

George and his friends found their creative energies heightened in the peaceful atmosphere of the retreat: in Rishikesh, the Beatles composed more than forty songs. Many were recorded on the *White Album*, and others would appear on their final LP *Abbey Road*. Too much time spent writing, though, struck George as a distraction from their purpose in coming to India, and he said as much.

“We’re not here to talk music,” he told the others.

“We’re here to meditate.”

“Calm down, man,” Paul replied.

“Sense of humor needed here, you know.”

George argued that they needed to make best use of their time. This is a land of yogis and saints, he reminded them, and people hundreds of years old. “There’s one somewhere around,” he said, “who was born before Christ—and is still living now” and then went looking, climbing paths that snaked high into the mountains.

George’s commitment to communing with these mystic beings impressed his friends. “The way George is going,” John said with admiration, “he’ll be flying a magic carpet by the time he’s forty.”

Apart from musical inspiration and mystic yogis, there was something else George discovered in Rishikesh: Nature. Perfected creation. Around him, flowering herbs opened their leaves each morning. Medicinal plants such as *primula*, *sausaurea*, and *aconitum* grew green and yellow with the rising sun. Purple Ipomea, blue and yellow Himalayan poppies, and downy white thistle colored his view of steep gorges, overhanging cliffs and vast stretches of forests and meadows. The area abounded with wildlife, and every so often a Musk deer or Indian porcupine would poke out its snout from under a bush or from behind a tree.

Whatever other gods there were, however many more he would meet on this magical journey, the goddess of nature spoke to him in commanding tones, a goddess of magnificent things as large as a mountain and small as a leaf. She was called by many names: Bhumi, Goddess of the Earth; Maha-Shakti, the Divine Mother; Kali-Ma, the Personified Universal Energy. Everyone in Rishikesh, from the Maharishi to the truck driver who delivered the daily produce, paid her homage. They wore garlands made of her flowers,