

Becoming The Full Butterfly

by Brian W. Aldiss

The Great Dream was a wild success, far beyond anyone's imagining. Afterwards, no one recalled exactly who had chosen Monument Valley for its staging. The organisers claimed most of the credit. No one mentioned Casper Trestle. Trestle had disappeared again.

So had much else.

Trestle was always disappearing. Three years earlier, he had been wandering in Rajasthan. In that bleak and beautiful territory, where once deer had lain down with rajahs, he came through a rainless area where the land was denuded of trees and animals; here, huts were collapsing and the people were dying of drought. Men, aged at thirty, stood motionless as scarecrows of bone, watching with sick disinterest as Casper trudged by; but Casper was accustomed to disinterest. Only termites flourished, termites and the scavenger birds wheeling overhead.

Afflicted by the parched land, Casper found his way through to a mountainous area where, miraculously, trees still grew and rivers flowed. He continued onwards, where the rugged countryside began to rise to meet the distant grandeur of the Himalayas. Plants blossomed with pendulous mauve and pink flowers like Victorian lampshades. There he met the mysterious Leigh; Leigh Tireno. Leigh was watching goats and lounging on a rock under the dappled shade of a baobab, while the bees made a low song that seemed to fill the little valley with sleep.

'Hi,' Casper said.

'Likewise,' Leigh said. He lay back on his rock, one hand stretched above his forehead shading his eyes, which were as brown as fresh honey. The nearest goat was a cloudy white like milk, and carried a little battered bell about its neck. The bell clattered in B flat as the animal rubbed its haunches against Leigh's rock.

That was all that was said. It was a hot day.

But that night, Casper dreamed a delicious dream. He found a magic guava fruit and took it into his hand. The fruit opened for him and he plunged his face into it, seeking with his tongue, sucking the seeds into his mouth, swallowing them.

Casper found a place to doss in Kameredi. Casper was lost, really a lost urchin, snub-nosed, pasty of face, with hair growing out in straggly fashion from a neglected crew-cut. Although he had never learnt manners, he maintained the docility of the defeated. And he instinctively liked Kameredi. It was a humble version of paradise. After a few days, he began to see it was orderly and sane.

Kameredi was what some of the villagers called the Place of the Law. Others denied it had or needed a name: it was simply where they lived. Their houses stood on either side of a paved street which ended as it began, in earth. Other huts stood further up the hill, their decrease in size being more than a matter of perspective. A stream ran nearby, a little gossipy flow of water which chased among boulders on its way to the valley. Watercress grew in its side pools.

The children of Kameredi were surprisingly few in number. They flew kites, wrestled with each other, caught small silver fish in the stream, tried to ride the placid goats.

The women of Kameredi washed their clothes in the stream, beating them mercilessly against rocks. The children bathed beside them, screaming with the delight of being children. Dogs roamed the area like down-and-outs, pausing to scratch or looking up at the kite-hawks which soared above the thatched roofs.

Not much work was done in Kameredi, at least as far as the men were concerned. They squatted together in their dhotis, smoking and talking, gesticulating with their slender brown arms. Where they usually met, by V.K. Bannerji's house, the ground was stained red by betel juice.

Mr Bannerji was a kind of headman of the village. Once a month, he and his two daughters walked down into the valley to trade. They went loaded with honeycombs and cheeses and returned with kerosene and sticking plaster. Casper stayed at Mr Bannerji's house, sleeping on a battered charpoy beneath the colourful clay figure of Shiva, god of destruction and personal salvation.

Casper was a dead-beat. He was now off drugs. All he wanted at present was to be left alone and sit in the sun. Every day he sat on an outcropping rock, looking down along the village street, past the lingam carved from stone, into the distance, shimmering with Indian heat. It suited him that he had found a place where men were not expected to do anything much. Boys tended goats, women fetched water.

At first, an old nervousness attended him. Wherever he walked, people smiled at him. He could not understand why.

Nor did he understand why there was no drought, no starvation in Kameredi.

He had a sort of hankering for Mr Bannerji's daughters, both of whom were beautiful. He relied on their cunctative services for food. They tittered at him behind their spread fingers, showing their white teeth. Since he could not decide which young lady he would most like to embrace upon his rope charpoy, he made no advances to either. It was easier that way.

His thoughts tended towards Leigh Tireno. When Casper got round to thinking about it, he told himself that a kind of magic hung over Kameredi. And over the barelegged Leigh. He watched from his rock the bare-legged Leigh going about his day. Not that Leigh was much more active than anyone else; but occasionally he would climb up into the tree-clad heights above the village and disappear for several days. Or he would sit in the lotus position on his favourite boulder, holding the pose for hours at a time, eyes staring sightlessly ahead. In the evening, he would remove his dhoti and swim naked in one of the pools fed by the stream.

As it happened, Casper took it into his head to stroll along by the pool where Leigh swam.

'Hi,' he called as he passed.

'Likewise,' replied Leigh, perfecting his breast stroke. Casper could not help noticing that Leigh had a white behind, and was otherwise burnt as dark as an Indian. The daughters of Mr Bannerji moulded with their slender fingers goat's cheeses as white as Leigh's behind. It was very mysterious and a little discomfiting.

Mr Bannerji had visited the outside world. Twice in his life he had been as far as Delhi. He was the only person in Kameredi who spoke any English, apart from Casper and Leigh. Casper picked up a few words of Urdu, mainly those to do with eating and drinking. He learned from Mr Bannerji that Leigh Tireno had lived for three years in the village. He came, said Mr Bannerji, from Europe, but was of no nation. He was a magical person and must not be touched.

'You are not to be touching,' repeated Mr Bannerji, studying Casper intently with his short-sighted eyes. 'Nowhere.'

The two young Bannerji ladies giggled and peeled back their skins of plantains in very slinky ways before inserting the tips into their red mouths.

A magical person. In what way could Leigh be magical? Casper asked. Mr Bannerji wobbled his head wisely, but could not or would not explain.

The people who flocked to Monument Valley, who had booked seats on the top of mesas or stood with camcorders on the roofs of coaches, had some doubts about Leigh Tireno's magical properties. It was the publicity that got to them. They had been infected by the hype from New York and California. They believed that Leigh was a messiah.

Or else they didn't care either way.

They went to Monument Valley because the notion of a sex change turned them on.

Or because the neighbours were going. 'Hell of a place to go,' they said.

When the sun went down, darkness embraced Kameredi like an old friend, with that particular mountain darkness which is a rare variant of light. The lizards go in, the geckos come out. The night-jar trills of ancient romance. The huts and houses hold in their strawy palms the dizzy golden smell of kerosene lamps. There are roti smells too, matched with the scent of boiled rice teased with strands of curried goat. The perfumes of the night are warm and chill by turns, registering on the skin like moist fingertips. The tiny world of Kameredi becomes for an hour a place of sensuality, secret from the sun. Then everyone falls asleep: to exist in another world until cock crow.

In that hidden hour, Leigh came to Casper Trestle.

Casper could hardly speak. He was half reclining on his charpoy, a hand supporting his untidy head.

There stood Leigh looking down at him, with a smile as enigmatic as the most abstruse Buddha.

‘Hi,’ Casper said.

Leigh said, ‘Likewise.’

Casper struggled into a sitting position. He clutched his toes and gazed up at his beautiful visitor, unable to produce a further word.

Without preliminary, Leigh said, ‘You have been in the universe long enough to understand a little of its workings.’

Supposing this to be a question, Casper nodded his head.

‘You have been in this village long enough to understand a little of its workings.’ Pause. ‘So I shall tell you something about it.’

This seemed to Casper very strange, despite the fact that his life had passed mainly surrounded by strange people.

‘You mustn’t be touched? Why not?’

When Leigh’s mouth moved, it had its own kind of music, separate from the sounds it uttered. ‘Because I am a dream. I may be your dream. If you touch me, you may awaken from it. Then - then where would you be?’ He gave a tiny cold sound almost like a human laugh.

‘Ummm,’ said Casper, ‘New Jersey, I guess...’

Whereupon Leigh continued with what he had intended to say. He said the people in Kameredi and a few villages nearby were a special sort of Rajput people. They had a special story. They had been set apart from ordinary folk by a special dream. The dream had happened four centuries ago. It was still revered, and known as the Great Law Dream.

‘As a man of Kameredi respects his father,’ said Leigh, ‘so he respects the Great Law Dream even more.’

Four centuries ago in past time, a certain sadhu, a holy man, was dying in Kameredi. In the hours before his death, he dreamed a series of laws. These he was relating to his daughter when Death arrived, dressed in a deep shadow, to carry him away to Vishnu. Because of her purity, the holy man’s daughter had special powers, and was able to bargain with Death.

The holy man’s spirit left him. Death stood over them both as the woman coaxed her dead father to speak, and to continue speaking until he had related to her all the laws of his dream. Then a vapour issued from his mouth. He had cried out. His lips had become sealed with the pale seal of Death. He was buried within the hour: yet even before the prayers were chanted and the body interred, it began to decompose. So the people knew a miracle had happened in their midst.

But the laws remained for the daughter to recite.

Her head changed to the head of an elephant. In this guise of wisdom, she summoned the entire village before her. All abased themselves and fasted for seven days while she recited to them the laws of the

Great Law Dream.

The people had followed the laws of the Great Law Dream ever since.

The laws guided their conduct. The laws concerned worldly things, not spiritual, for, if the worldly matters were properly observed, then the spiritual would follow.

The laws taught the people how to live contentedly within their families and peacefully with each other. The laws taught them to be kind to strangers. The laws taught them to despise worldly goods of which they had no need. The laws taught them how to survive.

Those survival laws had, of all the laws, been most rigorously followed for four centuries, ever since the sadhu was taken by Death. For instance, the laws spoke of breath and water. Breath, the spirit of human life, water the spirit of all life. They taught how to conserve water, and how a little should be set aside for human use every day, so much spared for the animals, so much for plants and trees. The laws taught how to cook with the best conservation of fuel and rice, and how to eat healthily, and how to drink moderately and enjoyably.

Speaking of moderation, the laws declared that happiness often lay in the silence of human tongues. Happiness was important to health. Health was most important to women, who had charge of the family cooking pot.

The laws spoke of the dangers of women bearing too many children, and of too many mouths to be fed in consequence. They told of certain pebbles to be found in the bed of the river, which the women could insert into their yonis to prevent fertilisation. The smoothness of the stones, brought down from the snows of the Himalayas, and their dimensions, were minutely described.

Nakedness was no crime; before the gods, all humans went naked.

Behaviour too was described. Two virtues, said the laws, made for human happiness, and should be inculcated even into small children: self-abnegation and forgiveness.

‘Love those near you and those distant,’ said the laws. ‘Then you will be able to love yourself. Love the gods. Never pretend to them, or you will deceive yourself.’

So much for-the spiritual part. Instructions on the way to bake chapatis took up more time.

Finally, the Great Law Dream was clear about the trees. Trees must be conserved. Goats must not eat of trees or saplings, or be permitted to eat the smallest seedling. No tree less than a hundred years old must be cut down for fuel or building material. Only the tops of trees, when they grew over six feet high, might be used for this: in that way, Kameredi and surrounding villages would have shade and a good climate. Birds and beasts would survive which would otherwise perish. The countryside would not be denuded and become a desert.

If the people looked to these laws of nature, then nature would look to them.

So spoke the sadhu in his hour of departure from this world. So said the head of the elephant, echoing him.

As Leigh Tireno spoke concerning these matters, he seemed to become, as he claimed he was, a dream. His eyes became large, his eyelashes like the tips of thorn bushes, his simple face grave, his lips a musical

instrument through which issued musics of wisdom.

He said that ever since the holy man's daughter gave forth the Great Law Dream through her blue elephant's head, the people of Kameredi had followed those precepts scrupulously. Nearby villages, having heard the laws, had not bothered with them. They had denuded their woods, eaten too greedily, begotten many children with greedy mouths. So the people of Kameredi lived happily, while less disciplined people perished, and passed away, and were forgotten on the stream of time.

'What about sex?' Casper asked.

And Leigh answered calmly, 'Sex and reproduction are Shiva's gift. They are our fortification against decay. Like Shiva, they can also destroy.' He gave Casper a smile of sorrowful beauty and left the Bannerji house, walking out lightly into the dark. The night-jar sang to him as he went his way. The night itself nestled on his slender shoulder.

'You want to promote an event where two crazy people sleep together?' The question was asked incredulously in a publicity office in New York. Fifth Avenue in the high thirties. Sale time again in Macy's.

'Are we talking hetero, gay, lesbian or what here?'

'Have they figgered out a new way of doing it? A short cut or something?'

'Forget it, you can see people screwing back home every night, in the safety of your own apartment.'

'They don't only screw, these two. They plan to have a very basic dream.'

'Dream, did you say? You want us to rent Monument Valley for some fucking queers to have a dream? Get the fuck out of here!'

Leigh was climbing naked from the pool. Little rivulets of water ran from the watershed of his back down the length of his long legs. His pubic hair twinkled like a spider's web loaded with morning dew. Casper could hardly bear to look. He trembled, unable to make out what was wrong with him. When did he ever experience such desire?

Looking in the grass to check no leeches were about, Leigh folded himself on a rock. He squeezed water from his hair with one hand. Sighing with contentment, he closed his eyes. He turned his faultless face up to the Sun, as though to return its rays.

'Really, you are a mess, Casper. This place should help you to get better, to mend - to be at peace inwardly with yourself.'

It was the first time he had spoken in this fashion.

'Those dream laws,' Casper said, to change the subject. 'They're a lot of Indian hokum really, yep?'

'We all have a sense at the back of our minds that there was once a golden, primal time, when all was

well with us - maybe in infancy.'

'Not me.'

'The Great Law Dream represents such a time for a whole community. You and I, my sad Casper, come from a culture where all - almost all - has been lost. Consumption instead of communication. Commercialism instead of contentment.

Isn't that so?'

Standing on the spot, looking sulky and secretly contemplating Leigh's exposed body, Casper said, 'I never had nothing to consume.'

'But you want it. You're all grab at heart, Casper!' He sat up suddenly, lids still shielding his honeyed eyes. 'Don't you remember back home, how they ate, how everyone ate and yet hardly breathed? The breath of life! How there was this sentimental cult of childhood, yet all the while kids were neglected, beaten, taught only negatives?'

Casper nodded. 'I sure remember that.' He fingered the scar on his shoulder.

'People don't know themselves back there, Casper. They cannot take a deep breath and know themselves. Knowledge they have - facts. Wisdom, not so. Most are hung up on sex. Women are trapped in male bodies, thousands of gay men long to be hetero... Humanity has fallen into a bad dream, rejecting spirituality, clinging to self-to lowly biological origins.'

He opened his eyes then, to scrutinise Casper. In the branches of the banyan nearby, pigeons cooed as if in mockery.

'I'm not so freaked out as I was.' Casper found nothing else to say.

'I came here to develop what was in me... If you travel far enough, you discover what you originally were.'

'That's true. Like I've put on a bit of weight.'

Leigh appeared to ignore the remark. 'As our breathing is automatic, so there are archetypes, I've come to believe, which guide our behaviour, if we allow them. A kind of automatic response.'

'This is over my head, Leigh. Sorry. Talk sense, will you?'

The gentle smile. 'You do understand. You do understand, and reject what is unfamiliar. Try thinking of archetypes as master - and mistress - figures, such as you encounter in fairy tales. The Beauty and the Beast, for instance. Guiding our behaviour like very basic programming in a computer.'

'Grow up, Leigh! Fairy tales!'

'Archetypes have been set at nothing in our Western culture. So they're at war with our superficiality. We need them. Archetypes reach upwards to the rarefied heights of great music. And down into the soil of our being, down to the obscure realms beyond language, where only our dreaming selves can reach them.'

Casper scratched his crotch. He was embarrassed at being talked to as if he was an intelligent man. It had happened so rarely.

‘I’ve never heard of archetypes.’

‘But you meet them in your sleep - those personages who are you, yet not you.

The strangers you are familiar with.’

He scratched his chin instead of his crotch. ‘You think dreams are that important?’

Leigh’s was a gentle laugh, not as mocking as the doves’. ‘This village is proof of it. If only... if only there were some way you and I could dream a Great Law Dream together. For the benefit of all humanity.’

‘Sleep together, you mean? Hey! You won’t allow that! You’re tabu.’

‘Perhaps only to a carnal touch...’ He slid down and confronted Casper face to face. ‘Casper, try! Save yourself. Release yourself. Let everything be changed. It’s not impossible. It’s easier than you think. Don’t cling to the chrysalis state - be the full butterfly!’

Casper Trestle took dried meat and fruit and climbed up into the mountains above Kameredi. There he remained and thought and experienced what some would call visions.

Some days, he fasted. Then it seemed to him that someone walked beside him in the forest. Someone wiser than he. Someone he knew intimately yet was unable to recognise. His thoughts that were not thoughts streamed from him like water.

He saw himself in a still pool. His hair grew to his shoulders and he went barefoot.

This is what he said to himself, scooping together fragments of reflection in the cloth of his mind:

‘He’s so beautiful. He must be Truth itself. Me, I’m a sham. I’ve cocked up my entire life. I’ve had it cocked up for me. No, at last I must grab a slice of the blame. That way, I take control. I won’t enjoy being a victim. Not no more. I’m going to change. I too can be beautiful, someone else’s dream.’..

‘I’ve been in the wrong dream. The stupid indulgent dream of time. The abject dream of wealth beyond dreams. Spiritual destitution.

‘Something’s happened to me. From today, from now, I will be different.

‘Okay, I’m going crackers, but I will be different. I will change. Already I’m changing. I’m becoming the full butterfly.’

After a few nights, when the new moon rose, he went to look at his reflection again.

For the first time he saw - though in tatters - beauty. He wrapped his arms around himself. In the pool, from tiny throats, frogs cried out that there was no night.

He danced by the pool. 'Change, you froggies!' he called. 'If I can do it, anyone can do it.' They had done it.

Somewhere distantly, when the Moon sank into the welcoming maw of the mountains, he heard dismal roaring, as if creatures fought to the death in desolate swamps.

From the hoarse throats of machines, diesel fumes spewed. Genman Timber PLC was getting into action for another day. Guys in hard hats and jeans issued from the canteen. They tossed their cigarette butts into the mud, heading for their tractors and chainsaws. The previous day they had cleared four square kilometres of forest in the mountain some distance above Kameredi.

The Genman camp was a half formed circle of portable cabins. Generators roared, pumping electricity and air-conditioning round the site. Immense mobile cranes, brought to this remote area at great expense, loaded felled trees on to a string of lorries.

There were many more trees to go. The trees stood silent, awaiting the bite of metal teeth. In times to come, far from the Himalayas, they would form elements in furniture sold from showrooms in wasteland outside Rouen or Atlanta or Munich or Madrid. Or they would become crates containing oranges from Tel-Aviv, grapes from Cape Province, tea from Guangzhou. They would form scaffolding on high rises in Osaka, Beijing, Budapest, Manila. Or fake tourist figurines sold in Bali, Berlin, London, Aberdeen, Buenos Aires.

It was early yet at the Genman site. The sun came grumbling up into layers of mist. Loudspeakers played rock music over the area. Overseers were cursing. Men were tense as they gunned their engines into life, or joked to postpone the moments when they had to exert themselves in the forests.

Bloated fuel carriers started up. Genman bulldozers turned like animals in pain on their caterpillar tracks, to throw up muck as they headed for their designated tasks.

The whole camp was a sea of mud.

Soon the trees would come crashing down, exposing ancient lateritic soils. And someone would be making a profit, back in Calcutta, California, Japan, Honolulu, Adelaide, England, Bermuda, Bombay, Zimbabwe, you name it...

Action started. Then the rain began, blowing ahead in full sail from the south west.

'Shit,' said the men, but carried on. They had their bonuses to think of.

The new Casper slept. And had a terrible dream. It was like no other dream. As life is like a dream, this dream was like life.

His brain burned with it. He rose before dawn and stumbled through the aisles of the forest. His path lay downward. For two days and nights he travelled without food. He saw many old palaces sinking down into the mud, like great illuminated liners into an arctic sea. He saw things running and gigantic lizards giving birth. Eyes of amber, eyes of azure, breasts of bronze, adorned his track. So he returned to Kameredi and found it all despoiled.

What had been a harmonious village, with people and animals living together - he knew now how rare and precious this was - was no more. All had gone. Men and women, animals, hens, buildings, the little stream - all gone.

It was as if Kameredi had never been.

The rains had not fallen on Kameredi. The rains had fallen at higher altitudes. With the forests felled, upper streams had overflowed. Tides of mud flowed downhill. Before that chilly lava flow, everything gave way.

The people of Kameredi had been unprepared. The Great Law Dream had said nothing of this inundation. They were carried away, breathing dirt, drowned, submerged, finished.

And Casper saw himself walking over the desecrated ground, looking at the bodies growing like uncouth tubers from the sticky mess. He saw himself fall in a swoon to the ground.

In Monument Valley, gigantic stadia were being constructed at top speed. Bookings were being taken for seats as yet not fabricated. Emergency roads were being built. Notices, signs, public restrooms, were going up. Washington was becoming concerned. All kinds of large-scale scams were being set in motion. The League of Indigenous American Peoples was holding protest meetings.

A well-known Italian artist was wrapping up one of the mesas in pale blue plastic.

When Casper awoke, all knowledge seemed to have left him. He looked about. The room was dark. Everything was obscure except for Leigh Tireno. Leigh stood by the char-poy, seeming to glow.

'Hi,' Casper whispered.

'Likewise,' said Leigh. They gazed upon each other as if upon summer landscapes choked with corn.

'Er, how about sex?' Casper asked.

'Our fortification against decay.'

Casper lay back, wondering what had happened. As if reading his thoughts, Leigh said, 'We knew you were in the mountains. I knew you were having a strong and terrible dream. I came with four women. They carried you back here. You are safe.'

'Safe!' Casper screamed. Suddenly his mind was clear. He staggered from the bed and made for the door. He was in Mr Bannerji's house and it was not destroyed, and Mr Bannerji's daughters lived.

Outside, the sun reigned over its peaceful village. Hens strutted between buildings. Children played with a puppy, men spat betel juice, women stood statuesque by the dhobi place.

Mud did not exist.

No corpses tried to swim down a choked street.

‘Leigh, I had a dream as real as life itself. As life is a dream, so my dream was life. I must tell Mr Bannerji. It is a warning. Everyone must take their livestock and move to a safer place to live. But will they believe me?’

A month passed away for ever before they found a new place. It was three days’ journey from the old place, facing south from the top of a fertile valley. The women complained at its steepness. But here it would be safe. There was water and shade. Trees grew. Mr Bannerji and others went into a town and traded livestock for cement. They rebuilt Kamedredi in the new place. The women complained at the depth of the new watercourse. Goats ate the cement and got sick.

An ancient hag with a diamond at her nostril recited the Great Law Dream for all to hear, one evening when the stars resembled more diamonds and a moon above the new Kamedredi swelled and became pregnant with light. Slowly the new place became their familiar Kamedredi. Small boys with a dog sent to inspect the old place returned and reported it destroyed by a great mud flow, as if the earth had regurgitated itself.

Casper was embraced by all. He had dreamed truthfully. The villagers celebrated their escape from death. The village enjoyed twenty-four hours of drinking and rejoicing, during which time Casper lay with both of the Bannerji ladies, his limbs entwined with theirs, his warmth mingled with theirs, his juices with theirs.

In their yonis the ladies had placed smooth stones, as decreed in the laws. Casper kept the stones afterwards, as souvenirs, as trophies, as sacred memorials of blessed events.

Leigh Tireno disappeared. Nobody knew his whereabouts. He was gone so long that even Casper found he could live without him.

After another moon had waxed and waned, Leigh returned. His hair had grown long, and was tied by ribbon over one shoulder. He had decorated his face. His lips were reddened. He wore a sari. Under the sari, breasts swelled.

‘Hi,’ Leigh said.

‘Likewise,’ said Casper, holding out his arms. ‘Life in New Kamedredi is made new. All’s changed. I’ve changed. It’s the full butterfly. And you look more beautiful than ever.’

‘I’ve changed. I am a woman. That is the discovery I had to make. I merely dreamed I was a man. It was the wrong dream for me, and I have at last awakened from it.’

To Casper’s surprise, he was not as surprised as he might have been. He was becoming accustomed to the miraculous life.

‘You have a yoni?’

Leigh lifted his - her - sari and demonstrated. She had a yoni, ripe as guavas.

‘It’s beautiful. How about sex now?’

‘It’s fortification against decay. Shiva’s gift. It can also destroy.’ She smiled. Her voice was softer than before. ‘As I have told you. Be patient.’

‘What became of your lingam? Did it drop off?’

‘It crawled away into the undergrowth. In the forest, I menstruated for the first time. The moon was full. Where the blood fell, there a guava tree grew.’

‘If I found the tree and ate of its fruit...’

He tried to touch her but she backed away. ‘Casper, forget your little private business for a while. If you have really changed, you can look beyond your personal horizons to something wider, grander.’

Casper felt ashamed. He dropped his gaze to the floor, where ants crawled, as they had done even before the gods awoke and painted their faces blue.

‘I’m sorry. Instruct me. Be my sadhu.’

She arranged herself among the ants in the lotus position. ‘The logging in the hills. It is based more on greed than necessity. It needs to stop. Not just the logging, but all it stands for in the mercenary world. Contempt for the dignity of nature.’

It sounded like a tall order to Casper. But when he complained, Leigh coolly said that logging was very minor and nature was vast. ‘We must dream together.’

‘How do you manage that?’

‘A powerful dream, in order to change more than little Kameredi, more than ourselves. A healing dream, together. As we have dreamed separately and succeeded. As all men and women dream separately - always separately. But we will dream together.’

‘Touching?’

She smiled. ‘You still must change. Change is a continuity. There are no comfort stations on the road to perfection.’

Within his breast, his heart jumped for fear and hope at ‘the wonderful words.

‘The things you understand... I worship you.’

‘One day, I may worship you.’

Special units of the National Guard had been drafted in to control the crowds. Half of Utah and Arizona was cordoned off by razor wire. Counter-insurgency posts had been established; Washington was wary of dream-makers. Tanks, trucks, armed personnel carriers, patrolled everywhere. Special elevated ways had been erected. Armed police bikers roared along them, licensed to fire down on the crowds if trouble

was brewing. Heligunships circled overhead, cracking the eardrums of Monument Valley with spiteful noise.

They supervised a sprawling site bearing the hallmarks of an interior landscape of manic depression.

Someone said, 'Seems like they are shooting the war movie to end all war movies.'

Private automobiles had been banned. They were corralled in huge parks as far north as Blanding, Utah; at Shiprock, New Mexico, in the east; and at Tuba City, Arizona, to the south. The Hopis and Navajos were making a killing. A slew of cafes, bars and restaurants had sprung up from nowhere. Along authorised routes, lurid entertainments of various kinds sprang forth like paintboxes bursting. Many carried giant effigies of Leigh Tireno, looking at her best, above booths with such come-ons as 'Change Your Sex By Hypnosis - PAINLESS!' No one mentioned Casper Trestle.

How the good folk jostled on their way to the spectacle! It was mighty hot there, in the crowded desolation; sweat rose like a mist, an illness above the heaving shoulders. Bacteria were having a great time. Countless city people, unaccustomed to walking more than a block, found the quarter mile from a Park and Ride bus drop more than they could take, and collapsed into the many field ambulance units. Rest was charged at \$25 an hour. Some walked on singing or sobbing, according to taste. Pickpockets moved among the crowd, elbowing hot gossippers of many kinds. The preachers preached their tunes of damnation. It was not difficult for the unprivileged, as blisters formed on their heels, to believe that the end of the world was nigh - or at least heaving into sight from the seas of misery, a kind of 'Jaws' from the nether regions - or that the whole universe might sizzle down into a little white dot, like when you turned off the TV at two in the sullen Bronx morning. Could be, ending was best. Maybe with this possibility in mind, a fair percentage of the adults stomped along like cattle, pressing fast food to their mouths or slurping sweet liquids. A fat woman, hemmed in by heated bodies, was hit simultaneously by congestion and digestion; her cries as she cartwheeled among the marching legs were drowned by sporadic ghetto music from a multitude of receivers. Every orifice was stuffed. It was the law. At least no one was smoking.' Varieties of bobbing caps amid the throng indicated children, big and little hobbledehos fighting to get through first, yelling, screaming, gobbling popcorn as they went. Underfoot, all kinds of coloured cartons and wrappers of non-biodegradable material were trampled in the dust, along with the tumbling bodies, the gobs of pink gum, the discarded items of clothing, the ejected tampons, the lost soles. It was a real media event, as much a crowd-puller as the World Series.

Casper had set the whole vast scheme in motion. Now he was responsible only for himself and Leigh. Human nature was beyond his control. He stood in the middle of a mile-wide arena where John Wayne had once ridden hell-for-leather. Mr V.K. Bannerji was with him, terrified by the sheer blast of public attention.

'Vill it vork?' he asked Casper. 'Otherwise ve shall have wiolence.'

But at six in the evening, when the shadows of the giant mesas grew like long, blunt, black teeth over the land, a bell rang and silence fell. A slight breeze arose, mitigating the heat, cooling many a feverish armpit. The pale blue plastic in which one of the mesas had been wrapped, crackled slightly. Otherwise all was at last still - still as it had been in the millennia before the human race existed.

A king-size bed stood raised in the middle of the arena. Leigh waited by the side of the bed. She removed her clothes without coquetry, turning about once in a full circle, so that all could see she was now a woman. She climbed into the bed.

Casper removed his clothes, also turned about to demonstrate that he was a man, and climbed in beside Leigh. He touched her.

They put their arms about each other and fell asleep.

Gently, music arose from the assembled Boston Pops Orchestra. Tchaikovsky's waltz from 'The Sleeping Beauty'. The organisers felt this composition was particularly appropriate on this occasion. In the million-strong audience women wept, kids threw up as quietly as possible. Before their television screens all round the world, people were weeping and throwing up into plastic bowls.

It was an ancient dream they dreamed, welling from the brain's ancient core. The beings that paraded across a primal tapestry of fields wore stiff antique garb. In these personages was vested an untroubled power over human behaviour. An untroubled archetypal power.

Before sex was life, aspiring upwards like spring water. After the advent of sexual reproduction came consciousness. Before consciousness dawned, dreams prevailed. Such dreams form the language of the archetypes.

In the espousal of a technological civilisation, those ancient personages had been neglected, despised. Hero, warrior, matron, maiden true, wizard, mother, wise-man too - finally their paths were bent to sow in human lives dissent. In disarray a billion lives were spent: war, rapine, mental torment, dismay... But LeighCasper in the tongue of dream vowed to these forces to redeem the time, asked in return - it seems - that male and female might be free of crime... to live in better dreams...

Casper struggled up through layers of blanketing sleep. He lay unsure of himself, or where he was. Much had transpired, that he knew: a shift in consciousness. The dark head of the woman Leigh lay on his breast. Opening his eyes, he saw that above him flared an Impressionist sky, encompassing cinnamon and maroon banners of sunset waving at feverish rate from horizon to far horizon.

Prompted by deep instinct, he felt down between his legs. He dug into a furry nest and found lips there. What they told him wordlessly was strange and new. He wondered for a while if, soggy from the miracle sleep, he was feeling her by mistake. Gently, he stirred her away from his breast... his breasts... her breasts.

When Leigh opened her eyes and looked honey-coloured at Casper, her gaze was remote. Slowly her lips curved into a smile.

'Likewise,' she remarked, slipping a finger into Casper's yoni. 'How about a fortification against decay?'

The multitudes were leaving the auditorium. The aircraft were heading like eagles back to their nests. The tanks were pulling out. The Italian artist was unwrapping his mesa. Imagining he heard tree-cutting machines falling silent in distant forests, Mr Bannerji sat on the side of the bed, to cover his short sighted eyes and weep with joy - the joy that survives in the midst of sorrow.

Immersed in their thoughts, the short-sighted multitudes went away. The different dream was taking effect. No one jostled. Something in their unity of posture, the bent shoulders, the bowed heads, was reminiscent of figures in an ancient frieze.

Here or there, a cheek, an eyeball, a bald head, reflected back the imperial colours of the sky, arbitrary yellows denoting happiness or pain, red meaning fire or passion, the blues of nullity or reflection. Nothing remained but land and sky - for ever at odds, for ever a unity. The mesas were standing up into the velvet, ancient citadels built without hands to commemorate distant time.

Although the multitude was silent as it departed, its multiple jaws not moving, a kind of murmur rose from its ranks.

The still, sad music of humanity.

The day's death flew its colours, increasingly sombre. It was sunset: the dawn of a new age.