

I'm in a room on an isolated ranch with some of my hippy coworkers, our backs tired and our sweat long dried after a long and loud night finishing the stage and sound system setup for one of the two San Francisco rock bands our crew works for. The plan is to be here for the weekend to continue our journey toward spiritual enlightenment. Naturally, this will include some mind-enhancing drugs.

My friend Mike stares at the tiny piece of LSD paper, hesitating. "Twelve to sixteen hours?"

"It's just lucy, dude. It'll take your mind on a wild ride," a voice interjects from across the room.

Mike lies down and slowly lifts it up to his mouth, looks at me, and places it under his tongue. Within seconds his skin starts to flush, and he moves his fingers. "They're tingling," he mutters. He starts running his tongue around his drying mouth and quickly starts jerking his head at what he's seeing. He's on a bad trip.

"Stop saying that," he shouts at the air, immediately turning to me. "Did you see that?!" He bends into a fetal position, head toward his chest and covering it with his hands, then swipes at the air. "Get away from me!"

With no other option, I attempt to guide Mike through his experience. "I'm here, Mike, your friend Dale. Trust me. Nothing bad is happening to you. Be open to what you see."

His shouting continues to escalate, so I bring him to a standing position and lead him away from the group and back to the ranch house. Timothy Leary, an ex-Harvard professor turned LSD guru, is in the kitchen talking with the family who live on the property.

"Leary, help me, man, I'm freaking out!" Mike says, his fingers like a steel grip on Timothy's arms. The family members take a few steps back.

"Pray, man, pray," responds Leary. "Connect with your spiritual self."

Mike whips his head to face me, the whites of his eyes twitching. "I don't know how!" he yells.

My lips part and out come the words I used to say every night by my bed—familiar, inviting. I speak out the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.

A holy shield of peace surrounds me, but when I lift my head, everyone in the room is glaring at me. One woman shakes her head, while a man seems to think his disgust will overpower any chance of life emanating from the prayer. Everyone but Leary is staring at us icily, and Leary notices the tension. "Why don't we chant the Hare Krishna?"

Without hesitation, we do so, the familiar words falling off my tongue, but the inner fear of what might happen if we stay makes us run to pack and leave the ranch as quickly as possible.

A few days later, Mike has recovered, but he will never forget his experience. Now at my parents' home, I stare in the mirror at my short hair, a surreal feeling of grief, of no longer fully believing I will find what I'm looking for.