

Paul Gebhart returned from a one year tour of duty in Vietnam with an un-diagnosed case of post-traumatic stress disorder. His solution was to self-medicate himself but that turned out to be disastrous for his marriage. His wife of ten years will no longer put up with his behavior. She forces him out of their house and begins seeing new people.

Inner Lights

by Michael Alan Shapiro

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Michael Alan Shapiro

INNER LIGHTS



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Chapter Three

On 40th Street

My brother, Stephen drove the rental U-Haul truck out of the driveway of my apartment house and worked his way through traffic. He found the on-ramp to Highway 1 outside Capitola and gunned the engine to bring us up to highway speed. The rental truck was loaded with cardboard boxes holding my worldly possessions and behind it we towed my blue MGB. The cab of the truck smelled of stale cigarettes. The red vinyl seats were dirty and stained and the dashboard dinged up from a thousand rides.

"I've past these places so many times," I said as I looked at the scenery along the coast. "I never imagined I would be leaving town like this."

Stephen concentrated on joining the flow of traffic. His brown hair bleached with golden highlights from the hours he spent at the beach. His tan face had premature wrinkles around his eyes.

"It may feel like you've lost," Stephen said as he looked to the left to check traffic, "but you've won your life back, Paul. Your marriage was over" he looked at me now. "How many people marry at twenty and stay together their entire lives?"

"Not many," I said, "but people stay together until their kids are grown."

"And you know how bad it would have gotten by then? Besides, Mary wasn't going to let it go on. She needed to find her next husband while she is still young enough to attract a man."

I felt the sharp edge of a knife in my gut. The thought that Mary was trying to attract another man turned the blade and I grimaced from the pain.

"Now you have your life back," Stephen went on. "It's a big world out there, with lots of great women and lots of great places. You're free to live your own life like you didn't get to do before."

“Do you realize mine is only the third divorce in our family?” I said, “Aunt Esther’s, Cousin Eddie’s and now mine. It just isn’t supposed to happen.”

“Forget that, Paul. It does happen. The question is where to from here?”

I thought for a moment, “I want to paint,” I said, “stupid as that sounds. I’d like to be able to make a living by painting or writing.”

“Okay, so take some time off and give it a try.” Stephen smiled. He seemed pleased with my ambition. He and I both wanted to be writers. We each had written short stories and poetry but neither of us had ever sold anything.

“I’m going to,” I said. “I have enough money saved so I don’t have to work for a while. I expect to pay you rent, but pretty much I can lay back this summer and paint. Maybe I can sell something, who knows?”

“You know they have street fairs at the beach,” Stephen said. “You can rent a booth and show your paintings there.”

“Yeah? Okay, that’s an idea. Now all I have to do is to paint something good enough.”

Six hours after leaving my life in Santa Cruz, we drove along the ocean south of Playa del Rey. Surfers rode two-foot high waves as overhead, jetliners cleared the dunes of LAX. The sound from their jet engines wiped out our small talk for a mile. Up ahead, two tall smokestacks from a large electric facility spewed a column of white smoke into the sky. Despite the noise and smog, the beaches were crowded with people.

Five miles further south, the highway entered the section of Manhattan Beach known as El Porto. Stephen pulled off to the side of the road and we unhooked my blue MGB and I drove it behind him through town. Driving into Manhattan Beach along the main street, Highland Avenue, there are on- and two-story buildings lining each side of the boulevard. Restaurants, bars, several Laundromats, convenience stores, reality offices and apartment houses all crowd together. Stephen made a right down 40th street. It was steep and

narrow and connected Highland Avenue to the beach. He parked the rental truck in his driveway.

The houses along 40th Street, from Highland Avenue down to the Strand, were all different ages and architectural types. But they were similar in that they were all two or three stories high and except for one eight-unit apartment house, were all single-family homes. The houses ranged in age from Stephen's, which was built in the 1920s to several just now under construction. Beach properties with narrow lots, the buildings fairly scraped each other between alleyways. The houses in the neighborhood shared two other things in common; all were built to get every possible view of the beach and ocean. They used outside porches, upper story decks and wall length windows as each owner found a way to incorporate the beach life into their homes. The other thing they all shared was the noise from the continuous traffic of cars leaving the beach parking lot. Because of its steepness, the autos, trucks and motorcycles had to gun their engines to make it up the grade. The din of racing motors was a constant background noise for life on 40th Street.

Stephen rented a house a few hundred feet from the beach. The house was fifty years old and an unusual mix of Tudor and Spanish styles. The outside walls were natural stone. Two round dormer windows in the living room above the garage jutted out from each corner of the second story. They looked like parapets of an old castle. The weather-beaten front door opened to a very steep stairway. On the steps half way up, I saw a paint can with its lid off and a paint brush sticking out of it. The paint matched the color of the stucco walls but the paint in the can had long ago dried up. I surmised that two or three months ago, Stephen had taken on the task of painting the stairwell walls. Having finished, he just left the half empty paint can; went upstairs to get a cold beer out of the refrigerator and forgot about it. How he could walk by it every day for months without noticing it, well that was my brother's special talent. Charming and relaxed, few things and certainly not open paint cans, bothered him. At the top of the stairs a

west facing window in the landing allowed bright sunlight into the living room. Turning right at the landing, I walked into the living room. A dozen plants hung in clay pots from the open beamed ceiling. Prints of sailboats and photographs of Native American Indians were on the white stucco walls. An old, beat up piano was along the left wall between the living room and kitchen. A brown couch along the far wall had a wooden coffee table in front of it. Stephen's bookcase and stereo system were opposite the couch. In the far-right and far-left corners of the room, the parapet's rounded windows let in a full view of the Strand and the Pacific Ocean a block away. In the right dormer corner, an antique wooden desk held stacks of unorganized papers.

I went through the living room into the hallway; to the right was the larger of the two bedrooms, to the left, the other bedroom and straight across the hall, the only bathroom.

I went to the bathroom, washed and tried to dry my hands with towels that hadn't been changed in a month. I opened a closet in the hallway and took out a fresh towel, wiped and went back downstairs. Stephen, his shirt off, had opened the U-Haul truck and was unloading my boxes out on the driveway. We carried my suitcases up the steep steps and into the smaller of the two bedrooms. Stephen went back downstairs for another load but I stayed and struggled to open the window. The room was airless. I managed to force the old window a third of the way open but was immediately stung by the odor of dog feces. Holding my hand over my nose, I leaned out the window and looked down into the fenced-in backyard. On what had once been a lawn, there lay the carcasses of three bicycles, rusted now and without seats or tires. A blue plastic tarpaulin covered over some other items and everywhere piles of dried up dog turds. I struggled to close the window. Finally getting it down, I went back to the truck to help Stephen. We stored my other boxes and a few pieces of furniture into the already overcrowded and disarranged garage.

"There's no parking anywhere along 40th Street," Stephen said. He pointed to my sports car parked along the curb.

“You’ll have to move until we return the truck and you can fit in the driveway. They’ll tow you if you don’t.”

“Sure, okay,” I said. I got my keys and went to get back into the MG but I had to catch my balance. The slope of the street was at least 60 degrees. Gravity pulled the door open and kept it open. In the driver’s seat now, I leaned full out and slammed the door shut, started the engine and drove around the block until I found an empty meter on Highland. Walking down the hill back to the house on 40th Street, I heard loud, thumping rock music from several of the apartments. Surf boards and boogie boards lined some of the balconies and I smelled the strong pungent odor of marijuana. In the driveway two houses from Stephen’s, a spray painted, multi-colored van had large iridescent balloon letters spelling LOVE painted on one side panel.

I recalled our summer vacations at the Jersey shore when we were kids. Stephen’s lifestyle incorporated those care-free days. He worked in the teamsters’ union of the motion picture industry. He was able to earn enough on a six-week movie, collecting overtime and meal penalties so he didn’t have to work for the next eight weeks. It seemed right too, living as a Bohemian, that is. Both of us had been anti-establishment. Having fun was number one, and fun meant women and getting high.

The weather in L.A. was fine. The beach life was a vacation from the adult world. I felt free, sort of, but I felt too the ever-present yearning to see my children, Ava and little Noah. I wanted to talk to them but I knew I couldn’t call them. I mean I could call them but telephone conversations with them were unsatisfactory; not immediate enough of an experience for a child. Talking on the phone was boring for them and frustrating for me. I could never find the words to explain what had happened to our family. They would never understand what I was going through. Then I thought, listen, I shouldn’t worry about them. They’re okay. They’re kids and in the moment and having fun. That’s their job. I was the lost one, even as I tried to enjoy a single day.

Stephen was sitting on the couch cursing as I reached the top of the stairs.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Pamela left a note for me on the bed." Stephen crumbled a piece of paper and threw it at the wastepaper basket by the desk. "She's moved across the street."

"Huh? I don't understand," I said.

"Me neither. She's moved in with Ken, the guy across the street."

"What? While you were gone two days to help me?"

Stephen didn't answer. He sat on the couch looking out the parapet window. "Was it because of me moving in with you?" I asked.

"No," he answered downcast. "No, it's not you." He looked up at me. "She's dumped me for him."

"Oh, geez. The guy across the street? Did you know this was going on?"

"I had no idea they were even seeing each other."

"Jesus, I'm sorry, Steve."

"Yeah, well she was being a jerk anyway. We were fighting over everything."

"You two were together for how long, what six months?"

"About that, yeah. Geez, this sucks. I mean I still have to see her right across the street. You'd think the two of them would have moved away."

I didn't say anything.

"How about some dinner," I asked after a few minutes. "Are you hungry?"

"Yeah, okay," Stephen said. "Let's go up to El Tarasco's and get some take out."

We walked up to Highland, made a right, walked two blocks to Rosecrans, crossed the street and stood in line at a small hole in the wall restaurant. The setting sun bathed us and the street in a golden hue.

We brought containers of burritos, enchiladas, rice and beans and drinks and carried it back to the house and unloaded it onto the kitchen table. The kitchen was ancient.

Aged and yellowed linoleum floors, a fifties style chrome Formica table. The decrepit faucet dripped a constant flow of water into the once white porcelain sink. The gas stove was an old, old affair. At the far end of the kitchen, a shelved pantry led to the backdoor stairway. The smell of dog feces from the backyard made me nauseous.

"I can't eat here," I said. "That smell is too much." I brought my plate into the living room and put it on the coffee table and turned the television on. Stephen joined me. I noticed that he looked out the window each time he heard a car drive by. I couldn't tell if he felt relieved or disappointed when it wasn't Ken's car.

"We have to do something about the smell, Steve," I said. "It's disgusting."

"Yeah, I try to keep it clean but Abbey's shits are powerful."

"When was the last time you cleaned it up?"

"I don't know, six or seven months ago."

"Six or seven months! Man, no wonder it stinks." Abbey heard her name so she came over to be petted. "No offense, girl." I said as I scratched behind an ear for her.

After dinner, I sat on the desk looking out the parapet front window at the beach and the sunset. A dozen surfers rode the last waves before dark but everybody else was packing it up. The fragrance of saltwater was on the gentle ocean breeze that came through the screen-less window. I leafed through Stephen's rolodex on top of the desk. There seemed to be no order to the cards. They weren't filed under the person's last or first name. "How do you find someone in here anyway?" I asked.

"I just know where they are," Stephen said from the couch where he was reading.

"You know where they are?" I looked over at him. "I don't understand. They're not filed by alphabet."

"Yeah they are."

"Michael Mulnar is in with the Jays," I said as I read one of the hand written cards.

"He's John Sima's friend," Stephen explained.

“Ah, I see,” I nodded, “so it’s by relationships.”

“Pretty much.” Stephen laughed.

The next day I went down the back steps and while wearing a bandanna over my nose and mouth that I soaked with a can of Coca-Cola, I filled three large trash cans with dog shit. I went back upstairs and dosed the bandana with a can of tomato juice. Refortified, I went back into the yard of dead dog shits and filled two large, black plastic trash bags and dragged them down the narrow alleyway to the curb for pick up. I needed a long, brisk shower after that mess so I went into the ancient bathroom and ran the shower. I wasn’t surprised that the water flow from the showerhead was only slightly more powerful than the kitchen sink’s dripping faucet.

After a very long shower, turning and turning my body under the dripping water, I dressed and went downstairs. I found a box with one of my blank canvas among the mess in the garage and I set up my easel at the large parapet window in the living room. I decided to paint Ken’s yellow, one story house across the street. A warm sea breeze carried the scent of the ocean and sun tan lotion through the open window. An hour later, a white Ford van pulled into the driveway. Ken was in his twenties. He had long blond, curly hair. His face was puffy from a hangover but it didn’t detract from his good looks. Pamela was a brunette. She wore a white short-sleeve blouse and white tennis skirt. She had long, tan, athletic legs. She noticed me in the window and waved. “I’ll be right back.” I heard her say to Ken as he carried their groceries into the yellow house. I watched her cross the street and without knocking, open the front door and walk up the steep stairs into the living room.

“Hi, I’m Pamela,” she said as she came into the room. She was even prettier up close. Her thin nose and high cheekbones were shaped like a woman on a Grecian urn. Her mouth was wide with thin lips and sparkling white teeth set in her perfect, Hollywood tan face. Her dark brown eyes were intelligent and inquisitive. But it was her sensual, physical presence that filled

the room. She was aware of it and she used it, flirting like a kitten.

"I'm Steve's brother, Paul," I said as I glanced at her chest. The three top buttons were unbuttoned.

"It's hot out," Pamela said feeling my stare. "Is Stephen home?"

"No, he's at the laundromat."

"Tell him I'd like to talk to him. Say, are you painting that?" She went past me and stood in front of the unfinished canvas. I didn't answer. "It's pretty good," she said. She rested her head on her hand and studied it. "It's kind of abstract," she said, turning toward me. "I mean the lines aren't very straight," she pointed to the outline of the yellow house, "and the shadows need to be worked, but I like it. I really do. It has an impressionistic feeling."

"Thanks, just practice," I said.

"Come by for a drink tonight," Pamela said as she turned again to face me. "You should meet Ken; he writes and paints too."

"Sure, if it's okay with Steve," I reminded her of the situation.

"Is he mad?" Pamela asked.

"Well, yeah, I guess you could say that. He didn't talk much about it except to say it was unexpected."

"God," she half laughed, half groaned. "We screamed and yelled at each other for two weeks and he says it's unexpected."

"I mean about moving in across the street with Ken," I said.

"Oh, well that just happened, nothing planned. I needed to get out of here."

"Okay, well, I'll tell him you came by," I said.

"Thanks. Nice to meet you."

I watched her walk away; her buttocks swinging discreetly but nicely. I had the feeling it was a practiced walk.

An hour later, I was still at the painting when I saw Stephen come down the street with Abbey. He carried a large laundry tub, overflowing with sheets, towels, jeans and shirts.

Abbey had a long piece of beef jerky held like a trophy in her mouth.

"Pam was here," I said as Stephen lumbered up the steps and into the living room. He dropped the laundry basket and fell in a heap onto the couch.

"Oh yeah?" Stephen said as he gasped for air. "I saw Ken's van outside," he said, out of breath. "What'd she say?"

"She wants you to call her. She wants to talk."

"Okay, thanks," Stephen said. Abbey licked his face and Stephen closed his eyes and lifted his head back but not before Abbey got in a few good swipes. "Okay, knucklehead, that's enough," he said and pushed her away.

That Friday night I sat on the desk; dressed and waiting for Stephen. The ocean's rhythmic pounding filled the house. White capped waves reflected the bright moonlight. We had all the windows open and the cool ocean breeze swept through the living room. It was single's night all over America. I could feel that in the air too. Someone was going to get laid tonight and thousands were going to try. It had been years since I was single and I was new at the bar scene so I didn't expect any victories but Stephen convinced me I should go out with him.

"You can't score if you're not in the game." Is how he put it so we were on our way to McFly's in Santa Monica.

I drove the MG and Stephen directed me to Lincoln Boulevard, down Washington and over to Rose Avenue. We parked behind the club and went inside. A jazz trio played in the corner of the room. Stephen and I stood one deep from the bar and ordered beers. I sipped mine and surveyed the scene.

"I'm lost," I said. "I don't know who I am anymore. I'm so used to being married and doing everything with the kids and Mary."

"Well now you're free," Stephen said. "You'd better learn to enjoy it too. I'll tell you one thing though, Paul, nobody wants to be with a depressed person."

"No, I know but it's difficult, Steve. I don't think you can really understand how hard it is. You've never been married.

You don't have two kids your heart is aching to see. I need to meet someone soon so I can start to feel good about myself."

"That's what I'm talking about, man," Stephen said shaking his head. "You've got to feel good about yourself first, even if you're only acting. Nobody wants to be around sad people."

"I'm not such a good actor," I said.

"No, you're not, but you'd better learn. I'm telling you, Paul, your sad face isn't going to attract anyone."

"Excuse me. Can my friend and I squeeze in to get a drink?" She was a tall brunette in a short red dress. Stephen flashed his charming smile.

"Sure," he said. "What are you drinking?"

"I'd like a gin and tonic, thanks."

"And your friend?"

"An iced tea, please." The friend was a shorter blond with a pixie nose and blue eyes.

"I'm Stephen. This is my brother, Paul."

"Jeanette, nice to meet ya." Jeanette squeezed closer, the crowd behind her pushed us all together.

"I'm Cat," the blond said. She shook Stephen's hand and smiled at me.

While Stephen and Jeanette talked, I noticed Cat looking around the room.

"Are you from Santa Monica?" I asked her.

"No, Venice," she said. "I hate these bars. The vibes in here are terrible. Look at them all trying to get laid, but acting cool. It's all so phony." She lifted her arms, held her hands, palms out towards the crowd, and let out a long, loud, high shrill note that came down octaves as her breath ran out. The bar was noisy but a few people stopped to stare at her. I stared at her too. "OOOOOOOooooooooooooommmmm Tee – She - He."

"Well that cleaned the place up." I laughed as she came to the end and turned toward me. I toasted her with my beer and she laughed.

We exchange a few pleasantries, where are you from, what do you do but then she said, "C'mon, get me out of here."

"Sure," I said. "Where're we going?"

"Why don't we drive up the coast through Malibu?"

"I have my car," I said, "but Steve won't have a way home."

"We can take my car," she said. "I'll get you home."

"Sounds good." I nudged Stephen. "Here's a ten for our drinks and the keys to the MG. We're going to take a drive up the coast."

Stephen's eyes widened in disbelief.

I shrugged my shoulders and smiled. "It must have been my sad face."

"And quick too!" Stephen laughed.

Cat's yellow VW Bug was parked in a tow away zone behind McFly's.

"You're lucky they didn't haul you off," I said as I opened the door for her.

"Not lucky," she said. "I gave the car a good sonic clearing before I left."

"Well, it worked."

I pulled into traffic and took Pacific Coast Highway through Malibu. At Sunset Beach, I parked on the side of the road and took the blanket Cat kept in the back seat.

"Watch your step," I called back to her as we made our way over dark boulders. The pounding of the waves onto the sand filled the night with a roar of white sound.

I waited for her to catch up. "Here, this way," I said and chose a path across the boulders and she followed. Lights from passing headlights guided us down to the beach.

I spread the blanket on the sand and Cat took off her shoes and went to the surf line. The waves' white bubbles lapped over our feet then quickly disappeared as the water rushed back out to sea. I stood next to her and she leaned into me.

"This is much better," she said.

"It's poetic," I said.

"Poetic?" she asked.

"The waves are white," I said, "like ice cream. The huge, hard boulders behind us are a castle's walls."

“Or big chocolate chips.” Cat laughed and held my hand. I turned to her. She came closer and we kissed. Our tongues touched. I felt her small, round breasts and put my hand under her dress. She felt my hard penis.

We made love on the blanket and I sat up after and wiped sand off of my arm and out of my hair.

“The only problem with the beach is it has too much sand,” I said.

She laughed again. “Okay, so let’s go back to my place and take a hot bath.”

“Now that’s a plan,” I said.

We gathered the blanket and re-climbed the fortress boulders and I drove in the slow lane from Malibu south to Venice Beach. Cat lived in a detached cottage behind a house on a quiet side street two blocks from the Strand. She let us in the door and turned on one light by the couch. I relaxed in a bean bag chair with a glass of red wine while she filled the tub with steaming hot water and lit candles. I watched her through the open door as she stripped and went into the bubbles. I went in and sat on the side of the tub.

“Why don’t you join me? The hot water is relaxing,” Cat said.

I stripped and cautiously entered the steaming bath. The candles’ filled the apartment with a gentle light and we made love again, Cat on top.

In the morning she dropped me off at Stephen’s. I showered, filled a bag with socks, jeans and underwear; ate breakfast and returned to Cat’s place in my MG. I parked in her driveway and walked to her front door. She left me a note on her door which read, “Paul, I’m on the beach at the end of the block.”

I walked to the Strand, making my way through and around the traffic of bike riders, joggers and roller-bladders. I stopped several times to watch jugglers, one-man-bands, limbo dancers and winos. Farther down, I saw Cat kneeling in the sand a few yards off the sidewalk. She was over a middle-aged woman lying on a blanket and I could hear her chanting

even above the din of noise that was Venice Beach. Her “Om” was a long, drawn out song that lasted for minutes. As she sang it, she floated her open palms a few inches above the woman’s body, starting at her feet and ending at the top of her head. The woman lay peacefully on her back with her eyes closed. A young man and his girlfriend waited for their turn. There was a hand-painted, brightly colored sign next to the blanket that advertised, “Sonic Cleansings”.

“How much do you charge?” I asked Cat after she had finished the last two customers. She counted out her morning’s take. “I don’t have a set price. Some people leave a dollar, some leave twenty. It’s whatever they want.”

“Let’s go out to Zuma Beach,” she said as she put her money into a cloth purse and folded the blanket.

“Where is that?” I asked.

“Past Malibu, but let me change shoes first.”

We went back to Cat’s and she changed shoes and her clothes while I sat on a bean bag in the living room. She had a stick of patchouli incense burning. Sunshine flooded into the room through the windows. I felt relaxed. Cat’s lifestyle reminded me of my hippie days in Santa Cruz. She came out of her bedroom in a red mini skirt and pink tank top.

“You look terrific, Cat,” I said and she smiled.

I liked having her in the car with me. I drove the blue MG with the top down. We went north, past the pier at Santa Monica, past the houses along the Malibu corridor, past Sunset Beach to Zuma. I found a parking place at the far end of the parking lot and we climbed a well-worn trail up the steep sandstone cliff. The day was sunny and clear; a steady ocean breeze ruffled through our hair. White cumulus clouds sailed over the ocean. At the top of the cliff, we sat on boulders looking out at line after line of hypnotic surf.

“This is a poem too,” Cat said.

“It is,” I agreed.

“Describe it for me,” she asked.

“On the cliffs above the beach,” I said without thinking, “breaking waves, and white clouds in blue sky. The sea wind

caresses us. How long has this been going on? How long will it be after we're gone?"

"I like that, Paul," Cat said. "Have you ever written your poems down?"

"I've written a few novels and books of poetry but no one is interested in publishing me."

"Is that what you really want to do?" she asked.

"I would like to create something that will last," I said. "Something, a painting or a novel that becomes a part of our culture. So far I haven't been good enough to produce anything of value." I turned back to look out at the far horizon. "Nothing that the world wants anyway."

"Your painting and your writing are important," she said. "Not because they may sell and make you famous but because you are alive and in touch with your feelings. You must be careful though, Paul, don't let the fame sickness take control."

I didn't answer.

"The richness of experience you describe," Cat went on, "and the joy in your paintings, they will bring you honor. Even if you are only acknowledged by a few; you must keep writing and painting because that's what you were meant to do."

"And you? What do you want to do in life?" I asked her.

"I'm here to help people experience bliss consciousness. I clean their vibrations; the colors around them that they've created with their thoughts."

"You can see auras?" I asked.

"Yes, and I can clean them with sound. You have a beautiful aura." She stood behind me and ran the palms of her hands along the outline of my shoulders and head. "But I see fear coming through, disrupting your vibration."

I started to protest but nodded, "Actually you're right," I said. "I'm always afraid. All the time; about money or about being alone for the rest of my life or about getting into a car wreck, about..."

"Close your eyes," she said as she rubbed my skull and chanted a low, soft, "Eeee-aaah-Ooooo." She ran her hands

down my back and repeated the phrase; “Moment by moment, breath by breath, in the Now, in Love, in God.

“Can you see the lights inside?” she asked.

I saw bright colors in my mind. They swirled then contracted into one beam of pure white light. It was brighter than the sun, but I could look directly into it. Was this my soul? I felt the Holy presence of Jesus Christ. Were these lights and colors coming from the center of the sun and from the center of me too? I felt divine, pure love sweep through my body and mind.

I had a realization that my consciousness was not from the physical atoms in my body, but from the emotions I felt. The Creator’s emotion of Love; it had no mass and was not a part of my cells. I saw it and understood it, but I could not put it into words so that you would understand or see it too.

A soft, blushing red filled my consciousness. It condensed into an orange ball surrounded by black, empty space. I smiled to see it.

“What do you see?” Cat asked me.

“It was an orange ball but now it’s changed into a beautiful white light with gold and silver along the edges.”

“Good” Cat laughed. “I can prove to you that our consciousness survives death. These lights, how can you see them? You don’t have eyes in your mind. And how can you hear your mind speaking? There isn’t a mouth inside your brain. There aren’t ears in your brain to hear with. There isn’t anything vibrating, but you can hear yourself talking and you can see with your eyes closed. In your imagination you can picture anything you want.”

“True enough,” I said to myself. I heard the words in my mind.

“And after death,” Cat said, “you will see and hear this same way, without a mouth, without eyes or ears. You will hear the angels calling and see God’s perfect white light of love.”

We sat for over an hour afterwards, neither of us speaking. We were together, a part of the beauty of the day. Later, when I

drove her home, I was too tired to stay another night so I went back to Stephen's. That evening at home I set up my easel and began to paint the image of the orange planet I had imagined. I covered the canvas in thick, black paint then painted a round orange ball in the center. Stephen looked up when I had almost finished. "Hey, that looks like this photograph." He held up a Time magazine.

I was shocked to see a full-page photograph of an orange planet in a black sky. "What is that?" I asked.

"It's a photo from the Explorer mission. They just received these pictures back from millions of miles out in space. It's one of Jupiter's moons."

"That's the exact image I saw in my mind as Cat was rubbing my head and chanting to clear my aura."

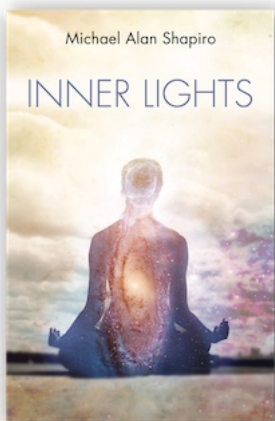
"She what?"

"On the cliffs at Zuma Beach," I explained. "There was fear in my aura. It was disrupting my vibrations and she cleaned it up."

"I see," Stephen said.

"Yes, and after she cleaned my vibrations, I saw this vision in my mind. I can't believe it. It's exactly what I saw. Look." I put my canvas next to the magazine. The images were identical.

"Far out, man." Stephen said in a funny, mocking, Cheech and Chong acid-head voice.



Paul Gebhart returned from a one year tour of duty in Vietnam with an un-diagnosed case of post-traumatic stress disorder. His solution was to self-medicate himself but that turned out to be disastrous for his marriage. His wife of ten years will no longer put up with his behavior. She forces him out of their house and begins seeing new people.

Inner Lights

by Michael Alan Shapiro

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