

"What stage of spiritual advancement are you in at present?" he asked the girl.

"Gosh, I have no idea," she said.

"Ah yes, the heart knows," he said. "And the heart knows best."

"I think I'm in an early stage of some sort," said the girl with perfect candor.

"There are six stages along the mystic path" said great Grindle, "and you are in one of them or another, at all times. Now your *first* stage is this: You have to read a large number of books on the various religions and philosophies, and to have listened to many doctors profess the different doctrines-and then experiment seriously yourself with a number of doctrines"

"That's only the *first* stage?" asked Candy, hardly able to believe it.

"Yes. The path is arduous, you see- many take it: few arrive."

"What is the second stage?"

"The second stage is to chose one doctrine from among the many one has studied and discard the others, just as the eagle carries off only one sheep from the flock."

"Gosh," said Candy

"Then does the path become truly arduous. The third stage is to remain in a lowly condition, humble in one's demeanor, not seeking to be conspicuous or important in the eyes of the world but behind apparent insignificance, to let one's mind soar above all worldly power and glory."

"And then?"

"Then you must attain the fourth stage: *indifference to all*. Behaving like the dog or the pig which eat what chance brings it. Not making any choice among the things one meets.

Abstain from effort to acquire indifference whatever comes: riches or poverty, praise or contempt. Giving up the distinction between virtue and vice, honorable and shameful.

Good and evil...neither repenting nor rejoicing over what one may have done in the past."

Candy was enjoying it immensely. She settled herself more comfortably.

"Then what?" she asked, wide-eyed and lovely.

"Then do you attain your *fifth* stage," said great Grindle, "there to consider with perfect equanimity and detachment the conflicting opinions of various manifestations of the activity of beings. To understand that such is the nature of things, the inevitable mode of action of each...and to remain *always serene*.

To look at the world as man standing on the highest mountain in the country looks at the valleys and lesser summits spread out below him. This is your fifth stage"

"Good grief," said Candy.

"Yes, the mystic path is an arduous path you see; many depart, few arrive."

"What on earth is the sixth stage?" the girl wanted to know.

"The sixth stage cannot be described in words, unfortunately. It corresponds to the realization of the *void*, which in Lamaist terminology, means the Inexpressible Reality."

"I don't get it," said Candy.

"Well," said great Grindle, "one must understand here the realization of the non-existence of a permanent *ego*. This is your great Tibetan formula: "The person is devoid of self; all things are devoid of self."

"And that's the end?" said Candy after a moment.

"Yes, for all practical purposes it is. There is a seventh stage, physically, of *suspended animation*. But that need not concern here."

"Suspended animation!" cried Candy, as though that pleased her more than the rest.

Great Grindle nodded, and the girl gave him a searching look, wondering indeed if he were not capable of this feat himself.

"Gosh, I'd love to be able to do that." she admitted at last."

"The path is arduous," said Grindle.