

Chapter 1: Maharishi's Final Warning

My friends levitate. The whole gang—Jamie, Doug, Beth—zoom through the air like helicopters. Anyway, that's what they called it—"flying," "levitation," and so forth. I know better because I peeked.

This was 25 years ago when levitating was the biggest secret in the Transcendental Meditation Movement. The flyers didn't have the Golden Dome back then, so they made do in the first floor lounge of my dormitory. They hung sheets over the windows and told everyone else to keep out. The cloak-and-dagger stuff was pretty lame because all I had to do was walk down the stairs, open the door, and look in.

Judging by the sounds I heard as I snuck down the stairs in my socks, levitation is a lot like an orgy.

"Oooooo!"

"Eeee-yaaaaa!"

Barring group sex, I was hoping to see a bunch of people hovering in the air the way the rumor mill described it. (Sample rumor: "Air traffic controllers will lose their jobs unless they learn to direct people instead of airplanes.")

"Ahhh-ahhh-AHHH!"

When I got to the bottom of the stairs, I saw that somebody had tacked up a picture of Maharishi, our guru, on the door of the men's lounge. His gaze surprised me with a pang of dread. If the stories were true and he's an incarnation of God, then he knew that I was about to commit the biggest no-no in the Movement. I was dripping sweat as I cracked the door and peered in from the shadows.

A bunch of guys were sitting in the lotus position on the floor, which was covered wall-to-wall with foam mats. Jamie was quivering all over and yelping like he was getting a root canal. The guys around him were bouncing up and down on their butts and giggling furiously.

After much twitching, Jamie went airborne. He pushed himself off the ground with his knees and bounced forward in a series of short hops—thud, thud, thud—landing on his butt with a goofy grin.

In my five years with the Movement, I'd seen the heights of devotion and the depths of paranoia. I'd been through hope and despair and crazy superstitions and grinding boredom without end. By then, it wasn't much of a surprise to learn that my best friend had a secret life as a bun-bouncing lunatic.

The thing that bugged me, as I stood in the shadows watching the happy faces go up and down, was the knowledge that each one of them believed without question that he was flying through the air under his own power like Superman. I knew these guys, and I knew the Movement. If Maharishi said butt-bouncing on foam rubber was magic, a miracle, a paranormal suspension of Newtonian physics, then it was. Period.

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