

Doing Lennon

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*Sanity calms, but madness  
is more interesting.*

—JOHN RUSSELL

As the hideous cold seeps from him he feels everything becoming sharp and clear again. He decides he can do it, he can make it work. He opens his eyes.

“Hello.” His voice rasps. “Bet you aren't expecting me. I'm John Lennon.”

“What?” the face above him says.

“You know. John Lennon. The Beatles.”

Professor Hermann—the name attached to the face which loomed over him as he drifted up, up from the Long Sleep—is vague about the precise date. It is either 2108 or 2180. Hermann makes a little joke about inversion of positional notation; it has something to do with nondenumerable set theory, which is all the rage. The ceiling glows with a smooth green phosphorescence and Fielding lies there letting them prick him with needles, unwrap his organiform nutrient webbing, poke and adjust and massage as he listens to a hollow *pock-pocketa*. He knows this is the crucial moment, he must hit them with it now.

“I'm glad it worked,” Fielding says with a Liverpool accent. He has got it just right, the rising pitch at the end and the nasal tones.

“No doubt there is an error in our log,” Hermann says pedantically. “You are listed as Henry Fielding.”

Fielding smiles. “Ah, that's the ruse, you see.”

Hermann blinks owlishly. “Deceiving Immortality Incorporated is—”

“I was fleeing political persecution, y'dig. Coming out for the workers and all. Writing songs about persecution and pollution and the working-class hero. Snarky stuff. So when the jackboot skinheads came in I decided to check out.”

Fielding slips easily into the story he has memorized, all plotted and placed with major characters and minor characters and bits of incident, all of it sounding very real. He wrote it himself, he has it down. He continues talking while Hermann and some white-smocked assistants help him sit up, flex his legs, test his reflexes. Around them are vats and baths and tanks. A fog billows from a hole in the floor; a liquid nitrogen immersion bath.

Hermann listens intently to the story, nodding now and then, and summons other officials. Fielding tells his story again while the attendants work on him. He is careful to give the events in different order, with different details each time. His accent is standing up though there is mucus in his sinuses that makes the high singsong bits hard to get out. They give him something to eat; it tastes like chicken-flavored ice cream. After a while he sees he has them convinced. After all, the late twentieth was a turbulent time, crammed with gaudy events, lurid people. Fielding makes it seem reasonable that an aging rock star, seeing his public slip away and the government

closing in, would corpsicle himself.

The officials nod and gesture and Fielding is wheeled out on a carry table. Immortality Incorporated is more like a church than a business. There is a ghostly hush in the hallways, the attendants are distant and reserved. Scientific servants in the temple of life.

They take him to an elaborate display, punch a button. A voice begins to drone a welcome to the year 2018 (or 2180). The voice tells him he is one of the few from his benighted age who saw the slender hope science held out to the diseased and dying. His vision has been rewarded. He has survived the unfreezing. There is some nondenominational talk about God and death and the eternal rhythm and balance of life, ending with a retouched holographic photograph of the Founding Fathers. They are a small knot of biotechnicians and engineers clustered around an immersion tank. Close-cropped hair, white shirts with ball-point pens clipped in the pockets. They wear glasses and smile weakly at the camera, as though they have just been shaken awake.

“I’m hungry,” Fielding says.

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News that Lennon is revived spreads quickly. The Society for Dissipative Anachronisms holds a press conference for him. As he strides into the room Fielding clenches his fists so no one can see his hands shaking. This is the start. He has to make it here.

“How do you find the future, Mr. Lennon?”

“Turn right at Greenland.” Maybe they will recognize it from *A Hard Day's Night*. This is before his name impacts fully, before many remember who John Lennon was. A fat man asks Fielding why he elected for the Long Sleep before he really needed it and Fielding says enigmatically, “The role of boredom in human history is underrated.” This makes the evening news and the weekly topical roundup a few days later.

A fan of the twentieth asks him about the breakup with Paul, whether Ringo's death was a suicide, what about Allan Klein, how about the missing lines from *Abbey Road*? Did he like Dylan? What does he think of the Aarons theory that the Beatles could have stopped Vietnam?

Fielding parries a few questions, answers others. He does not tell them, of course, that in the early sixties he worked in a bank and wore granny glasses. Then he became a broker with Harcum, Brandels and Son and his take in 1969 was 57,803 dollars, not counting the money siphoned off into the two concealed accounts in Switzerland. But he read *Rolling Stone* religiously, collected Beatles memorabilia, had all the albums and books and could quote any verse from any song. He saw Paul once at a distance, coming out of a recording session. And he had a friend into Buddhism, who met Harrison one weekend in Surrey. Fielding did not mention his vacation spent wandering around Liverpool, picking up the accent and visiting all the old places, the cellars where they played and the narrow dark little houses their families owned in the early days. And as the years dribbled on and Fielding's money piled up, he lived

increasingly in those golden days of the sixties, imagined himself playing side man along with Paul or George or John and crooning those same notes into the microphones, practically kissing the metal. And Fielding did not speak of his dreams.

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It is the antiseptic Stanley Kubrick future. They are very adept at hardware. Population is stabilized at half a billion. Everywhere there are white hard decorator chairs in vaguely Danish modern. There seems no shortage of electrical power or oil or copper or zinc. Everyone has a hobby. Entertainment is a huge enterprise, with stress on ritual violence. Fielding watches a few games of Combat Gold, takes in a public execution or two. He goes to witness an electrical man short-circuit himself. The flash is visible over the curve of the Earth.

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Genetic manipulants—*manips*, Hermann explains—are thin, stringy people, all lines and knobby joints where they connect directly into machine linkages. They are designed for some indecipherable purpose. Hermann, his guide, launches into an explanation but Fielding interrupts him to say, “Do you know where I can get a guitar?”

Fielding views the era 1950-1980:

“Astrology wasn't rational, nobody really believed it, you've got to realize that. It was *boogie woogie* . On the other hand, science and rationalism were progressive jazz.”

He smiles as he says it. The 3D snout closes in. Fielding has purchased well and his plastic surgery, to lengthen the nose and give him that wry Lennonesque smirk, holds up well. Even the technicians at Immortality Incorporated missed it.

\* \* \* \*

Fielding suffers odd moments of blackout. He loses the rub of rough cloth at a cuff on his shirt, the chill of air-conditioned breeze along his neck. The world dwindles away and sinks into inky black, but in a moment it is all back and he hears the distant murmur of traffic, and convulsively, by reflex, he squeezes the bulb in his hand and the orange vapor rises around him. He breathes deeply, sighs. Visions float into his mind and the sour tang of the mist reassures him.

Every age is known by its pleasures, Fielding reads from the library readout. The twentieth introduced two: high speed and hallucinogenic drugs. Both proved dangerous in the long run, which made them even more interesting. The twenty-first developed weightlessness, which worked out well except for the re-entry problems if one overindulged. In the twenty-second there were aquaform and something Fielding could not pronounce or understand.

He thumbs away the readout and calls Hermann for advice.

\* \* \* \*

Translational difficulties:

They give him a sort of pasty suet when he goes to the counter to get his food. He shoves it back at them.

“Gah! Don't you have a hamburger someplace?” The stunted man behind the counter flexes his arms, makes a rude sign with his four fingers and goes away. The wiry woman next to Fielding rubs her thumbnail along the hideous scar at her side and peers at him. She wears only orange shorts and boots, but he can see the concealed dagger in her armpit.

“Hamburger?” she says severely. “That is the name of a citizen of the German city of Hamburg. Were you a cannibal then?”

Fielding does not know the proper response, which could be dangerous. When he pauses she massages her brown scar with new energy and makes a sign of sexual invitation. Fielding backs away. He is glad he did not mention French fries.

\* \* \* \*

On 3D he makes a mistake about the recording date of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. A ferret-eyed history student lunges in for the point but Fielding leans back casually, getting the accent just right, and says, “I zonk my brow with heel of hand, consterned!” and the audience laughs and he is away, free.

\* \* \* \*

Hermann has become his friend. The library readout says this is a common phenomenon among Immortality Incorporated employees who are fascinated by the past to begin with (or otherwise would not be in the business), and anyway Hermann and Fielding are about the same age, forty-seven. Hermann is not surprised that Fielding is practicing his chords and touching up his act.

“You want to get out on the road again, is that it?” Hermann says. “You want to be getting popular.”

“It's my business.”

“But your songs, they are old.”

“Oldies but goldies,” Fielding says solemnly.

“Perhaps you are right,” Hermann sighs. “We are starved for variety. The people, no matter how educated—anything tickles their nose they think is champagne.”

Fielding flicks on the tape input and launches into the hard-driving opening of “Eight Days a Week.” He goes through all the chords, getting them right the first time. His fingers dance among the humming copper wires.

Hermann frowns but Fielding feels elated. He decides to celebrate. Precious reserves of cash are dwindling, even considering how much he made in the international bond market of '83; there is not much left. He decides to splurge. He orders an alcoholic vapor and a baked pigeon. Hermann is still worried but he eats the mottled pigeon with relish, licking his fingers. The spiced crust snaps crisply. Hermann asks to take the bones home to his family.

\* \* \* \*

“You have drawn the rank-scented many,” Hermann says heavily as the announcer begins his introduction. The air sparkles with anticipation.

“Ah, but they're *my* many,” Fielding says. The applause begins, the background music comes up, and Fielding trots out onto the stage, puffing slightly.

“One, two, three—” and he is into it, catching the chords just right, belting out a number from *Magical Mystery Tour*. He is right, he is on, he is John Lennon just as he always wanted to be. The music picks him up and carries him along. When he finishes, a river of applause bursts over the stage from the vast amphitheater and Fielding grins crazily to himself. It feels exactly the way he always thought it would. His heart pounds.

He goes directly into a slow ballad from the *Imagine* album to calm them down. He is swimming in the lights and the 3D snouts zoom in and out, bracketing his image from every conceivable direction. At the end of the number somebody yells from the audience, “You're radiating on all your eigenfrequencies!” And Fielding nods, grins, feels the warmth of it all wash over him.

“Thrilled to the gills,” he says into the microphone.

The crowd chuckles and stirs.

When he does one of the last Lennon numbers, “The Ego-Bird Flies,” the augmented sound sweeps out from the stage and explodes over the audience. Fielding is euphoric. He dances as though someone is firing pistols at his feet.

He does cuts from *Beatles '65*, *Help!*, *Rubber Soul*, *Let It Be* —all with technical backing spliced in from the original tracks, Fielding providing only Lennon's vocals and instrumentals. Classical scholars have pored over the original material, deciding who did which guitar riff, which tenor line was McCartney's, dissecting the works as though they were salamanders under a knife. But Fielding doesn't care, as long as they let him play and sing. He does another number, then another, and finally they must carry him from the stage. It is the happiest moment he has ever known.

\* \* \* \*

“But I don't understand what Boss 30 radio means,” Hermann says.

“Thirty most popular songs.”

“But why today?”

“Me.”

“They call you a ‘sonic boom sensation’—that is another phrase from your time?”

“Dead on. Fellow is following me around now, picking my brains for details. Part of his thesis, he says.”

“But it is such noise—”

“Why, that's a crock, Hermann. Look, you chaps have such a small population, so bloody few creative people. What do you expect? Anybody with energy and drive can make it in this world. And I come from a time that was dynamic, that really got off.”

“Barbarians at the gates,” Hermann says.

“That's what *Reader's Digest* said, too,” Fielding murmurs.

After one of his concerts in Australia Fielding finds a girl waiting for him outside. He goes home with her—it seems the thing to do, considering—and finds there have been few technical advances, if any, in this field either. It is the standard, ten-toes-up, ten-toes-down position she prefers, nothing unusual, nothing *à la carte*. But he likes her legs, he relishes her beehive hair and heavy mouth. He takes her along; she has nothing else to do.

On an off day, in what is left of India, she takes him to a museum. She shows him the first airplane (a piper cub), the original manuscript of the great collaboration between Buckminster Fuller and Hemingway, a delicate print of *The Fifty-Three Stations of The Takaido Road* from Japan.

“Oh yes,” Fielding says. “We won that war, you know.”

(He should not seem to be more than he is.)

\* \* \* \*

Fielding hopes they don't discover, with all this burrowing in the old records, that he had the original Lennon killed. He argues with himself that it really was necessary. He couldn't possibly cover his story in the future if Lennon kept on living. The historical facts would not jibe. It was hard enough to convince Immortality Incorporated that even someone as rich as Lennon would be able to forge records and change fingerprints—they had checked that to escape the authorities. Well, Fielding thinks. Lennon was no loss by 1988 anyway. It was pure accident that Fielding and Lennon had been born in the same year, but that didn't mean that Fielding couldn't take advantage of the circumstances. He wasn't worth over ten million fixed 1985 dollars for nothing.

At one of his concerts he says to the audience between numbers, “Don't look back—you'll just see your mistakes.” It sounds like something Lennon would have said. The audience seems to like it.

\* \* \* \*

Press Conference.

“And why did you take a second wife, Mr. Lennon, and then a third?” In 2180 (or 2108) divorce is frowned upon. Yoko Ono is still the Beatle nemesis.

Fielding pauses and then says, “Adultery is the application of democracy to love.” He does not tell them the line is from H. L. Mencken.

\* \* \* \*

He has gotten used to the women now. “Just cast them aside like sucked oranges,”



Fielding mutters to himself. It is a delicious moment. He had never been very successful with women before, even with all his money.

He strides through the yellow curved streets, walking lightly on the earth. A young girl passes, winks.

Fielding calls after her, “Sic transit, Gloria!”

It is his own line, not a copy from Lennon. He feels a heady rush of joy. He is into it, the ideas flash through his mind spontaneously. He is doing Lennon.

\* \* \* \*

Thus, when Hermann comes to tell him that Paul McCartney has been revived by the Society for Dissipative Anachronisms, the body discovered in a private vault in England, at first it does not register with Fielding. Lines of postcoital depression flicker across his otherwise untroubled brow. He rolls out of bed and stands watching a wave turn to white foam on the beach at La Jolla. He is in Nanking. It is midnight.

“Me old bud, then?” he manages to say, getting the lilt into the voice still. He adjusts his granny glasses. Rising anxiety stirs in his throat. “My, my...”

\* \* \* \*

It takes weeks to defrost McCartney. He had died much later than Lennon, plump and prosperous, the greatest pop star of all time—or at least the biggest money-maker. “Same thing,” Fielding mutters to himself.

When Paul's cancer is sponged away and the sluggish organs palped to life, the world media press for a meeting.

“For what?” Fielding is nonchalant. “It's not as though we were ever reconciled, y'know. We got a *divorce*, Hermann.”

“Can't you put that aside?”

“For a fat old slug who pro'bly danced on me grave?”

“No such thing occurred. There are videotapes, and Mr. McCartney was most polite.”

“God, a future where everyone's literal! I *told* you I was a nasty type, why can't you simply accept—”

“It is arranged,” Hermann says firmly. “You must go. Overcome your antagonism.”

Fear clutches at Fielding.

\* \* \* \*

McCartney is puffy, jowly, but his eyes crackle with intelligence. The years have not fogged his quickness. Fielding has arranged the meeting away from crowds, at a forest resort. Attendants help McCartney into the hushed room. An expectant pause.

“You want to join me band?” Fielding says brightly. It is the only quotation he can

remember that seems to fit; Lennon had said that when they first met.

McCartney blinks, peers nearsightedly at him. “D’you really need another guitar?”

“Whatever noisemaker’s your fancy.”

“Okay.”

“You’re hired, lad.”

They shake hands with mock seriousness. The spectators—who have paid dearly for their tickets—applaud loudly. McCartney smiles, embraces Fielding, and then sneezes.

“Been cold lately,” Fielding says. A ripple of laughter.

McCartney is offhand, bemused by the world he has entered. His manner is confident, interested. He seems to accept Fielding automatically. He makes a few jokes, as light and inconsequential as his post-Beatles music.

Fielding watches him closely, feeling an awe he had not expected. *That’s him. Paul. The real thing.* He starts to ask something and realizes that it is a dumb, out-of-character, fan-type question. He is being betrayed by his instincts. He will have to be careful.

Later, they go for a walk in the woods. The attendants hover a hundred meters behind, portable med units at the ready. They are worried about McCartney’s cold. This is the first moment they have been beyond earshot of others. Fielding feels his pulse rising. “You okay?” he asks the puffing McCartney.

“Still a bit dizzy, I am. Never thought it’d work, really.”

“The freezing, it gets into your bones.”

“Strange place. Clean, like Switzerland.”

“Yeah. Peaceful. They’re mad for us here.”

“You meant that about your band?”

“Sure. Your fingers’ll thaw out. Fat as they are, they’ll still get around a guitar string.”

“Ummm. Wonder if George is tucked away in an ice cube somewhere?”

“Hadn’t thought.” The idea fills Fielding with terror.

“Could ask about Ringo, too.”

“Re-create the whole thing? I was against that. Dunno if I still am.” Best to be noncommittal. He would love to meet them, sure, but his chances of bringing this off

day by day, in the company of all three of them ... he frowns.

McCartney's pink cheeks glow from the exercise. The eyes are bright, active, studying Fielding. "Did you think it would work? Really?"

"The freezing? Well, what's to lose? I said to Yoko, I said—"

"No, not the freezing. I mean this impersonation you're carrying off."

Fielding reels away, smacks into a pine tree. "What? What?"

"C'mon, you're not John."

A strangled cry erupts from Fielding's throat. "But ... how..."

"Just not the same, is all."

Fielding's mouth opens, but he can say nothing. He has failed. Tripped up by some nuance, some trick phrase he should've responded to—

"Of course," McCartney says urbane, "you don't know for sure if I'm the real one either, do you?"

Fielding stutters, "If, if, what're you saying, I—"

"Or I could even be a ringer planted by Hermann, eh? To test you out? In that case, you've responded the wrong way. Should've stayed in character, John."

"Could be this, could be that—what the hell you saying? Who *are* you?" Anger flashes through him. A trick, a maze of choices, possibilities that he had not considered. The forest whirls around him, McCartney leers at his confusion, bright spokes of sunlight pierce his eyes, he feels himself falling, collapsing, the pine trees wither, colors drain away, blue to pink to gray—

\* \* \* \*

He is watching a blank dark wall, smelling nothing, no tremor through his skin, no wet touch of damp air. Sliding infinite silence. The world is black.

—Flat black, Fielding adds, like we used to say in Liverpool.

—Liverpool? He was never in Liverpool. That was a lie, too—

—And he knows instantly what he is. The truth skewers him.

*Hello, you still operable?*

Fielding rummages through shards of cold electrical memory and finds himself. He is not Fielding, he is a simulation. He is Fielding Prime.

*Hey, you in there. It's me, the real Fielding. Don't worry about security. I'm the only one here.*

Fielding Prime feels through his circuits and discovers a way to talk. “Yes, yes, I hear.”

*I made the computer people go away. We can talk.*

“I—I see.” Fielding Prime sends out feelers, searching for his sensory receptors. He finds a dim red light and wills it to grow brighter. The image swells and ripples, then forms into a picture of a sour-faced man in his middle fifties. It is Fielding Real.

Ah, Fielding Prime thinks to himself in the metallic vastness, he's older than I am. Maybe making me younger was some sort of self-flattery, either by him or his programmers. But the older man had gotten someone to work on his face. It was very much like Lennon's but with heavy jowls, a thicker mustache and balding some. The gray sideburns didn't look quite right but perhaps that is the style now.

*The McCartney thing, you couldn't handle it.*

“I got confused. It never occurred to me there'd be anyone I knew revived. I hadn't a clue what to say.”

*Well, no matter. The earlier simulations, the ones before you, they didn't even get that far. I had my men throw in that McCartney thing as a test. Not much chance it would occur, anyway, but I wanted to allow for it.*

“Why?”

*What? Oh, you don't know, do you? I'm sinking all this money into psychoanalytical computer models so I can see if this plan of mine would work. I mean whether I could cope with the problems and deceive Immortality Incorporated.*

Fielding Prime felt a shiver of fear. He needed to stall for time, to think this through. “Wouldn't it be easier to bribe enough people now? You could have your body frozen and listed as John Lennon from the start.”

*No, their security is too good. I tried that.*

“There's something I noticed,” Fielding Prime said, his mind racing. “Nobody ever mentioned why I was unfrozen.”

*Oh yes, that's right. Minor detail. I'll make a note about that—maybe cancer or congestive heart failure, something that won't be too hard to fix up within a few decades.*

“Do you want it that soon? There would still be a lot of people who knew Lennon.”

*Oh, that's a good point. I'll talk to the doctor about it.*

“You really care that much about being John Lennon?”

*Why sure. Fielding Real's voice carried a note of surprise. Don't you feel it too? If*

*you're a true simulation you've got to feel that.*

“I do have a touch of it, yes.”

*They took the graphs and traces right out of my subcortical.*

“It was great, magnificent. Really a lark. What came through was the music, doing it out. It sweeps up and takes hold of you.”

*Yeah, really? Damn, you know, I think it's going to work.*

“With more planning—”

*Planning, hell, I'm going.* Fielding Real's face crinkled with anticipation.

“You're going to need help.”

*Hell, that's the whole point of having you, to check it out beforehand. I'll be all alone up there.*

“Not if you take me with you.”

*Take you? You're just a bunch of germanium and copper.*

“Leave me here. Pay for my files and memory to stay active.”

*For what?*

“Hook me into a news service. Give me access to libraries. When you're unfrozen I can give you backup information and advice as soon as you can reach a terminal. With your money, that wouldn't be too hard. Hell, I could even take care of your money. Do some trading, maybe move your accounts out of countries before they fold up.”

Fielding Real pursed his lips. He thought for a moment and looked shrewdly at the visual receptor. *That sort of makes sense. I could trust your judgment—it's mine, after all. I can believe myself, right? Yes, yes...*

“You're going to need company.” Fielding Prime says nothing more. Best to stand pat with his hand and not push him too hard.

*I think I'll do it.* Fielding Real's face brightens. His eyes take on a fanatic gleam. *You and me. I know it's going to work, now!*

Fielding Real burbles on and Fielding Prime listens dutifully to him, making the right responses without effort. After all, he knows the other man's mind. It is easy to manipulate him, to play the game of ice and steel.

Far back, away from where Fielding Real's programmers could sense it, Fielding Prime smiles inwardly (the only way he could). It will be a century, at least. He will sit here monitoring data, input and output, the infinite dance of electrons. Better than

death, far better. And there may be new developments, a way to transfer computer constructs to real bodies. Hell, anything could happen.

*Boy, it's cost me a fortune to do this. A bundle. Bribing people to keep it secret, shifting the accounts so the Feds wouldn't know—and you cost the most. You're the best simulation ever developed, you realize that? Full consciousness, they say.*

“Quite so.”

Let him worry about his money—just so there was some left. The poor simple bastard thought he could trust Fielding Prime. He thought they were the same person. But Fielding Prime had played the chords, smelled the future, lived a vivid life of his own. He was older, wiser. He had felt the love of the crowd wash over him, been at the focal point of time. To him Fielding Real was just somebody else, and all his knife-sharp instincts could come to bear.

*How was it? What was it like? I can see how you responded by running your tapes for a few sigmas. But I can't order a complete scan without wiping your personality matrix. Can't you tell me? How did it feel?*

Fielding Prime tells him something, anything, whatever will keep the older man's attention. He speaks of ample-thighed girls, of being at the center of it all.

*Did you really? God!*

Fielding Prime spins him a tale.

\* \* \* \*

He is running cool and smooth. He is radiating on all his eigenfrequencies. *Ah* and *ah*

Yes, that is a good idea. After Fielding Real is gone, his accountants will suddenly discover a large sum left for scientific research into man-machine linkages. With a century to work, Fielding Prime can find a way out of this computer prison. He can become somebody else.

Not Lennon, no. He owed that much to Fielding Real.

Anyway, he had already lived through that. The Beatles' music was quite all right, but doing it once had made it seem less enticing. Hermann was right. The music was too simple-minded, it lacked depth.

He is ready for something more. He has access to information storage, tapes, consultant help from outside, all the libraries of the planet. He will study. He will train. In a century he can be anything. Ah, he will echo down the infinite reeling halls of time.

John Lennon, hell. He will become Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Afterword

In 1974 the Beatles were fading as figures but looming large as legends.

The anguished early-70s music of Lennon contrasted strongly with the light, sweet songs of McCartney. The two of them seemed to reflect mirror-opposite views of what the past decade had meant. Lennon appealed to intellectuals, and I felt instinctively that he would, even after the breakup, remain the lightning rod of the foursome.

I decided to write a story about the curious fanaticism that was already enveloping the Beatles. Lennon was the logical choice—readers are intellectuals, after all. The yearning of so many to be a part of that Golden Age bounce and verve was a natural motivation. I made notes for the piece for months. To keep the right tone, I wrote the story in one day, compressing time to gain energy.

But time can't be frozen, and now events have caught up with the facts of this piece. They caught up with me at, of all places, a publisher's annual meeting. I was a guest author at Pocket Books' annual meeting of editors, publishers, and representatives. A lively crew, they are. I had been out to dinner with them, and returned to the Hotel del Coronado to find the lobby abuzz with the news of Lennon's death.

From there my memory takes a jump-shot forward. I am lying face down on the bed in my room, feeling like a bus had run me over with studied care. I lurch up to find that, first, I must soon heed the call of nature, and second, I am fully clothed, and third, sunlight is trying to pry up the shades.

Returning from the bathroom, I notice a pile of crumpled bills on a table. They are all singles. I can remember nothing of the night before.

I go down to breakfast, where veiled questioning reveals that I got into a long poker game with the sales representatives. And drank a lot. And, apparently, won.

I still have no memory of those hours. Rereading this story, I realized again how heavily the news hit me. I do remember, though, that sometime around 1978 someone in rock circles told me that McCartney had read the story in Terry Carr's *Best of the Year* anthology, and passed it on to Lennon. I rather wonder what he made of it.

Here you will find a logic built on what I saw as a swelling undercurrent in the mid-70s. Its John Lennon carries no memory of a brutal booming, lancing pain, and sudden dark. It would be impossible to write this story now, including those facts, and yet retain the same tone.

So I shall let it stand. Science fiction is at times predictive, and there are notes sounded here (particularly, in Fielding's attitude toward the true Lennon) which strike me as a bit eerie. Mark David Chapman wanted to be Lennon; he signed that name on registration forms, apparently without attracting much attention.

One can read this, then, as an inspection of what lay waiting for Lennon outside the Dakota on December 8, 1980. But I hope that fact will not dim the spirit of this story, which attempted to reach the more joyous emotions of that time.