



The Fool's Journey

By SUSAN MOUNTAIN

Day after day, alone on the hill
The man with the foolish grin
is keeping perfectly still.
But nobody wants to know him,
They can see that he's just a fool
And he never gives an answer.
But the fool on the hill
Sees the sun going down
And the eyes in his head
See the world spinning round.
*

It's cloudy today, and I keep thinking about Detroit 1970. Recalling when I first arrived and had no money or place to stay. I should have been scared, but wasn't. The phantom of that Detroit blind faith returns when needed. The shadow of youthful hope, cloaked in Fool's wisdom tips his plumaged hat and holds my hand. He tells me "Everything's gonna be alright." And I believe him.

I rode from New Mexico to Detroit, Michigan, in the back seat of a 1967 navy-blue Mustang. I don't remember the baby balanced across my knees ever complaining, just her smiles. While I was hungry all the time, she got plenty of mother's milk. Being thin as a pretzel was a good thing, because I was flanked by two commune Mothers holding their babies.

The riots of 1968 had all but demolished Detroit's inner city. Towering old brick houses that had once belonged to the rich were in varying states of decomposition. Scavengers were robbing the finely carved woodwork from their insides, leaving only rats and ghosts behind. The faces in the windows of these crumbling old houses were dark skinned and brooding. My white face became a neon sign that flashed "You don't belong here."

Somebody in our commune knew an old guy who was "cool" and living in one of the rundown

brick mansions. He let us "crash" at his pad until we found a house to rent. I remember his balding head, and how he tried to put the free-love-make on every woman in our group. While I don't recall his name, I do remember that he left nursing mothers alone.

Well on his way,
his head in a cloud
The man of a thousand
voices, talking perfectly loud.*

Within a couple of weeks we rented a house from an obese trickster named "Bobo." It was next door to "Andre the Pimp" who was helping high school girls earn money after school. The mattresses on his floor were framed with red velvet drapes, and foot traffic to his front door was unending. Andre had a huge Afro and drove a lime green Cadillac with a leopard skin landau roof. It took us months to figure out that we were renting an abandoned building. Bobo didn't give refunds.

Having no money for food, we became experts at sorting through trash bins for edibles at the A&P Grocery store. The wilted veggies accompanied stale bread from Mother Walker's Cupboard and satisfied our hunger. Toasted raisin bread was the favorite, and occasionally there was peanut butter to divvy up. It was imperative that we used both hunting and gathering skills to survive.

This Detroit saga sounds horrible, but it didn't seem like it at the time. Our commune had big plans, and just needed time to get them started. We pooled our energies and started to connect with everyone in our community. Some of us got jobs while others became involved in local politics. A local politician connected us with inner city programs, and hired us for roofing jobs. We were known as the people from "Tacos, New Mexico." No one had ever heard of Taos.

I got a job working in the camera department of Hudson's department store in downtown Detroit. I would go to the company cafeteria for lunch, eat my bread, and fantasize that it was lemon meringue pie. I squirted my mother's milk in the black marble toilets during my breaks. Our inadequate collective paychecks helped us survive that first winter in Detroit.

Christmas came and went that year, only the department stores celebrated. Their lights and tinsel magnified our poverty. The "hawk" attacked me with his coldness outdoors, and raped our old house. It was impossible to stay warm, so we huddled together wearing coats and hats inside the drafty house. Our hot water radiator heating system never got beyond lukewarm.

The children caught chicken pox that winter in the Motor City. Just when the disease had seemed to run its course I came down with it. The sores covered every place on my body, including the inside of my mouth and the soles of my feet. The itching drove me temporarily insane, and I couldn't bear to look in a mirror at my scab encrusted teenage face. I was ready to give up all hope in Detroit, but suddenly the weather changed.

Gray skies became spring blue, green shoots popped up in the cracks in our front sidewalk, and my sores began to fade. The babies learned to walk, and Andre hired us to re-roof his house. The toothless, wig-wearing woman next door started sending over corn bread and greens. In return, we became Camille's handymen.

I had an affair with a smooth talking neighbor, announced that I was searching for absolute truth, and then questioned whether it existed. The commune opened a health food restaurant in an old mansion. We made banana milk, fried rice and

deep-fried Hiziki seaweed rolls. Our biggest battles were waged with the hungry cockroaches and Peter, Detroit's Poet Laureate, who wanted to eat for free. We thought we were invincible, and maybe we were.

The only things I still possess from Detroit are the gray shadows of memories that haunt me on cloudy days. If I reunite with a person that shares these Detroit memories, our shadows merge and are made tangible again. We remember that anything is possible if you keep the faith, and are willing to take risks, much like the Tarot Card Fool stepping off the edge of a cliff into the unknown. It's much scarier now that I'm older. Time isn't always gentle with faith.

The hawk is on the prowl again.

It is going to be a cold winter.
This Fool is ready for magic.

And the eyes in his head,
See the world spinning around.
*

**The Fool On The Hill*

1967 from the album -
Magical Mystery Tour (John Lennon, Paul McCartney)

Graphics by
Jason Montalvo



Susan Mountain is the winner of the fifth annual Award for Prose, a writing contest initiated by Karen Rosenbaum, who taught creative writing, literature and composition for more than 30 years at Ohlone.