

One of Us

by Con Chapman

Rachel was, without a doubt, the most popular girl on campus. So many of the women were drones, and so many of the men were horny, that it left her with a fairly broad canvas on which to paint her personality. She didn't understand why everybody had to be so gloomy and studious all the time. She smiled at people because she was a happy person. She'd always been a happy person—why should she change just because she had chosen to go to a college where nearly everyone had been a high school valedictorian?



Maybe she'd made a mistake, but there was the scholarship money, and she hadn't gotten in to her first choice, so she'd transplanted herself from the suburbs of Boston to Chicago, and she wasn't going to stop living for four years just to get good grades. Life would take care of itself, she decided.



There were a few innovations she had introduced to the campus social scene for which she'd become rather well known. She would take off her blouse at concerts, a breach of decorum even at a school that had a clothing-optional dance once a year at Valentine's Day. It made a lot of people uncomfortable. Outside the social breakdown of the annual feast, as everyone knew from reading Claude Levi-Strauss, even tribal societies observe certain standards of decorum. Rachel's bare breasts would flop about, her white New England skin in sharp contrast to the dark gyms where the white rock bands and the black blues musicians would play. It made other women uncomfortable, since her conduct raised expectations among the men. It made most of the men uneasy when she would try to drag them on to the dance floor, they in their finest dishabille, she in blue jean bellbottoms and nothing else.



By senior year she had taken as her lover a drummer for a jazz guitarist's group who'd played on campus, and then at a club on the North Side. He was on tour most of the time, so she functioned as a sort of dowager empress to the undergraduate social scene, appearing at every party and concert and urging people to break down the walls of repression that kept them from feeling and expressing universal love for each other. Other people would write the great novels, or make the big discoveries, or run for office. She'd decided that her mission in life was simply to bring people together.

It was at a pot-luck dinner at the feminist coffeehouse that she sat next to Mark and Linda, a quiet couple who were on the fringes of the floating social scene that centered around her apartment, with its four male and one other female occupants. Mark wore his hair Indian-style; long, with a headband to keep it out of his eyes. Linda's hair was essentially the same, parted in the middle, without the headband. They both wore glasses and were a little paunchy from study and no exercise. They had, early on in their college days, decided that they were soul-mates, and so there was no reason to join in the drinking and drugs and lover-swapping that the students who were still in the mode of finding themselves indulged in.

"So you're into astrology?" Mark asked with a rising tone in his voice as he noticed Rachel's necklace with the Pisces symbol on it.

"Yeah—it's cool," Rachel said.

"We are too," Linda said eagerly. "Yeah, there's a lot of stuff out there that you won't learn in your classes," Rachel said.

"For sure," Mark agreed. "I'm doing an independent study on world religions, and I think I'm on the verge of proving how they really outweigh a lot of scientific skepticism."

"Cool!" Rachel exclaimed. "I dated a pre-med student last year, and I basically talked him out of med school," she said. "He's thinking of going into holistic medicine now."

"That is *so* wonderful!" Linda said. They ate the potluck fare—lentil soup, vegetarian lasagna and carrot-raisin salad—and talked for a long time. Rachel was glad for the company—her drummer was out of town, and she always felt better with people to talk to.

"Why don't you guys come back to my apartment?" she asked when they had bussed their dishes and were ready to leave.

"Sure—we'd love to," Mark said. He always seemed to speak first, she noticed, but they were so obviously in love she respected whatever order of precedence they had worked out.

They made it back to her place—it was empty except for Phil, the anthropology major, who was holed up in his room, as usual. "Do you guys want some tea?" she asked; both of them said "yes," so she boiled some water and made a pot of chamomile.

They went into the common room, and Rachel put on some soft folk music, figuring it was appropriate for the mood and the company. "So what else are you guys into?" she asked when they had settled themselves.

"Oh, uh, lots of stuff," Mark said. "Astral projection." He said this with the same beaming smile that he'd had on his face throughout the evening.

"Really," Rachel said, a statement more than a question. "And . . . have you done it?"

"Oh, yes!" Linda said. "It's a totally different world from ours."

"And we're starting to get into weather control," Mark said.

"Can you really do that?" Rachel asked, trying to sound supportive and not skeptical.

"There are people out on the west coast, in Seattle, who've been experimenting with it," Mark said.

"Because of all the rain," Linda added.

"They were some of the founders of the Revolutionary Youth Movement, but they sorta soured on politics so now they're getting into more cosmic things."

"Huh—I see," Rachel said as she sipped her tea.

"I'd like to be able to use it here during the winter," Linda said.

"It gets so grey in Hyde Park in the winter. In the spring it's like you traded in a black-and-white TV for a color set!"

They all laughed at that, and Rachel got up to change the music. She put on a record whose album cover had a pentangle on it, and Mark picked it up from the floor to look at it.

"The pentagram has magical powers, you know," he said to Rachel.

"That's what I've heard, but I don't know too much about it," she replied.

"The five points represent the five planets of Mercury, Jupiter, Mars, Saturn and Venus—Queen of the Heavens."

"Mark is very sympathetic to the women's movement," Linda said.

"Unh-huh," Rachel said.

"The Pythagorean version has two legs pointing up," Mark said, as he turned the album cover to demonstrate. "That's where the children of the pre-cosmos were during their gestation before the cosmos to be born."

"Cool," Rachel said.

"The divine products of the seed of Chronos were deposited in the five recesses."

Rachel looked as he pointed to the album cover. "Do you guys want some more tea?" she asked.

"I'm fine," Linda said.

"I'm okay," Mark said. "Rachel," he said when they had all been silent for a moment.

"Yes?"

"We're glad you asked us over tonight."

"I'm glad you guys could come. You're always so quiet—you just hang back at parties and don't dance or drink or anything. It's cool how you're so—self-contained."

"Yes," Mark said, his voice trailing off. "You know, we've been watching you for some time."

"Watching me?"

"Yes—with admiration." Linda chimed in. "We think you're so nice!"

"I like you guys," Rachel said. "It takes all kinds of people to make the world go around."

"Precisely," Mark said. "But there are certain special kinds of people who are necessary in order for the universe to work out its destiny."

"You mean like really dynamic visionaries?"

"Sort of," Mark said. "People who are willing to push the boundaries of convention."

"I'm all for that," Rachel said with a smile, feeling they were back on familiar ground.

"Rachel—we think you're one of us," Mark blurted out.

"One of you?"

"One of the chosen ones. One of the ones who will leave this planet and this time-plane, and progress to a higher evolutionary plateau.

She looked at Linda, who was nodding at her, smiling.

"I . . . I guess I don't know what you mean."

"There are certain people," Mark continued, "who are chosen to carry out the will of the universe as it unfolds. We have experienced the life force, and we think *you* are a living embodiment of that life force."

Rachel looked at Mark, and for the first time her face revealed a sense of uneasiness. "So . . . what are you saying?"

"We'd like you to join us in our astral travels!" Linda said, smiling even broader than she had been.

"I—I—that's great. Thanks. I—uh—will think about it."

"There's no rush," Mark said. "We realize that, in the great chain of being, we are really subservient to you."

"You have extraordinary powers that you don't even know about!" Linda added cheerfully.

"So, you know, just think about it, and we hope that when it's finally time for us to blast out of this godforsaken state of being, you'll lead the way."

They were all quiet after this explanation, and Rachel looked down into her mug. "Sure, sure," she said. "I'll think about it. And I'll talk to my boyfriend about it. I'd want him to—to come along."

Mark's face lost its glow when she said this. "He's that tall guy with the leather jacket, right?"

"Right—you've probably seen him on campus sometimes."

"I'm not sure he's qualified to move on to the next level of consciousness," Mark said.

"He's kind of a breeder, isn't he?" Linda asked.

"Breeder?"

"You know, his end in life is to produce lots of offspring to carry his seed among the fields of the earth," Linda explained.

"I don't know. We always make sure we use birth control."

"Still, he's, you know—very macho," Mark added. "I think he's probably one of the earth-bound ones."

They were silent again, and Rachel decided she would feel better—freer, easier—if she stood up. Maybe that would help change the tone, shake things up a bit.

"We'll wait to hear from you," Mark said, taking her change of position as a sign that the evening was over.

"We *really* want to follow you to the next level," Linda said, her face aglow with pure joy.

"Sure, sure. I'll think about it seriously," Rachel said, moving towards the door that opened into the hall.

"That's great," Mark said. "We really appreciate it."

"Goodnight, sweetheart," Linda said, giving her a big hug and a kiss. "We love you so much!"

"Goodnight—lots of love to you guys, too," Rachel replied.

She closed the door behind them, then walked down the hall to her room. She lay down on her mattress and looked out the window to the building across the alley, with the moon hanging above it. She wished she were gone, far away, where even her drummer couldn't find her.

