



James Beach

Chasing Rainbows

Deck: In the sky paratroopers jettison from silent jets. Layton knows less than Link knows about the invasion. They come like a mass of falling stars, into the forest, from the campsite and up to where Harry camps, beyond their ridge and beyond even the next. Link, at least, understands that this battle is about him, the rest of them. Meanwhile Zed and Zanie glom onto the hippie, for answers.

DRAINBOWS are energy vampires, says the hippie with a white ponytail who identifies with the Rainbow sect. He describes the ghoul as any random normal or abnormal person who lives to suck vibrancy from human aura. Like experiencing love, the art of romancing an energy field off the body can be a hypnotic to the vampire, who may keep sucking long after he or she is full; drainbows have human limitations. They come in all shapes or sizes, may be a waif or a giant or a freak; a fly-by-night lover; a criminally pretty drifter; an old ugly grifter; a political or academic or religious misfit; a user or abuser of drugs; a weird eater; a trash-picker; a juvenile; a delinquent; an elitist; an atheist or agnostic spirit—all this is characteristic of a drainbow. They shift through forms and phases. Ghosts, in retrospect. Most anyone is susceptible to energy-



drain, esp. if lonely, horny, weak, hungry, drugged, tired, co/dependent, or for whatever reason enchanted with drainbows.

The old hippie has young admirers. This is his usual. He camps the national forests in several states, loans out tents and sleeps in his covered truckbed, shares his weed and tells tall tales about folk-art beads or healing stones, or legends. He stores these wares and props in giant plastic tubs stacked near his truck. In exchange for meals he might offer goods or services, or lend an array of hand tools, or let a tent go. He meets hundreds of people, camping. Earlier today the old hippie shared how some Rainbow gathering kids, who slept with him for a rainy night in his flatbed, liked to cuddle. Tonight he pushes the concept of drainbows.

“Drainbows,” nods an impish man, just 20, community college drop-out, lotus pose with eyes turned inward and shut. His name is Layton. He wants to please everyone and he’s been told he’s good at this. “Massive sinkholes, sucking up the spectrum. Eating our pots of gold. Can leprechauns can avoid getting sucked by a drainbow, I wonder. This is good pot. I’m getting eyelid graphics.”

“Holy hologram,” agrees the girl who wants to be with the old hippie. She nestles in close to the closed-eyed youth, her self-esteem precluding choice. Her hair slips like spaghetti from a colander to his bony lap, her face sliding down his chest until her mouth reaches his crotch. The denim is the same as that of the old hippie, thinks the girl of 17. Her vagabond lungs blow hot moist air, make a circle on the blue jeans fly. Layton’s visceral response gives the girl reason to widen her mouth.

“The drainbow are crafty,” warns the old hippie. He tangles loose white hair on a finger before tucking the strand into his ponytail. He marvels at the melting of the girl. He’s working hard now to expand his listeners’ attention spans, every decade remastered, digitally; technology invests in generation next. (Thus: vexing an old hippie into being that proverbial rolling stone.) To this he responds with another



kind bud. His exchange of material possessions for freedom is exemplary, to the groupies grouped near the fire. The vibe emanating is mostly in his favor.

Already a murmur of dissent, from the eldest groupie. His plots of escape are discernable by his defeated slouch, detachment from the fire, humdrum surveying of their camp. Smarter than his school pals and peers, he somehow miscalculated along the path... Where is his beautiful house/spouse, he often asks himself. He's growing anxious over being the oldest at most parties or campfires. At 24, his mood is stunted by a simmering rage against a societally demanded adulthood that eludes him. He feigns ignorance, still, about knowing about any of it. His name is Link.

"Having problems, Link?" says Layton, suspicious of his new friend's toggle.

"Fucking pants, left them at the stream," responds Link. (His toggle: getting up to look for the pants/ remaining at the picnic-table.)(His spirit dancing, his ass on the redwood bench.) His windbreaker shorts now getting noticed by the other groupies, the old hippie; he's been a virtual monk for nearly a year. He continues, "The pants are zip-offs; the legs below the knee are at the stream, maybe in the stream."

"Group search," calls a voice from the deep woods.

"No thanks!" replies Link. A strange quality to the timbre reminds everyone that they are mortals in an enchanted land.

The next moment is tense, as though a voyeur is preparing to show himself, at long last. A rustle in the cloak of encroaching night in the dense late-summer foliage is a focal point for the moment. Layton straightens his spine, arches his neck, angles his vision to better see who it is on the trail.

Even in the twilight, the old hippie recognizes the small, well-hewn frame of his occasional camping buddy of the past 2 weeks. "Harry," the hippie exclaims, as though he knew who it was all along.



Aghast at the fresh crowd, drawn as a moth to flame, the dirt-dusty camper stumbles into the circle of firelight. “Buddy they, the squirrels got into my, the, my mushrooms, so I couldn’t bring ’em,” he says, by way of greeting. The pants to Link’s shorts drop out of the hip pockets of his coveralls. “Call off the group search,” he mumbles. His shy apology (for either the eavesdropping or the ruined fungi?) is the sharing of his flask, full up with table wine that Zanie brought out yesterday.

“That’s all right,” the hippie assures his friend. “Did you eat? We might have a little of that chili pepper and squash soup, left over, for you.”

Hairy, unkempt, glasses rigged with tape and tinfoil, Harry is an intermittent neighbor living in a tent pitched about a mile up the mountain from the roadside campsite. He lives up there, maybe, to avoid detection by the forest rangers who would enforce their sanction of a 2-week camping limit in that national forest. According to legend, thousands of people lived “off the grid” in the forests, existing on berries, road-kill, game, poachings, garbage bins, charity. Harry was the one yesterday who got Link talking about going mushroom hunting tomorrow.

Link takes a pull from the flask, turns to the hippie. “Your vampire, he could cast a spell, make me space out, my pants legs.”

“Drainbows ain’t as crafty as all that,” the old hippie says, slurring. Across the stone firepit, his audience smokes his pot. Pinon burning in the firepit eclipses the smell of the weed. The audience acts like his friends, interjecting with a relevant fact, joke, memory or issue; if he’s quiet, they’re usually fixing snacks or making plans. Off on a hike, or a nap or a fuck, he supposes, when he suddenly finds himself alone. Tomorrow they plan to mushroom hunt, the old hippie reminds himself. He is ready to expound on drainbow tactics, hesitates. With the sun set, the kids are cloaked in shifty pieces of shadow and firelight. To the old hippie, the figures of Layton and the girl are parent and child, the latter with crocodile tears. He accepts a psychiatric diagnosis from a few years



back, with reserve. Hallucination with the girl giving head is proving real, incredibly. His age of reason has come and gone twice. “Girl, what are you doing?”

“Hmm?” hums the girl. She lifts her head out of Layton’s lap to show that his button fly is open. The girl’s name is Zed. Like Layton, the girl has left school (media art) for a gypsy life (sort of, and alike, in that neither of them has had to do anything obscene to survive). At 21, she will receive \$700,000 if all remains well in her life—barring, we think, death—; the girl can add a 0 to that figure, as her gift on birthday 26. At 40, Zed will own much of some company or other. She cares causally (sort of). It’s all rather abstract, yet. Tonight, she finally got to use techniques like what she learned tying a cherry stem with her tongue and teeth. Being paralyzed from the neck down, like that painter who held the brush with her teeth, could simplify things, the girl thinks. Certain activities would be the same. Her brain seldom implores her to stop thinking.

Brave for more than an instant, Layton pivots so shadows make it harder to see him going flaccid. Not an exhibitionist, the public fellatio did turn him on. Some of that was due to her tits, on his legs. Some of it was due to Link’s resting his boots against his, playing some footsie.

As for Link, the old hippie’s pot has put him in a reverie. At a twig snap, Link snaps awake. It is his fiancé, Zanie, returning from their campsite with gasoline for the damp firewood.

“Oh, you got the fire going,” she says, deadpan. Gone for an hour, and only Link has missed her. (The hippie had had recollections of the big woman with the black hair, wearing the sweater-dress, mostly because of the smell of her chili pepper and squash soup supper, as she stood cooking over his gas stove.)

“There you are,” says the old hippie. “Did you save any soup?”

Suspicious by nature, Link reels at new paranoia over his fiancé getting fucked by the mushroom man, up at their camp. A search of the site would turn up any evidence. Guilty until proven innocent, the mantra



since their engagement. He sees that Zanie is without her watch. It would be hung on the inside of the tent door. If she took her nap as usual, the alarm on the watch would be reset, for tomorrow around this time. If she had deviated the alarm would have gone off, might still be sounding. The only other reason to not preset the alarm would be latrine. Any evidence is at the site, she's gone, vows Link, steady on the dark trail to their camp.

Meanwhile Layton is also doubting Link's fiancé. This is because she's at the picnic-table cutting up mushrooms dug from Harry's pocket, by firelight, convincing everyone they are edible, nonpoisonous, nontoxic, nonpsychedelic mushrooms. Rather than think her a liar, he believes her to be a waking dreamer who straddles worlds of sleep and life, ascribing elements of life and sleep to each.

In a bold maneuver, the old hippie refills the bowl while snuggling next to, almost with, Zed. "Are you gonna share that inheritance with me, when you get it?" he says, lips almost on her ears.

Fantasizing about who to let in on her trust is Zed's favorite pastime. Hardly anyone guesses what she's doing. Flirting was a theoretical aspect, until now. "Is the Groundling an emissary on Cloud-9?" she says; "We think not."

Layton has heard her confuse him with this before. Rather than think her a head-case, he believes a poetical screw may be loose. If we agree, we have an agreement. We can still fuck on Cloud-9. Rather than think her a snob, he enjoys her distinctions between people, the things they buy. If we elope, we can register the same items. Are we on Cloud-9? Rather than do it like yesterday.

The old hippie can see the young lovers' play. Her, into maturity/gray; him, into naïve youths. She, all about lists/targets; he, all about fits/connections. As the elder male, he can easily see how the youth's artistic/scientific/intrinsic sense of self needs balancing, with members of his own sex, with his own sense of spirit. As the situation was evolving, Zed was betrothed to Layton; best if they all played together. After



awhile, the girl would be freed. She could take up with him. Winner take as much as humanely possible. “Has anyone stolen my heart?” he repeats; “has anyone seen it?”

“We think not,” Zed echoes, “we think not.”

Link’s absence becomes known, somehow. The old hippie cuddles up to the firepit. Zed gives him some of the blanket. Layton closes his slack-jaw. “Bizarre Love Triangle” (1988, New Order) plays in each of their minds, consciously in Zed’s. Layton’s sleep apnea is as engaging a conversationalist as poor Zed can handle.

Coincidentally, the subconscious strata shared by Link, Zanie and the old hippie, is playing “Ordinary Hate Square” (2037, We Might be Science). This means all of them will live through the next couple decades, and will have some common influence exerted from a mystery corner. Only the old hippie has an inkling as to what this all may mean. For whatever reason, his unfinished master’s thesis was on the dimensions of the square; the lyrics “...airy hate square.” filtered into his thoughts even then, he realizes today.

Astrology, fate, sighs the old hippie. “Written in the stars,” he says, lips now against the earlobe of Layton, who’s smuggled himself into the micro-chasm of snuggle spanning the comfort zones round Zed and the old hippie.

Layton signs up, with a sigh, oblivious to the agreement. He wonders why females act the same, but leave him different. At 20, he’s fed up with dating games. He’s run the gamut. “All’s fair in love and war” taunts him from whatever text. To him, love is war, the words are synonymous, married. Black or white, binary, basic formula. Does he dream in color? Is “clear” a b(u)yproduct of reception technology? With all-color video, the filling-in is guesswork, non-mandatory exercise. Most people watch films to be entertained. Most modern viewers choose “bright & fuzzy” movies; most classic readers choose “dense & vivid” books. This being no longer the thoughts of Layton, but a partial from the labyrinth that befits the mind of God, as relayed to the author, as



experienced semiconsciously by Layton.

“Why are you always chasing drainbows?” erupts Zanie, in song. She’s mocking her fiancé, unaware that he’s in agony, tearing their tent and packs to pieces in search of her old wristwatch. “There you are!” She opens the cube of soup, lays the lid on the picnic-table, and motions Harry closer. The self-taught mycologist, having found a container in the trash, accepts her cooking in earnest.

Smiles as the old hippie loads the pipe, takes several large tokes, reloads. “This bowl,” he says, “is meant as a single-hitter. Meaning,” he exhales, hands the pipe to Layton, “the bowl is meant for one smoker.” As usual, tonight’s groupies take their single toke and pass it on. And he loses track of who’s smoked and who’s in need. This is exacerbated if immersed in interfacing, esp. with young admirers of his gemstones.

In the sky paratroopers jettison from silent jets. Layton knows less than Link knows about the invasion. They come lit up like a mass of falling stars, into the forests of pinon or ponderosa or aspen, from the campsite up to where Harry camps, beyond their ridge and beyond even the next. Link, at least, understands that this battle *is* all about him, the rest of them. And Zed and Zanie glom onto the hippie, for answers. Cognizant of what could be construed as an invasion, the old hippie believes that the paratroopers are firemen. His plan is to stay put until instructed otherwise. Firemen know how to handle an emergency. Yet all at once he stands, begins hauling tubs to load in the front of the flatbed. Best to be prepared, if getting evicted, he manages to think. As logic, it’s sound. Then again, an ordinary rationale might prove false as the situation becomes clearer.