

# Night & Day

by Jack Swenson

The professor walks into his class one day, shuffles his notes, turns to face the class, and doesn't know what to say. He can't remember what he had planned to talk about. He can't remember the lecture he so carefully prepared the night before. He looks at his notes, but can't make sense out of the words. He looks up at his students. He recognizes the faces. He smiles. They smile back. He doesn't utter a word.

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There's a lot of what they call Thirteenth stepping that goes on at the Juice Church. Guys are looking for gals, and gals are looking for guys. They find true love at the meetings. I had my eye on a girl named Alexandra. She told me that she had a boyfriend. "You'd like him," she said. I assured her that I would not. Max takes me under his wing, helps me a lot. "God either is or he isn't," he says. I tell him what the hell, I'll give it a try. I remember seeing a motto somewhere: "God could and would, if He were asked."

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Max dreams about rice paddies, the click of napalm canisters when they are released, and a fiery salvation. He dreams about children bringing bombs into bars hidden in fruit baskets. He dreams about seeing VC who won't talk thrown out of helicopters. We talk about My Lai, and he laughs. They did that all the time over there, he says. He tells me that he was peering at his reflection in the mirror one morning, and he saw the face of somebody he didn't know. Before we part one day I ask him how his wife is doing. "Who?" he asks. He tells me he doesn't see her anymore. Since she lost her job, she plays on the computer all night and reads.

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The day I turned thirty I started to run. I thought I looked fat. To trim some pounds, I ran. I ran a mile every morning, uphill, downhill, and on the flat. I ran the last hundred yards or so as fast as I could. Then my lady love ran off with a high school social studies

teacher. By that time my wife had smelled a rat and moved out. Later she wanted to try to patch things up, but I didn't. I sold the house and moved into an apartment. I met a sweet young thing at school, and I convinced her to move in with me. That December I asked her what she wanted for Christmas. "A diamond would be nice," she said.

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Around midnight a pretty black nurse poked her head in the door. "Are you the alky?" she asked. "Come here baby," I said. "Whatcha got?" "Pamphlets," she replied. She let me fondle her ass while I read one titled "Why We Were Chosen." "Good question," I said. "What's the answer?" "Beats me," she said.

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I remember going outside after the storm and looking for damage to our house. Nothing seemed to be amiss. There was a small tree down in front of my neighbors' place next door. It was oddly quiet, and the air had a strangely urgent quality. The sun came out, and water on the leaves and branches turned oaks and aspens into Christmas trees. Everything glistened. I searched the sky, and the clouds were white and gold. A solitary bird was singing at the very top of a tree.

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Of course our next door neighbors on the other side brought Mimi to the party. Mimi was a golden-haired three-year-old. When Mimi spotted me she put a knuckle in her cheek and grinned. The little flirt! Later, on the deck in back of the house, with her papa looking on, I played the penny game with Mimi. I held up a coin and made it disappear. Then magically I pulled it out of her shoe. The child looked up at me in wonder. Her eyes were as fresh and blue as seawater. Her moon face formed a perfect circle.

