

"Close your eyes and listen," Shadow said.

Processions of red and black checkers filled Angelo's mind, swaying, then parading, then flying by. Waves of color spread across vast spaces. A vibrating G-major chord from a steel guitar string blew the colors away, leaving a pearly surface. The hard-edged nasal twang of Bob Dylan's voice etched designs across it. As Dylan sang "Hey, Mister Tambourine Man," the shimmering surface broke into fragments.

"Jingle jangle." Angelo saw and heard staffs of silver bells, their tones chording in long even rows. "You have no one to meet—" Angelo tasted loneliness, brackish and metallic on his tongue. Shadow was far away. He was alone. Everyone is always alone. Everyone. Always. Always. Everyone.

He couldn't feel his body. Was he breathing? It didn't seem important. "I'm ready to fade." Fade—fade—fade—echoed inside him. Ah! This, then, was death. Nothing to lose, nothing to fear.



Angelo moved through a featureless darkness. The sorrow of separation surged through him. He was the earth. He felt the sun's pull. He yearned to move closer. But then a mist cleared in his mind and he saw his urge was a wish to die. To join the sun, to give in to her attraction, was to be destroyed.

"The earth," Angelo said, trying to squeeze the enormity of his experience into words, "wants to be free."

Shadow seemed to understand. "Stay with it."

Dylan's harmonica blew insistently. Angelo saw the ceiling open, revealing huge rings of clouds. He rose toward them.

Oh God, this time he was dying! Soaring through the rings, they shifted from brilliant white to pale white, then darker and darker until there was no white left at all.

Death might be, after all, the least interesting state. He found himself amused at the thought—and at still being able to think. After death, is

there still thought? How long would it continue? He was falling toward a pinpoint of light. He knew, without knowing how he knew, that he would fall forever. This was his true state—to fall eternally toward the light.

Might he fall up? Immediately he felt himself stretched as thin as a soap bubble. He rose. As he did, he sensed other presences; he was one of many, one of multitudes! He was one-who-joined-together. Not a person, not a planet. Humbled by having forgotten this.

Peals of laughter fanned out like rings of water on a pond. Alone? Alone? Alone? It was an idea beyond comic. There could no more be aloneness than there could be death.

Suddenly a wave of darkness engulfed him. No, please. No more death, no more darkness. Even as he cried out, the dark universe began to fill with light. Far ahead he saw a glowing human form. He felt its love. It was Christ! Desperately, gratefully Angelo flew toward him.

Then empty space.

Christ was no longer there, but the light and the love remained. When he looked back, he saw steel corner brackets, plywood and pine framing. Christ was no more than a billboard, a highway sign between the stars! A voice sang, "Drop-kick me, Jesus, through the goal posts of life." Convulsed with laughter, Angelo turned back toward the light. He was going home.

When she heard Angelo laugh, Shadow stretched out and relaxed. Angelo merged into the light and sang with the other voices. These beings interpenetrated Angelo, blending harmoniously yet retaining their identities. The shared existence was blissful. Glee! Glee! Glee! They sang of the hide-and-seek Angelo had played, losing and finding himself.

The song and the singers made a vast ring. Its dark formless center attracted Angelo. He flowed forward to fill it. The center resisted his entry. He grew in volume, plunging more of himself toward the blackness. The voices fell away. More radiant than a hundred suns, he arrayed himself against the darkness. The darkness tore holes in him. Joyfully he

filled them with light. The darkness writhed in his grasp.

"In opposing, you give me form," it said. The darkness spread and covered him. "You are alone, and I am everywhere."

In tears, Angelo looked over at Shadow. She was now sitting in a half-lotus posture, her eyes closed, her breathing regular. "I lost it all," he said.

Shadow opened her eyes. "Maybe." Bright light emanated from her body. Ranks of angelic beings spun around her. The medieval images in Doré's etchings—reminders! Others had seen and remembered. In Shadow's voice he heard the echo of the joy.

"I'm you. I'm so much. I—" he said.

"I know," she said.

Did she really know the terrible, unending constriction and ignorance of this life? Imprisoned in a body, unable to touch the inner core of any other person and terrified of death?

He blinked. Glory enveloped him.

"Forgot so soon?" she teased.

"So close," he whispered. "Is it always this close?"

"Always. Always and forever. Like this." Shadow held her fingers very close together. "But we forget." She snapped her fingers. "Then, poof—we remember. It's a game." She put her finger across his lips. "No more words."

"I'm God," he said into her fingers.

"Me, too."

She put her other hand over his eyes; its coolness calmed him. Infinity in a grain of sand, he thought. Of course—obvious, obvious.

He recalled his physics professor. Dr. Malcolm Tambert, slamming his hand onto the podium, his distended belly shaking. "Nothing but dancing atoms, gentlemen! No-things hitting other no-things. You are little else but atoms dancing." Dr. Tambert had been in a German prison camp during World War II. He said that recalling the laws of physics every day kept him sane. "The laws of e-terr-i-t-y, gentlemen, the always

and forevers."

Angelo saw Bear at his desk, a beer can near his hand. "No-things hitting no-things," Dr. Tambert said. Angelo watched the cloud of dancing atoms that were Bear's hand encircle the dancing atoms of the beer can.

In a single breath, Angelo became aware of the equality of all things.

He looked at Shadow, saw her head on her neck on her body, her legs crossed under her torso, and understood cubism. He saw her sitting on the bed, the mattress dipping slightly where her weight had compressed the springs, and understood Platinous. He saw the window and in knowing that the view outside was the view inside, understood the non-dualistic nature of the perceived world.

Is part of the game to pretend you're not God? Jesus no more than a cardboard cutout on the route to Heaven? Buddha, Moses, Zeus—more cutouts? Burma Shave slogans on the roads to Paradise?

**Be a noble, not a knave,**

**Caesar uses Burma Shave.**

**God tells us how we must behave,**

**Jesus uses Burma Shave.**

**Nobody knows de stubble I've seen.**

**Glory, glory, hallelujah.**

God loves to cover and uncover himself. He is like a kitten playing with yarn. Finding himself, he applauds, then hides again. Everything is God—every damn thing!

Tears flowed down Angelo's face. "Is there anything but God-hide and God-seek?"

Shadow rubbed her eyes and said, "I have an apple for you."

God wants God to have an apple. He hesitated. An apple? God sent

them out of Eden to play hide-and-be-sought. God never stops playing. God's little slithering pal gave them a drugged apple. That was the clue. Once aware of the knowledge you could never go back to what you'd been. Ignorance is not bliss, knowledge is. The secret protects itself.

Angelo gazed at the apple on the plate. It was luminous; the gentle tilt of the stem asked him to touch it. He did and the fruit parted, falling into two pieces. He picked one up. His eyes caressed it. He savored the line of skin, the white flesh glistening with jewels of juice, the core and the exposed seed. Such complex perfection. The curve of its skin let the light slide over its glossy surface. This apple came from the tree of knowledge as did every other apple. The knowledge that he was hungry, and that he was holding food, felt as if the gift and the giver had become a single being.

As he bit into the apple, he became aware of the perfection of what he was doing. The piece of apple in his mouth was exactly the right size. It touched his tongue and the roof and the sides of his mouth precisely where it should. His eyes filled with tears of pleasure.

"You okay?" Shadow said, and leaned toward him.

"Oh, yes. I'm one der full." The words flowed out around the apple bits in his mouth, each sound equally flawless. "Infinity in a grain of sand."

"Is there sand on it?" Shadow moved to take the apple.

"No, no. It's perfect." He chewed, reveling in the harmony of his lips, tongue and teeth working together.

"You're dripping," she said, and kissed a corner of his mouth.

Was it still perfect? It was. Everything was exactly as it should be. The juice, her kiss. How could anything be other than it was? Everything had to be perfect! He lay down again.

Christ died for our sins. Why did he bother? Wasn't it perfect to suffer? He died to remind us. Of course—Re-Member. Drilled into him—all those Sundays he never understood.

Angelo walked along a dusty street, jostled by the excited crowd. He had to find Jesus, tell him not to do it. Sin didn't exist, only perfection

and forgetfulness. Nothing to forgive. Angelo pushed his way to the front. Jesus was already on the cross. Their eyes met.

He saw that Christ forgave him; he forgave everyone. For they know not that they have forgotten. Angelo saw the darkness. Christ falling into the hands of the darkness—forgetting, suffering.

"Forgetting is the only sin," he said.

Shadow nestled close to him. "So, don't forget."

"I can't help it."

"Then maybe it's not a sin."

He pondered her idea. "But it is a problem."

"Problem, problems, always problems." She rubbed her face into his neck.

"Do you ever forget?" he asked.

"Sure, but sometimes, when I remember—" She sat up, then straddled him and pinned his arms down against the blanket. "Oh boy! When I do, it's a total gas!"

Angelo lay on his back, chained to the floor with heavy iron shackles on his wrists and ankles. Guards entered his cell. One kicked him in the side. The other slammed his boot into Angelo's jaw. He grunted from the pain. Then—he remembered. The chains fell away. He clanged his wrists together. The clanging became rows of singing angels. His bracelets were silver—diamonds—flowers, and were gone. He heard the teasing laughter.

Shadow brushed her hair back and forth over his face.

"I remembered," he said, grinning up at her.

"Whoopee!" she said, and kept on brushing.

He recalled how Christ had looked at him. Christ died to remind us. Apples grow to remind us. Shadow's hair reminds me. Everywhere, reminders to redeem ourselves.

He reached up to hug Shadow. She let herself be captured in his arms.

He heard the music again.

for asked for a detailed justification of the same items he'd explained three times already.



The Grateful Dead, having finished their second set, were packing up their instruments. The crowd pleaded for yet one more encore. Jerry Garcia picked up the last live mike. "Hey, everybody. This is only the beginning. We're just the warm-up band for the music going on inside you."



White Lightning was sandwiched between two men, one white, one black. Dear Abby, she thought, looking from one to the other. I am at a large informal social gathering sitting between two drug dealers. I am turned on to both of them, and they to me. What is the best way to keep both their affections? If I tell one I intend to leave with the other, the one left behind might do something ugly. Is there a correct way so I do not get beaten up or bring down the pigs on us all? Sincerely, Double-barreled in San Francisco.

She moved a hand off the inside of her thigh, sighed deeply, and hoped something would resolve the situation.



Across her bedroom, Shadow saw Angelo's eyes frozen with fear. She reached out and touched his shoulder. "Whatever you're feeling, let it go." The popes' axe-miters withdrew, shrinking until they vanished from sight. "Thank you," Angelo said weakly.

Shadow placed a record on the shaft of the record player. Angelo watched the turntable begin to rotate. The record teetered, then dropped with a smack onto the mat. The tone arm raised itself, poised above the outer edge, then dove gracefully down, setting the needle into the spiral-in groove.

## CHAPTER 26

# Angelo set free

The Glory of Him  
 ...glows ever more bright  
 In that heaven  
 which most allows his light.

Dante, *Paradiso*, Canto I

**T**HE GOD SQUAD played to a small group of adults and children on the sparse lawn near the merry-go-round. Maya held several small children's hands as she sang:

Welcome to this drama  
 to find out who you are.  
 Welcome to this universe,  
 in which you are the star.

She danced with the children as the band repeated the chorus.



In his office, Bear fumed over Washington's critique of his monthly expense reports. For the fourth straight month, the Agency's internal audi-