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BAREFOOT conducts his seminars on his houseboat in Sausalito. It costs a hundred dollars to find out why we are on this Earth. You also get a sandwich, but I wasn't hungry that day. John Lennon had just been killed and I think I know why we are on this Earth; it's to find out that what you love the most will be taken away from you, probably due to an error in high places rather than by design.

After I parked my Honda Civic in the metered slot I sat listening to the radio. Already all the Beatles songs ever written could be heard on every frequency. Shit, I thought. I feel like I'm back in the Sixties, still married to Jefferson Archer.

"Where's Gate Five?" I asked two hippies going by.

They didn't answer. I wondered if they'd heard the news about John Lennon. I wondered, then, what the hell I cared about Arabic mysticism, about the Sufis and all that other stuff that Edgar Barefoot talked about on his weekly radio program on KPFA in Berkeley. The Sufis are a happy lot. They teach that the essence of God isn't power or wisdom or love but beauty. That's a totally new idea in the world, unknown to Jews and Christians. I am neither. I still work at the Musik Shop on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley and I'm trying to make the payments on the house that Jeff and I bought when we were married. I got the house and Jeff got nothing. That was the story of his life.

Why would anybody in their right mind care about Arabic mysticism? I asked myself as I locked up my Honda and started toward the line of boats. Especially on a nice day. But what the fuck; I had already made the drive over the Richardson Bridge, through Richmond, which is tawdry, and then past the refineries. The bay is beautiful. The police clock you on the Richardson Bridge; they time when you pay your toll and when you leave the bridge on the Marin side. If you arrive in Marin County too soon, it costs you big bucks.

I never cared for the Beatles. Jeff brought home *Rubber Soul* and I told him it was insipid. Our marriage was breaking up and I date it from hearing "Michelle" one billion times, day after

day. That would be roughly around 1966, I guess. A lot of people in the Bay Area date events by the release of Beatles records. Paul McCartney's first solo album came out the year before Jeff and I separated. If I hear "Teddy Boy," I start crying. That was the year I lived in our house alone. Don't do it. Don't live alone. Right up to the end, Jeff had his antiwar activity to keep him company. I withdrew and listened to KPFA playing baroque music better left forgotten. That was how I first heard Edgar Barefoot, who impressed me initially as a jerk-off, with his little voice and that tone of savoring his own cerebral activity immensely, delighting like a two-year-old in each successive *satori*. There is evidence that I was the only person in the Bay Area who felt that way. I changed my mind later; KPFA started broadcasting Barefoot's taped lectures late at night, and I would listen while I tried to get to sleep. When you're half asleep, all that monotonous intoning makes sense. Several people explained to me once that subliminal messages had been inserted in all the programs aired in the Bay Area around 1973, almost certainly by Martians. The message I got from listening to Barefoot seemed to be: You are actually a good person and you shouldn't let anyone else determine your life. Anyhow I got to sleep more and more readily as time passed; I forgot Jeff and the light that had gone out when he died, except that now and then an incident would pop into existence in my mind, usually regarding some crisis in the Co-op on University Avenue. Jeff used to get into fights in the Co-op. I thought it was funny.

So now, I realized as I walked up the gangplank onto Edgar Barefoot's cushy houseboat, I will date my going to this seminar by John Lennon's murder; the two events are for me of a seamless whole. What a way to start understanding, I thought. Go back home and smoke a number. Forget the wimpy voice of enlightenment; this is a time of guns; you can do nothing, enlightened or otherwise; you are a record clerk with a degree in liberal arts from Cal. "*The best lack all conviction*" . . . something like that. "*What rough beast . . . slouches towards Bethlehem to be born.*" A creature with bad posture, nightmare of the world. We had a test on Yeats. I got an A-minus. I was good. I used to be able to sit on the floor all day eating cheese and drinking goat's milk, figuring out the longest novel . . . I have read all the long novels. I graduated from Cal. I live in

Berkeley. I read *The Remembrance of Things Past* and I remember nothing: I came out the door I went in, as the saying goes. It did me no good, all those years in the library waiting for my number to light up, signifying that my book had been carried to the desk. That's true for a lot of people, most likely.

But those remain in my mind as good years in which we had more cunning than is generally recognized; we knew exactly what we had to do: the Nixon regime had to go; we did what we did deliberately, and none of us regrets it. Jeff Archer is dead, now; John Lennon is dead as of today. Other dead people lie along the path, as if something fairly large passed by. Maybe the Sufis with their conviction about God's innate beauty can make me happy; maybe this is why I am marching up the gangplank to this plush houseboat: a plan is fulfilled in which all the sad deaths add up to something instead of nothing, somehow get converted to joy.

A terribly thin kid who resembled our friend Joe the Junkie stopped me, saying, "Ticket?"

"You mean this thing?" From my purse I got out the printed card that Barefoot had mailed me upon receipt of my hundred dollars. In California you buy enlightenment the way you buy peas at the supermarket, by size and by weight. I'd like four pounds of enlightenment, I said to myself. No, better make that ten pounds. I'm really running short.

"Go to the rear of the boat," the skinny youth said.

"And you have a nice day," I said.

When one catches sight of Edgar Barefoot for the first time one says: He fixes car transmissions. He stands about five-six and because he weighs so much you get the impression that he survives on junk food, by and large hamburgers. He is bald. For this area of the world at this time in human civilization, he dresses all wrong; he wears a long wool coat and the most ordinary brown pants and blue cotton shirt . . . but his shoes appear to be expensive. I don't know if you can call that thing around his neck a tie. They tried to hang him, perhaps, and he proved too heavy; he broke the rope and continued on about his business. Enlightenment and survival are intermingled, I said to myself as I took a seat—cheap folding chairs, and already a few people here and there, mostly young. My husband is

dead and his father is dead; his father's mistress ate a mason jar of barbiturates and is in the grave, perpetually asleep, which was the whole point of doing it. It sounds like a chess game: the bishop is dead, and with him the blond Norwegian woman who he supported by means of the Bishop's Discretionary Fund, according to Jeff; a chess game and a racket. These are strange times now, but those were far stranger.

Edgar Barefoot, standing before us, motioned us to change seats, to sit up front. I wondered what would happen if I lit a cigarette. I once lit a cigarette in an *ashram*, after a lecture on the Vedas. Mass loathing descended on me, plus a sharp dig in the ribs. I had outraged the lofty. The strange thing about the lofty is that they die just like the common. Bishop Timothy Archer owned a whole lot of loftiness, by weight and by size, and it did him no good; he lies like the rest, underground. So much for spiritual things. So much for aspirations. He sought Jesus. Moreover, he sought what lies behind Jesus: the real truth. Had he been content with the phony he would still be alive. That is something to ponder. Lesser people, accepting falsehood, are alive to tell about it; they did not perish in the Dead Sea Desert. The most famous bishop of modern times bit the big one because he mistrusted Jesus. There is a lesson there. So perhaps I have enlightenment; I know not to doubt. I know, also, to take more than two bottles of Coca-Cola with me when I drive out into the wastelands, ten thousand miles from home. Using a gas station map as if I am still in downtown San Francisco. It's fine for locating Portsmouth Square but not so fine for locating the genuine source of Christianity, hidden from the world these twenty-two hundred years.

I will go home and smoke a number, I said to myself. This is a waste of time; from the moment John Lennon died everything has been a waste of time, including mourning over it. I have given up mourning for Lent . . . that is, I cease to grieve.

Raising his hands to us, Barefoot began to talk. I little noted what he said; neither did I long remember, as the expression goes. The horse's ass was me, for paying a hundred dollars to listen to this; the man before us was the smart one because he got to keep the money: we got to give it. That is how you calculate wisdom: by who pays. I teach this. I should instruct the Sufis, and the Christians as well, especially the Episcopalian

bishops with their funds. Front me a hundred bucks, Tim. Imagine calling the bishop “Tim.” Like calling the pope “George” or “Bill” like the lizard in *Alice*. I think Bill descended the chimney, as I recall. It is an obscure reference; like what Barefoot is saying it is little noted, and no one remembers it.

“Death in life,” Barefoot said, “and life in death; two modalities, like *yin* and *yang*, of one underlying continuum. Two faces—a ‘holon,’ as Arthur Koestler terms it. You should read *Janus*. Each passes into the other as a joyous dance. It is Lord Krishna who dances in us and through us; we are all Sri Krishna, who, if you remember, comes in the form of time. That is his real, universal shape. Ultimate form, destroyer of all people . . . of everything that is.” He smiled at us all, with beatific pleasure.

Only in the Bay Area, I thought, would this nonsense be tolerated. A two-year-old addresses us. Christ, how foolish it all is! I feel my old distaste, the angry aversion we cultivate in Berkeley, that Jeff enjoyed so. His pleasure was to get angry at every trifle. Mine is to endure nonsense. At financial cost.

I am terribly frightened of death, I thought. Death has destroyed me; it isn’t Sri Krishna, destroyer of all people; it is death, destroyer of my friends. It singled them out and left everyone else undisturbed. Fucking death, I thought. You homed in on those I love. You utilized their folly and prevailed. You took advantage of foolish people, which is truly unkind. Emily Dickinson was full of shit when she prattled about “kindly Death”; that’s an abominable thought, that death is kind. She never saw a six-car pile-up on the Eastshore Freeway. Art, like theology, a packaged fraud. Downstairs the people are fighting while I look for God in a reference book. God, ontological arguments for. Better yet: practical arguments against. There is no such listing. It would have helped a lot if it had come in time: arguments against being foolish, ontological and empirical, ancient and modern (see common sense). The trouble with being educated is that it takes a long time; it uses up the better part of your life and when you are finished what you know is that you would have benefited more by going into banking. I wonder if bankers ask such questions. They ask what the prime rate is up to today. If a banker goes out on the Dead Sea Desert he probably takes a flare pistol and canteens and

C-rations and a knife. Not a crucifix displaying a previous idiocy that was intended to remind him. Destroyer of the people on the Eastshore Freeway, and my hopes besides; Sri Krishna, you got us all. Good luck in your other endeavors. Insofar as they are equally commendable in the eyes of other gods.

I am faking it, I thought. These passions are bilge. I have become inbred, from hanging around the Bay Area intellectual community; I think as I talk: pompously, and in riddles; I am not a person but a self-admonishing voice. Worse, I talk as I hear. Garbage in (as the computer science majors say); garbage out. I should stand up and ask Mr. Barefoot a meaningless question and then go home while he is phrasing the perfect answer. That way he wins and I get to leave. We both gain. He does not know me; I do not know him, except as a sententious voice. It ricochets in my head, I thought, already, and it's just begun; this is the first lecture of many. Sententious twaddle . . . the name of the Archer family's black retainer in, perhaps, a TV sitcom. "Sententious, you get your black ass in here, you hear me?" What this droll little man is saying is important; he is discussing Sri Krishna and how men die. This is a topic that I from personal experience deem significant. I should know, because it is familiar to me; it showed up in my life years ago and will not go away.

Once we owned a little old farm house. The wiring shorted out when someone plugged in a toaster. During rainy weather, water dripped from the light bulb in the kitchen ceiling. Jeff every now and then poured a coffee can of black tarlike stuff onto the roof to stop it from leaking; we could not afford the ninety-weight paper. The tar did no good. Our house belonged with others like it in the flat part of Berkeley on San Pablo Avenue, near Dwight Way. The good part was that Jeff and I could walk to the Bad Luck Restaurant and look at Fred Hill, the KGB agent (some said) who fixed the salads and owned the place and decided whose pictures got hung up for free exhibition. When Fred came to town years ago, all the Party members in the Bay Area froze solid, out of fear; this was the tip-off that a Soviet hatchetman was in the vicinity. It also told you who belonged to the Party and who did not. Fear reigned among the dedicated but no one else cared. It was like the eschatological judge sorting the sheep, the faithful, from among

the ordinary others, except in this case it was the sheep who quaked.

Dreams of poverty excited universal enjoyment in Berkeley, coupled with the hope that the political and economic situation would worsen, throwing the country into ruin: this was the theory of the activists. Misfortune so vast that it would wreck everyone, responsible and not responsible alike sinking into defeat. We were then and we are now totally crazy. It's literate to be crazy. For example, you would have to be crazy to name your daughter Goneril. Like they taught us at the English Department at Cal, madness was funny to the patrons of the Globe Theater. It is not funny now. At home you are a great artist, but here you are just the author of a difficult book about *Here Comes Everybody*. Big deal, I thought. With a drawing in the margin of someone thumbing his nose. And for that, like this speech now, we paid good money. You'd think having been poor so long would have taught me better, sharpened my wits, as it were. My instinct for self-preservation.

I am the last living person who knew Bishop Timothy Archer of the Diocese of California, his mistress, his son my husband the homeowner and wage earner *pro forma*. Somebody should—well, it would be nice if no one went the way they collectively went, volunteering to die, each of them, like Parsifal, a perfect fool.