

Doors of Deception

an anachronistic fiction

by

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“I wouldn’t rate Ringo as a better drummer . . . I’m adamant about that . . .”

– Pete B. (as quoted by Spencer Leigh in the book about that infamous “sacking”)

Jim Morrison and John Keats were feeling frustrated and fatigued after a full hour of taking turns—while otherwise ignoring one another—knock-knock-knocking on the tall door whose knob-less outer surface had been recently cleansed and then faithfully refreshed with pearl-reminiscent, semi-gloss, mold-resistant exterior paint purchased by Pete himself at Black Friday discount prices from a Westminster brimstone-and-mortar hardware store near St. John’s Wood. Having become *so-o-o* tired of alternating one poet’s fruitless, polite-sounding, finger-knuckle tappings with the other poet’s fruitless, ruder-sounding, fist-hammer rappings, both were becoming discouraged, were fearing having to settle for a scheduling snafu that might demand near-eternal patience. At the end of that unproductive hour, sitting on plush-pillowed chairs in the open-air hallway that served as a waiting room, both poets had finally decided—spontaneously, simultaneously—to stand up from their chosen locations at opposite ends of the wide-aisled hall, *loosen* up, and fight terminal tedium by approaching one another half-way, willing to hazard the feigning of a friendship.

J.M. spoke first, breaking the vocal silence in a quiet, not-quite confident, quick-rhythmed articulation: “I’m surprised, Mr. Keats, that in such a spacious and auspicious venue as this, we’re the only two . . . *petitioners* . . . showing up. I wonder how many lonely lyricists canceled their reservations for this house of . . .” He paused, turned his brown-leathered back to his waiting-area companion, took several steps to face the window-less door up-close, and sighed loudly. “But just maybe . . . well, perhaps I *do* have . . . some . . . *friends* . . . *in . . . side . . .*” He held up two fingers in the shape of an obsolete peace sign, then closed them scissor-like against his forehead before shifting them forward in vague salute. “Maybe they beat us to the *pun*—” He slammed his right fist into the palm of his left hand, then turned and retraced his steps back toward J.K. “Perhaps they conspired to show up way early, intending to keep us . . . yes, me *and* you . . . from . . .” When he did not hear a corroborating comment of concern, J.M. shrugged and walked on down the hall, moving farther away from the unwelcoming door, hands shoved into the back pockets of tight, green-gold, snake-skin trousers.

After several moments of further silence, J.K. finally spoke second—so far there was no-one to speak third—although reluctant to go ahead and follow the *somewhat-welcoming* Door down the hall. His tone tentative, his syllables were hesitant. “Certainly I . . . sub . . . *scribe* . . . to your *sent* . . . uh . . . *meant* . . . your . . . Well, *sir* . . . *prized* like you . . . *all so . . .*” Suddenly, with rapid strides and a changing mind, he began marching toward J.M.’s departing back, the heels and toes of his re-soled shoes clicking quietly.

“Like the taps and ticks of early telegraph machines,” J.M. thought to himself, glancing back, listening carefully, wishing he had studied Morse Code—or designed his own *Morrison* Code—perhaps as part of some pretentious film-school soundtrack project. (“Damn,” he mused, “*that* would have made a great album title . . .”) He raised his left hand, signaling a halt to the

two-man parade that had no audience, waiting for J.K. to catch up. He cupped his right hand behind his ear and crouched down as though to listen more carefully for meaningful sound. “Sir *Prized*, you say? Did I *win* somethin’? Eh?” He quickly stood fully erect and shot his arm out to clap the other poet aggressively on the back. “Or didja just get somethin’ stuck in your *throat*?”

J.K. coughed a few red, upper-case consonants into the soft air that surrounded them, then pulled a handkerchief from the outer breast-pocket of his purple-pleated Norfolk jacket. He coughed again, spraying a thin stream of green, lower-case vowels onto the stained square of wrinkled cloth. “Thanks,” he choked out. “Musta been something I wrote. Much better now.”

“Maybe Pete can refer you to an Ear, Nose, and Throat specialist somewhere in there.” J.M. flipped a forefinger forward, pointing toward the tall door. “Like I just said, I think I’ve got more than one *friend* in . . . side. Even if they don’t seem interested at the moment in admitting . . .” The sometimes-dour Door’s voice trailed away. He frowned for a few moments, then gradually formed his face into a friendly grin before again slapping the sometimes-sour Romantic on the back, but gently this time. “We’ll get you all fixed up,” he said cheerfully.

The little communication crisis temporarily resolved, the two poets found themselves slowly-but-surely relaxing, feeling less self-consciously awkward in one another’s unexpected presence, and before too long began cautiously swapping stories of interesting earthly experience. “I think,” commented J.K. at one point, his speaking voice apparently fully restored, “you actually took your band’s name from my fellow countryman poet’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, but many rock critics seem to know only that it came from the title of Aldous Huxley’s book about drugs: *The Doors of Perception*. Did you know William Blake was the original source that inspired Huxley’s usage?”

“*Damn straight!*” roared the Door-man, looking insulted. “Mr. Keats, I am an *educated* artist. I am not blind. I read and re-read the words on the relevant pages of the relevant writers. First Blake, then Huxley, then Blake again, Heaven, Hell, Perception, Reality . . . and marriage even . . .” He stopped mid-sneer and blinked one eye (an ancient *blink*, but not a modern *wink*, noted J.K.). “You know, of course, that *I* know all about Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.”

J.K. looked embarrassed, lines of flesh implying non-verbal apology creasing his face as he nodded several times. “Of course,” he finally whispered.

“Righto, Jacko . . . By the way, you may be surprised to hear that early-on—before that big blast of L.A. fame struck sparks that led to global golden fireworks—me and my Door-mates debated changing the name of the band.”

“How interesting!” said Blake’s once-upon-a-time compatriot. “Change it from *The Doors*? To *what*, may I ask?”

“At one point—in the strange days during which we were struggling through a little ditty with the original working-title of ‘Ignite My Hell-Fire’—we considered calling ourselves *The Windows!*”

“How insightful,” J.K. cooed, a sweet smile slowly widening his (mostly) white-teethed mouth. “One would have to actively *open* a door and walk through it to get the benefit of what might lie on the other side; but you can just stand close and *peer through* a window to perceive the reality on the other side, perhaps a new type of reality just waiting to be explored. And then one could decide whether or not to . . . Well, such a breakthrough—such an *advantage!* Not as *dangerous!*”

“Hmm,” J.M. mused, an involuntary furrow puzzling his forehead. “I don’t think I ever really . . . *considered* it . . . in *those* terms . . .”

“Although,” added J.K., “you *do* have to keep handy a bottle of highly diluted ale or some other effective liquid, plus something similar to washable handkerchiefs—to cleanse the glass of grime and germs and keep it perceptually—if not perpetually—transparent.” Without realizing he was doing so, he patted the monogrammed breast pocket over his heart. “But speaking of windows and the venerable Mr. Blake, did you know that when William Blake was a young boy he looked up from his writing table and through a window in the wall saw actual *angels*? ”

“Hmm, hmm,” repeated the mind-open Door. “Ya don’t say. Yeah, yeah. Coulda been, coulda been. If it had been me, of course, I would have opened that window and thrown my ink-pen at those angels. But, Johnny Boy, *regarding the name change*, for me it soon became moot.”

“Mute?” J.K looked concerned. He nervously licked his lips. “Did you lose your . . . *voi*—?” He placed the tip of a well-manicured finger upon the lump of thyroid cartilage that lay beneath the skin of his throat. “I, too, once suffered loss of—”

“No, Man, *no*,” J.M. corrected. “It was a *moot* point, a *moot point*! I think your education was more medical than legal, but I assume you know the *moot* concept—in the courts of attorneys and judges, or in the classrooms of law schools. Right? Meaning: it doesn’t really matter beyond the boundaries of philosophical discussion, ‘cause the case is already closed. Somethin’ like that.” He turned open palms toward the always-bright Heavens visible above the ceiling-less waiting area in a gesture perhaps indicating the need for higher authority—or simply signaling “whatever.”

“What case d’ye mean?” asked J.K., taking his hand from his Adam’s-apple. “And how *much* closed? Completely? Locked up?”

“As closed as that damn door down there!” Once more, the rock vocalist’s voice was a roar. “Turns out some computer geek name o’ Gates had already been granted copyrights or patents or

some such wording permissions for near-exclusive use of the name for certain commercial, professional, technological, even *ill*-logical purposes he was starting to develop but was still a couple of years away from fully delivering. There was no use pursuing *that* name change. We weren't going to spend our days responding to high-tech esoteric legal complaints or carrying on arguments with suit-coated—*lawsuit*-coated—data-coding dudes like *him*.”

“Ah,” said J.K., “I learn something new every day. But you, too, Mr. Morrison, might be able to learn something new from *me* about—” He had started to laugh, but his laugh was threatening to become a cough. He snatched at his handkerchief, grabbing it just in time to catch a brief flow of pink punctuation marks escaping from the left corner of his half-closed mouth.

“You okay?” asked J.M., his face clouding.

J.K. nodded. “Best if I stay quiet for a moment. Tell me more about trying to change the name of your band.”

“Well, sure,” agreed J.M. “If you’re feeling well enough to listen, that is.”

J.K. nodded again, shoving the now-wadded handkerchief into the back pocket of his tan twill breeches.

“Since it appears we’ll have time . . . to . . . *kill* . . .” J.M. jabbed his thumb over his shoulder toward the still-sealed door. “Until *that* sucker *opens* . . .” He sat again on the nearest plush-pillowed chair, extending his legs fully, brown Mojave-moccasin heels down, orange-beaded toes pointing up at the bluish-silvery sky. “That first experience with young Mr. Pearly Gates and his Windows would not be my last. Buckle up for this one, Buddy. A couple of years later, taking my inspiration from the legend of how some 3M corporate types made a fortune out of little sticky notes, I noticed how in our recording studios so many of the computer screens had little yellow rectangles stuck on them with hand-jotted messages. Often there were so many you

could no longer see what was on the screen behind them. It gave me the great idea for something larger, something in the shape of a window blind you could affix to the top of a monitor with little suction cups—even complete with a little roller bar so you could pull down the shades with finger and thumb whenever you wanted to hide what was on your screen. I called my prototype product *Close The Windows*. I thought you could even order it with your own customized message on it, like ‘Post No Bill’s’ or ‘The Gates Are Shut’ or something equally sarcastic or merely mundane. Maybe just like ‘Let You Know When I’m Free Again—If Ever.’ But again, picky Pearly got some legal geek to intervene—I have no idea how they even got *wind* of my little project—and they claimed once more that we were infringing on some weird version of a commercial copyright license.” The singer shook his shaggy head. “I gave up—decided to let ‘em keep the damn windows *open*. Or somethin’ . . . As one of my mother’s housekeepers used to say before she quit in a huff over some hourly wage nonsense, I wasn’t gonna friggin’ *do* windows anymore. Just not worth fightin’ about . . . too much of an energy drain on my brain.”

“So sad,” said J.K. in a thick, scratchy whisper. The cloying scent of a distant, unidentifiable flower tickled his nostrils. “So frustrating for you. Blake would have understood. *Energy*, yes. Like he said, ‘Eternal delight’ . . . and all that.” He sat in the soft seat next to the CEO of Doors, who calmly reached into the V-shaped side pocket of his leather jacket and offered his suddenly sneezing companion a lemon lozenge from a small yellow box.

“*Thank you*,” J.K. whispered hoarsely, unwrapping the lozenge and placing it carefully on the tip of his instantly-soured tongue. “Ath gooth rithanth ta tetchy teks lak thothe.”

“Ha!” snarled J.M. “It wasn’t even finished *then!* Our little game of non-musical chairs was not over!” He suddenly stood, flapping his arms up and down, slowly at first but then faster and

faster. “For a brief period of earthly time I wanted to change our name to *The Screens*, but . . . well . . .”

J.K. stood to join the one-time-Door. Arms straight down at his sides like an Irish step-dancer, his nose and throat feeling a little less irritated now, he addressed his new friend in a voice freshly clean and clear. “You remind me at times of a meeting I had with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. As we walked and talked, he frequently moved his arms up and down like I have observed you doing—like an earth-bound bird too big and heavy to lift up and fly.”

The dominant Door definitely looked annoyed. He toyed with a necklace of thickly-braided, indigo-dyed lariat rope that lay in a loose oval around his throat. “Thanks for such a stimulating, irrelevant, and possibly insulting interruption. What does that comment have to do with naming my band *The Screens*?” He strode defiantly down the hall toward Pete’s semi-gloss door.

Once again, J.K. looked embarrassed, his cheeks becoming more pink, less pale. He marched down the hall himself, staying a step or two behind J.M. “Not sure what I . . . intended to . . . so sorry if you think I was . . . Well, please, continue; please tell me what *kind* of screens you had in mind.”

J.M. waved a hand dismissively. “Not to worry, Man. No apology needed.” He turned away from Pete’s door, flapped his arms some more, and curled his lips in a parody of an Elvis grin. “I wasn’t thinking of geeky Gates and his high-tech *computer* screens—I’m meaning like screen *doors*, like just, you know, screen doors on the back porch of a summer beach cottage to keep the flies and beetles and other bugs away on a hot day or night while *you* stay *cool*. It’s of paramount importance, Man, to always try to stay *cool*.”

J.K. nodded his head vertically. “It helps you become almost *literally* cool if you install a fine-mesh screen on your bedroom window—helps you drift asleep on a hot night.” He shook his

head horizontally. “Especially if you’re recovering from an illness.” His cheeks, deep pink moments ago, were becoming pale again.

With a thumbs-up gesture, J.M. smiled briefly. “Right. *Especially*. I guess. But now remember, Man, a *screen* is not exactly a *window*. Maybe more like a big *mask*—one with a lot of little holes. You need *air* holes in a window screen or a door screen, for example, to let good fresh . . .” He held up latticed fingers in front of his face and stared at his fellow poet, his peering pupils appearing tiny. “Or maybe like little *eye* holes in a child-sized mask . . . eye holes to see what’s . . . Hmm. Maybe we should have called ourselves *The Masks*.” The smile behind and between the finger spaces was widening. “When I was an innocent little brat—so long ago now—I loved reading and re-reading old comic-books about that cowboy dude called The Lone Ranger. Maybe I should have worn a stylish mask while performing. *He* wore a mask while performing—while performing *good deeds*: rescuing people and bringin’ bad dudes to justice! A mask, for sure, with eye holes. But really, who *was* that . . . that . . . behind that . . .?”

“Was he *really* so alone? That legendary ranger? That masked man?” The body language of J.K.’s rotating head was vague, perhaps hoping to encourage some further revelation that might or might not be forthcoming.

J.M. seemed to exit some sort of trance as he lowered his finger-mask and converted the thumbs-up gesture of a few moments earlier into the “you’re out” signal of a baseball umpire, jerking it toward the smooth and knob-less door a few feet behind him. Ya know, Mr. Keats, you European cricket players might not realize why American baseball umpires wear masks. Do ya?”

“Well,” quickly answered J.K., “I assume it’s to keep their faces safe from wild balls.”

J.M.’s laughing suggested some form of vulgar leering. “You get partial credit, Johnny, partial credit. I have always believed that it’s also to discourage some steamed-up batter from

breaking a nose or loosening some teeth when he gets called out on a lousy third-strike that's clearly high or low or wide. An example of *injustice!*"

Not knowing if Mr. Door was pretending to be a clown or pretending to be crazy, Mr. Keats stayed stock-still without responding.

"But on a more practical note, let me inform you now that the best explanation for the fiasco of *The Screens* name for a rock or pop band is best introduced by Pete, the saintly guy in *there*—the aging lad or bloke or Blakean angel or Failed Beatle or whatever name or label you want to give *him*—the man behind *that!*"

As though—or perhaps *actually*—on cue, a smooth-sounding clearing of an unseen someone's throat was followed by a melodiously modulated "Ah-hem!" That was followed quickly by an exultant "Ah-theem!" as the *faux*-pearl door was being pushed slowly from the inside by a dark-suited man with similarly dark hair (cut in "pudding bowl" style) who emerged into the waiting area smiling mischievously, twirling two silvery drumsticks in his right hand and carrying over his shoulder with his left a pillow case of shimmering white. Faint sounds of echoing harp strings faded as he pushed the door closed behind him without looking, using the bottom of a high-heeled, highly polished, black-leather riding boot.

"Pete!" shouted Morrison. "At last!" He looked at Keats. "Johnny Boy, this is the best man to tell you some gossip about the fiasco of *The Screens*."

"Nice meetin' ya, Mr. Keats," said Pete Best, dropping the drumsticks and extending his right hand for shaking. The sticks landed with a metallic clatter on the pink marble corridor floor. While shaking hands with Keats, Pete nodded toward Morrison. "They shoulda called themselves *The Defenestrators*. Look it up! I mean it—look it up!" His laugh moved up and down the scale, touching each note in a mid-range octave, rhythmically in harmony with the

echoes of the two drumsticks that continued to tap in regular four-four on the gleaming floor. He carefully laid the spotless sack down, its unsecured top open just enough to reveal the frame-edge of a rose-maple therapy harp. Then, dramatically and suddenly, Pete flipped his right hand around, three fingers clamping his palm while the forefinger and thumb portrayed the profile of a small toy pistol. “*Bang, you’re dead,*” he said. The drumsticks immediately ceased their restless quivering, stayed flat, and fell silent. “It’s a dumb trick,” he said, “making my *drumsticks dumbsticks*. Ringo invented it. For a long time I had no mind to learn how to do it. Didn’t want to learn nothin’ from *him*. But after a while, I sucked up my pride and practiced. Now I think it’s a neat bit, yeah?”

Morrison’s laugh threatened to evolve into low-dose clinical hysteria. “I never heard *that* one before, Pete. Neat? Yeah. Definitely. *Neat, Pete.*”

“Those were the days, my friend . . .” The drummer’s voice was high and pure, a choir-boy falsetto.

“We thought you’d *nevv . . . err . . . end.*” Morrison’s voice was a velvet purr, not quite a drunken slur. “So, hey, Best Man . . .” Demonstrating affection beyond a mere handshake, he embraced the former Beatle with an earnest wrap-around hug. “I was just telling Mr. Keats here that you could explain why we gave up on naming ourselves *The Screens.*”

“Oh, yeah, it’s crazy, Mr. Keats. I’ll share the simplest version I can manage to remember after all these years.”

“I’d be grateful,” said Keats. “All this ancient nomenclatural culture is fascinating.”

“Well, I’ll tell you only if you agree to tell me later—maybe after we go back into the studio over there and finish your applications and get you two through these important auditions—but *priorities, priorities:* don’t forget that I believe getting more timeless lyrics from the likes of

poets like you guys may be what we will come to call ‘the secret sauce to eternal success.’ But, yes, indeed, at some point today I *do* want to hear from you if it’s true that Albert Grossman, that punter who assembled folk-singing Peter, Paul, and Mary—*another* famous naming situation: ‘Paul?’ Oh, come on, give us a break!—yes, Gross Man himself, Dylan’s legendary manager, did he *really* want you and Byron and Shelley to form a trio and tour music halls of the British Isles. That’s what I’ve heard.”

Morrison let out a loud and boisterous cackle. Keats emitted a quiet and shy vibration, more a digestive noise than a laugh.

“Another one I never heard before,” said the former Door. “So tell us, Johnny.”

“It’s *not* true,” said the shy Romantic. He reached toward his back pocket, fumbling for his handkerchief, took it out, un-wadded it, paused, half-smiled, refolded it neatly, put it back again. “As I have said many times, the difference between Lord Byron and me was that he wrote about what he *saw*, and I wrote about what I *imagined*. He was a word machine. It was harder for me. A tour with him would have ended after the first performance when the audience became disappointed at how little output I had to contribute to a live show compared to his—my slender sheaf in contrast to his bulging bag.”

“Didn’t *think* it would have worked out,” said Pete, “and now I know I was correct. I’m grateful for confirmation from the horse’s mouth!”

Keats took out the handkerchief again. He coughed once, not too painfully, then blotted from his chin the blue residue of lower-case t’s missing their crosses, lower-case i’s missing their upper tittles, and one question mark missing its lower tittle. “Blake would have been better,” he whispered. “He wrote and painted what he actually saw—but what he *actually* saw *was* his

imagination.” He refolded his handkerchief. “Never encountered Grossman, by the way—rumours, just rumours, tabloid tittle-tattle tattle-tales. But now what about *The Screens*?”

Pete looked concerned, gestured toward Keats’ bluish chin. “You all right, mate?”

Keats nodded. “Temporary issue,” he said. “*Limited* issue. Nothing too serious.”

Pete pulled something from the pocket of his white dress-shirt. “Contemporary tissues,” he said. “Cleaner. More sanitary.” Keats accepted the little packet, his face sober. “Okay, then,” said Pete. “Before I . . . *left* . . . the group . . . we wanted to call ourselves *The Screams*—because that was what we were beginning to be all about, ya see?”

“Oh, *we* saw. We saw all right. ‘The men don’t know, but the little girls . . . understand!’

And all that goes with *that!*” Morrison’s long laugh suggested an animalistic howl.

Pete’s brief laugh was less a howl than a pretend growl. “The background of what happened later, Mr. John Keats, was that either Paul or George failed to keep the idea a secret—mentioned it to some American FM deejay in Detroit who mentioned it to some flack in Berry Gordy’s Motown music shop. So we got a call from some low-level PR hack claiming that *The Screams* sounded too much like *The Supremes*. How stupid! Three of us assumed it was just a practical joke. Definitely not a big deal to lose sleep over. But somehow that little phone session got under the skin of the sensitive Mr. Lennon—who made it clear we would never be called *The Screams*. But that absurd little scenario always stuck in my craw! I filed the name away for future reference, along with a few of my *other* . . . resentful . . . insecure . . . memories.”

“A real-life ‘Heard it Through the Grapevine’ situation!” added Morrison. “So, Pete, allow me to interject some oddball info for the benefit of Mr. Keats. The thing *repeated* itself! I mean, Johnny, my band-mates and I heard it through *another* grapevine that Mr. Pete Best here was going to start a new band of his own that he originally *did* want to call *The Screams* but then

quickly thought better of it and switched it phonetically to *The Screens!* Maybe to annoy Lennon or the dudes at Motown—or even *me . . . Somethin’ like that.*”

Pete Best’s tooth-baring grin was so wide and high it looked as though he were in pain. “Well, Jim, I wouldn’t go *that* far . . . I just liked the rhyme with *teens*. But the rest is innocuous history. Mr. Keats, *The Doors* kept their name of course and skyrocketed up the charts, while my new band’s first record—*The Screens Play for Teens*—was a remaindered dust-bin dud.”

John Keats looked bewildered. He looked first at Jim Morrison, then back at Pete Best. He shook his head and began fumbling at the little packet of tissues. Taking one out, he used it not for catching a cough, nor for cleansing a nose, but for drying one of his eyes.

“Why are you crying?” Pete’s voice was soft.

“Yeah, what’s happening, my good pal?” Jim’s face was serious.

The legendary poet of the Romantic Era in British *literary* history took a deep breath and turned his gaze directly at the almost-legendary drummer of the Rock Era in British *musical* history. “Today’s experience with you two, at least so far, has taken me back to something I’ve always believed: that ‘life is divine chaos’ . . .” He turned the damp tissue over and dabbed the un-used side around his other eye. “I’m still trying to find the meaning of that word ‘divine.’ ‘Life,’ I understand, and ‘chaos’ also. But *divine*? ”

Jim Morrison seemed stunned. “What do you understand about *life*? ”

“It’s messy,” said John Keats.

“Maybe it’s supposed to be that way,” said Pete Best. “All for the . . .”

“Good one,” said the tearful poet, trying to smile. “And maybe we are all three leading posthumous existences. Maybe that’s why the chaos *is* divine.”

The drummer pointed his fingers toward the floor and snapped them with a sharp *pop!* His sticks arose as though pulled by an invisible string and floated over to nestle in the American rock star's hands. The white sack floated up and over to the man in need of comfort. "I can teach you—either of you—to strum a therapy harp. It has something in common with Coleridge's window-sill Aeolian Harp: on neither is it possible to play a 'wrong' note."

"*That's* the dude he could have toured with," said Jim Morrison. "Coleridge! *Not* big-bag, big-bad Baron Byron!"

"On the other hand," continued Pete Best, "it's totally up to you two. You don't *have* to be an instrumental virtuoso to be allowed inside. I already have Duke Ellington's uncle plus Yo Yo Ma's great grandmother in there. Today's audition is limited to finding fresh lyrics for the current incarnation of my Heavenly choir. You two are opposites, and my idea is that if we can reconcile your obviously different poetic orientations . . . if we can find something they *could* have in common . . . *marry* the two . . . a convenient marriage of . . . well . . . perhaps we can come up with something even Paul and George or John and George or John and Paul would have been proud to have composed together."

Jim Morrison carefully placed the drumsticks into the white sack John Keats was holding, being careful not to bang them against the strings of the therapy harp. "Well, let's see now . . . *unheard* music maybe . . . yes?" His whisper was wistful.

John Keats added the little packet of tissues to the white sack. "Still . . . Sweeter . . . Still." His voice was nothing but breath, but the words themselves were visible for a moment when misty wisps of alphabetical essence formed and dissolved in the cool air that surrounded the three seekers.

“Best to get back to the studio,” Pete said, pointing. A door swung open, silently. “And not just for auditions. I’m thinking, too, about picking your brains for a new name for the choir inside. I wanted to call us *The Halos*, but believe it or not there’s an oldies group called the *Hi-Lo*’s gaining steady gigs for PBS television beg-a-thon fundraiser shows. They’re into their own time-tuning—time-*taming*—versions of harmonized opposites. And making it work, I might add. At least musically. In any case, I need help coming up with something more credible than *The Squeaky Cleans*. Yup, somebody inside actually suggested that. Out loud.” He shook his head, dark bangs winging wildly.

Just as the door closed behind the trio, a gray cloud passed quickly under an especially bright star in the darkening sky above the roofless waiting hall, casting to the floor a brief and gauzy shadow (not in the shape of a full-stop period, closer to that of a serial comma).