



Two Spirits Dancing
The Murder of John Lennon

by

D.W. Pryke

Text Copyright © D W Pryke 2003 All rights reserved

CONTENTS

New York, Saturday 6th December 1980

Liverpool, November 1947

New York, Friday December 5th 1980

Los Angeles, July 1974

Honolulu, June 1977

New York, Monday November 10th 1980

New York, Saturday December 6th 1980

Special supplement – The Countdown to Murder

New York, Saturday 6th December 1980

He arrived late Saturday morning, having flown in from Honolulu via Chicago, on a United Airlines flight, and from the airport, he took a cab to the YMCA closest to the Dakota, the West Side. In the back seat, he withdrew into a brooding silence, as if gathering himself for a final effort, pulling his thick winter coat tighter and staring blankly out the window. A faint reflected image of his face stared back. This was a part of the journey he had not really planned; he didn't even think about it till the driver asked him where to: but he always seemed to use the Y, wherever he was, and it just came as kind of natural for him, having done so much for the organisation in the past. He was tired from the travelling, and cold from the change in climate, and detached in a way that made this short taxi ride take forever. But when he arrived, and struggled up the stairs with his holdall and an old army bag, and got to his room, he was disappointed at the cheap, sad furniture and the general air of shabby neglect. Still, he told himself, he was in New York, the big Apple, and despite his weariness, he could feel the thrill of being back in this city where he knew his destiny lie.

He dumped his bags in the room, showing distaste at the stale smell that met him and then, on a sudden impulse, almost immediately went out, walking the few blocks to West 72nd Street and the Dakota building. When he stood there, on the edge of Central Park and just across the road from the apartment block, he saw an ugly, sandy-grey mass of Gothic whimsy, with ornate cornices, decorated stone mullions, and gargoyles staring from

the guttering, all looking like some fantastic film set, but totally unreal and unconvincing: so much so, Mark thought, it looked flat and two-dimensional, despite the squat oversized spread of the place. It was like Frankenstein's castle in cartoon form, like the Addams' family house projected on screen.

Mark craned his neck upwards to the windows on the third floor, trying to see a sign of life, a movement, something, but every pane was blank, blinded and shut, the whole building giving off a foreboding, forbidding air.

Against the winter grey of the park's bare trees, it rose awkward and ungainly, a part of the old world, blackened with generations of grime, its windows blinded and seemingly oblivious of the city, the people and the park. The block, in this weak December light, seemed unbalanced, as if it might topple down upon the unsuspecting shoppers below, and yet it had a perfect symmetry. Perhaps, standing as it did at the fringe of this forest of a park, it was just out of proportion or out of place.

When built in 1884, the block was so far out of town it was a joke. New Yorkers thought it so distant, so remote, they gave it the ironic title it held today. But places grow and change and places shift their point of focus. New York had grown and spread and the city had crept ever outward. Now the Dakota stood at the centre of things, and still looked as though it belonged elsewhere.

From the street, the apartment block rose in massive stone blocks, but it was made to look like carved and chiselled wood. It was incongruous in New York City, an outcrop of old Europe, transposed to the new world, a Medieval Cathedral or castle standing in its grounds.

Mark stood a long while taking in this scene, almost spellbound. It was something he had thought about and imagined so often, and anticipated so much, and now he was here and the building in front of him. But there was something wrong, something slightly

out of perspective in all this: it was more like another of his dreams, a kind of detailed and vivid imagining. He also had an overwhelming sense of *déjà vu*, of having stood there, at that spot, some time before in his life, but he had no clear memory when. He tried hard to get a fix on it, like trying to trawl up a faint and distant fragment, an impression, but every time he got anywhere near it, it slipped away.

He crossed the road, and realised there was a small group of people gathered on the corner, surprised in a way, that Lennon was able to draw others, and not just himself, to this very spot.

*

At a window on the third floor, stood a lonely figure.

The security glass, bulletproof, blast-proof, shut out the sounds of the city below, shut out the bustle, shut out the energy.

Inside apartment 72 was undisturbed silence, and the man at the window seemed out of place. His body was leaning at the wrong angle, almost slumped, with his forehead pressed uncomfortably against the glass, hardly breathing.

The late afternoon light, filtered by the heavy white silk blinds, gave a smokiness to the rooms, as if everything was being seen through barely opened eyes. The apartment was both lavish and luxurious; in all respects a dream realised, a dream of wealth beyond desire, a dream of possessions seized and held. It was a fairy grotto of gold and jewels, jealously and obsessively guarded. White silk and gold leaf; antique and kitsch; Old Masters and avant-garde. Everything around him was testimony to the unbelievable success he had enjoyed and an acquisitive passion he indulged. This was one of the most famous men in the world: his voice might be heard singing on countless airwaves

bounced around the globe. One of the richest men too. The apartment was a multi-million dollar cocoon for John Winston Ono Lennon.

It was also a twilight realm. This late afternoon, the wintry shadows were beginning to gather in the stillness.

Lennon was tired. For the past month he had worked in a kind of creative frenzy. He was getting back and starting over. The dry, sterile period of self-imposed retirement was over. The autumn's Bermuda holiday had fused several things in his mind and been the spur to get back into The Hit Factory. He knew he was ready, but he had not known that he would pour out nearly twice the number of songs he needed for an album. The dam had been breached: the music flowed again.

He was drained, though. He had spent almost a quarter of his life in various studios all over the world, and done it all, and sometimes had to do it all again and again, but these last few weeks had been different. The energy he felt had been almost a burn, and it had caught him unprepared: he had not felt that spark for years. He had thought he might never feel it again: that was one of the reasons for five years of nothing. Five years of self-doubt: five years of living on his past. But he was determined to break the spell and find that creativity once more. The songs had come in the night, often waking him with their insistence, their need to be scribbled down, or else they would be gone forever. Taunting him, sometimes. That was how it had been at the height of his powers, and he was surprised that getting started again had been so easy.

And the world was listening once more. His songs were playing, Yoko's were playing, and the diary was filling with interviews. He had done Playboy in September and one for Rolling Stone only yesterday. Later this evening, it was the turn of the BBC.

That pleased him. The folks back home would hear it and they'd be thrilled he was back in business.

He ran his hand through his hair and looked around the room.

Despite everything, it was still a place of exile.

Below was the busiest city in the world, and the park. It was still the one city in the world he could walk about unnoticed almost. He could still be anonymous here, still free to roam. And he loved Central Park, because in many ways it reminded him of Tittenhurst, Surrey. He and Yoko spent hours losing themselves in this green heart of New York, strolling, the perching on their favourite bench, just talking. He had been amazed to find life-sized figures of Alice at the Mad Hatter's tea party: there they were, in Central Park. His favourite characters from childhood, waiting to come to life for him in New York. Yoko had smiled and told him so matter of factly that this city had everything. He knew what she meant.

But this city had another face. He knew that too. Seven floors down, it could have been the surface of another planet. Perhaps it was. A hostile planet, its inhabitants irrational, violent, destructive, unpredictable. The apartment had been virtually sealed off for several years, relying upon its own life support system, its air conditioning, its generators, its waste disposal, and of course, its security systems.

From the streets and from the park, people would look up to the tall skyscraper block of luxury penthouses and apartments, and wonder what it was like, living a fairy tale life in that great grey stone castle.

*

Mark got chatting to a couple of fans, waiting like him, to catch a glimpse of Lennon. He talked about Hawaii and how he had come nearly six thousand miles to see his idol, and how he was overwhelmed with actually being there, standing yards away from the entrance to Lennon's apartment.

It was suggested that he buy a copy of the new album, and when Lennon appeared, as he surely would, then Mark could get it autographed, and the folks back home would think wow, and really be impressed. And Mark went along with the idea, joking about how no-one would believe it, and how he would have to bring out all the airline stubs and hotel receipts and so on, to convince his friends that he'd even been to New York, let alone come home with this great trophy.

And so, mid afternoon, he walked the block and a half to the nearest record store, smiling all the time to himself that this too was part of it all: Holden had started walking over towards Broadway because he wanted to find a record store that was open on a Sunday, and here he was, following in his footsteps. He half expected to meet the family and the little kid about six years old, walking in the street, right next to the kerb, with the traffic rushing by, and the parents taking no notice. The kid singing "If a body catch a body coming through the rye," and he could kind of protect the kid, see he came to no harm. But it wasn't to be: not today, or perhaps he'd just missed that particular moment.

When he got to the record store, he soon found a copy of Double Fantasy, with its dark picture of Lennon and Yoko kissing on the front, and on the back cover, a picture of them standing on the sidewalk where he had been standing only twenty minutes before. He thought that was amazing, that he and Lennon and Yoko were somehow being brought together like this, everything confirming it, everything pointing to this coming together.

Back at the Dakota, the other fans were beginning to lose heart for the day, and the doorman had told them again and again that

Mr. Lennon was out of town and wasn't expected back for some weeks. Perhaps. But Mark knew otherwise: there were just too many signs, too many clear, unequivocal coincidences telling him that the time was right, that Lennon was here, now, and that he had to go ahead with it.

But the others wandered away one by one, leaving Mark all alone, now a little cold and tired for standing all day, waiting. At about five o'clock, Mark too had had enough, and with a final glance towards the entrance doorway, turned and headed back to the West Side YMCA.

As he went along, he was still concentrating on feeling how Holden felt, looking around him at the faces of all these phoneys, at the fake Christmas decorations everywhere, plastic Santa faces on street-sign posts, the shop windows of false snow scenes and tinsel, parcels and presents, and Christmas everywhere, but all of it strangely out of place in these dirty New York streets.

He got back to the Y about five thirty and went straight up to his room, this time taking more notice of the tacky corridors, the paint flaking from the walls, the general air of neglect and tiredness. This place was a real dump. His room was not much better, cramped and sad, and he threw himself on the bed and covered his eyes with his arm, and lay there thinking, going back over the last few days and the sense of things gathering, everything gaining momentum, waiting for the final act.

He swung himself off the bed and switched on the tv. It was a big old set that had clearly seen better days. The picture flickered into life but it was nothing but swirling snow, and hiss, and the figures were ghosts floundering. He tried the other channels, but they were all the same, the pictures rolling and twisting across the screen. Ghostly figures trying to reach him.

Mark thought of the images that had been beamed to him over the last couple of years, especially the Hermit album, and most

recently the Adventures in Utopia. Those messages were crystal clear and precise: Todd never had, never would let him down. And perhaps these images were meant to be like this; it wasn't a fault, it was two figures ghosting together, and that was how it was meant to be.

He went back to the bed and made himself comfortable in the middle of the sagging mattress and tried hard to relax his breathing and catch up on some sleep. He rested, but it was a broken, fitful rest, listening to the doors opening and closing, shouts and cackling laughter from all around him.

Just after midnight he woke with a start. Something had shaken him, a loud echoing shout just outside his door. This place was the pits: it struck him it was a lot like the Edmont Hotel, where Holden stayed, full of perverts and morons, screwballs all over the place. As he lay there listening, Mark was not the least surprised to discover the place was full of gays, and they were all quite open about it, standing in their doorways, hanging around the elevators, some of them hand in hand, chatting the night away. After all, things were coming together as they were written: no surprise there.

He lay there in the darkness, listening to the laughter and crude jokes, hearing every word with a mixture of disgust and fascination. On and on they went, not loud, but not too quiet, either, so everyone on that landing could hear their every word. No attempt to be private, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for them. Mark wanted to storm out there and scream at them to shut up, but lay there immobile, spellbound, like it was some part of a nightmare he could do nothing about, that he was outside of and yet it was touching somewhere deep inside him.

He could not sleep, and got up and paced his room, going to the window again and again, peering out and across the back alleys to other windows, other patches of light and colour. An orange glow covered the city, and above that a black winter sky. Orion

hung overhead, like a giant hourglass, a giant sign that it was almost time, or like a huge conductor, his arms outspread, ready to bring the orchestra to order.

These thoughts of time made him feel impatient. He couldn't stay here: he had to make it happen tomorrow, or the next day, because it had to be done and it had to be done now. The sand was running out, and he knew, the longer he left it, the more likely he was to lose heart.

He knew he had to get out of here and make it happen.

And so, just after midnight, when he went down to Reception, they were surprised that he was checking out. Jesus, he thought, they ought to be surprised that anyone stays there. "Thought you said you're here for a week or two?"

He thought of the dumb sort of look on the guy's face, mimicking in his mind, the nasal tone of voice, almost ready to wise-crack an answer. But it was no big deal. The guy was bored whether he checked you in or checked you out: it was all the same to him.

He took another cab to the Sheraton Center, which was much better, more classy, more comfortable, a place he knew from his first visit a few weeks back. This was better, a million miles away from that crummy Y, with its dirty corridors and all. Further, too, away from the Dakota, but that was no problem. What did a few more blocks matter? He'd come something over six thousand miles for this.

He worried about the cost of the room, but he did not intend staying long. And the Sheraton staff had really made the difference, made him feel that the extra cost was worth it. They could not do enough for him, making him feel a real somebody. They called him Sir all the time. "Carry your case, Sir? Staying for business, Sir? Or pleasure, Sir?" Chatty, like that but not nosy; they didn't want to know his life story: they just wanted to show they thought anyone who stayed at the Sheraton Center,

had to be important, like a movie star, a celebrity. The sort of treatment they get. Shown respect, kind of silent acknowledgement that you counted for something. It was a great feeling, one he could get used to, had he time to enjoy it.

It wasn't as if this was a luxury place, or anything, but those guys had really made him feel good, with their warmth and their smiles, like he was a long-valued client, back in town from some business trip. Some old guy of a porter carried his holdall up to his room, all respectful and that, and Mark had felt a slight sense of embarrassment about the battered holdall, and about letting the guy take it. No expensive, executive set of leather cases that no doubt he was used to, just an old brown leather holdall that had been round the world with him, and showed the scars of its travels. Still, he didn't suppose it meant a thing to them; they must see all sorts, in a place like this.

When he made himself comfortable in Room 2730, he began to unwind a little, and he realised, with surprise, just how tense he was. Understandable, really, but it had sort of crept up on him. One moment he was feeling fine, the next he felt wasted, and washed out, as if it was all catching up on him. He sat on the edge of the bed, knowing that trying to sleep would be useless, his mind racing through everything. He'd been through it a million times, till he couldn't face it again, but he had to think it through again, as if looking for some way out of it, or looking again to check on the validity of the signals. He was restless, and the place was too quiet, and in some strange way, he felt quiet inside, too, but with a kind of whispering quietness that set him on edge. So, he quit his room. He felt stretched to the limit, and lousy, but he had to, needed to get out.

He hoped the sharp air this December morning might make him feel better, pushing along 7th Avenue, already quite busy with early Christmas shoppers. It had crossed his mind to walk the twenty blocks back to West 72nd Street, to the Dakota, but he decided not to. Tomorrow, he would do it. Tomorrow he would

feel like it, tomorrow he would go back there and wait, maybe all day, if needs be, and try to end it. In the meantime, he needed some fresh air and a break from his own thoughts more than anything else. A distraction. And so, he window-shopped and tried to make himself feel like any other tourist in New York, seeing the sights, enjoying the atmosphere, and the experience of following Holden step by step. Except he was not like any other tourist: he was here on a mission to kill.

*

The Sunday was spent retracing Holden's footsteps again, making his way through the streets full of Christmas shoppers, everywhere bustling and busy. He felt exhilarated in the crisp steel-blue air, pushing through the crowds, pausing a while on the sidewalk and watching this great tide of people drifting by. The city seemed decked in red and gold and silver: red robed Santas, ringing bells, rattling money boxes, shouting out their seasonal greetings; gold and silver decorations draped on street signs and trimming the shop windows. He felt alive and good, better than he had felt for a while. The sidewalks were in deep shadow but they glittered and sparkled with miles of coloured lights, strung up like beads of dew on giant spiderwebs.

When he got to Central Park he was in another world, a world of wintry grey: a frozen, stark other place, quieter, motionless.

This was a hushed, muted world. The occasional car horn, a distant police siren, these sounds crept in, but they did not belong, for there was something keeping that world at bay. But Mark felt he belonged. The air was different, the pace slower, but somehow more intense. He felt he could breathe here, and relax a little, though all the time he knew he was getting closer.

He looked around, at the Sunday joggers and dog-walkers, couples just strolling, talking. There was humanity here, but Mark felt he was in an ancient forest, where the frosted grass and the dark outlines of trees brought a sort of peace to him: as if they were from a different time, before all this began. He heard a lone woodpecker hammering at a tree. He could not tell from which direction the sound came, and that was it: he sensed he was being drawn in and slowly disoriented. As if the longer he stayed in this magical place, the less chance he would have of breaking free.

The greyness closed around him. There was a tint of bruised plum to the light, a darkening in the distance, like leaking blood in the sky. He felt he was being pulled into a fossil world, where everything was sponged of real colour, still, and ossified. The wicked Queen had cast her spell. She had poisoned the very core of the Big Apple.

This fanciful idea had made him smile, before he realised the truth of it. Why shouldn't she? That's what wicked Queens did. This was not a park, a place of play and innocence: it was a forest of experience. He had heard the tales of mugging and murder and rape. That was the work of the wicked Queen, and that was what lent an unreal air to the place. Snow White had hidden in the forest, had escaped the murder intended for her, and lived in magical innocence. But not for long. The forest must have its way, for the darkness is the more powerful and will get you in the end. The apple had to be the bait, like it was in the garden, and it had to be poisoned: half poisoned, half o.k.

He noticed some children playing on roller skates, shouting and screaming, pretending at murders and monsters. They were unaware of the blurred boundary between innocence and experience, though they exploited it to the full.

Mark remembered one winter, just before Christmas, when his teacher had read "The Snow Image" to the class. He had been lost in its simple beauty, savouring each moment yet anticipating the

end. Hawthorne certainly understood, that fragile, magical snowchild was doomed as soon as she had been created. The children's innocent fantasy destroyed by the warmth of kindness, by the cruel blindness of adults. Children were so vulnerable, and the child inside the adult as vulnerable as ever. Suffer the little children to come unto me.

It had been his favourite story for ages afterwards. He had borrowed a copy of the tale from the library and read it over and again. He knew it was teaching him something precious, that a child's mind is open and trusting and unsullied. It was the adults who corrupted. They deceived, they lied, they twisted everything. They could leave nothing untouched, nothing unspoiled. He resolved that the lesson would not go unheeded; he would be on his guard against betrayal.

And then, suddenly, he saw a red cap. A girl running over the rise in the distance. He caught his breath. Phoebe. It was Phoebe. It was another sign. The crazy red hunting cap that Holden had given her. The people-shooting cap, he called it. And he felt kind of dizzy, faint with excitement. This was it. He was so close, so goddamn close.

He was nearing the Carousel: could just make out that special merry-go-round music, that was always playing, always the same. It wasn't 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' this time though, like in the book, but he couldn't quite make out what it was. But that red cap was clearly Phoebe, and he just couldn't stop thinking of her, and then, in turn, of his own sister Susan, and how he might have seen her for the last time. And the rest of his family. They sure wouldn't want to know him soon, once all of this came out. He knew he was leaving them behind: that sounded so final, but he had been leaving them behind for years. Like Holden says, you start missing everybody, and there's nothing you can do about that.

But he pictured old Phoebe, smiling, and going up to the Carousel, but walking round it slow and casual at first, like she had no intention of ever being the little kid again, and then climbing on that big old horse. Saying she was too big, but really only teasing. And then, once on, grabbing for the golden ring. All the kids trying to grab the gold ring, and Holden knowing you have to let them try, even if it's odds on they'll fall off and hurt themselves. You have to let them grab for the gold ring, have to let them have their grab for happiness.

Round and round on the Carousel, the kids so damn happy: laughter and squeals, shrill and piercing. Round and round, riding the horses, enjoying the danger, excited and safe. And the parents and mothers and everybody sitting on the benches watching over them all.

Mark felt happy. Content and complete, and kind of at peace with himself, because he knew from this, that he was near the end.

He stood watching.

He looked for the red cap, but it was gone. The darkness was gathering, the wintry world closing in.

*

Earlier that Sunday afternoon, walking the crowded sidewalks of 7th Avenue, he had slipped into a bookstore to buy a copy of *Catcher In The Rye*, but he was stopped in his tracks in the entrance, by a large poster of Lennon there before him, that bespectacled face famous the world over, staring at him, as if asking him why are you here? Or rather, where have you been? Mark Chapman stood rooted to the spot, held by those other eyes.

Lennon was back bigtime; the glossy-covered Playboy magazines featuring his latest interview were piled high, and a small group of shoppers were flicking through the pages, trying to get a flavour of the article. Mark was drawn forward and his hand reached out, and he was out, on the street and in the sunshine, the magazine slipped inside his coat pocket. The whole thing had taken no time at all, and in a way, he had felt nothing, just a coldness, a detachment from it that left him numb, a kind of holding his breath and keeping his eyes dead ahead, like a little child who has shoplifted for the first time, telling himself he will be alright if he can just make it to the door and away. Get out, get away.

That, rather than reel with the shock of this coincidence, this synchronicity slapping him in the face. That poster, those eyes: that strangely quizzical look of greeting, of recognition.

Once back on the sidewalk, Mark began to breathe again, but he dare not look behind, feeling as though the something that had just confronted him might now be following him. He was two blocks from the bookstore when he began to relax and look around him, and enjoy the place. It was a beautiful day, almost spring-like, and this city was electric and alive; alive in a way that was different from all those other cities, all those tired and sad great cities he had visited on his grand tour, when he skidded around the world at break-neck speed in that long summer of 78. Looking back on it, it had been like a cat chasing its tail, perhaps chasing himself, perhaps getting it out of his system, before settling down with Gloria. He didn't like to think about that. But this city was something else: there was nowhere like this. Paris, London, Dublin: they had all had their days, but to Mark, they were all burnt out. There was a spirit of place: and places come alive, have their time, and then die.

New York, the gateway to the New World. New Life, new beginning. The city throbbed with energy. He could feel it all around him, a definite charge, a dull, low hum of constant

activity. The sounds and the colours and the smells seemed supercharged, as if the place had energy to spare.

He walked, enjoying the wintry sunshine, and had been drawn to a street corner, where a small crowd had gathered. Mark hovered on the edge and watched. He had been expecting a busker or street entertainer: something he had always had dreams of being. But this was something else, an hallucination, a vision meant for him. It was another sign. Mark stood captive, transfixed at the scene before him, and yet somehow, it seemed to be happening not outside, not there before him, but inside him.

Two figures, all in black, white plastic Pierrot masks. Death masks. Faceless faces, sightless eyes, dumb black mouths.

Losing the sound from the scene was unsettling. It was like being tuned to a radio or tv station that suddenly stopped transmitting. He seemed to lose reception. Mark felt he had stumbled into a pocket of silence, or into a familiar dream he knew so well.

It was a mime. The two figures mirrored each other, their each and every movement, exactly, with the slow precision of pent up frenzy. They performed a long routine of robotic dance, a ballet of machine becoming flesh. They danced to a silent and yet tangible music. For Mark, they were dancing to the music of this city. But there was also an inner beat, hammering so loudly inside his skull, and they were dancing to the reverberations. They were linked to him through this inaudible music: he knew they were the only three in that crowd who could hear these whispered rhythms, the moan and sigh of New York breathing.

The black figures began crouched on the sidewalk. Mark could not tell what they were. Shapes. Inhuman. Sources of energy. They rose almost imperceptibly slowly, ten yards apart, back to back. They were opposite poles, holding the other in check. As the figure on the left stretched an arm, so the figure on the right stretched the corresponding arm. The ballet took both figures full

circle, for they seemed to revolve in each other's orbit, and once back where they had begun, to the inch, they turned to face each other with those white plastic non-faces. Their mime was then a dance of recognition, of tentative, momentary reaching out, and then withdrawal. They turned away, or tried to, but something always pulled them back. And finally, they were drawn across their circle, their index fingers touched, like God instilling life into Adam, but this was a touch of death. It was the touching of opposites. Yin and Yang, black touching white, Death taking Life. Both figures flinched and fell to the sidewalk, lifeless heaps.

He wasn't sure he had taken breath during this whole performance: now his lungs fought for air. He had witnessed an omen.

He wanted to hold onto the moment and never let it go. This was it; this was the clearest sign yet and just for him and nobody else. The crowd did not see it. They had watched but had not seen. And now it was too late, because it was over, and one or two people had thrown coins into an open suitcase, and some were clapping, as if this was just another street act. The crowd had started to disperse: on their ways once again, these New Yorkers and tourists for whom this had been a minor distraction, an insignificant and bizarre drama in a day of trivia.

For Mark, it was a glimpse of something within. It was a sign that everything would work out fine.

It was telling him that the time was right. This was his destiny.

He had learned to recognise the significant coincidences in life. His time at the Castle had taught him that, because there, he had learned the everyday was not the everyday. There was more meaning than that, a pattern, a timing, a rhythm, and you just had to find the rhythm that was yours and tune in. Everything had its time. Everything had its tuning, and he had begun to find his true note and his now.

His mind raced over the last few months, during which time he had become obsessed with piecing it all together. Going over the details again and again in ever closer focus. He had begun to make it an exact science, and once he started using the keys given to him, he had uncovered so much. For years, he had been floundering through the maze, hopelessly lost, until he had discovered this key of focussing, fine-tuning the signal. Now he could open all doors. Now he could unlock all the caskets, be they of lead or of gold. It was only by endlessly replaying and re-examining incidents that they made any sense.

This had been the awakening of Mark David Chapman, or rather his re-awakening. He recalled that fantastic burn of feeling reborn, that spiritual rebirth that had been his salvation.

The energy of that rebirth had driven him to New York. He had never before felt such power, not even when Jesus had come into his life in 1971, and saved his soul. That had been fantastic, but it did not touch this. Once he had the key, he could see where he should be, where he should go, and what he should do. It was all so clear. The walls of the maze just crumbled into dust. He now had an uninterrupted vista, a purpose, a mission.

As he stood there, still, on that corner of 7th Avenue, as the performers who had acted out his omen shrugged themselves into winter coats and prepared to move on, Mark thought back to those agonising years when he had felt something was wrong in his life, but he could never figure out what that something was. Some nagging sense that he never really belonged in his family. He never really seemed to get anywhere with Jessica. He never really knew what he was doing, because it had all been so unreal. Unreal and unconnected. It was the connections that were missing. Somehow they had been cut, somewhere, so nothing connected with anything, and that made him a nothing. That was why he had drifted and spun out of control: he had nothing to

hold onto, nothing to do. Nothing to do with him: nothing to be so be nothing.

As a child, the sense of bewilderment and loss and anger and frustration and everything, had been at its most potent. What can a child do? They're so trusting and vulnerable. But what can they do when there is nothing to hold on to? He remembered being little boy lost, like he was wandering so long through a dark and fearsome forest, or stumbling through a mire, his life a nightmare, never going anywhere, never ending.

And he had tried, really tried, to kick and scream his way out and find his way home. He had battled with everyone, had fought and been bloodied, but he was never sure who or what he should fight. Most times, he was fighting himself; he knew that now: perhaps he had known it all along.

He felt like one of those characters in the cartoons, where the little angel is whispering in one ear, and the little devil is screaming in the other.

He could not win. He was the one who fouled up on everything, watching others claim the spoils of victory, while he was the all time loser. No matter what he tried - and he had tried so damn hard to fit in, to be like the others, to do the right thing, to say the right words, to be perfect, and play the part written for him. He had even struggled to have the right kind of dreams, and to keep them neatly tucked away - but no matter how hard he fought to cut down and even cut out those beautiful dreams of his, they just kept on surfacing and spoiling it for him.

But then he had awoken to the idea that you cannot control your dreams, they are your destiny, and your truth. He had Todd to thank for that. You must let your dreams control you, let your dreams have their reality.

He had such wonderful dreams, real dreams, not some kind of meaningless mess, all bits and pieces, fragments, just thrown together. Not random, freewheeling images. Not the mind unwinding, not vague, almost remembered impression. No. Mark's dreams had become something else, incredibly vivid, living, intensely real experiences that played over and over in his mind like a film loop. They rehearsed themselves to a precise script, they re-ran and re-ran and perfected themselves to the unheard commands of a great Director: a master of word and image. These dreams were far more real than the empty life he was living. Or rather, they were his life. That's what this re-awakening had shown him. So why deny them? Why not live them.

As a little child, he had longed to be a dragon slayer. Pictures of dragons filled his drawing books, stories of dragons filled his head, and that dream-longing, with all its variations, had gone on for weeks, like a neverending fairy tale. He wanted to be able to even it all up a little, to take on the dragons and defeat them. He wanted to take his seat at the Table Round amongst the heroes. He wanted to sport his Lady's favour and joust as Champion. He would ride a milk white steed, bear the arms of a true knight, and join the quest. Pennants would stiffen in the breeze, the green oaks would dapple the earth with their shade, fair damsels would adorn the field, and the quest would draw him on.

He had dreamed of storming the enchanted castle on the border of a sparkling lake, beyond the deep, dark forest, and only he could break the spell. It was his quest. He must enter the very core of that eternal fierce destruction.

That's what the moment meant to him: it recalled the wonderful dreams of his childhood, and it calmed his soul.

And the same afternoon, Mark stood outside the Dakota again, gazing up at the intricate Gothic stonework, trying to imagine some of the apartments inside, running his eyes from window to window. He recalled the building had been used as a set for the film, "Rosemary's Baby", which he had seen some years before. He looked up at one of the balconies and involuntarily shivered at the memory of the figure plummeting to the sidewalk below, right where he was standing. The thud of bones breaking, the slow spread of blood at his feet.

Caught in this reverie, he had had another glimpse of this force that was taking him to his destiny: as if it were some movie re-run, he watched a slight figure of a woman glide past him, unnoticed by anyone else, frail and ordinary enough to pass like a phantom through the small crowd gathered. She was gone before he could react, and only then did a kind of recognition come: it was Mia Farrow, the actress. He was suddenly sure it was her, and felt exhilarated with excitement.

Rosemary had walked by him: the girl who had been seduced by the Devil. Suddenly, things dovetailed in his mind: not long after shooting the film, Sharon Tate, the director's wife, herself heavily pregnant, had been slaughtered in the notorious Manson Family murders. And there, in the background, were some Beatles' lyrics, songs like Helter-Skelter, and Little Piggies and Blackbird, all from the "White Album". It was another sign, another signal that all was going to plan: Manson claimed it was the lyrics that had called him to action, that he was to start an apocalyptic race war that would destroy the world, so a new world could begin.

Again, Mark was stunned at the simplicity and the complexity of the signal. There was the Dakota connection; there were the Beatles' lyrics, and Lennon's in particular; there was the killing power of white, and Lennon again; and there was the idea of the

Anti-Christ, the Devil's child, innocent, beautiful, but Satan nonetheless.

For Mark, it was all coming together with amazing clockwork precision, and with such speed it left him breathless.

*

It was dark, very dark, when he got back. He was thankful when he saw the Sheraton's neon sign, because he had had enough. Tired, almost lethargic, he felt he had been treading tarry black sidewalks: wet, sticky tar. His legs ached, his feet were sore, despite having bought the orthopaedic shoes, knowing he would have to wait around ages. He was cold and hungry, his mouth was dry, his throat seemed tight. But his mind was racing. Jesus was it racing! So many things to think about, so many ideas to go through in every detail.

Mark came out of the elevator and felt kind of unsteady as he went down the corridor to his room. With sudden, rising panic, he wondered if he was going down with 'flu or something. That would really screw up his plans. He was sweating and felt really bad. As he fumbled with the key he told himself to get a firm grip, forced himself back under control: this was crazy, to fold up now, when he was so close to the final act.

He kept his heavy winter coat on, giving himself time to warm up, but almost an hour passed and he still felt shivery. He had not eaten much that day: perhaps that was it. Should he call Room Service and ask them to bring him something? Or call out for pizza? But then the thought of it made him feel quite nauseous. He went over to the washbasin in the corner of the room. There was one of those strip lights over it: a shaver point and a mirror. He took a real good look at himself. Pulled down his eyelids, stuck out his tongue. He did not look good. His face was drawn

and pale, almost totally drained of colour. His eyes were bloodshot and they seemed to have a strange, fixed kind of stare. As he turned away, there, for just a fraction of a moment, he caught sight of Mark, the old Mark, out of the corner of his eye, kind of looking back at him: but what he saw, with a tremendous sense of distance and detachment, was not himself. That wasn't him. There was no recognition in that stare. This was someone else intruding.

He tumbled onto the bed and threw his arm across his eyes. He had to get a grip on this. He felt he was falling apart. This was crazy. He had prepared and planned this: he couldn't blow it now. The main thing was to concentrate on his breathing: slow and steady and easy. Slow and steady and easy, slow and steady and easy. Work it out, think it through and keep control.

Despite the lack of sleep over the last few days, it was not tiredness he felt. It was a kind of desertion, a crisis of confidence, even, trying to rob him of his strength and his destiny. Earlier, he had felt the buzz of New York, begun to feel the energising power of this city that never sleeps. Each breath he took confirmed in him that the signals had led him here and the time was now. Keep still. Keep quiet. Keep control. Let synchronicity see it through, let New York do its work.

*

He was here to be alone, here to be on his own. He knew that now. Now that the whore had left, he knew it had been a terrible mistake. He thought he needed her, needed company, thought it would ease the tension. He thought being alone was too dangerous, and the Playboy magazine had got him roused. And after all, Holden had tried with the girl: that bit was just amazing, that she should turn up like she had stepped out of the pages of the book, blonde hair dyed to the roots and the green dress. The

same sort of age, even: it was pure synchronicity, a pure coming together of time and history, and a sign of total confirmation for him. He was really Holden now and no mistake, like he had made the pages come alive, created them from the black ink and the white paper, and, with amazing power, breathed life into her. Or perhaps it was not him, he had not made anything happen, but it had happened none the less. He was now Holden, in New York, with the whore in the green dress, and on the trail of the phoney “Catcher”.

He looked at the disturbed bedclothes and thought of the girl, young enough to be his kid sister, old enough to be Sin herself.

But no, he needed this stillness, this silence, found in the middle of the night, in the middle of this city. He had to be alone. He wanted, more than anything, to lose himself in this towering mass of concrete and steel and glass, amongst these numberless hordes of lonely people. Here he thought he would wander like some free spirit. Be himself, be who he wanted to be.

And he had come to New York to finish it. That was it, pure and simple.

Mark felt himself drifting into a warm and comfortable doze, and went back to the girl, sprawled wide open for him, looking pale and unreal in the dimmed lighting. He could enjoy her now, as an image in his mind, in a way that he couldn't when she was there with him, cool and white to his touch, offering herself. He had never been able to enjoy sex, never been able to understand the idea of it being a pleasure, being drawn into some other body, being unable to control it once it began. Even with Gloria it was difficult.

Sudden feelings of guilt disturbed him, like a dull punch to his guts, a wash of feelings that nearly always did hit him after the act. He thought of his wife, thousands of miles away in a different world, and how she had no idea what he was going

through, or why he was here. He had not told her because he knew she would never understand, and though he didn't like keeping things from her, this was too big for her to even begin to grasp.

He reached for the phone and after some problems with the switchboard girl, he called Gloria, trying to tell her, trying to tell her not to worry, trying to make sure she was alright. He found it hard though, because there was too much he couldn't tell her, and she wanted to know what was going on, and there were no words, no way to tell her, so the phone call was punctuated with long, heavy silences, and he thought she was crying at the other end, sniffing, and her voice trembling, but he couldn't do a thing to help her. And he didn't really care. It was just impossible, trying to reach her over that kind of distance.

He put down the phone with a dead click.

Mark rolled from the bed and went over to the display he had set up. It was his altar display, his farewell message to the little child inside him, that insistent little child who wanted to cause so much pain. These were all the things that were important to the person he once was, to the child he still harboured inside.

He picked up the black-bound Bible from its position, checking that it was splayed open at the right page: Saint Mark, Chapter 7. It was his own Gospel, his very own, and therefore special to him. And it was his favourite, because it said it all. It was all there: the phoney's, the hypocrites, the evil from within and the casting out of that evil. All there, and written just for him.

"And looking up to Heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened."

Be opened. He loved that. It spoke directly to him. Opened, like he had been opened to his destiny. Opened to receive the signal.

He replaced the Bible carefully and picked up the photograph of himself at Fort Chaffee. There he was, the Pied Piper, leading all those Vietnamese kids, playing guitar, leading them in songs. God, he was so happy there, and he knew he was doing so much good, and something to change the world for the better. He was somebody important there, and there was nothing more important than what he had done there: he made a difference. He cherished those memories.

He glanced at his expired passport: it had taken him round the world, and the airline tickets that had brought him here, to his destination. They had brought him to his destiny. Now, there was nowhere else to go.

Everything was in place. He had agonised over what to include in this display, because there were so many possibilities, so many bits and pieces that you picked up in your life. So much trivia, so much trash, and so little of any real value or meaning, and yet everything before him was charged with special significance, charged with the power that was to see him through. He knew they made a strange sight, but he knew they were the right things.

He picked up the small photo of Dorothy in her red shoes: it was overlain with so many meanings, reminding him of that night with Jessica, when they watched the movie together and she had called him the lion, timid and caring; those jerks at High School calling him “Pussy” to his face, and behind his back, the bastards; perhaps, like Dorothy, he had been brought here on a twister, spun around and up and down till he didn’t know which way to turn, but that he was here to destroy the wizard, and the wicked witch, that much he now knew.

Among all of these meanings, which to choose: from all his possessions, which to display? There were always so many meanings cramming for space.

Everything in its place.

In this hour before dawn, he knew he was almost there. The time was right and this was the place he had to be.

Today, the child and the man would finally resolve their differences, today, he would finish it once and for all. Today would bring the end of the nightmare.

*