

**GRATEFUL
DEAD
I HAVE
KNOWN**



article **By ED McCLANAHAN** A BRIGHT SUNDAY AFTERNOON in August 1971, just one week after Bill Graham closed the doors of the Fillmore West forever and ever, and I'm sitting in the living room of Jerry Garcia's new house on the headlands above a coastal village an hour north of San Francisco (a very nice house, by the way, not luxurious or anything but altogether nice enough to reflect the Grateful Dead's rising fortunes during the past couple of years); and if I were to glance over my shoulder, I could see beyond the picture window all

riding that train, high on cocaine...or was it just a leettle laughing gas?



the way down the tilting rim of the continent to the shimmering Pacific. Only right this minute, I'm not into scenery at all; right this minute, I'm deeply engaged in being paranoid about my tape recorder, just sort of *stroking* the treacherous little bastard, before I entrust to its tape-eating maw the wit and wisdom of Jerry Garcia, lead guitarist and chief philosophical theoretician of what some claim is the greatest rock-'n'-roll band in the world—Captain Trips, they call him.

Jerry, meanwhile, is doing exactly what he always does, playing it as it lays, which right now means sitting there beside me in his rocking chair, gazing benignly out the window, beaming within the dark nimbus of his hair and beard like a stoned-out John the Baptist, waiting.

"What I'd like to do," I'm prattling, rather desperately trying to fill with the sound of my own voice the void my incompetence has created, "I'd like to feel free to take as many liberties with this interview as I've been taking with the rest of the material, to, uh, interpolate and rearrange things here and there when it seems. . . . But maybe you . . . ?"

"Sure," Jerry says cheerily, waving aside my question. "You're gonna *lie* a little, you mean. Sure, you can say I said anything you feel like, I don't give a shit."

"Good deal! Because what I'm planning to do, see, is to take this interview and sort of write myself out of it, my own voice, I mean, so that what's left will be just *your* voice, disembodied, just rapping out loud. Like, for instance, did you happen to read John Sack's interviews with Lieutenant Calley? Do you remember how Sack himself isn't really a *presence* there, how it comes down as if it were just Calley alone, telling his own story? That sort of thing. And then I'll just take your voice and weave it through the piece, probably in italics or something, just lacing it in and out wherever it seems. . . ."

Jerry grins and says: "Sure, feel free, whatever. Only the erroneous assumption in that, see, is that a guy like Calley might ever volunteer any information at all. Or me, for that matter. I mean, nobody ever hears about some of the shit that comes out in interviews unless somebody asks me, you know what I mean? In fact, it's like the basis of the reality from which you write, because you wouldn't write this thing if you'd never talked to any of us, would you? I mean, you know what I mean? If you weren't interacting in there, the story would never have occurred. So it's, like, you can include yourself or not, but either way, it's all you. . . ."

. . . .

OK, then; *me*, by God:

So there I am in September 1970, early morning, and I'm hurrying home to California to write about the Grateful

Dead (I've been at this quite a while, you understand) after a three-week hiatus back East, barreling along in my big Dodge camper all alone through the everlasting vast reaches of central Iowa, on a back road somewhere 40 miles in some direction or another from Cedar Rapids, and it's raining like a cow pissing on a flat rock, a cold, driving rain that chills me even with the camper's heater ramming hot air up both pants legs; and beside me on the hump of the engine's housing are spread my Official Accuracy Reporter's Notebooks filled with three-week-old runic scribblings (garcia missing 2 joints midl. finger rt. hand!—phil lesh leanness *lincolnesk!*—sam cutler rd. mgr. look like capt. hook!!—bob weir billy the kid!!—john mcintyre bus. mgr. *elegant*, look like yng. *rich widmark!!!!*) and several yellowing copies of *Rolling Stone* featuring articles about the Dead, and my little portable stereo tape recorder and five cassettes of the Dead's albums, and—here comes the weird part—on my head I'm wearing, Buck Rogerslike, an enormous pair of superpowerful stereo headphones plugged into the recorder, and the volume is turned up full blast and the Dead's "Turn it on! Turn it on!" is crashing into my eardrums and I'm bouncing ecstatically in my seat and hammering the heels of my hands on the steering wheel to Bill the Drummer's surging, 19-to-the-dozen rhythms, while the guitars scream as loud as locomotive whistles; and now an image swirls to mind and shapes itself, the interior of my skull has somehow become the interior of the Fillmore West, San Francisco's onetime Carousel Ballroom, this cavernous old relic of a pleasure palace amid whose tawdry grandeur our forebears forbore Guy Lombardo and Shep Fields and His Rippling Rhythms that we might live to dig the Dead, my throat and tongue the Fillmore's threadbare maroon-carpeted lobbies and stairwells and my teeth its curlicuing rococo plaster balustrades and my brainpan the grand ballroom itself, my medulla oblongata its vaulted ceiling festooned with heavily sagging billows of silvery-gray asbestos damask, and there are 3000 dope-crazed Dead fans crouched haunch to haunch in the darkness on the immense dance floor of my mind, while at the far end of the great chamber, on-stage, dwarfed beneath the high curved bleached-white band shell that is the inner surface of my forehead, the Grateful Dead are getting it on, a demon-driven suicide squad of assassins under the harsh command of the archbrigand Pigpen ("turn it on! jes a leetle bit hi-eee-yer!"), a murderous little band of renegades, savages, tartars in cowboy mufti, angels of death armed not with three supercharged guitars and a set of

traps but with three choppers and a mortar, mercilessly laying waste to the shrieking, writhing mass of defenseless supplicants spread beneath them, and against the backs of my eyeballs the giant light-show screen behind the bandstand is ablaze like the night sky above a battlefield with the garish lightning of their fusillade, it is more than just a massacre, it is a by-God *apocalypse* hurtling along right here inside the fragile eggshell of my skull at 70 miles an hour through the Iowa monsoon, the incredible cacophony of it thrumming in my blood and beating wildly against the backs of my eyes, mounting and mounting and mounting until it peaks out at about 11,000,000 megadecibels and Pig screams "Yeeeeeeeeeeeeee-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-ow-wwwwwwwwwwww!" and barks "And leave it on!" and within the headphones there descends an abrupt and wondrous stillness, a silence made infinitely deeper and more profound by the absence not merely of the Dead's righteous racket but of *all* sound, the headphones baffling out even the engine's roar along with the slap-slap-slap of the wipers and the steady suck of tires on the flooded roadbed, as if the whole wet world were inexplicably and without warning stricken mute, and as the wipers streak the veil of water on the windshield, I see, standing stalwart by the lonely Iowa roadside like heaven's own herald, an enormous billboard, sky-blue, with great thick square white letters proclaiming, for no good reason at all,

TIME ENDS
ETERNITY WHERE

and even as the wind-blown water sheets the glass again, blurring, then fracturing the image beyond all intelligence, I hear Jerry Garcia begin the next song on the tape, his voice rising sweet and clear and plangent into the silence,

"You know Death don't
Have no mercy
In this land. . . ."

. . . .
"I mean, everybody who's makin' a big thing about the closing of the Fillmore, that's a crock of shit, actually. Because, you know, what'd they do before there was a Fillmore? I mean, there's always been a musician scene, musicians have always traveled around and you could always hear music. And that's gonna happen no matter what. In most places, see, there isn't any Fillmore. And that doesn't affect anybody except, you know, the Fillmore freaks. I think the end of the Fillmore is just the beginning of different space. . . ."

. . . .
"The first time I saw Jerry Garcia," my young friend Harry (who is said to be a genius in molecular physics, his
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major at Stanford, but nonetheless retains a certain charming innocence in matters of the spirit) was telling me the other day, "was in the Straight Theater up in the Haight in '67. I'd never even heard the Grateful Dead except on the radio; I was just beginning to find out about the head scene in those days. But I just *loved* their music. And when they came on that night—I remember the light show was all these yellow, swirling things going all the way up to the ceiling, it was like *sunshine*—I went up to the front by the stage and stood there lookin' up at Jerry, and I was thinkin' how I'd just never *seen* anyone like this before, this far-out, mellow dude just playin' that rock 'n' roll, the notes so clear and uncluttered, a beautiful, sparkling thing, you know? And so I looked up at Garcia and I just couldn't *help* but smile, it was just that . . . the *calm* on his face, it was like a *Buddha*, you know, like you can see where the *Buddha* is at. Nirvana, you know . . . and Jerry saw me lookin' at him, saw me smiling, and *he* smiled at *me*! And that just blew my *mind*! It was so *different*, this dude was just so *different*, I mean, before that I could *never* have smiled at a rock musician, they were all guys who were just showing off, 'I'm the big stud,' you know. It was all just a big *pose* kind of trip with them, showing off for their chicks and the audience, being tough guys. But *this* dude, I mean you could relate to him *directly*, with just your *eyes* that way. . . ."

It's a late-July Saturday night backstage at the Fillmore West, and out front the Grateful Dead are blasting away on the third and final set of the evening, but I alone of all the 3000 mind-blown music lovers in the hall can't hear them, not at this particular moment, anyhow, because my head has just now bottomed out of one of those bottomless nitrous-oxide tail spins and is only just beginning its swifter-than-the-speed-of-sound ascent, whizzing upward toward a reality I'd just as lief not hurry to confront, thanks all the same, this tiny overheated broom closet of a dressing room with six or seven freaks (foremost among them Zonk the Gasman and his faithful chrome-plated side-kick The Tank, that immortal pair to whose mutual beneficence the rest of us owe this glorious occasion) laid out on the floor in one or another stage of laughing-gas hog-wildness, grunting and groveling and slobbering and scuffling for the hose like so many French pigs rooting after the Ultimate Truffle (one spaced-out little groupie has had about 12 separate and distinct sets of convulsions in the

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past half hour, so many that her seizures have become part of the decor of the high; we anticipate them now, and when it's her turn to toke on the hose, we observe her as coolly as if her drooling rictus and spasmodic shudderings have been provided by the management for our amusement between our own tokes), and up there in the real world, where this particular gas flash is about to surface, I'll be obliged to open my eyes again and deal with the dismal fact that the Dead's final set is well under way and I have yet to really listen to a note they've played all evening, not to mention the equally onerous fact that my tape recorder and my brand-new Official Accuracy Reporter's Notebooks are lost somewhere amid the melee at my feet (I've somehow succeeded, by the way, in commandeering the only chair in the room, an overstuffed old number that's just right for doing nitrous oxide in, since it's so thoroughly rump-sprung I can't possibly fall out of it), and sooner or later I'm going to have to dig them out—the ignominious tools of this ignoble trade, I mean—and Get Down to Bidness, fall by the nearest phone booth and slip into my Front Page Farrell suit so that when the Dead have wrapped up this set I'll be all primed and cocked to zap them with the ole five Ws, the way Miss Parsons taught us in high school journalism (Who-What-Where-When-Why-and-sometimes-How-are-you, Grateful Dead?), when suddenly my head pops through the surface of my consciousness like the bobber on a fishing line that has just been gnawed in two by The Big One That Got Away, and the sound of the Dead catches up to me all in one great roaring rush, the voice of Jerry Garcia amplified to boiler-factory rumbustiousness yet still somehow as sweet and gentle as the purest babbling branch water chiding me:

"Please don't dominate the rap, Jack,
If you got nothin' new to say. . . ."

Oh well, I tell myself happily, settling back into the welcoming embrace of my armchair, probably Jerry's got the right idea there, probably I'd better just have me one or two more tastes on them there noxious gases, just to clear my head, and then I can go out there nice and fresh, all primed and cocked to. . . .

SCENE: *The Dead's business office in San Rafael, where BOB HUNTER, the Dead's lyricist, has just been telling everybody about a friend recently returned from a trip to Cuba. Enter RAMROD, one of the band's equipment handlers.*

HUNTER: Hey, you know who So-and-so talked to? Fidel Castro!

RAMROD: Yeah? Far out! How'd he get his number?

Now the first time I ever saw Jerry Garcia was in midwinter 1965, in Ken Kesey's house up in La Honda. I'm lounging around Kesey's living room, see, and this extraordinarily curious-looking party comes shuffling through. In point of fact, he's the very first true freak I've ever laid eyes on, this somewhat rotund young man with a hairdo like a dust mop dipped in coal tar, and after he's gone Kesey says that was Jerry Garcia, he's got a rock-'n'-roll band that's gonna play with us this Saturday night at the San Jose Acid Test, their name is the Warlocks but they're gonna change it to the Grateful Dead.

At the time, to tell the truth, I wasn't exactly galvanized with excitement by this bit of news; after all, only a few Saturday nights before that I'd attended what I've since come to regard as the Olde Original Acid Test, a curiously disjointed but otherwise perfectly ordinary party at Kesey's house featuring nothing more startling than an abundance of dope and a drunken Berkeley poet who kept loudly reciting Dylan Thomas and, at midnight (hours after I'd gone home, adept as ever at missing the main event), the ritual sacrifice and subsequent immolation of a chicken.

But what I didn't know then was that 400 people would turn up for the San Jose Acid Test, which begat the Palo Alto Acid Test, which begat the Fillmore Acid Test, which begat the Trips Festival, which begat Bill Graham, who (to hear *him* tell it, anyhow) begat Life As We Know It Today. Still, like I said, I couldn't possibly have known that at the. . . .

Michael Lydon (in *Rolling Stone*) on Jerry Garcia: "Some call Jerry a guru, but that doesn't mean much; he is just one of those extraordinary human beings who looks you right in the eyes, smiles encouragement and waits for you to become yourself. However complex, he is entirely open and unenigmatic. He can be vain, self-assertive and even pompous, but he doesn't fool around with false apology. More than anything else he is cheery—mordant and ironic at times, but undauntedly optimistic. He's been through thinking life is but a joke, but it's still a game to be played with relish and passionately enjoyed. Probably really ugly as a kid—lumpy, fat-faced and frizzy-haired—he is now beautiful, his trimmed hair and beard a dense black aureole around his beaming eyes. His body has an even grace, his face a restless eagerness, and a gentleness, not to be confused with 'niceness,' is his manner. His intelligence is quick

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and precise and he can be devastatingly articulate, his dancing hands playing perfect accompaniment to his words."

"The thing about us, I guess, is that we're not really layin' anything on anybody. I mean if you're tellin' people directly how to 'be right,' how to act, how to do, if you're talkin' to people on that level, then the kind of feedback you get is gonna be more of, like, 'You promised me this, man, now where is it?' It's the I-demand-to-speak-to-John-Lennon-personally syndrome. Like, one time this guy came into our office, this fucked-up guy, just walked right up and started staring at me in this intense way, man, and he was so heavy, it was as if he was about to say something really important, you know, really urgent, he looked like he was on the verge of exploding or something, and finally he says, 'Listen, when are you guys gonna get it on,

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man? Because you know scientology's got a good head start!' But it's just the price you pay for standin' up in public, you get stuff comin' back at you, and if you're a little fucked up yourself, you get fucked-up feedback, that's all."

Another summer Sunday afternoon, and I'm driving up to Marin County to see a softball game between—get this—the Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane, and just before I get on the Golden Gate Bridge I pick up this most remarkably scroungy, stringy-haired, snaggle-toothed hippie hitchhiker—"Wheat Germ," he called himself. I swear he did—who says he is bound for Sausalito, and in the slow Sunday bridge traffic I light up a number and rather grandly offer him a hit, all the while coming on (I admit it, I'm freakdom's own Major Hoople) absolutely shamelessly about the Great Moment in Sports

that the editors of a certain National-ly Known Publication have prevailed upon me to cover for them this afternoon, and Wheat Germ coolly takes his toke and lays a fat smoke ring against the windshield, and then goes for the inside pocket of his ragtag old Goodwill Bargain Basement tweed hacking jacket and outs with . . . gasp! . . . a badge? a gun? No, just a saddle-soap tin, the kind that's about twice as big around as a Kiwi can, which he extends to me the way one might proffer a tin of lozenges, and I see that it's full of these little purple tablets, *thousands* of them, tiny lavender pastilles that slither around inside the can like collar buttons when Wheat Germ shakes them gently, saying, through a sudden spray of spittle so dense that, as his excitement rises, I can sometimes almost make out a rainbow in it, "Serve yourself, dad, go on, take some, shit yeah, all you want, me and my brother Yogurt's got a factory up in Sausalito puts out seven hunnert of these tabs an hour, it's good acid, man, I mean I've moved over six million dollars' worth of dope in the last three years and nobody's got burnt yet!"

Yogurt? Six million?

"Shit yeah, over that. And that don't even count the shipload of hash the Interpol narcs shot out from under us down at Yucatán last month! Them Interpol pigs, man, they're all a bunch of Commies or somethin', fifteen hunnert keys, man, straight to the bottom of the Pacific!" (The Pacific? Uh, say there, Wheat Germ, Yucatán is. . . .) "Shit yeah, I mean they tar-petered the mother, man! But I don't give a shit, I got me a crew down there right now, divin' for it, I mean I'll get the bastid back, fucking-A dig it, dad, I deal for all the *big* people, see, the really *heavy* dudes, I mean Janis and me was just like *that*, dig, and whenever I need anything done, I just. . . . I mean I got people all over the fuckin' country workin' for me, man, in my organization. The Syndicate, me and Yogurt call it, hee-hee-hee. Listen, man, are you *sure* you can't use a hit of this acid? Because I was just thinkin', you know, I wouldn't too much mind doin' a little dealin' to them guys, the Dead and the Airplane." He pauses long enough to glance down at the array of Official Accuracy Reporter's Notebooks spread between us on the engine housing, and adds, "Reporter, huh? I can dig it. What are you, dad, a sportswriter or somethin'?"

"I don't have too much trouble with that kinda stuff, dealers and guys like that. Because I think there's a thing to it, like bein' able to say, No, man, I don't feel like goin' on that kinda trip today. And when you learn how to do it, you just don't find yourself in those



"This witches' coven you've joined—is it here in Samford? I don't want to worry about you down in the city at all hours."

situations very often. And it's not necessarily to be putting somebody down, or even to be turning down some kind of energy exchange or whatever, it's just learning to assume that everybody can understand everything, and just tryin' to communicate with that principle always in mind. So I don't have too much trouble with those guys, actually. . . .

Anyhow, I didn't go to the San Jose Acid Test. But a few Saturday nights later I did make it over to a ratty old night club called Ben's Big Beat, in the mud flats beside the Bayshore Freeway, for the Palo Alto Acid Test; and the what's-their-names, the Grateful Dead, they were there, too, Jerry Garcia plucking strange sonic atonalities out of his Magic Twanger, backed up by a pair of cherubic-looking boys named Phil Lesh, on bass guitar, and Bobby Weir, on rhythm guitar, and a drummer—Bill Kreutzmann—who looked so young and innocent and fresh-faced that one's first impulse was to wonder how he got his momma to let him stay out so late, and, mainly, this incredibly gross person who played electric organ and harmonica and sang occasional blues vocals—Pigpen, someone said his name was—beyond a doubt the most marvelously ill-favored figure to grace a public platform since King Kong came down with stage fright and copped out on the Bruce Cabot show. He was bearded and burly and barrel chested, jowly and scowly and growly, and he had long, Medusalike hair so greasy it might have been groomed with Valvoline, and his angry countenance glowered out through it like a wolf at bay in a hummock of some strange, rank foliage. He wore, as I recall, a motorcyclist's cap, crimped and crumpled Hell's Angel style, and heavy iron-black boots, and the gap between the top of his oily Levis and the bottom of his tattletale-gray T-shirt exposed a half-moon of distended beer belly as pale and befurred as a wedge of moldy jack cheese. Sitting up there at that little spindly-legged organ, he looked enormous, bigger than life, like a gorilla at a harpsichord. But the ugly mother sure could *play!* To one as dull of ears as I, who'd always pretty much assumed that the only fit place for organ music outside of church was the roller rink, those ham-fisted whorehouse chords he was hammering out seemed in and of themselves to constitute the most satisfying sort of blasphemy. And sing? The way this coarse-voiced ogre snarled his unintelligible yet unfathomably indecent talkin'-blues phrases would curl the very Devil's codpiece; fathers of teenage daughters must have shuddered in their sleep as far away as Burlingame that night. Verily, he was wondrous gross, was this Pigpen; yet such was the subtle

alchemy of his art that the more he profaned love and beauty, the more his grossness rendered him beautiful. "Far out!" the teeny-boppers and their boy-friends in Ben's Beat kept exclaiming while Pig worked. "Isn't he far fuckin' out!" It was an expression I'd not run into before, but even at first hearing it seemed destined, if only for its com-mo-dious inexactness, to be with us for a good long while. In any case, it accom-mo-dated Pigpen very nicely; he was indeed one far-out gentleman, no doubt about it, none at all.

Summertime, midmorning, and I'm sitting in the living room of what was then Jerry Garcia and Bob Hunter's house, under the redwoods up a canyon in Larkspur, 15 or 20 miles north of San Francisco, sitting there in an old easy chair reworking my notes on last night's three sets at the Fillmore ("An Evening with the Grateful Dead," the show is titled, and Jerry played all three sets, straight through from 8:30 until nearly two A.M., two sets with the Dead and one with their country-cousin stable-mates the New Riders of the Purple Sage, and will do the same tonight and again tomorrow night, yet while he's playing he looks as if he could happily go on forever). While I'm sitting there, Jerry, yawning and stretching and scratching like a freshly dehydrated bear, is pattering around the stereo in search of a record by a vocalist he's so far identified only as "my favorite girl singer," and Jerry's lady, Mountain Girl (a great, gorgeous creature, an Amazon's Amazon, a Valkyrie with raven tresses, the sort of awesome, Venus-of-Willendorf beauty who inspires me to pure press-agent flack-ery, the "one-hundred-sixty-pounds-of-eye-poppin'-pulchritude" school of prose) . . . ahem . . . and as I was saying, Mountain Girl is banging around in the kitchen fixing breakfast for me and Jerry and Hunter (who is right now standing in the doorway blinking myopically behind his enormous, sleep-frazzled Pecos Pete mustache), and Hunter's lady, Christy, is out back playing with Jerry and Mountain's two kids, and Jerry, dark eyes suddenly aglint behind his dandelion-yellow-tinted glasses, hollers "Eureka!" or "Aha!" or whatever and plunges his hand wrist-deep into a disordered stack of albums and comes up with . . . no, no, not Joplin, not Grace Slick, not Joni Mitchell or Joan Baez or Laura Nyro, not even Tina Turner or Big Mama Thornton, but . . . Dolly Parton?

Who'da thought it? Who'd ever have supposed that the favorite girl singer of the spiritual leader of the Heaviest Rock-'n'-Roll Band in the Known World would turn out to be *my* favorite girl singer. . . . Dolly Parton, the fairest wildflower that ever bloomed in Tennessee, the best female country vocalist

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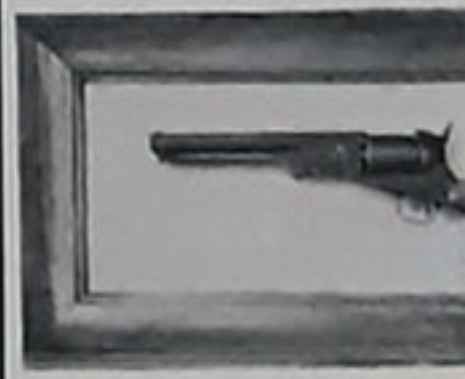
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since the prime of Kitty Wells? Far—how you say?—*flung!* Far fuckin' flung!

Jerry's at the turntable now, flipping switches and adjusting dials, blowing invisible dust off the record with French-maid fastidiousness, delicately plucking up the tonearm, catching it the way one might pick up a small but outraged serpent, with two fingers just at the base of the skull, gingerly almost to the point of reverence, and a moment later the room is filled with the exquisitely melancholic strains of Dolly Parton's mourning-dove-with-a-broken-wing voice, keening,

*In this mental insti-too-shun,
Looking out through these orn
bars. . . .*

It's her beautiful *Daddy, Come and Get Me*, about a girl whose husband has had her committed ("to get me out of his way"), and when Dolly comes to the lines "It's not my mind that's broken / It's my heart," Jerry Garcia, standing limned in soft morning sunlight before the arched front window, turns to me and . . . remember now, this is the Jerry Garcia, Captain Trips himself, the same Jerry Garcia who only 12 hours earlier utterly blew out 3000 of the most jaded, dope-devastated heads ever assembled even at the Fillmore (Dead fans are notorious in that regard) . . . that Jerry Garcia turns to me and clasps his hands to his breast and rolls his eyes after the goofy, ga-ga fashion of a lovesick swain and utters an ecstatic little moan and swoons into the nearest chair . . . and for the next half hour, while our breakfast turns cold in the kitchen, he and Hunter and I sit there in the living room tokin' on a taste of Captain Trips's morning pipe and groovin' on Sweet Dolly's bucolic threnodies about lost loves and dying lovers and stillborn babes, and by the time her last words ("O Robert! O Robert!") fade into silence, I swear to God there's not a dry eye in the room. . . .

It is, I suppose, my unhappy destiny to be eternally numbered among the Last of the First; 'twas ever thus, even in 1966. For by the time I arrived, stoned to the eyeballs, at the Longshoremen's Hall in San Francisco for the final night of the Trips Festival, it had somehow got to be one or two or three o'clock in the morning, and the Dead were packing up their gear and nearly everybody had gone home. Some late-lingerer hanger-on was fiddling with a slide projector, running through old slides that one of Kesey's Pranksters had shot in the La Honda woods, and even as I walked into the vast, almost empty hall there flashed, purely by cosmic coincidence—the *synch*, Tom Wolfe named it—on a giant screen above the bandstand, a gargantuan medium-close-up image of . . . right . . . of *me*, slapped up

there on the wall behind the stage like some kind of weird wallpaper, head and shoulders in monumental proportions, my eyes masked behind a 12-foot span of impenetrably black wrap-around shades and my nostrils as big as manholes and my tightly pursed mouth, a furrow the length of the grave of a good-sized dog, fixed in what I must have intended to resemble a pensive attitude but that now seemed fraught with nameless apprehensions (to tell the truth, for all the time I put in hanging around the edges of the La Honda scene, I never did quite manage to shake off that vague, stranger-in-a-strange-land uneasiness that is the special affliction of us day-trippers); and, dwarfed by my looming monolithic visage, the Grateful Dead and their equipment crews slouched about at their assorted chores, a shadowy platoon of climbers grouping to scale a one-man, two-dimensional Mount Rushmore. All in all, it seemed as appropriate an image as any to remember the Trips Festival by, so I turned on my heel and split as quickly as I'd come.

And that was the very last time I sought out the company of any Rock-'n'-roll Stars whatsoever, the very last time until. . . .

"Looks like you fell in with a bad crowd, man."

Huh? Hoodat said dat?

Jerry Garcia, that's who; Jerry Garcia wading through the jack-strewn corpses carpeting the floor wall to wall, Jerry Garcia grinning down at me, his face swimming slowly into focus, his hairy aspect droll, almost elfin, Jerry Garcia reaching for the guitar case he stashed behind my chair about seven centuries ago when this right was young and so was I. All of which means, lemme see now, all of which means. . . .

Sonofabitch, it's *over!* Three sets, three whole sets of the Sweetest Sound This Side of Pandemonium, five solid hours I've been cuddled up back here in icy congress with a cold tank while out front the Dead were raising a rumpus loud enough to wake the living and set a multitude to boogalooing, and I've scarcely heard a sound all evening long, save the nitrous oxide whistling through the empty chambers of my mind. . . . I mean, great *Scott*, Front Page, you've got a *story* to write, fella, you can't be loafin' around back here on your dead ass when. . . .

Prodded at last by my long-dormant conscience, goosed by good intentions, eyeballs bulging maniacally with the effort to Pull Myself Together, I am halfway to my feet when Jerry, who by now has retrieved his guitar case and made his way back to the doors, turns and halts me with an upraised hand.

"What's your hurry?" he says, still grinning. "The tank's not empty yet, is it?"

I blink as this highly relevant bit of intelligence illuminates my socket-in-consciousness, and when I look again Jerry is gone, vanished like the Cheshire cat, leaving just the memory of his grin hanging in mid-air to mark his passing. And the next thing I know I'm back in my chair once more, and somehow the hose is rising magically, like a fakir's cobra, from the writhing turmoil on the floor to meet my outstretched hand, and I am thinking Yeah, right, just another li'l toke or two for the road, and then I'll get a good night's sleep so I can come back tomorrow night all primed and cocked to. . . .

"An Evening with the Grateful Dead," Fillmore West, first set, raw Official Accuracy Reporter notes considerably refined and amplified after the fact: The Acoustic Dead lead off, Bill the Drummer and the three guitars (all acoustic, no electronic augmentation) and Pig, his electric organ temporarily supplanted by an old upright piano—they open w. *Cumberland Blues*, much fine bluegrass gittar pickin', good downhome lyrics like "a lotta po' man got de cumberland blooze, / he cain't win for looo-zin'"—sounds like it came straight out of Appalachia (didn't tho—Hunter wrote it)—Jerry sings it *just rite*, his husky tenor a power-thru-gentleness sort of trip, almost unnaturally soft but with a kind of lilting gulp that makes me think of Lefty Frizzell or the way Hank Williams sings *Honky Tonk Blues*—JG's voice's sweetness belies its tuffness, and is in perfect counterpoint to the uncompromising pessimism of Hunter's lyrics—seems to me the Dead are carrying their years in this meat-grinder racket really well, aging gracefully—Bobby Weir *still* has the face of a debauched Renaissance choirboy, beautifully modeled features, there are moments when he looks like a dissolute 12-yr-old—when he does backup vocals for JG (or solo, as on *Truckin'* and several others) he sings in a voice not quite his own, the kind of voice that skims across the top of the glottis and comes out sounding like it never plumbed the depths of the throat at all—Pig's piano has that fine country-honkie-Gospel kind of plinking barrelhouse gait that's perfect for the back-to-the-roots thing the Dead are into these days—Pig has somehow shed 50, maybe 75 pounds in the five years since that night at Ben's Big Beat, and now stands revealed as what he was all the time beneath that S. Clay Wilson—ogreish exterior, a fierce-looking *little* guy in cowboy funk, boots and low-slung Levis and oily leather shepherd's coat, a battered Stetson with its rolled brim cocked so low over his eyes that his tough, pinched little face is barely visible above his scraggly goatee, Gabby Hayes with teeth—Phil Lesh almost never surfaces in the group, but is always working behind

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everybody else, providing substance on bass, fleshing out vocals, clowning, goofing around with little hippy-dippy mouth-breather mugging trips, he looks to be the loosest of them all onstage—Bill Kreutzmann is darkly handsome, dour, brooding, solemn, looks "deep" and plays the same way, hunches possessively over his traps and seems almost to lose himself in his own rumbling-hoofbeats-in-the-middle-distance rhythms—he is *never* flashy; his drumming is as steady as the drone of a tamboura, a fixed point around which the guitars work their airy filigrees; tonight's the first time the Dead have tried a strictly acoustic set on the Fillmore audience, and when *Cumberland Blues* is over, a scattering of old-line Dead fans, missing the electronically amplified bedlam of yesteryear, holler "Play louder! Play louder!"—but Jerry, smiling beatifically, steps to the mike and cools them out by explaining, very gently, "No, no, man, you don't understand, this is the part where we play *soft*, and you *listen* loud!"—then they do *New Speedway Boogie*, *Dire Wolf (Don't Murder Me)*, *Candyman* and two or three others, mostly from the *Workingman's Dead* album, then finish off the set with a reverently beautiful and altogether decorous rendition of that All-Time Number-One Sike-O-Deelik Space-Music Golden Oldie *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, everybody loves it, crowd really gets off behind it—a fine, rousing set, looks like a good night. . . .

"I just play the way I play, I play what I like to hear. I don't really think about guitar players anymore, I think about music, I like music, you know what I mean? When I buy records I don't buy guitar players, I buy . . . music. Because all those guys, they're just learning to play the guitar, just like I am, and I don't listen to them much, because that'd be like learning from me. You know? They've derived all their shit from the same shit I've derived all my shit from. No, I listen to the real shit if I'm lookin' for ideas musically, guitarwise and so forth, I go to the masters, not to the other students. Like Django Reinhardt, or B. B. King, you know, guys who really play. But the main thing is that I play music because I love music, you know, and all my life I've loved music, and as I've gotten more and more into lookin' at the whole, over-all thing. And that's where I am now, doin' that. . . ."

Among the habitués of the performers' lounge backstage at the Fillmore is this tall, rangy, loose-limbed, spacy-looking young freak—the Sunnyvale Express, they call him—who, during the breaks, is never far from Jerry Garcia's circle of friends and admirers, usually

toying idly with a guitar, just noodling, picking out disconnected phrases and fragments to underscore whatever conversation is going on around him, nothing special, here a bit of bluegrass, there a snippet of flamenco or a rock riff or what-have-you, anything at all, apparently, that comes to mind. It's obvious he's a Garcia fan, but there is about him none of that earnest innocence and humility that can do so much toward making even us hero worshipers a tolerable lot; rather, the Sunnyvale Express' whole bearing and manner bespeak the languid arrogance of a coxcomb, and a couple of times I've spotted him eying Jerry with a look of ill-disguised envy.

He is here again tonight with his old lady, an impossibly beautiful but otherworldly looking redhead named (brace yourself) The Burning Bush, who paints her eyelids dead black like Theda Bara and wears antique crushed-velvet vamp costumes, the two of them lounging in an old threadbare armchair near the couch where Jerry sits talking animatedly to a rock-magazine interviewer. As I cross the big room toward them, the Sunnyvale Express disentangles himself from the several pale, entwining limbs of The Burning Bush, rises slowly from his chair, takes up his guitar, props one foot on the arm of Jerry's couch and announces, in a voice as somnolent with dope as a sleepwalker's, "Now I'm 'onna play jus' like ole G'cia, here."

And with that he launches into what has to be accounted, at least on the face of it, one of the most dazzling virtuoso performances I've ever heard, clawing great fistfuls of sound off the bass strings even as he picks the high notes off with blinding music-box precision and delicacy, playing, as far as I can determine, no particular song but rather a kind of collage, a mosaic—all right, a *medley*, then—of those staccato riffs that are almost a Garcia signature, not chords but swift, rushing runs of single bass notes in which each note is resonantly, sonorously deep yet somehow clear, sharp, *bright*, never murky or muddy. Closing my eyes, I can at first almost make myself believe it is Jerry himself who is swathing my mind like a swami's turbaned head in layer upon layer of silken sound; but after a minute or so I begin to sense that for all its resonant vibrancy, the Sunnyvale Express' playing desperately wants the very quality that Jerry's is richest in, call it density or warmth or even, if you must, soul, and that the only ingredient the Express can replace it with is a sour mix of envy and insolence and sullen mockery. His playing is technically perfect but as devoid of human feeling for the music as a player piano tinkling away on an empty stage; one whose first interest was in listening to the real thing had as well attend a concert featuring an oyster playing *One Meatball* on the piccolo.

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PHIL LESH: The Grateful
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So it is no surprise to discover, when I look again, that the same old Sunnyvale Express is playing still. Just behind him, leaning forward in her chair, sits the Burning Bush, her dark-ringed eyes glazed with rapture, her right hand lost to the wrist between her lover's parted thighs, cupping and fondling his crotch in the upturned palm. And around them, on the couch and in the other chairs, Jerry and his friends sit listening and watching, their faces stonily impassive. When, after he's played for maybe five minutes or so, the Express senses at last the chilly indifference with which his efforts are being received, he abruptly stops playing, favors his implacable audience with an elaborately phlegmatic shrug and turns and drifts off toward the far end of the room, the Burning Bush floating along beside him, her busy hand now wandering aimlessly, crablike, across his narrow rump.

"Whew, that guy," says Jerry wearily, rising to go out front for his set with the New Riders. "He's, like, my own personal psychic bedbug." Then, brightening, he adds, "But you know, I need guys like him around, everybody does. I mean, they keep us honest, you know what I mean?"

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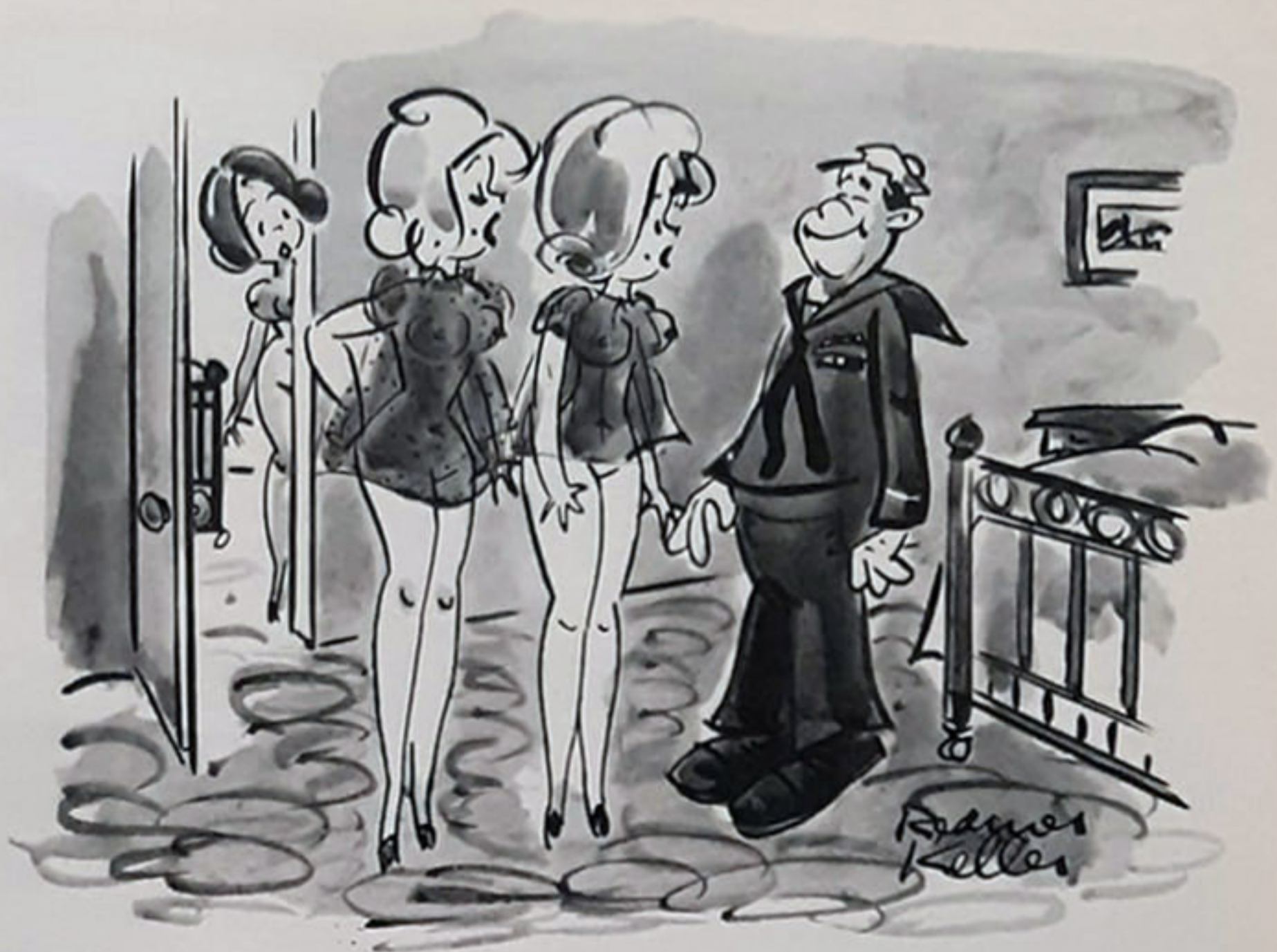
PHIL LESH: The Grateful Dead are trying to save the world.

• • •

"I don't think of music as a craft, see. Like when I'm writing songs, I don't sit down and assemble stuff. Because music to me is more of a flash than a craft, so that somethin' comes to me and that's the thing I'll bother to isolate, you know, the stuff that nudges its way out of the subconscious and you sorta go *Oh!* and suddenly there's a whole melody in your head. And it happens just often enough to seem like a, you know, like a flow, I mean I recognize the mechanism, I know what it is as opposed to everything else. And that ends up to be the stuff I can live with a long time, and that's a thing I think about a lot, too. . . ."

• • •

So here we are, me and ole Wheat Germ, smack in the middle of your typical sunny Sunday afternoon in a small, semirural suburb in upper Marin County, and well under way is your typical softball game in your typical small-town municipal ball park: chicken-wire backstop, rickety wooden bleachers along both base lines, scrofulously barren infield, shaggy outfield—in short your regulation government-issue I-see-Amurrica-playing scene as it is enacted every summer Sunday not just here in Marin County but from sea to shining sea, lots of good cold beer and good fellowship and good-natured umpire baiting . . . and, here today among these particular devotees of the national pas-



"You take him. I'm on a salt-free diet."

time, an abundance of good vibes and good karma and the world's own amount of goooooood dope.

Because the curiously coiffed 50 or 60 fans in the stands here today are not your common ordinary garden-variety bleacherites, those dulcet-toned, under-shirted cigar chompers and their frumpy Cowbell Annies who customarily attend to the umpire baiting on these occasions. Such undershirts as are in evidence this afternoon are brilliantly tie-dyed, and the ladies in the crowd, for all their electrified *Bride of Frankenstein* hairdos, are almost unanimously pretty, not a frump in sight. No more do those improbably befurred gents manning their posts upon the field of combat bear more than a passing resemblance to the Mudville Nine's anonymous opponents, nor is that the Mighty Casey at the bat.

No, sports fans, the awful truth (may J. G. Taylor Spink, up there in the Great Press Box in the Sky, be spared it!) is that the freaks afield are Jefferson Airplanes to a man; and the big-wigged fellow who just struck out, the one who looks like John the Baptist, that's Jerry Garcia, guitarist extraordinaire but a banjo hitter if ever there was one. And the umpire just now being baited, that scowly little dude with the scraggly chin whiskers and the red-white-and-blue backwards baseball cap, is either Augie Donatelli or Pigpen McKernan, choose one.

So far, seen as I am seeing it through the sickly-sweet blue smaze of the dread devil drug, it's been a genuine pisscutter of a ball game—which appraisal has, as

the Great Scorer is reputed to have written, nought to do with who's winning (the Airplane, by about 11 to about six, nobody seems to know exactly) or losing, but solely with *How They're Playing the Game*. For if the Great Scorer ever looked in on this contest, He'd probably take His ball and go home; because these weirdos are simply having much more fun than this moldy old sport was ever intended to provide. Most of them play like the guys who always made the second string in high school but never actually got in a game: lotsa hustle, lotsa chatter on the benches and base paths, no end of hot-pepper razzle-dazzle when they're chucking the old pill around the infield, but complete and utter panic when they somehow get themselves involved in an actual honest-to-god play. The Airplane, for instance, has a beautiful, big-bearded guy wearing bib overalls in the outfield who circles frantically under pop flies like a man with one leg shorter than the other, hollering "Me! Me! Me! Me!" and waving his arms as though besieged by a swarm of bees, but who, to my admittedly none-too-reliable recollection, has yet to lay a glove on the ball. And Jerry Garcia cavorts very impressively around the Dead's hot corner until he sees the ball headed in his direction, at which point he instantly goes into such gleeful paroxysms of excitement that he can't possibly execute the play.

What they lack in skill, though, they more than make up for in *élan*, jawing at Pig and guzzling beer in the on-deck circle and squawking "Whaddya waitin' "

for, *Christmas?*" at batters who don't choose to swing at every pitch within bat's length of the plate. So that when, along about the fifth, Mickey Hart, sometime second drummer for the Dead, bounces one out of the park over the low fence in deep left field, and a furious hassle ensues along the third-base line over whether or not Pig should have ruled it a ground-rule double instead of a homer—both teams storming up and down the base paths and gesticulating wildly and turning the air yet another shade of blue with good old-fashioned cussing plain and fancy—one understands immediately that behind all their histrionics the players are taking enormous delight in burlesquing these hoary old rituals, and at the same time one senses too that behind *that* is a profound and abiding respect—*reverence*, even—for the very traditions they are pretending to make light of. Which in turn goes a long way toward explaining how it is that the Dead, who not long ago were plunging ever deeper into the howling wilderness of electronic exoticism, are now working almost exclusively within the relatively strict, fundamental forms of stay-at-home country music and blues. It may even help explain why Mickey Hart, after he has negotiated the knot of wrangling dialecticians around Pigpen and tagged the plate, trots directly over to where I'm sitting with my ubiquitous notebook spread upon my knee, and says, grinning proudly, "Listen, man, I don't give a shit what you write about my drummin', but you be *sure* and put that fuckin' homer in, OK?"

Anyhow, all those heady speculations aside, there remains one more disconcerting little distinction between today's contest and your run-of-the-mill Sunday softball game; to wit: That unwashed young chap over there, furtively but eagerly proffering first this freak, then that, something or other from the small round tin he's palming, is no peanut vendor. As a matter of embarrassing fact, he's none other than the noted Wheat Germ, my very own millionaire millstone; and judging from the withering scowls his attempts to peddle his wares have been drawing all afternoon, business is bad, exceeding bad. Evidently, the Dead's and the Airplane's respective rooting sections prefer their tradesmen to come on—if at all—considerably cooler than Wheat Germ, who, his self-advertised \$6,000,000 worth of experience in these affairs notwithstanding, has already forgotten the cardinal precept of his chosen profession: *Nobody* loves a pushy pusher. Poor old Wheat Germ; even from where I sit, in the bleachers down near third, it's apparent that he's trying way too hard, buttonholing fans while they're trying to watch Paul Kantner strike out Jerry Garcia, spraying them with the humid spindrift of his enthusiasm, generally conducting

himself in a manner likely to get him a reprimand from the Dealers Association's Ethical Practices Committee if the word gets around.

Which is all the same to me, actually, except that as I ponder the obdurate sales resistance his cheap-Jack wheedling seems to be eliciting in the market place, it begins to occur to me that it just might not be in my best interest to associate myself too closely with this pariah in the present company. After all, despite the unarguable fact that it was my vainglorious boasting of Connections in High Places that brought him here in the first place—thereby making Wheat Germ in a sense the corporeal embodiment of my vanity, my alter ego incarnate—I am nonetheless a Responsible Card-Carrying Member of the Fourth Estate and, as such, it behooves me . . . oh Christ, here he comes now, heading straight for me, wearing the rueful hang-dog look of a man who's just suffered put-down upon put-down, everybody'll see that he's with me and suppose I got no more cool than he does and I'll never get within hollerin' distance of the Dead again and . . . it positively *behooves* me to maintain at all costs my credibility in the eyes of these the subjects of my report to my vast readership, one might almost say I *owe* it to my public to cook this albatross' goose somehow, to sneak away from him or pretend I don't know him or offer to drive him to the bus station or. . . .

We need guys like him, they keep us honest. Jerry Garcia's own true words echoing up from some lost recess of my memory, and even as I hear them I hear too my own voice saying, aloud and straining to convey the heartiness I'm trying hard to feel, yet in a kind of secret harmony with Jerry's words, "Hey listen, Wheat Germ, the New Riders are playin' at the Family Dog tonight, and I've got an extra ticket. You want to come along?"

And as his snaggle-toothed grin chases the despair from Wheat Germ's unlovely countenance, I am smote by yet another Cosmic Axiom, this one more or less of my own making: One man's pain in the ass is the next man's psychic bedbug. Dig it, dad, you never know when you might need one.

PIGPEN: Hey, Magazine, y' wanna know the secret of m' success?

ME (*eagerly*): Yeah, sure, hell yes!

PIG (growling *sotto voce* behind his hand, mock furtive as a Disneyland Foxy Loxy): Take thirty-five percent off the top and *split!*

"Well I think the Grateful Dead is basically, like, a good, snappy rock-'n'-roll band, I mean that's its basic character. So when we do country stuff, for instance, people sometimes tend to think

we've suddenly gotten very pure, very direct. But we don't actually do it very purely or directly at all, compared to, like, Roy Acuff, say. And if we're talking about country music, we have to compare it to those kind of guys. I mean, when we play it, it's still us. . . ."

"An Evening with the GD": fillmore west, second set, new riders of the purple sage: garcia on pedal steel, dave torbert on bass, david nelson on electric guitar, mickey hart on drums, and most of all, marmaduke, nee john dawson, vocalist-lyricist-acoustic-guitarist, lovely little guy all decked out (unlike other deads and new riders in their shitkicker roughrider cowboy funk) in high-style western sartorial splendor, dude duds, hand-embroidered cowboy shirt, hand-tooled high-heel boots, trimly blocked stetson atop incongruously long pale blond locks, a psychedelic roy rogers—they open w. the great dave dudley truck-driver song *six days on the road*, leap blithely from that to the stonies' dope-disease-and-dark-night-of-the-soul song *connection*, then to *henry*, a very funny rock-'n'-rollicker by marmaduke, about the travails of a dope runner (" . . . went to Acapulco / to turn the golden key. . . .") who gets himself involved in a wild keystone kops car chase after sampling his own wares ("henry tasted, he got wasted / couldn't even see. . . .")—crowd *loves* it, fillmore is jammed to the rafters with dead fans by now and they're unanimous in their enthusiasm for the new riders—marmaduke onstage is really something to watch, he's so fresh, so ingenuous, so enthralled by the whole rock-'n'-roll-star trip, even backstage he can hardly keep his hands off his guitar, and out front when the crowd shows it digs him he blushes and grins all over his face and practically wags his tail with delight—new riders do 2 more marmaduke songs, *dirty business* and *the last lonely eagle* (which yr. reporter, ripped again, keeps hearing as *the last lonely ego*, but fortunately does not fail to note that garcia plays brilliantly on it despite the fact that he's only taken up the pedal steel seriously in the last year or so, none of that mawkish, whiny, hawaiian-war-chant rebop; his pedal steel, like his guitar, is crisp and intense, it *weeps*, of course—it wouldn't be a pedal steel if it didn't—but it's properly *melancholy*, never merely sentimental)—then marmaduke does a yodeler that I don't recognize (*yodeling?* in the *fillmore?*), then they finish off the set by bringing the whole house to its feet with the stonies' *honky tonk woman*—as marmaduke, beaming happily, basks in the warm applause, it occurs to me that these guys rank right up there near the top of the lower order of eternal verities: rock-'n'-roll stars may come and go,

but there'll *always* be the sons of the pioneers. . . .

Backstage again, and I've retreated to the remotest corner of the lounge to work for a few minutes on my notes on the New Riders' set. I'm just getting fairly deep into it when I begin to feel that creeping uneasiness that signals another presence, close at hand and watching me intently. I lift my eyes reluctantly from my notebook and find myself face to face with a small child, just a toddler, a little boy about a year old, standing there right next to the arm of my chair, his wide blue eyes fixed on my moving ballpoint. He has rust-red hair, brushed neatly flat, and a round, fair face upon which has settled an expression as solemn as a judge's. And he very definitely does *not*, let it be said here and now for reasons that will momen-

tarily become apparent, resemble Jerry Garcia in any way, shape or form.

"Hi sport," I greet the boy, offering him the pen. "You wanta write something?"

"Oh lord, baby, don't go bothering people that way, sweetheart. Is he bothering you?"

The mother, presumably: a tall, slender blonde, very pretty in a sort of pale, bloodless way, oddly brittle-looking somehow, a china figurine off some Victorian parlor's whatnot shelf, or perhaps, with her plaid wool skirt and cardigan sweater and plastic barrettes and silk stockings and penny loafers, a portrait by Andrew Wyeth. Here amid this tribe of weird Aquarian savages, she seems, in *every* sense that the phrase can conjure, out of time.

"No, he's fine," I reassured her, flipping a page in my notebook for the boy

to leave his mark on. "Let him write; he probably understands it all better than I do anyhow."

"Are you writing something about the band?" she asks. I own up to it and name the magazine I'm doing it for. "Oh," she says, "that's very interesting. Because Jerry Garcia, well, he's, you know," she rolls her eyes significantly toward the kid, who by now is assiduously inscribing his hieroglyphic autograph in my notebook, "he's Little Jerry's father."

Uh, beg pardon, ma'am, but, heh-heh, I could've *sworn* you said. . . .

"His true father, I mean. He's his true father."

My first flash is to those two lines from Jerry's song *Friend of the Devil*, the ones that go "Got a wife in Chino, babe / And one in Cherokee. . . ." But then I cop another quick peek at the weanling at my knee, with his sober delft-blue eyes and that red hair, and instantly the next lines of the song come to mind: "First one say she got my child, / But it don't look like me." Which is to say either that the girl is some kind of shakedown artist, or that she is, as the quaint old phrase so delicately had it, bereft of reason. Because if this kid is Jerry Garcia's offspring, then I am Walter Winchell.

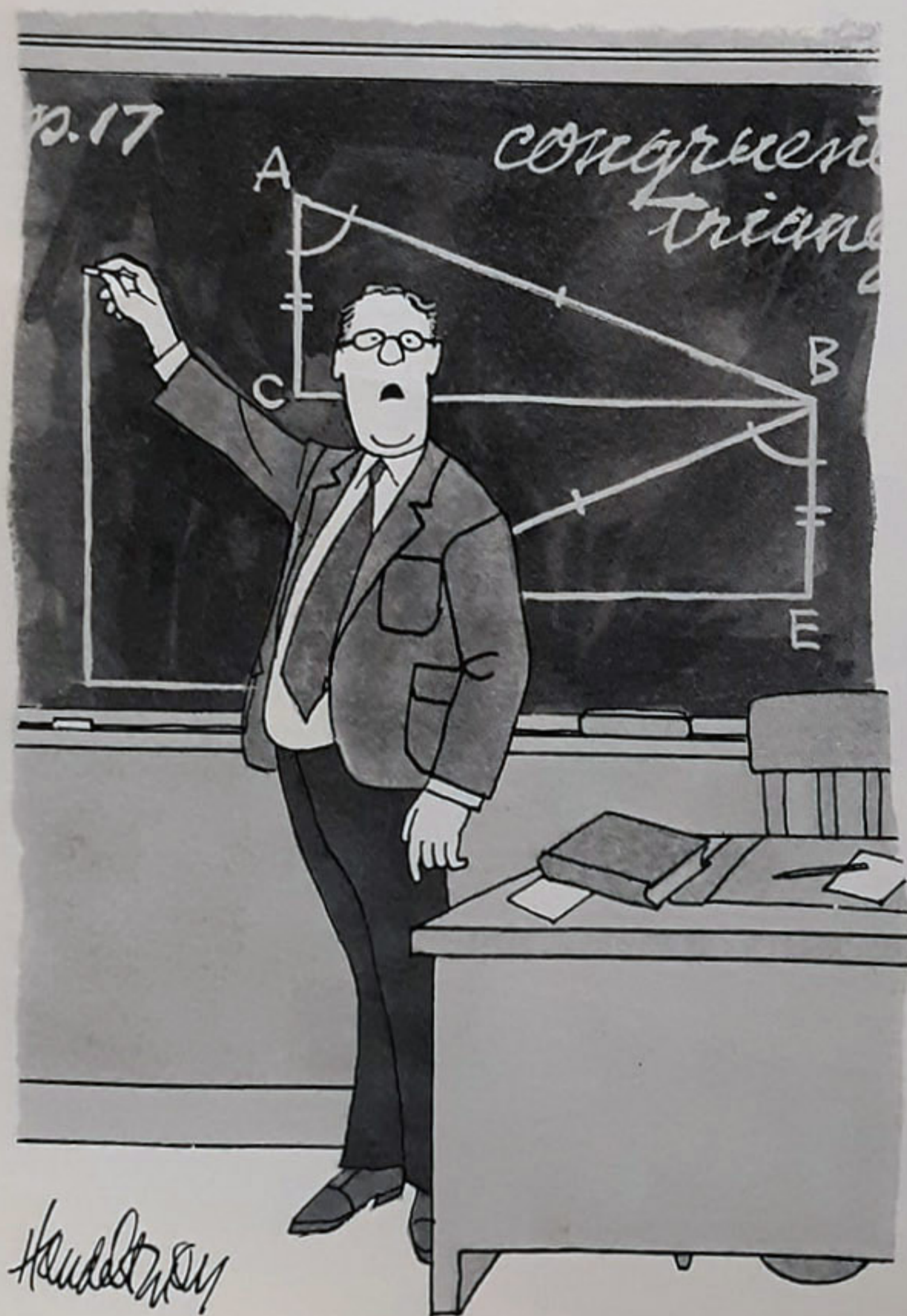
"And you know what?" she hurries on. "I came all the way out here from Stockton on the Greyhound, just so he could see Little Jerry, and I paid my way in tonight just like everybody else, and I talked the door guy into letting me come backstage and *everything*, and then when I said Hi to Jerry and held up the baby to him and all, he acted like, you know, like he didn't even *know* us. Which I just don't understand what's *wrong*, I mean, I sure hope it's not because of something I've, you know, *done* or anything. . . ."

True father indeed. But this time I can plainly hear, through the rush of words, the faint rattle of hysteria that bespeaks a screw loose somewhere.

"I just hope he's not, you know, *mad* at me or something," she adds, bending to scoop up Little Jerry and clutch him defensively to her breast, as if to demonstrate that nothing in the living world terrifies her quite as much as the thought of Jerry Garcia in a snit. "Because I certainly don't know what I could've, you know, *done*. . . ."

My pen slips from Little Jerry's moist grasp and clatters to the floor. Rising to retrieve it, I offer her what meager reassurance I can muster. "I wouldn't worry too much if I were you." I tell her lamely, "Jerry's pretty busy these days, he probably just didn't. . . ."

"I mean, we're *very close*, me and Jerry are. Like, you take the last time I saw him, last April I think it was, why, I just walked right up to him, right on



"Some of you may be wondering what application any of this could possibly have to the real world of drugs."

the street outside this building, and said, you know, Hi! And he said Hi back, and *smiled*, and sort of patted the baby on the *head* and *everything*. And that's why I'm afraid he must be mad about something. Because this time he just, you know, walked right on by like he didn't even *see* us!"

The girl is beginning now to look as distraught as she sounds; her cheeks are flushed and several strands of hair have pulled loose from the barrettes to dangle limply at her temples, and her pale eyes well with tears. She is, as they say, Going All to Pieces, and as her fragile composure shatters I can read in the crazed web of striations a case history of her delusion that, if not altogether accurate in every detail, will answer almost as well as if it were:

Two years ago she was a carhop in a Stockton A&W root-beer stand, and that night summer before last when she got herself knocked up, the redheaded Stockton College dairy-and-animal-husbandry major who took her and two six-packs out on the levee in his Mustang played the Grateful Dead on his eight-track stereo while he pumped drunkenly atop her in the back seat, and she heard, in midzygote as it were, not the redhead's sodden grunting but a true dream lover's voice, his honeyed lips just at her ear whispering what somehow seemed—even though she didn't exactly, you know, *understand* it, quite—the sweetest, tenderest, loveliest thing anybody had ever said to her, ever in her life:

*Lady finger, dipped in moonlight,
Writing "What for?" across the
morning sky. . . .*

Jerry Garcia of course, ready, as always, with the right word at the right moment. And since from that night forward she never once saw or heard from the redheaded dairy-and-animal-husbandry major ever again, whereas she could hear from Jerry Garcia any time she wanted to, merely by playing a Grateful Dead album on the \$29.95 Victor portable stereo she'd bought on sale at the discount store with her first week's wages from the root-beer stand, we-e-e-lll. . . .

"I mean," she whimpers wretchedly, "we don't *want* nothing from him, not one thing. But you'd think he could've at least *rekanized* his own flesh and, you know, *blood*. . . ."

Well, it occurs to me to observe, there are an awful lot of people around here tonight, most likely he really *didn't* see you. But then it also occurs to me that she is already quite clear on that technicality, and that as far as she is concerned it's altogether beside the point; according to her lights, a man is *obliged* to see and recognize the fruit of his own loins in *any* crowd, he is.

And anyhow, before I can utter the first word, the girl suddenly squeaks,

"Oooo! There he *is!*" and takes off for the other end of the room, leaving me standing there dumfounded in a left-over cloud of her tooty-frooty dime-store perfume, still biting the air and trying to think of something to say. She is headed, as you might expect, for Jerry Garcia himself, who stands at the far end of the lounge talking to Pigpen and Phil Lesh and Zonk the Gasman's handsome wife Candace and Bob Weir's beautiful, Garboesque girlfriend Frankie; and as she makes for them I see, over her shoulder, those great blue eyes of Little Jerry's gazing back at me, grave as a lemur's stare.

The girl marches resolutely up to Jerry and thrusts the baby at him and announces herself—I can't hear what she says, but it's doubtless some such commonplace pleasantry as "Allow me to present your own flesh and, you know, *blood*—" And Jerry looks at her with an expression so blankly devoid of recognition that for an instant I'm afraid some hideous little slice-of-life drama is about to happen, that any second now she's going to whip out a .44 and start blazing away at Jerry or herself or Candace and Frankie or whomever a lady in her frame of mind might settle on as a fit target for her ire.

But when at last Jerry's countenance lights up with that fabled beatific smile, and he says Hello or whatever and bends to peer closely at the baby, then at her, and, still smiling, shakes his head, there is even in his denial of them such a palpable quantity of gentleness and generosity that she is utterly disarmed and undone. She blushes and shies and smiles back at him, and after a moment she shoulders the baby once more and goes on out, restored, into the main ballroom. As the door closes after her, Jerry turns back to the others and delivers himself of one of those exaggerated, palms-up-turned, beats-the-hell-out-of-me shrugs, and that's it, it's over, Good karma has triumphed once more over Bad, and playing lead guitar for the Grateful Dead is still quite as safe a calling as, say, playing first base for the Philadelphia Phils in 1949. . . .

"Guys in other bands have that kind of stuff a lot, there'll be five or six chicks runnin' around all the time sayin' they're somebody's old lady, that kind of trip. But we don't get too much of that sort of thing, actually, we're all kind of ugly for that. Ugly but honest, that's us. Hey, there's a good title for you, 'Ugly But Honest.' A'course, we ain't all that honest, either. Maybe just 'Ugly' is good enough. . . ."

"an evening with the gd." fillmore, third set, full complement dead (garcia, weir, lesh, pig, kreutzmann, hart), full electronic amplification—they open w. *dancing in the streets*, a motown-style



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rocker, follow that w. merle haggard's tender honky tearjerker *mama tried*, then it's a man's world with pig doing a very creditable james-brown-in-white-face, then buddy holly's *not fade away*, working through their repertory the way a painter might put together a retrospective, displaying their influences, putting the audience through the same changes the dead themselves have been subject to—it is eclecticism in its very best and highest sense, and the audience, already thoroughly jacked up by the first two sets, is flashing strongly to it—the upturned faces near the stage, awash with the splashover of swirling colors from the light show, seem almost to glow with enthusiasm and delight, and each time the band takes up a different song there arises from out there in the dark a wild chorus of voices, dozens of them from even the farthest corners of the hall, whooping and howling and yipping like coyotes baying at the moon, aa-ooo-aa-ooo-aaaa-ooooo, a savage, animal, tribal thing one knows instinctively they do *only* for the dead, in *honor* of the dead—a christian missionary would get gobbled up in seconds in such a scene as this—now bob weir, looking like a full-color, slick-paper idealization of billy the kid on a dime-mag cover, sings *truckin'*, hunter's leisurely, laid-back ramble about the vicissitudes of life on the road with the dead ("busted / down on bourbon street / set up / like a bowlin' pin. . ."), puts me in mind of those old-timy toddlin' tunes like *side by side*, only with more substance, gene kelly and donald o'connor with soul—they follow that with two more hunter songs, *uncle john's band* and *casey jones*, and by the time casey ("drivin' that train / high on cocaine. . .") is highballing down the track toward that fateful encounter with train 102, the crowd is on its feet and chugging up and down, it is the train, a great joyous surging mass of energy hurtling headlong into the uncharted darkness of the future—and it doesn't stop when the song ends but charges right on into *love light* with just the scantest pause to catch its breath, pig taking the throttle now, strutting around onstage with his tambourine whirring in his hand and his hat cocked low and mean, *dangerous*, snarling and fierce ("i don' want it all! / i jes wanna leetle bit!"), his exhortations as raw and lewd and laden with insinuation as a carnival kootch-show pitchman's hype ("git yo' hands outta yo' pockets and turn on yo' *love light!*"), and every now and then i seem to hear a line of such brazen, unbounded lickerishness ("dew yew lak ta fu-u-u-uckkkk?") that i start and blink and wonder did he really say that?—and the whole thing builds and builds, 10 minutes, 15, 20, and now the audience is clapping to keep time, they have joined the dead en masse as one enormous synchronized syncopated single-minded rhythm section, taking up the beat from

bill the drummer's tom-tom and making it their own, *insisting* on it, *demanding* it, and the dead are delightedly handing it over to them, one by one laying down guitars and drumsticks and leaving the center of the stage to pig and jerry, first weir, then hart and lesh, then even bill the drummer, leaving their posts to join the crew of groupies and quippies and buddies and wives and old ladies at the rear of the stage back against the light-show screen among the throbbing blobs, greeting friends and accepting tokens on whatever gets passed their way, beer or joints or cokes or ripple, and just jerry and pig and the audience are left to mind the music, jerry's guitar weaving incredible intricacies in front of the rhythmic whipcrack of applause, pig chanting his unholy litany (" . . . so come awn bay-beh, baby please, / i'm beggin' ya bay-beh, and i'm on my knees. . .") like a man possessed by a whole mob of randy, rampant demons, and now jerry too puts down his guitar and leaves, and it's just pig up there alone with his tambourine and his snarl (" . . . turn on yo' *light*, all i *need*. . .") and his 3000-man rhythm section keeping time, *keeping* time, i've never before considered (" . . . huh! . . .") what that expression really means, the crowd has undertaken to tend and cherish the beat until the band comes back (" . . . i jus' got ta *git* sum, it's all i *need*. . .") and resumes its stewardship, the whole arrangement amounts to a very special kind of trust, we are (" . . . huh! . . .") not just audience but keepers of the flame, we are *of* the grateful dead, *with* them (" . . . got ta keep pooshin', all i *need*. . .") and *for* them and *of* them. . .

BLAM!

It's the crack of doom or the first shot of the revolution or anyhow a cherry bomb that Pig has somehow set off just at his feet, a cloud of dense gray smoke still boils up around him, no longer any doubt about it, he is plainly a satanic manifestation, and without my noticing them the other Dead have stolen back to their places and taken up their instruments, and at the signal of the cherry bomb the song blasts into life again, the decibel count is astronomical, the crowd is shrieking in one hysterically ecstatic voice and the volume of the music is so great it swallows up the very shriek itself; by a single diabolic stroke a multitude 3000 strong has suddenly been struck dumb, the din is enough to wake even the moldering spirits of those moribund old poets who once set myriad toes atapping in the hallowed hall, I can almost see them now, Vaughn Monroe and Wayne King the Waltz King and Clyde McCoy and Ginny Sims and the Ink Spots and Frankie Yankovic and Ralph Flanagan and the Hilltoppers and Kay Kyser and His Kollege of Musical Knowledge and Horace Heidt and His Musical Knights

. . . a whole host of phantoms, troupers to the last, crawling out of this old wormy woodwork and rising up from the rankest, dankest depths of the memory of man to join the living Dead for one last encore, just *listen* to the racket, Bill the Drummer's heavy artillery is pounding at my temples and Mickey Hart is laying into his four great shimmering gongs until the pandemonium itself is all atremble with their clangor and my back teeth taste of brass, and Lesh and Weir are ripping furiously at the faces of their guitars and the crowd is screaming as if that enormous palpitating blood-red blob of light behind the band were the flaming dawn of doomsday, and Jerry's guitar is winding out a shrill silvery coil of sound that spirals up and up and up until, whining like a brain surgeon's drill, it bores straight through the skull and sinks its spinning shaft into the very quick of my mind, and Pig, a rag doll buffeted by hot blasts of ecstasy gusting up from 3000 burning throats, flings himself into a demented little St. Vitus's dance of demonic glee and howls the kamikaze cry of one who is plunging headlong into the void, the last word beyond which *all* sound is rendered meaningless as silence. . . .

YEEEEEEEE-

O-O-O-O-OOWWWWWWWWWW!

“When I talk about musicians, I’m talkin’ about people who make *music*, not just people who are technically perfect. Music bein’ That Thing Which Gets You Off, I mean that’s just my definition of that word. And when you’re playin’, and really Gettin’ Off that way, it’s like when you’re drivin’ down a road past an orchard, you know, and you look out and at first all you can see is just another woods, a bunch of trees all jumbled up together, like there’s no *form* to it, it’s chaos. But then you come to a certain point and suddenly—zing! zing! zing!—there it is, the *order*, the trees all lined up perfectly no matter which way you look, so you can see the real *shape* of the orchard! I mean you know what I mean? And as you move along, it gets away from you, it turns back into chaos again, but now it doesn’t matter, because now you *understand*, I mean now you *know* the secret. . . .”

Want ad in the *Berkeley Barb*:

GRATEFUL DEAD FREAK, 16, wants to write same, long-hair only, guy in Bay Area. No gay. Need love, warmth. Titus Canby, Box 700, Milpitas, Calif. 95035. Any age.

Hmmm, lemme see now. . . Dear Titus: I am a 38-going-on-39-year-old long-hair Grateful Dead Freak, no gay, and . . .

