term "red pill" and its opposite, "blue pill," became common symbols for the choice between ignorance of illusion (blue) and embracing the sometimes-painful truth of reality (red).

The moment in Athens, Hasmukh noticed the deformed streetcar tracks, he began to feel as if he had boarded a fast-moving train that never stopped and had no emergency brakes.

After the three Germans survived the long flight to Bombay, they took a local taxi late at night, which took them to the long-distance taxi stand. Cool air made their arrival in the subcontinent tolerable. When the vehicle reached the outskirts of the city and began the climb into the mountainous parts of their trip, the experience turned into a more characteristic East Indian welcome. Half the exhaust fumes entered the car, and all windows needed to be open. The family survived this challenge as well, and arrived in the morning in the city of Poona, where the driver dropped them off at a recommended hotel.

Before Hasmukh set foot in the Ashram his very first time, he had to spend a week sick in bed, staying at the hotel continuously. A harmful bug had infected his intestines, causing high temperature and seeing to it that he remained helpless. During this period, Chandra went to the Ashram daily, with and without Parmesh, who sometimes had to keep his father company. Whenever she returned from her day trip, she reported exciting news and related what happened to her. There were also moments when he looked at her flushed face and physical appearance that he almost knew she had been with someone else, which essentially was confirmed one night

when she did not return at all. However, his physical condition during this initial week in Poona did not allow him to ponder too much about these details in the life of his partner.

After registration and a negative AIDS test, Hasmukh could finally enter the place where all Sannyasins wanted to be: near Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. He took an orientation tour of the facilities and then was on his own for a while. Most of the attendees inside walked around dressed in a variety of attire, from red to purple, and from kaftans to loose-fitting pants and shirts, which could be purchased in a boutique. The atmosphere on that first day felt very humid and busy; the seasonal monsoon in its final phase soaked the second-largest city in the state of Maharashtra in western India on a daily basis. As Hasmukh roamed the pathways in the Ashram, people everywhere were trying to mop and dry bits and pieces of the property. Makeshift canvas had been spread over specific areas throughout the lush garden area. In the middle of the main section was Buddha Hall, an oval tent construction held together and stretched out by thick ropes and bamboo poles. The marble surface inside Buddha Hall required cleaning and drying after every event. The first one began at 6:00 a.m. in the morning with the Dynamic Mediation and continued until after the *Satsang* at night.

Hasmukh caught up with the rest of his family in a coffee shop, where they served delicious Western-style cappuccino, cakes, and pies. The priority for many, especially newcomers, were questions such as "How much?" and "Where?" It was mandatory to save money everywhere conceivable and consequently spend as much time as possible in the Ashram. Chandra had a head start with her reconnaissance about where they could stay in the future and leave the more expensive hotel as soon as possible. She took Hasmukh by rickshaw on Main Road to the east and let the driver stop in a rural area mixed with apartment houses.

As the three from Germany walked slowly down a dirt road, they came to a site that appeared to be the remnants of a previous farming enterprise. Chandra knocked at the door of a small house and talked to someone inside, who gave her a key. They walked a few steps back to another small building that stood separate from the others. When she opened the door and let Hasmukh look inside, he did not know what to say; he was in shock.

As he scanned an empty space with dirt floor, almost a hut but concrete walls and a tin roof, without a window, water, or utility, Hasmukh said, "Sorry, I can't do that."

From that moment on, they were a separated couple with child.

Nevertheless, he helped them obtain the necessary equipment to start a new home, such as a mattress, a cooking oven, and many small items. He quickly found himself an inexpensive room with an old Sannyasin woman who rented her second bedroom to Bhagwan's visitors. Whenever coming home or leaving the apartment, he had to go through the property owner's bedroom, which was a nuisance, but the place was in a perfect location to reach the Ashram via a brief bicycle ride.

A few days later, with Hasmukh not quite settled into his new home with a bed surrounded by a mosquito net, the doorbell of the apartment rang. Since the Ma was not at home, he went to open the door. Chandra stood there with a concerned expression in her eyes but smiling at the same time. "You need to help us. Our place is under water, and everything we have is wet."

He guided her into his room, where they talked about the recent downpours and the flooding it caused. As they were sitting on the small couch that came with the room, she said to him, "Good to see you. Come a little closer, let me hug you."

They were pals on gracious relations, with no reason not to indulge. He shifted his position close to her, and then they hugged. She knew him so very well that it was no issue to coerce him softly to undress and have sex with her.

Parmesh meanwhile, in a building near the Ashram where Sannyasins were organizing the beginnings of a new kindergarten and day-care facility, appeared to have had a great time when his parents picked him up. The whole family stayed together one more time for a few days until Chandra found another place to live.

While the new arrivals tried to organize their life in and near the Koregaon Park neighborhood on the east side of Poona, they did not miss anything inside the Ashram. Master Bhagwan sporadically took some time off his nightly discourses, and he happened to be doing just that when the family arrived. At such times, the congregation celebrated with live music and watched one of the master's videos instead. The interruptions in his live appearances were caused by intermittent ill health, nausea, fatigue, pain in the extremities, and lack of resistance to infection. The master expressed his belief the illnesses were due to poisoning by US authorities while they kept him in prison.

For the average Sannyasin not involved in the dealings of the Rajneesh organizations, the recent developments in Rajneeshpuram, Bhagwan's deportation, his odyssey around the globe,



and finally his return to the Ashram in Poona generated significantly fewer worries than his personal well-being. It had to do with genuine love and respect for the master, as well as a portion of egoistic self-interest because presumably 99.99 percent of the disciples would not express confidence that they had reached sustained enlightenment. For that reason, when it finally came about that Swami Prem Hasmukh met his master in person, he remained in awe for the entire period of approximately two hours, his mouth and eyes wide open.

After the initial lecture, Hasmukh could not have told anybody what had gone on or what Bhagwan said or who sat next to him. Because of problems at Buddha Hall, the lecture took place in an alternative venue, a smaller, more intimate one across from the large tent. Hasmukh had been lucky enough, after passing sniffing and security checks, to find a seat on the floor in the sixth row, almost opposite Bhagwan's armchair. He remembered the moment Bhagwan appeared and slowly walked a few steps with his hands in the Namaste greeting position in front of him and then settled into the chair. After that, all turned void.

With the help of his landlady, Ma Adarsha, who gave him advice on where to buy things and where to eat when not in the Ashram neighborhood, Hasmukh eased quickly into a daily routine. He got up early to ride his bicycle to the Dynamic Meditation at 6:00 a.m., had breakfast in the Ashram or vicinity, and then went to the morning discourse or video lecture. He equipped himself with a change of red clothes, kaftan and pants with shirt, and soon felt at home in the new outfit.

The only issues that abruptly reappeared, because they had never left, were Chandra and the changing relationship with her, including questions involving Parmesh. Now that they were living apart, they had to organize who took care of him at what time. She had moved into an area close to Koregaon Park, the Indian village, where she found one room in a family's house that was separated by a locked door. It was modest and basic but considerably improved from the previous situation in the stable.

The actual issue, however, was not external; it came from within Hasmukh's mind. After a very intensive day in the Ashram, surrounded by hundreds of people, at night he returned to a room he had to tiptoe to, with a bed under a mosquito net—alone. He experienced attacks of anxiety, jealousy, and fear of being alone—his number one issue. Sometimes he could not fall asleep, even though he had been up and going for twenty hours. Then he got out of bed, sneaked quietly through Adarsha's room again, and went outside into the night, walking or taking the bike

through the dark streets of Poona, which had only few streetlights on its main roads. In a way, he enjoyed the odors and noises of the sleeping city, the pungent smell of decay after a downpour, smoke from always-burning fires in empty barrels, the night guards in front of apartment buildings used to keep the mosquitoes at bay, and the frequent urinal spots along streets where men relieved themselves.

For any visitor to the Ashram on a modest budget, one method of long-term survival in Poona was the opportunity to worship—work—full time in the Ashram. Reimbursements for this activity included free entry, meditations, lectures, and most of all, free food. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner for worshippers were served in the back of the area, where kitchen and cafeteria space filled a wide expanse, with doings almost around the clock. Additional to the external benefits, Ashram workers were given the opportunity on a rotating basis, to sit in rows close to the front during the master's discourses. Here, the inner circle around Bhagwan nestled on embroidered cushions and custom-made low-sitting chairs. Therapists, performers, financial benefactors, physical caretakers of the master, secretaries, and prominent visitors had their permanent seats up front, close to Him.

Once their organizational issues with Parmesh had been taken care of and the parents knew, he spent the days in good hands with other Sannyasin children, Hasmukh faced the question of what to do with all the time between meditations.

It was one of these beautiful, glorious Poona mornings, when the clouds disappeared and the sun dried up all moisture after the *Satsang*. Birds chirped during Bhagwan's lecture; he told his followers to stop worrying all the time, to listen to the birds and take them as an example. The session left everybody in a very mellow mood. As Hasmukh walked down the lane toward Main Road to have a cappuccino at the German bakery, he ran into Chandra, who smiled all over her face and asked him, “What are you doing? Come, let's walk together. Why don't you join us in the electrical department? Right now, we are a crew of two but could use another person. Very cool and easy job. They leave you alone.”

He thought about this prospect for a few days, visited her and the second person, Abhirat, a very young, blond man from England, in the Ashram during their worshipping hours, and decided it would be worth a try, including all the benefits. The electrical department leader accepted Hasmukh immediately and assigned him to join the other two members of the team. It truly felt hip, suddenly to be an insider with different dealings, and the work could not really be

labeled as such—frequently there was no job to do at all. When the electrician team had an assignment, it meant fun—laying a cable over roofs and drilling through walls from one place to the other. Sometimes they were up on ladders between people strolling around in the Ashram, hanging a cable on trees and lampposts. Hasmukh visited areas of the Ashram, he had no idea existed before. His new position came just in time to save money. He had been looking for a new place to live and found a basic one-bedroom apartment about a mile away, where he paid only a little more than for the room in Adarsha's apartment.

What immediately drew his attention, and increasing suspicion, however, was the way his worship partners reacted to each other. They appeared to have a lot of fun, laughing often when Hasmukh did not get the point, and most of all, every now and then, they disappeared without telling him where they were going. The old jealousy machine in what he thought of as his heart began working again and caused frequent pain attacks until Chandra candidly admitted that the two did have a sexual relationship.

For Hasmukh, this confirmation of his suspicion actually was easier to handle than the initial wariness. In addition, he sort of liked young Abhirat and his open, fresh British points of view about the whole scene. He appreciated the young man's knowledge of details in the Ashram that he had no clue about—such as the small space above the boutique in the Ashram; its windows faced Buddha Hall, and during *Satsangs*. By sitting up there, one could avoid long lines and checks, view the master directly across the space, and hear him over the speaker system.

Sometimes, it became so intense in their cubicle-sized office that the electricians were shaken inside out. Throughout the day, the small room facilitated switchboard operations, and at night, one or two members of the electrical department used it for their functions. They discovered that the switchboard was not locked for outgoing calls. Hasmukh began calling Germany free and talked to Yogesh in Hamburg and his assistant Monika, who took Sannyas and had received the name Eshana. Both of them appreciated the live conversation from within the Ashram with the music group playing in the background.

The six acres that contained Bhagwan's Ashram were perpetually changing—reconstructed, rearranged, cleaned, maintained, and used. During Hasmukh's initial visit, there was a small park-like recreational area right behind the fence and the main gate, in front of the administration and shops building. The smoker community met in parts of it, and the rest served as a place to relax in the shade of bushes and trees. Isolated bamboo benches between trees

provided rest spots away from the crowd. In the midst of the brush was a concrete platform with an iron cap, perhaps some kind of utility access. People used it to sit on, puff a *beedi* or smoke cigarettes. One night after a video lecture, Hasmukh went to this spot and lay down on his back, his legs resting on the gravel around the area.

Recently pain had come back; jealousy and his number one fear. First, he had found out by talking to young Abhirat that Abhirat was not the only one who enjoyed Chandra's fondness. Then he had witnessed with his own eyes during one of the almost-nightly private parties how she left with men—especially one Brazilian guy who looked like a bearded bear. Tall and huge, he apparently worked somewhere close to the master. Hasmukh felt like the rug had been pulled from under him, that he had no chance against this type of competition. Therefore, when he lay on his back on the concrete pedestal, he let the pain sink in overpoweringly, feeling it sweep over him, and as he became aware of tears running down his cheeks, he felt a space between the observing and the actual feeling.

At that moment, he felt first gentle fingers and then a hand slowly closing on his right hand resting on the concrete. He did not do anything. He sensed the contact, which seemed to be a miracle. Hasmukh did not investigate immediately who it might be. As time passed, the fingers first gently played with his fingers, then an entire hand carefully feeling and caressing his. He opened his eyes and saw a shadow between him and the moon and streetlights—the silhouette of a person with long hair that slowly moved down toward his face, and then the hair surrounded his head and a cheek nestled against his cheek.

Much later, after a seeming eternity, at the Ashram's closing time, a couple walked hand-in-hands down Lane 1 in Koregaon Park and took the next available rickshaw. It transported them to a hotel about two miles away.

Hasmukh had found a new friend. Her name, Lalitya, meant Loveliness, Grace, and she was the only person he had ever met in whom he recognized sadness that might have been deeper than his. He gladly accepted Lalitya's invitation to join her at the hotel, instantly drawn to her. Hasmukh learned that she arrived from Switzerland some time ago, which enabled them to communicate in German. This first night, however, the two new friends did not talk a lot. They rested on the bed and felt each other's energy, touched with hands, and cuddled tenderly while a candle burned down slowly. He found her very attractive in a way that needed further exploration. Lalitya's physique was also alluring but it stayed in the background during their

encounter. Only when the first light of morning shimmered through the curtains did they undress and feel each other's naked bodies, but they were too fatigued for further activities.

Meeting Lalitya distracted Hasmukh somewhat from his internal brew, but ongoing surges of jealousy kept him frequently on his toes. On any given night were many opportunities to party; it became impossible to keep track of Chandra, and he felt helpless to let her go.

One day when he came by her room to see Parmesh, she invited him inside and said, "He is with the Indian family across the street; the children are his new friends."

Then she continued, "I tell you, I can hardly walk. This Brazilian last night, he did it to me so much, I am raw down below."

Hasmukh could see that she waddled like a duck.

Through a strict routine, starting the day early with the Dynamic, working in the Ashram, and meeting with other people, and of course the congregations with the master, he survived this testing time. It was at night, after lectures and dinner, that the challenge to stay calm and centered began. Habitually, he rode the bike after dark to Chandra's place and checked whether he could see or hear anything. He never did.

Abhirat introduced Chandra and him to a couple of nice British Sannyasins who were visiting the Ashram only for a short time and made sure they had a good time at night by organizing parties. On several occasions, they all went together and took the new designer drug Ecstasy, which triggered amazing feelings but left users with strong aftereffects. This early version of the drug might have been practically toxic.

Following one of these social events, Abhirat, Chandra, and Hasmukh went to her room and lay down on her bed under a mosquito net, next to Parmesh. She had invited him to join them for the night. When everybody settled down under the bed sheet, the young Brit took her from the back while she was lying on the side. She faced Hasmukh and he could see how she enjoyed the attention. For some reason, this situation did not hurt him at all and also did not have a stimulating effect. Hasmukh thought he might have conquered jealousy by going through with this.

Then a dramatic event occurred.

"Can you please come quickly? Something happened with Parmesh; we have to bring him to the hospital immediately. His shinbone might be broken. He sat on the back of my bike

and his leg came in between the spokes.” Chandra met Hasmukh in the electric department and told him the news.

The parents transported their son in a rickshaw to an emergency room, where the staff took an X-ray and put the whole leg in plaster. For the next month, one of the parents sat always by Parmesh’s bedside to take care of the little boy. Hasmukh began to paint a picture during this period. When the broken bone healed, the family thought it would be time for a vacation, and they took an overnight bus to Panaji in Goa.

While they camped out at Anjuna beach, Hasmukh and Chandra took their last two Ecstasy trips and went through a memorable night at the beach. Fog settled in after midnight. The two walked next to each other through the thick of it for what seemed to be an eternity. The matured partners enjoyed another extraordinary experience while walking and feeling the fog and their next step, since they could not see anything. Back with small, sleeping Parmesh on the beach, they talked all night long until the next morning.

Suddenly Abhirat arrived from Poona, changing the whole chemistry of things. For a few more days, the group delighted in the cheap but good seafood that the native restaurants served and then boarded a return bus to Poona, where they had to face reality, their future, and how to survive a little longer.

Concentrated efforts contemplating the money issue brought about the idea to contact Yogesh in Hamburg and ask him for a loan. He was the only person Hasmukh and Chandra knew who had access to funds. After the telephone operator crew in the Ashram left their workplace for the day, the two Germans went into the switchboard compartment on the second floor and placed the call to Hamburg, Chandra carrying out the conversation. Once again, Yogesh was happy to receive a ring from the Ashram, where he wanted to be as well, and thought briefly about the request of his friends. He agreed to hand over the cash to Eshana, who would be leaving Hamburg for a visit to the Ashram shortly.

A couple of weeks later, Hasmukh and Chandra received the money from the messenger, and all three were happy.

To invest and increase the loan amount, the couple concocted the project idea of purchasing inexpensive hashish in Poona, then moving it to Australia and selling it there for a huge profit. Subsequently, with the profit made, they would buy gold in Sydney and sell the gold back in Poona. The original hash idea came from Abhirat, who said he knew people who had

done it successfully. As a starter, he provided the connection in a faraway slum area of the city, where he and Hasmukh went by rickshaw one night. Between huts, fireplaces, playing children, and elderly squatting people, a woman produced some samples from her dark sari that appeared to be black hash and looked OK to Hasmukh. He told her he wanted two pounds of it, and she told them to come back in two weeks, that someone had to get it from Bombay.

While they waited for the goods to arrive, Chandra and Hasmukh discussed repeatedly who would take the trip to Sydney. He wanted to take the risk and responsibility, but she argued that customs officials would not inspect a woman as thoroughly as they would a man. His idea was based on the method of transportation.

Hasmukh wanted to cut down the whole two pounds in little pieces, wrap them in plastic film, which he would ingest before departure and then pick out of a toilet bowl in Sydney.

They reached a temporary agreement: Hasmukh would do the job, but whenever he felt unsure, Chandra would take over. First, the product had to arrive, and then the tedious processing would begin, which they could work on together. Hasmukh's apartment was perfect for this kind of task: no adjoining neighbors through a door, a third-floor private entrance in an apartment building overlooking a green zone with occasional settlements.

When the merchandise arrived, it did not possess the quality of black Afghan, felt a bit dried out, and weighed less than a kilo, but Hasmukh accepted it anyway. For the next month, he visited the Ashram only occasionally to eat and get fresh, filtered water from their purification system. Otherwise, he stayed in his apartment to process the hash. Using a hammer and then a coffee grinder, he produced a powdery, sticky quality of hash that he could easily mold into larger, capsule-size pieces. After that, he used two layers of cling wrap to seal the bits and then fused both ends with fire. Chandra dropped by rarely to sit in for a few hours while working on the merchandise and after a few weeks stopped completely. She told him she could not handle working with it.

Lalitya showed up sometimes, wondering had what happened to Hasmukh. When he told her, she became quite concerned about his plan. From then on her visits occurred more often, as well as her overnight stays.

Even though he did not smoke any of the hash, the continuous smell in his apartment and the sticky stuff on his fingers made him feel dazed. His entire way of life and purpose of being in Poona changed. When he could estimate the end of his preparations, he visited Chandra to get

her part of the money for the Australia trip. To his disbelief, she told him she did not want to participate anymore, which after his investment and time spent on the groundwork, would have left him unable to purchase the ticket.

He left her place without major confrontation, returning at a time when he knew she would be in the Ashram and retrieved the funds from her hiding place. Then he purchased his ticket.

Lalitya spent one more night with him during which they made sweet love and she told him to take good care of himself. The night before his departure, he went to dinner with Chandra, who had forgiven him his desperate move with the money. Hasmukh selected lamb stew on rice in the Indian restaurant, enjoyed a bottle of beer, and then at home began swallowing the tabs with lots of nonalcoholic liquids. At the same time, he took medication to stop bowel movements.

It will never be known for sure if the lamb stew or something else was the cause, but when he arrived in Bombay and checked into a hotel, he began to vomit, and diarrhea set in. It was an ugly situation Hasmukh found himself in; the consumption procedure became more hurtful the more he swallowed, his throat did not want any more of it, but he forced himself. By the end of the nightmare, he had recovered from the toilet and cleaned approximately half of what he had taken earlier. Frantically he tried to think of a solution with his battered brain; he needed to leave for the airport soon. Hasmukh took a plastic shopping bag and threw the smelly merchandise into the bag. Then he placed a pair of reeking sneakers on top of it. Thinking it would make anyone reluctant to look into the plastic bag, he placed one of the extremely dirty, stinking hotel towels on top of the sneakers.

He made it on board the Qantas flight with the plastic bag and an oversized, Indian-made business case. As he approached the customs counter at Sydney's Kingsford-Smith Airport, Hasmukh felt calm inside. His physical and mental condition had been overwhelmed too long to worry any further; he prepared himself to accept anything. As he put his two items onto the inspection table, the agent briefly touched the rim of the plastic bag, glanced inside, and then waved the new arrival to the exit. His idea had worked.

By recommendation, Hasmukh made his way to Bondi Beach by public transportation and checked into a small hotel. As he was about to leave the reception area, he noticed a framed black-and-white flyer on the wall. It contained a reproduction of a local newspaper report about a



man caught by the police with a large amount of drugs in this particular hotel. Chuckling to himself, Hasmukh walked down the open-air veranda to his room.

The smile on his face froze when he talked to his dealer connection on the phone. The ambiguous arrangement Hasmukh and Madir had made in Poona was in the event he ever showed up in Australia. It also included price and method of handling the deal. Madir, whining about the situation in Sydney, made an offer for the entire cargo that did not come close to what he had previously proposed. After the events of the previous forty-eight hours, Hasmukh's woozy condition did not help him avoid a panic attack. He felt duped, but agreed to the deal because he could not imagine him selling the merchandise on the streets. Desperately, he stayed up most of the night, searching the room and neighborhood for tiny pieces of metal, such as screws, nails, and coins, to implant into randomly picked tablets and produce more weight. Often he went to the toilet and recovered more of it.

The next day, he met with Madir at his apartment. Hasmukh did not expect the man to examine, peel, and weigh each of the perhaps two hundred capsules, but he did. He also discovered each little weight and enjoyed the opportunity to drop the purchase price even further.

Nevertheless, after all was said and done, Hasmukh still had a considerable amount of cash in his pocket. He inquired at a Sannyas community that leased a large house in a chic neighborhood, and they offered him a room. From the slum of Poona to the big house with swimming pool and nice people around him, he took a week off and went sightseeing, swimming in the pool, and hanging out.

Two weeks later, on an early morning, Hasmukh arrived back in Poona, where he checked into a hotel. The size of his luggage had quadrupled before he left Sydney. He now owned a Fender Stratocaster, a small but powerful sound amplifier, two large loudspeakers without boxes, and four small bars of gold. After he informed the sub lessee of his apartment that he had returned and needed the apartment, he walked by Chandra's place to let her know. She was home alone, Parmesh somewhere with his Indian friends, and prepared to go worshipping in the Ashram.

“To tell you the truth, I did not expect you back here. Things have changed,” she said while looking at him in a way he had never seen before—derogatorily.

“I came here to let you know that I am back, and I shall give you your part of the money as soon as I sell the gold.”

She went off to work, driving a moped.

Hasmukh went to the Ashram and enlisted as a guard in the security department; they needed additional people for gate duty. His first time on duty, he met Kaya, who shared the same hours with him at the entrance gate. After a few days, he invited her for dinner and then to his hotel room. She came from Germany as well and had an unrefined, Bavarian brashness that he liked very much.

As soon as he had set foot back on Indian soil, he felt the survival instinct penetrate every pore of his body. When he had met with Chandra, he realized that from then on he was totally on his own. The vague plan he had imported from Australia included becoming a one-man band and party entertainer. Once he reached Poona and realized what the plan included, it was a different story—though something he anticipated. Consequently, he enjoyed Kaya's company enormously during the night in the hotel. He used the room's supply of body lotion to cover her entire muscular frame and meticulously massaged every inch of it. Then the two Ashram guards made love and fell asleep.

Hasmukh went jewelry-store hopping and offered the first bar of gold for sale until he received the best cash offer for it. As soon as he could move back in his apartment and became aware of its condition, he decided to give it a paint job. During the next weeks, he perused different market places in town. Metal market, paint market, electrical equipment market—he became very busy investigating and purchasing items he thought he needed to make life comfortable and a home in this city.

Once again, he moved from the apartment into the hotel when the painters moved into his apartment. To apply the light-green paint, as he required took two people more than a week for two rooms. Hasmukh thought they actually used the time to live there. He ordered a huge wooden loudspeaker box from a carpenter, who delivered it by ass cart.

During this very busy entrepreneurial period, he met Alka from Wohltorf in the Ashram. The two made a dinner date and ended up in his nice hotel room for a night of uninhibited intercourse. At the same time, he began to purchase small quantities of hash to smoke occasionally and had a bottle of Kingfisher at night.

As usual in situations of pleasure, reality set in when he returned into his apartment alone. He surveyed his equipment, counted the available cash, and grasped that he had much less than originally estimated.

April arrived with very hot temperatures outside and in the apartment. Because there was no air conditioning, Hasmukh developed the habit of leaving half an inch of standing water on the tile floor, but soon learned the hard way that was not a good idea. One night, he was tinkering inside the amplifier housing, which had stopped working. While standing in the water on the floor, he suddenly was hit by an electric shock. It felt so intense continuously everywhere in his body, he had to decide whether to go on living. With plenty of will power and enormous strain, he pulled the plug. Shortly thereafter, he noticed the itching mosquito bites all over his body, another result of water on the floor. It crossed his mind that things inside and outside of him were deteriorating and that he was alone with it.

To begin with—and also to vent his background anger against the internal Ashram organization—he filed another application to take Sannyas. Bhagwan was in resting mode at that time, and a person named John took his place to conduct name assignment and initiation ceremonies. Hasmukh received a document with his new name, Anand Jaan, or Blissful Life, and one of the new versions of the mala with the master's picture encapsulated in solid, transparent plastic.

Since Jaan had not seen Bhagwan for some time and longed for his attention, he used the Sannyas name letter as stationery to deliver a question to him: "Can you please talk about Buddha's son?"

Some weeks later, lo and behold, the master told the rather sad story of the Buddha's son. Jaan was not present during the lecture but listened to it on a videotape. A few days after the question to his master, Jaan carried his Fender Stratocaster in its case all the way to the front door of Bhagwan's off-limits area in the Ashram and knocked at it. A man opened it slightly and Jaan explained that he wanted the master to bless his guitar. The inner-circle guard accepted the instrument in its case, and after a few days, Jaan could pick it up from the office, theoretically in blessed condition.

This little act of attracting attention earned him a visit to the small medical facility; one of the physicians in the Ashram met him at the front gate and asked whether he minded coming with him for a brief checkup. Jaan did not mind and had a rather strange conversation with the man, who needed to find out whether he was OK. Obviously, he could not find anything physically wrong at that time, but asked Jaan if he would consider returning to his home country for a while.

Another few days went by, and when Jaan reported for duty at the front gate, Swami Prem Amrito, Bhagwan's personal physician, was waiting for him to give notice that he could not enter any more.

## Life without Center

For a while, as long he had some cash, he rather enjoyed his new position on the outside, sitting in the German bakery and watching the comings and goings of Sannyas traffic passing by. However, when the *Satsangs* and lectures began and only a few tourists or seedy individuals lingered around the area, he felt very lonely. With the force of nature, Anand Jaan began to walk on the edge and then stepped into the world of here and now.

The sudden lack of money enabled an uncomplicated transition from the state of planning and remembering to unconcealed awareness. One morning, Jaan woke up, had nothing to drink or eat, and then began a long journey. First, he became a member of an exclusive group of people, some of them illicit, sick, mad, and homeless. He learned when and where to be and discreetly score a cup of coffee or some food. Surviving in the summer heat twenty-four hours a day on free sugar from the tables in a restaurant became a daily exercise. Knowing where to cool off with running water splashing on his head was a necessity for survival. He experienced almost continuously intense, sensational moments, and the most intense feelings one can imagine came when hunger set in. If it was satisfied for a moment, it still lingered on in the background like a wildcat ready to attack again. It was as if he himself turned into an animal with awareness.

Daily, he met new people who shared a few moments of their life with him. He was a regular in the known crowd around the Ashram and beyond. Absolute highlights were a few instances he would never be able to forget.

One was when his ex-girlfriend with little Parmesh on the back of her moped pulled up at the supermarket next to the German bakery. Even though he stood up from his chair, she did not look at him and quickly went with their son inside to go shopping. Jaan waited for her exit to catch another glimpse of his beloveds, and when they came out, Parmesh awkwardly glanced at him but without real acknowledgement, and then off they went.

Another night, Jaan accidentally hooked up with one of the regulars in the rebel crowd, a tall, handsome, well-dressed British mulatto. They were standing around with a large bunch of people listening to a modest open-air concert in the neighborhood and met two young Iranian students who invited them to join them for a party night. First, they went in a car to the Iranian's apartment and had a few drinks and some joints. Then they got back into the car and visited pubs

in Poona. It had become very late at night. The Persians were sitting in the front of the small Indian-made vehicle, the mulatto and Jaan on the backseat. There was no traffic whatsoever on the streets of Poona. The driver accelerated fast, racing along a very long, very straight section of a main road. They approached intersections and sped through them without using the brakes.

The car's speed was about 100 kilometers per hour as the driver steered toward another crossroad, when Jaan noticed from the distance that a bicycle rider was moving very slowly from the left toward the middle of the intersection without looking or noticing the approaching, speeding car. It was unclear whether the Persian had noticed the bicycle. He hit the bike and rider, who flew about thirty feet straight up in the air. The car rushed through the intersection. Jaan looked through the rear windows, saw the man fall to the ground where he did not move anymore.

The Iranian stopped the car some distance away, and the four walked slowly back to the scene without attracting attention. Before the crowd of curious onlookers became too large, they returned to the car and left. Jaan and his acquaintance preferred walking together and separated later.

The fact that Lalitya's stay in Poona was ending concerned her very much. That might have been one reason she did not really grasp the situation Jaan was in when the two met before she departed to Zurich. She promised to help and send money for a plane ticket with a friend. As time passed and Jaan thought sporadically about how to get out of the position he was in, he remembered her and the promise. One day, a concerned person who had been aware of his predicament approached him with a letter. It had been sitting in the Ashram's mailbox for a while. In the letter, Lalitya told him that a Sannyasin from Switzerland, Samit, had left for Poona with money for him. Jaan investigated, and someone pointed out the Swiss Sannyasin to him when he walked down Main Road. He approached Samit, introduced himself, and asked for the money. However, Samit told him he had no money.

Jaan forgot quickly about the issue because matters of more immediate importance were developing moment by moment. The electricity in his apartment had been turned off some time ago. He used the place for sleeping, which became more difficult because of all the mosquitoes, to take showers, and to drink water. A long time ago, he had let go of any caution about drinking the local tap water.

Once, the mulatto with a beautiful, blond-haired, and caring Danish woman and he stayed the night on his futon mattress. Jaan thought that they had sex. In fact, he was very attracted to her. When she looked at him with her radiant blue eyes whenever she sat in the restaurant next to the supermarket and he entered, she acknowledged him with a smile. He always felt invited to sit with her. If Kiersten was not already there, he would wait for her impatiently and feel disappointed if she did not show up. During the weeks and months of Jaan's existence outside the Ashram, the two of them became close. Kiersten had no intention of taking Sannyas. She had come from a long vacation in Goa and dropped by Poona to check out the scene she'd heard about.

Then it happened. Jaan walked up the stairs to the second floor of his building to take an afternoon shower and could not open his apartment door. The lock had been changed, with all his belongings inside. He walked to his rental agent's home and negotiated that he could leave his personal belongings, including passport, with him until further notice.

Now that he faced homelessness in Poona, the daily survival pressure increased to some degree. Where to sleep, clean up, stay cool, eat, and drink were the only concerns.

A Nordic angel came to the rescue. "Get your passport. I'll take you out of here to Bombay and arrange that money will be sent from my home," Kiersten said.

The next day she took his hand and they both went by rickshaw to the train station. For a moment, for the first time in a very long time, Jaan felt relaxed as they sat in an air-conditioned train car on the way to Bombay. The rental agent had let him take whatever he could carry in his bags.

In the big city, they searched for a proper hotel and took a room on the third floor. Here the two had sex for the first time. Jaan wore his sunglasses, with Kiersten on top of him. She rode him like a horse until she noticed that he was not seriously into it. They were lying in a room, illuminated with neon light and with wooden window shutters. The windows were surrounded by a veranda on which soldiers passed by continuously and tried to peek into their room. They changed hotels and ended up in a quieter, more neglected space; but they did not really care because they took a couple of Kiersten's LSD pills, which took them through the night.

She once again took Jaan by the hand to the German consulate, where he explained that he had lost all his money in a robbery and needed a return ticket. The consular officer gave him a

small amount of cash, which would not last more than a few hours, and told him that the procedure for getting the ticket could take a week. When Kiersten heard that, she told Jaan that she would wire money to an Indian bank, since she had to leave for Copenhagen the next day. After another night together, the friends said good-bye, and Jaan was by himself again. He had to survive the next days on a mini budget, waiting for money from Kiersten or a ticket from his consulate—whichever came first. After a few hamburgers and coffees in the Taj Mahal Hotel coffee shop, his budget money was gone.

Jaan lingered around and luckily, later that night he met Hans sitting at the counter in the coffee shop. They began talking in German about this and that. Hans worked for Lufthansa administration, and when Jaan began to tell his story, he handed him a wad of rupees under the counter and said, “Let’s have some fun. I might know just the right place.”

The two Germans took a taxicab, and Hans asked the driver to take them to the red-light district. It took a while until the trip ended in an area where the main street was crowded with many people; the scene looked like a mixture of market and festival. Jaan noticed a building that attracted his attention because of its small balconies and red lights in some windows. Inside the building was a courtyard surrounded by a four-story staircase. Many doors and secondary levels of floors branched off from it.

In this maze, Jaan lost Hans and went through many open doors with bizarre attractions inside. There were organized meetings, tarot readers, fire-eaters, clowns, and deformed humans. Then he came to a door, which opened into a brightly lit room with a bench on one side and a mirror on the other. Through the mirror, he could see into another room. Perhaps twenty women of all shapes and sizes stood in a row next to each other.

A man appeared at Jaan's side and said, “Take your pick.”

He took his best choice, and the woman guided him through a network of small paths until they reached an available cubicle, not much wider than the single-sized mattress on a pedestal. She lay down on the bed with her dress on and hoisted it above her midsection to expose the divine vulva. The poor woman had no condom available, but Jaan luckily had his germicidal and also some arousing spray in his pocket. He had bought it in the gift shop of the Taj Mahal, where it caught his attention because of the erotic Oriental picture on the package and its contents based on artificial cocaine.



Back on the street, he walked to the queue of waiting taxis and returned to his hotel. Once he paid the driver, he realized that the money left from Hans was just enough to pay for one more night in the hotel and some food. After only a few hours in bed, he converted his new plan of action into reality. His requirements included food, running water, air conditioning, and security. Jaan succeeded in catching a ride on the bus serving the Bombay International Airport. The desperate idea he had come up with during the night was that he could wait near the Lufthansa counter until they would take him to Frankfurt.

He located the German airline operations office but found it closed. Jaan settled down with his luggage and began to wait opposite the ticket counter on a row of airport seats. He waited for a long time and forgot how long he had been waiting. After the second night on the floor or a seat in the terminal, he knew where and how he would get something to drink or eat. Sometimes his hunger became so intense that he almost began begging, as the local street beggars did, but luckily, he always found a giving person by talking to people. The forty-eight hours had been very exhausting, and because he did not understand what was going on with Lufthansa, he grew angry.

When it turned dark outside for the third night, the hunger and resentment were too much to handle. He jumped the counter and began knocking on the office door until the glass window in the upper part shattered. Airport security arrived shortly. The agents handed him over to the police, who drove him to their station close the airport. As soon as Jaan entered the building and saw the scene inside, he relaxed and knew it would be OK. The police officers began questioning him and filed a report. They told him that in the morning, they would contact the German consulate, and then they offered chai and some rice with *dal*. Jaan was the only customer that night.

He shared the station building with a few officers, who let him stay overnight on one of their own cots. Later in the morning, a consular employee arrived with a file folder that included his ticket to Frankfurt. A very happy Jaan boarded the huge Boeing 747 and enjoyed every moment of this luxurious part of his journey, especially the airline food and drinks.

To his amazement, Hilde stood waiting for him at the arrival terminal in Frankfurt. Clerks of the Interior Ministry had contacted Jaan's mother regarding payment for his ticket. She had declined to pay, but they told her on what flight he would be arriving. She had called Hilde to let

her know. The moment he recognized her in the crowd, he became very emotional and went to his knees to kiss the ground. He felt very grateful to be back in Germany.

## Curtain Call

As the giant plane touched down with a gentle bump at Bombay International Airport, Jaan, who had changed his name back to Hasmukh, stopped reminiscing. He knew he had been very lucky last time. What he did not know, however, was whether he had done the right thing. Leaving Parmesh in Italy had been one of the most difficult tasks of his life. It also was intensely emotional, because neither he nor his son wanted to separate from each other. But rationality and practicality had gained control with a slight edge.

After his reappearance from India, Hilde granted him permission to stay for a while on Neudorfer Hof in the woods of Hessen. Hasmukh slowly recovered his physical and emotional strength, while he could be with Magda and Johannes. Knut took care of them at the time because Hilde worked in Frankfurt during the week.

By the end of the summer, he went back to Hamburg and began another stint driving taxi. Kiersten visited him first, and then he visited her in Copenhagen, but they realized that without steady income, they had no chance of maintaining a relationship. At some point, Hasmukh went to Zurich to see Lalitya, with whom he had maintained telephone contact during the months. Quickly he realized that she was unable to handle a man in her apartment. Her own issues of depression kept her too preoccupied, even though Jaan tried his best to pull her out of it.

Working six days a week and living modestly, he was able to regenerate in every aspect. Daily he went into the Dharmadeep for the Kundalini and had dinner in the center's restaurant. It did not take long until he made new friends, and one day Eshana, from Yogesh's doctor's office, told him that she felt attracted to him. The two began an affair that lasted a few months, until she realized that Hasmukh had no intention of going any deeper. His objective was to go back to Poona, to the master and the Ashram as soon as possible.

Almost a year after he had left, Jaan was back as Hasmukh. He was so excited about many things. First, would they even let him enter the Ashram? To see Bhagwan again was his main purpose of being there.

He met Chandra and Parmesh near the front gate. They had never left the place. Between Hasmukh and his son, it was love at first sight. The little one appeared a little shy for some moments, but they became quickly inseparable. Chandra acted toward Hasmukh as if nothing

had ever happened. She and her new boyfriend from Italy were about to leave for Europe. Since Parmesh insisted on being with his father, they agreed to let him stay with Hasmukh.

Father and son became lucky when another couple, who had also a little boy, offered their luxurious apartment to Hasmukh that he could move into while they went to Europe. A great time began, during which the happy duo of Hasmukh and Parmesh enjoyed each other. The comfortable apartment was located not far from the Ashram. Hasmukh rented a television plus video player from the local movie-rental place. Parmesh went to the kindergarten that Sannyasin parents had organized outside of the Ashram, and at night, after the discourse with Bhagwan, they went to dinner together. Sometimes a friend would help baby-sit and stayed with the two together in their bedroom.

Much too early, an electronic message arrived from Chandra that she and her boyfriend had settled down in a small town in northern Italy. Most of all, they had found the perfect school for Parmesh, who had reached school age.

Despite the fact that his son said, "No, I don't want to go there, I want to be with you," and started to cry bitterly, Hasmukh stayed reasonable, booked a flight for the two, and went with his son to Italy.

He could not imagine that it would be better for the child to be with a single father driving taxi in Hamburg all the time. Two very well meaning adults offered the best for his child, including lovely Italy and an international school where his son would make good friends. Father and son separated from each other with broken hearts.

Now, back in Bombay, the routine of waiting for luggage, passing through Indian customs, and then taking the taxi to another taxi pulled Hasmukh out of his tearful thoughts. He was about to face another round of India and Poona, the master and the Ashram.

Arriving as usual very early in the morning, he checked into the accustomed inexpensive hotel and from there began his third stay. Luckily, the apartment he and Parmesh had stayed in was still available, and he could use it for a few months.

Major changes awaited him at the Ashram. Out of Bhagwan had become Osho. The nightly meetings with the master, in person or via video, now called the White Robe Brotherhood, were celebrated in white robes instead of red clothing. In addition, Osho introduced a new meditation, the Mystic Rose. Hasmukh thought he needed to catch up on something.

During a three-day group session, the participants laughed, cried, and witnessed each segment nonstop during one whole day, except for breaks.

The groups and therapy department offered always-new methods and techniques, such as Dehypno and Tibetan Pulsing. Hasmukh enrolled in Tibetan Pulsing, a modern adaptation of an ancient method of clearing away that, which impedes the natural ebb and flow of energy. The sessions did not leave any significant recollections. Hasmukh's all-time favorite was the group with the changing names, Awareness Intensive. He had done a weeklong Primal group in the Miasto Center in Italy with Ma Yoga Sudha before, and he saw that she offered the weeklong Awareness Intensive in the Ashram. Hasmukh had the highest respect for the therapist and loved the discoveries of the mind during the group process when he had done it before.

For the duration of seven days, participants were not permitted to communicate with each other, except during the sessions. They were on a strict diet without sugar and in silence when leaving the group rooms. The only enquiry, which would be asked when two partners sat opposite each other, was, “Tell me who you are?”

For days after the group, a state of heightened awareness lingered and then slowly diminished. At that time, Hasmukh knew exactly what his main purpose in life was: to stay enlightened, awakened, and maintain this state permanently.

The closest he had ever come to permanence before was during his first visit to the Ashram. At the time when Buddha Hall was still a simple tent roof with bamboo supports. Three thousand disciples with the master (still Bhagwan) talking, leaving long silences between sentences, and then total silence—only the birds chirping, an occasional rickshaw passes by the front gate, deep silence. No thought. Then music was gently indicating that the discourse had ended. As Bhagwan, up front with a big smile, swaying his arms to the music, said one time, “There is so much love in this hall.”

This phenomenon occurred many times in the fall of that year, and Hasmukh's state of consciousness remained in that heightened space all the way down the road to the German bakery or until he talked to somebody.

He began working in the reception pavilion as concierge, selling tickets and giving advice about where to find anything a newcomer might want to know. Hasmukh met many pretty women, some of whom he got to know more intimately. It was a time of indulging and no fear within and out of the Ashram. Two or three parties a week were organized in hotels or the open

air across from his new apartment building. Clock time passed quickly. For a week, he went to Candolim Beach, Goa, to enjoy the ocean and the seafood and then came back to Poona to resume his position in the reception area.

Over the past weeks, he had noticed a medium-sized, red-haired woman with hazel eyes and a sexy, petite built. Once he even sold tickets to her, but they never talked privately. One night, like many nights before, he took his used moped and drove to the hotel about three miles away from Koregaon Park, which sometimes hosted parties on its rooftop. As usual, after arriving, he positioned himself near the mass of wildly dancing Sannyasins and had a bottle of beer. At the perfect moment, he joined the dancers and became one of them. Then he noticed her, the woman with red hair, having a break near the balustrade of the roof. She noticed him as well, looked and smiled, and then joined him dancing.

He immediately realized that she was a smooth, agile dancer, vibrant, energetic. More and more the two became a couple dancing with each other, forgetting all about the people around them, sometimes coming closer, sometimes far from each other, but never losing sight and never touching each other. Eventually, they had to take a break to cool down and drink, the sweat streaming down their bodies. Hasmukh had just met Rakkasa, Sanskrit for “dancer.”

After the party, he took her home to her apartment, where they spent their first night together. A relationship like a cool-burning flame began to sprout from a seed into fragile seedling and then a sapling. Later it developed bark and shed leaves. Hasmukh invited Rakkasa on a trip to Goa, and after a few weeks, considering her schedule in the Dehyprno Institute, she accepted. The couple enjoyed their honeymoon in Candolim.

A week had passed. Sweetest passion and being friendly with each other at the Goa beaches could have lasted forever, when Rakkasa suddenly said, “I want to go back to Poona. I feel I have to be there.”

Hasmukh, trying to understand, agreed to join her. Their taxi from the airport dropped them off close to her apartment. The lovers went outside to have a first look into the Ashram. A large crowd of people moved from the south of North Main Road toward them. The mass filled the whole road, like a demonstration without shouting.

As they began to recognize individuals in the crowd, Rakkasa suddenly put her hand in front of her mouth and cried out, “He died. He left his body. Do you see it? They carry him on their shoulders.”

Then he saw as well. About eight men held a stretcher on their shoulders. On it laid a body encircled with flowers. As the men in the crowd came closer, Hasmukh could clearly identify his dead master. Rakkasa and Hasmukh joined the procession, together with many other Sannyasins, and spent the whole day and the following night very close to the fireplace of the burning *ghat* on the Mula River. They were singing and chanting, crying and laughing and mourning.

When they returned to her apartment in the early in the morning hours, Rakkasa said, “We have to clean our clothes.”

He took his clothes to the dry cleaner. The Ashram and Poona changed forever.

## Edmonton, Alberta

In March, Rakkasa and Walter set off on a trip to Maui, Hawaii, to see the enlightened teacher in person. His name was simply John, and he offered a three-day retreat on the beautiful island where the two had been many times before. Walter agreed to the undertaking because of the location, the time off work, and most of all to show his interest in what had been going on inside his partner.

The meetings took place in a community center conference room, which was packed when they arrived. They were able to find two empty chairs toward the side of the room, not facing the podium directly. As Walter found out quickly, it did not matter.

For seven years, he had been perfectly happy, until his companion decided to fly to Poona again. Rakkasa had remembered her personal reason for existence: to become enlightened. During her subsequent visits to the Ashram, which lasted sometimes up to eight weeks, Walter had stayed in Southern California and suffered acutely. Once, he even made an appointment with the UCLA psychiatric facility to get something that could ease his pain.

He never went because Rakkasa sent an e-mail from Poona, telling him that everything was OK, not to worry. His perfect life appeared to fall apart, he could hardly perform his duties in the office, and the drinks at night did nothing to change that, just made things worse. For all those years, he had not been interested in anything remotely connected to spirituality—tarot cards, horoscopes, past life, therapy groups, and so on. Suddenly he was back in a situation that reminded him uncomfortably of past experiences.

When young Canadian John, with long, gray-blond hair sat down on his armchair, he did not glance to his right immediately. Soon, however, Walter noticed that the man began scanning the room, from left to right. He did it very slowly and in silence. Out of the blue, he noticed that John was wearing a golden helmet, which he had not been wearing a second before. At the same time, Walter's peripheral vision diminished and concentrated on the space around the podium. It arched upward, and then he perceived that the whole auditorium moved inside a capsule through space.

Ultimately, John turned his head to the far right where Walter sat. Things went out of control. Flashing from the direction of the teacher's eyes was an aura of golden light, and then



Walter saw nothing at all for a while. After recovering, he thought, *Wow, it still exists. That is interesting.* John had caught his attention.

During lunch in a diner, Rakkasa said, “You will not like it, what I have to tell you.”

Adrenaline, panic, anxiety—you name it—went through his interior system.

“I do not want to continue an intimate relationship with you. We can still be together as friends, but no more sex. I also want to visit Edmonton, perhaps even move there.”

Cool on the outside, he managed to reply, “OK, sure, I understand. Perhaps I want to visit Edmonton myself.”

As a result, in April the two were sitting in a small turboprop plane departing from Denver, Colorado, to Edmonton, Alberta. All the flying was possible because of Rakkasa's airline benefits. As the aircraft made its way slowly over the endless northern plains and Walter looked down through the window, he shuddered. The sight of a gray-white landmass with an occasional speck of frozen water made him regret being on the plane. When they picked up a rental car and made their first drive through the outskirts of the city, he felt appalled by the ugliness of it. Large and small trucks and SUVs crawled at a minimum speed over icy highways. They had left pleasant sunshine and temperatures in the upper seventies for below-freezing conditions.

Rakkasa and Walter's first meeting with John de Ruiter in Edmonton took place on a Monday. They found the meeting place in an industrial area outside of town and entered the building. Once again, Walter could not believe his eyes. In the room were only very few people scattered all over the metal folding chairs, less than twenty. The atmosphere reminded him of an Alcoholics Anonymous meetings he had seen on TV. Then teacher John entered the room. He sat down on an armchair, which had been raised slightly so everybody could see him. Possibly, due to the small number of participants, John remained with individuals for a long time. He gazed first at someone, listened to a question, then said something or nothing, and continued to the next person.

When he reached Walter and the two looked at each other, something locked. The connection remained steady for one-and-a-half hour. Throughout this time, Walter was aware of where he was and what went on; at some point he even said something, but later forgot what it had been. He only remembered the changing faces of the teacher and felt him inside of himself. Speechless, he wondered what John might have seen in him that caught his attention for so long.

Their plan was to stay two weekends and another Monday to attend the meetings with John and investigate the city. Walter's vacation time, however, did not allow him to be away that long. In the middle of the week, he called the office and reported that he was sick. His employer told him that was not acceptable and fired him over the phone. Without the desire for any of it, bridges crumbled behind him.

By the end of May, the couple gave notice to the leasing office, donated most of their furniture to Goodwill, and reserved a large U-Haul trailer plus hitch, which fit behind their Chevy Caprice. Filled to capacity, they left Los Angeles and drove into Edmonton on July 1. The movers arrived in front of the house they had rented near the University of Alberta. Beautiful, warm summer weather welcomed and eased them into the new home.

All went well on the surface. It appeared as if Rakkasa appreciated his presence around her and in the house, someone familiar. As for Walter, each time they went into their separate bedrooms, he felt pain around his heart. They joined a tennis club in the neighborhood, went to many parties together, and felt excited about the new situation. Rakkasa was able to continue working for the airline by leaving a day earlier to be on time at her hub. Walter cashed out his 401(k) plan and other investments and initially felt comfortable spending a long time in Canada. Since John traveled to many different places, internationally and within his country, the couple followed him to Amsterdam, Holland, Denver, and San Francisco.

The first serious issue occurred when immigration officials at the Edmonton airport wanted to know what Walter's comings and goings to Canada were all about. Next time he left the country and then returned, he used a rental car from Seattle to cross the border without being checked. Then he did not leave again for a long time.

Since John had been going to Poona for some time already, an illustrious group of people gathered around him in Edmonton. The size of the long-term crowd increased. Many of them were lost Sannyasins souls looking for someone to replace the master gone. The new teacher had a very different style and delivered his message in a way that made no sense to many. Emerging from a conservative Dutch Protestant background, John used language, sometimes difficult to comprehend.

Before the organization published his first book in various languages, Walter was glad to help by translating John's audio tapes from English into German. At the same time, he felt he had a very intimate connection with the new teacher and understood his words fully.

Rakkasa's connection to the new master appeared to be even more intimate. Since she was able to supply flight vouchers for him and his family, she was permitted to accompany the whole group to Maui on a vacation.

Meanwhile, summer in the city had plenty to offer the newcomer from Los Angeles. Walter played a lot of tennis with different people and went to the meetings with John on a regular basis. The congregation grew monthly, with people from all over the world. Some of them managed to stay long-term. The couple's little red house with a lawn behind the building was perfect to grill the German specialty, bratwurst on a BBQ. Often, Walter invited friends from the group for dinner when he served his version of sauerkraut.

During midsummer, he began to sit down at his computer and write the story of his life. As he went through his documents, he found an old black-and-white picture of his parents. He hung the picture on the wall facing his workplace in the living room. One day, during an especially quiet and hot morning, when all the windows and doors were open, he glanced at the picture for a long time. He had been working on laying out the initial details of the story with his parents.

Then it came to him: this person with the hooknose could not have been his biological father.

At the moment of realization, the effects on Walter were mild. The longer he thought about it and progressively remembered more details of his youth, the implications turned distressing. Walter had been deceived for all of his life.

On his birthday, he smoked his first cigarette in two years and then gradually picked up the habit. During the holiday season until well into January, the teacher with his entourage, including Rakkasa, went to Poona again.

The meetings in Edmonton continued with John's replacement facilitators. Some individuals, who had been with the teacher from the beginning of his career, were able to hold presence for some time. Only very few and mostly local group members were at the meetings. Walter took the opportunity to sit down in one of the special, individual-owned, very comfortable armchairs. He closed his eyes, feeling totally at ease with himself and his situation. Outside the building, it was twenty-two degrees below zero, a temperature in which one did not go for walks any more than ten minutes.

Very quiet, very much inside of himself, he went deeper and deeper. The meeting continued with an occasional question and the speaker on the podium replying. It had no effect on the deeply meditating Walter.

He came to an innermost place that allowed him to ask the question, “Who am I really?”

It may have been the most important moment of his life when he clearly saw himself as the most fragile, most beautiful, small pink lotus, nestled in *the spacious womb of all creation*.