

Man's Son

By Jenny Butler

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There are two worlds. The one inside and the one outside and he had a foot in both. The left foot and the right foot could not walk together but strove like snakes to stretch out in different directions, his slithery serpent-feet like the great cock-headed Abraxas. He tried to live in truth, to contain the luminous and dark within him, to comprise maleness and femaleness, to encompass the evil and the good, god and the devil, but the dragon's barbed tail came to swipe and knock him off kilter.

The part most misunderstood by those out there is how he, like a babe in the woods, was led by the hand through a landscape he did not recognize, through a realm he could not comprehend. Thrust out against his will into 1967's summer-of-love, into a psychedelic haze of confusion. Smiling faces, pink and yellow flowers in their hair, called him "brother", called him "friend". They hugged, shouted joyfully, and he joined the singalong troupe heading for the Haight. Pronounced like "hate" they told him, but he felt there only love.

He let his hair grow long and they sang his songs and he sang theirs and all held hands inside the music. They didn't 'think' – rejecting an analytic process passed down from 'The Man' – and so they weren't divided in their minds. But being from the inner world, the unique view from inside-outside, he could predict the darkness ascending and descending. His mind's eye batted frantically to blink away the visions of cops donning beast-marked foreheads – on their helmets, the great bear-seal of California State – with batons thumping hippies up and down the hill, beating down kids derailed from Vietnam's draft too "Peace" to fight back. He saw bloodied bandanas and flower-buds crushed underfoot, centrifugal black vibes beginning their rotation in the epicentre of peace. He knew what was coming, not just for them, but for this world.

A son of man, raised by the men of the penitentiary, he struggled to navigate this new landscape of coded meanings and sidelong glances. He didn't know the rules or how to learn them. Not at all like prison's mainline, toe-the-line, "stay in line motherfucker!" To him, the world outside was full to the brim of incomprehensible conventions, sneaky smiles and two-faced liars. He wasn't the children's teacher but he tried to help them stand up, for themselves and for the world. He, the wounded enemy, would find a desert hideaway, a cave, and stow the children away. He was to be the avenging one with a key to the bottomless pit. Man's son but a child of God, a hybrid creature – the Death Valley Angel.

Once a cherubic-faced child sold for beer; his small life's worth measured out in amber liquid, not even a tankard or a pitcher but a pint – a small measure! A crass transaction, a spurning, but only adoration for her, his upturned boy-eyes to a mother's face he couldn't hate. Growing up, he wished to be a friend to everything he saw, everything he felt, everything he knew – air, trees,

water, animals – and he felt all the way alive! But the thought-games of others caused confusion: they wanted him to kick and lash out in destruction, to be a boy like the other “boys who will be boys”. On a darkening day, he held out his hand and wished for the pretty butterfly to land but what came instead was a Death’s Head Moth. It screamed in his face, made buzzing white noise like an electrical transmitter. He never again held out his hand in friendship.

In his caged life, walled in and well defined, he fared better, if better is a shadow-life of a shadow-self. Clarity here – the rules, the regulations, procedures and protocol – all this he understood; knew his number, what was expected, what they wanted. All now rubber-stamped, signed and sealed with a consistent answer: Request Denied. He thinks back on the sad new dawn of the burnt-out sun when the many strands of love and newness became entangled with old dark under-the-noon threads, back to when the shadowy figures asked him to extend the hangman’s rope to those nine.

“Not a snitch, never!” he thinks to himself.

But the bigger picture he could explain and make them see, if only the world outside would listen to his testimony of how the black sun’s tendrils wrapped themselves around the rainbow like an evil octopus and sullied the rainbow-children’s world until all days were grey.

A little troupe, a close-knit Family, tried to bury themselves in the sand. The Man caught their feet and stopped them slipping down the hole, snatched them up before they could enter its vast depths. No chance of escape into the underworld! In a dried blood spider-web of intricate

intrigue, even the Scorpio-scorpion was trapped. Love was squeezed out of hearts drip by vibrant drip until no way was left but to strike first, attack or be attacked. Like mistreated dogs, they would turn to bite the next hand that reached, whether foe or friend.

“Could it have been any way but this?” he thinks, as he holds out his hand. Through the bars of the cells, angry and screaming, the Moth-Man is on his way.

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