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Once again, it became necessary to avail the kitchen table, which resided in a small room, almost an afterthought of a room, perhaps serving initially as a lean-to addition to the main house, before being converted to a kitchen by these whom I had come to know. An entire disused kitchen area existed within the house.

Perhaps one ought delineate this adjunct room, which had become the nerve center of their universe. A rectangle, perhaps 9 feet wide, by 16 feet in length, surfaced in plywood, painted white to reflect light, especially at night, with a square gray tile linoleum floor, humped and sloping downward toward the northwest corner. The low ceiling sloped to head height at the wall next to the table, and attained to its highest somewhere around seven and a half feet at the wall above the stove. The wood-fired cookstove hugged the longer wall which attached to the balance of the house facing toward the northeast. Facing the stove, to the left, the northwest wall was colonial-windowed above the sink; to the right, the southeast wall, with an entry to an all-weather, mostly glazed porch. Above the entry resided the Chelsea chronometer, a barometer, and an anemometer. To right of the entry, hanging upon the wall the framed glazed photo of the farmer in his Cal 20 under sail; and to the left a glazed, framed photo of the house of a frosty winter morning. The porch, a recent addition, which fronted toward the southeast and opened through *french* doors to the southwest, the nominal entrance to and exit from the domicile; and lastly the low wall at the end of the sloping lean to roof, next to the center of which was placed, beneath the colonial-windows, the white-painted wooden kitchen table.

This shed-like room had been a space one could close off from the balance of the house during the winter. The wood cookstove became the center of activity during those long dark and dismal months. The table had become the vital spoke, but also lying next the stove, the spoke of cutting boards and crocks of rice, tea and flour, spoking again to the sink where ran the *Cold* siphoned from the stream a half a mile down the road-up the hill, and where, after a time the *Hot*, having been diverted somewhere in the plumbing to pass through the water jacket within the firebox of the stove, became heated, and thermally gurgled along to the painted black storage tank located within the house, abutting the adjoining wall behind the stove. The double sink felt, on each of its halves, on the one side nothing but the eternal flow of *Cold*, whereas the other on His Left Hand could enjoy such gradients, as upon the early morning, a *Cold* in intensity determined by the hour of retirement of the previous day, and whether a man or woman had taken to bath before such

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retirement, and how cold it might grow during the night, and still permit any flow at all; to such an intensity of *Hot*, as the industry of baking would infernalize the day sufficiently to produce blasts of air, water and steam, accompanied by wild emanations only marginally contained within the plumbing; in fact the looser joints might yield to the pressure wrought by the high calorificity of the heated water.

Spoked further lie the cupboards, these serving only as metaphor for what had been two hinged plywood panels suspended from a boxy affair attached to the wall next to the sink at a right angle to it; wherein was indeed found an assortment of cups such as friends might throw in a beginner's pottery class, all heavy and unwieldy, rather of a glazed brownish hue; and such as one might find in a second hand restaurant supply outlet, all white, blunt, thick edged, heavy, awkward; receptacles intended in design to survive the wear and tear of bus-boys, dishwashers, and a thousand cursory handlings, but not, and I repeat, not to serve aught but foul brews for high pittance; here they have come to rest, and upon a cold morn, if one forgets to heat the vessel upon the stove, his early morn cup of brew will send chill through his frame as the stone vat dissipates the very inth of calorificity. That selfsame cupboard contains, as well, a surprising incongruity. Whereas doubtlessly one might have procured those stone crucibles, anointed bowls; those discusses, cast as plates, those stone quoits, embellished as saucers; and the veritable oval bird baths, so conjured as platter fit for hash browns, side of bacon, and sunnyside ups, accompanied with a spray of parsley and a square of jelly; what ho!, nay, but some English version of China, all patterned and enfloraed, florid, not too frail, but more kindly disposed to the aesthetic of one's fond indulgence in the horn of plenty. And within easy reach, therein were housed those essential vitamins, antacids, laxatives, and other wondrous preparations designed to regulate the very core of one's being as it were.

And if this should not arouse your curiosity, what you might imagine amongst the flatwear located in a drawer below, then I have failed in my wilder excursions of the pen; and Aye!, 'tis so, as ye might suspect, such an assortment of army bivouac, camping gear, such implements designed to serve the palates of Queens, however not so brightly polished to dazzle the eye, but Behold!, further digging through the tiers of metal clinkings, one discovers somewhat the history of rejected cutlery, in spoons too narrow, or too broad, forks, whose tines are squat, too wide and blunt, unable to spear what needs spearing, lest one have many hours to devote to dining, and those strangely handled, preoccupied with design as it were, as to make them but awkward things even to look at, much more, be engaged in prehensile activity; and knives whose severing edge was marginally designed to rive butter, mashed potatoes and sundry pastries, but not up to the refinements of the

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rapier demanded of cutlets, chops, ribs, breasts, legs, livers, and various other parts.

We must not omit those devices gathered to observe the deft manipulations of the foreign nations of the Orient, nor those porcelain soup spoons tucked away in the cupboard, brought out upon the occasion of every entree. While it may not be fair to intrude upon this rustic simplicity with such as but the truer still, these people had come from another more refined world, more dainty as it were, full of rituals and etiquette; and in subservience to those fine traditions, they provide, within the house, the multileaved oval oak dining table, the fine silver, the real china tea cups, and linen to match; so that if ye be a special guest, ye shall receive such royal dispensations as accords your humble rank amongst the human contingent; and OH!, as much as the world has never seen, wines fabricated in these very environs, that to this very place ye must travel in order to partake; and Toast away.

But even before one would invoke and glorify the great artificer of cornucopia, one dast prepare the victuals, and if one but raise his head, as he stands before the counter laid with cutting board and dough board, he will observe a rack of blades to cut every which way, as butcher, slicer, cheffer, woker, baker; and device, as whisker, stirrer, butterer, baster, squeegie, funnel, spatula; and, but with a craning of the neck, suspended from the ceiling, the masher, grater, ladles, grinders, strainers, beaters, rollers, (regular and waffle) more spatulas; and, arrayed upon the wall, in between and amongst the others, an assortment of pans, an enviable steamer double-boiler of heavy gauge stainless steel, stainless steel sauce pans; a plethora of cast iron skillets; cooking pans, and pressure cookers of aluminum; baking pans of all shapes and sizes; bowls, bowls of stainless steel, of wood, of pottery, and a host of oils, lard, and greasings. Oddly, only in that they are not handy, the seasonings are secreted away from the hubbub of the steamy kitchen; and more oddly still, 'cause they so richly endow all these preparations that must admit and submit to His Benediction.

Nearby, and verily attached to one side of the cupboard, within easy reach, one vital spoke, of which one might generate diverse commentary in response to its noisy (and noisome) intrusion into this distant world, this remove. It sits politely, unobtrusively, until invited to join in, and apprise those who would be apprised. But once it has advanced its main theme, it argues ceaselessly without interruption, or remorse, until it becomes lost, disjointed, and overbearing. It will tolerate no discussion or fair exchange of views, and remains stolidly deaf to entreaty. It may be worldly, aye, transoceanic even, and ply one with distant cultures, rhythms, musics, but, Oh GAWD!, what a rhinoceros hided, cataleptic stupefaction is thine superheterodyne soul, OH!, the abysmal sonority of Nadir, so claimed the ne plus ultra, synonymous with some untoward traverse of the heavens; ye blast me;

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try as ye might to catch my frequency, you sound but a discordant note in your harmonizings. Your one obvious virtue, though hidden amongst all the other features of your flattened countenance, resides in plain hieroglyph: **OFF**, *Off*, *Off*, *off*, *Off*, *Off*, *Off*, *Off*, *Off*, *Off*, **Off**, *Off*, **OFF**, *Off*, **Off**, **Off** !!!

The spoking of the stove tended therefrom toward the source of ingress and egress from the space, throughinwhich came the occupants of the house, and the many gatecrashers come-by to partake of the brew receptacled in those awkward urns served in metaphor, and to become drawn, as if they had not sought it on their own, into those heated battles ensuing over the kitchen table. As one debated during the daylight hours, he would find the kitchen table placed in front of windows that glazed toward the southwest, overlooking a shrubbed, and in season, and e'er long as the seasons would permit, a flowered garden, beyond the garden, a 'root cellar', and a beyond pasture, and still further beyond, a rising rocky hillside landscaped and graced with a fondly revered ancient cedar snag, and crowned with evergreen as it melded with the distant sky, much of which one could not see as the low overhanging eave of the sloping room cut off one's upward gazings. If one wanted to see beyond into a further distance he might feast his eyes through the windows to the side of the lean-to kitchen, above the sink, which looked to the northwest into the orchard, and beyond the larger expanse of pasture to the wooded terminus of evergreen that too melded with the visible sky.

Outside the window next the table, suspended from the overhanging eave one could meditate upon the collection of bells that had served various functions during their tenure on the farm, while now serving only to chime, ding, dong, and bonk a mystical sort of musical accompaniment to the frontal systems tumultuously passing through these latitudes during the fall and winter. Incident with the autumnal equinox, the bells were joined by braids of onions and clusters of corncobs still in their husks, suspended from the eave. At night a lone propane mantled lamp attached to the upper window casing illumined the table from above, while another lone propane mantled lamp attached to the ceiling above the stove provided the cook with illumination. Sometimes during the gray rainy winter days, despite all the white surfaces and the number of windows it was so 'dark and gloomy' within, both propane lamps would burn all the day long.

There were we ensconced upon compacted hard flat homemade cushions, squashed feathers, bound in a colorful cotton floral print, only marginally more comfortable than the indestructible institutional oak chairs, bearing still their inventory numbers stenciled upon their backs; fit company for the austere white coffee mugs, and otherwise augmenters of sober monastic thought and discussion upon the verities. "State Your Case; eat hearty."

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She said, "Your country is still the hope of the world."

That was after I had been lambasting it, saying all the declamatory things I usually say. And that is not what Alfred North Whitehead conjectured.

"Many outsiders believe that of us", was my coddling, but somewhat sullen response. "I suppose there is hope some future generation can take it all seriously enough to make something of it, but that can only happen after the great bankruptcy, during the rebuilding phase; just so long as the documents are still in tact; and haven't been so badly mauled by a devious, narrow-minded, bigoted, intolerant Supreme Court, that wants to return to some atreumentous oppression of the human spirit." "I still say its all been a great accident in the affairs of men. Such great abundance had made it possible for a handful of ingenious people to ravish, excuse please, subdue, the earth; they raided the pantry; they have heaped up yesterday in a pile over there." "I don't know, I have to believe we have our fingers on two different pulses; maybe one of is out of touch with reality." "You have said you played the game, and gave your best (sometimes more than you wanted), and you felt it was not enough to help much." "So now what?"

"I guess we'll just observe what others do. I'll tell you, here on this Island, as you will find out, we have so much to do just staying reasonably warm, clean, fed, that all the world and national problems get to be viewed in a different light." "Believe me, cynics are alive and well on this Island; but I make it clear I am not amongst you, with your dim dark view toward our fellow man." "Dim!, Dark!, View!?", quickly seizing upon the denunciatory encapsulation, I took exception; "Must every scrutinization, albeit with an open-minded skepticism, be viewed as a nigrification of the world?" "Does it hurt so much, to admit there are things that fail us, that are our responsibility to address; that we avoid; that there is something we must do, because it is ours, it and ours alone to do, that we can never escape these things that is ours to do, and until we do them, we will forever bump into them, collide with them?" "Don't get me wrong; I am not insensitive to what takes upon the appearance of the darker view, as a quality of a man's soul, and what effect that has upon others. Surely the man who goes about with the proverbial 'What's good about it?', even when the sun shines upon him, must appear a bit tendentious, to say the least. But ho, far better be so darkly imbued, if it is truth in whose service one be, than to overestimate the accomplishments of our kind. I do not deny, the strides; and perhaps it is so we shall never be happy, even in Elysia. One does not so easily yield his pessimism once it invades his soul, and believe me such a state is easily acquired - in all modesty I admit this; and if only 'twere so simple a thing as the ditty ring:

The difference 'twixt The optimist and the pessimist is droll;
The optimist sees the doughnut,

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Whereas the pessimist sees the hole.

It is not so simple; but I suppose there is a quality of soul, and a state of mind beyond which no amount of objectivity may make progress. We cannot ignore the part played by our innate self, the sixth sense, as it were, the intuitive part, that cannot be imprisoned, nor particularly expressed in the tongue, or the word, but nonetheless exists as a validity, a presence that rings true within. Sure, anybody can hide behind this little nuance, this copout - avoidance of clarification, if you will. And many do, and concoct the damndest bits of 'hallucination', (for the lack of a better characterization; perhaps a schizophrenic projection), from what I would estimate to be a desperation, (more familiarly referred as 'quiet desperation'), to give form to that tormented interiority that cannot grasp that needed something in any tangible, or concrete form. But I do suppose it is our task to reveal this intuitive part, that is, to do one's best to expose it as remedy, as clarification. Perhaps that will relieve some part of the solitary agonizing. But this involves great risk; even if one succeeds in getting it out there, there is little guarantee it will be understood, and will only add greater dimension to the huge ? question mark that hangs over all our heads. This is to say, if neither the word, as the result of correct reasoning or logical construction, nor as the emanation of intrinsicity or essences, is to propound a synopsis of revealed truth, then what have we? Are we thus abandoned to the adage 'The wish is the father to the thought', or the 'hallucination'? Is that affected part more buoyant, more pleasant to be around, than those who persevere and will not accept second best. Don't get me wrong; I'm not saying because you cannot accept the blacker outlook, that because you prefer the cheerier aspect, that you are compromised into an unreality, into a consultation with astrological significances, with extraneous talismanic entities. I suppose the possibility exists one might as easily run the course as he has throughout his life, finding nothing new therein, that is, one might as easily intuit or suspect the exigency of a Fate beyond the human pale, an obdurate presence before which we might cower, or with which we might learn to live, fully recognizing the illusory quality to life in any case. We are of such little avail: *Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat drink and be merry, for that shall abide with him of his labor the days of his life.* Ah!, from out the ashes and dire preachings of Ecclesiastes emerges the Dionysian spirit. What say you to that?" Have I wormed my way back into your good graces?"

"Indeed you have, and I'll drink to that!" She looks toward the silent one, smiling cheerily, "Whats say, we have a glass?"

"O.K.", he utters matter-of-factly, rising from his awkward comfort, askew in the shapened cushion ballasted against the gravitational flux imposed by the sloping floor; leaving thus his straight-backed oaken

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ensconcement, he repairs to the wine shed to fill the wickered jug; and merry we shall be, for a while, until winkin', blinkin' and nod. 'While we sleep, we shall all be equal'.

We have thus concluded, without success, another assault upon the treacherous escarpment, having come away weary, and none the wiser, but no less apt to rouse ourselves, despite all we know of our foe, or do not know, as the case may be, to renew the advance upon such Brobdingnagian prodigiousness.

Ah!, yes, yet another day was witness to a scuffle in the presence of the kitchen table, its very whiteness clamoring for decency, purity of ethic and complimentary strategy in debate. And only the demons, who flash these irksome gauntlets before us, know why it is we risk and cannot resist one more time to pick a quarrel; perhaps as reprisal for the last unresolved abandonment. Onward to Grenada!

Once again I stood accused, Oh!, Alas! to put it another way, I had innocently (oh, how innocently does the provocateur do anything), yea, I had been, neither as devil's advocate, nor as straw man, obliged, either to listen raptly and lividly, to the contravention of my own opinion, or that of those whom had at sometime expressed similar views, or I had to leave in order to avoid the offense to my ears. Still, as always, one to purpose himself to some intellectual circumspection or propriety, I found, *jacta alea est*.

Rather artlessly I had made mention of the tenuous arguments put forth by the edifice-builders of the future, that tended to whitewash the dangers of nuclear energy; I made some remark like, "O.K., we've had our fun with our big toy; can't we just leave it be?" "Must we persist in this awful argument of, Gawd, 'What is it - Progress?' 'Is that the expression?'; or is it truly a subduing?, conquering?; Geezze, its almost suggestive of an unmentionable rapturous undertaking."

My antagonist interjected as reprimand to a narrow outlook, "You cannot deny what this represents to the Third World, to the developing country? What right would we have to say they are not entitled to their share in this great discovery?" "Look, its here to stay; its not a matter of choosing not to have it." "Christ, its the hope that other alternatives exist when the well runs dry?"

I bantered in return, "You might be right about the last part, I'd hate to see them go after the sperm whale again, if there are any still any remaining. But I'll take exception to the proliferation as a right. It could not be a right to continue atmospheric testing, once the big guys agreed it was bad news: Strontium 90 and Cesium 137; that was O.K. for them, but when The People's Republic of China heard about 'the narrow view', she said Bullshit! That may not be a case in point, because that's bad nuclear energy, in anybody's book. The peaceful use of the atom may be

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predicated in saving lives with nuclear medicine - for those that can afford it (sorry for the cynicism), but, it is, I maintain, more predicated in an old argument, the Industrial argument, which has paid lip-service to, (dare I say promised) idealities it has not and cannot deliver on an equalitarian basis, for which everyone must pay; equally. What the Industrial argument does do is make a few men rich and powerful. What in hell good is that? Will we be content with the trickle-down mentality, the 'great benefactor of mankind' mentality? The new oligarchy. We must slave away at something in order to consume something that fattens somebody else's coffers? Why so?"

"Come, now, don't argue so narrowly all the time."

"Look, its easy for you, and for me, for that matter, to sit here in this little hideaway, and argue something that will leave us relatively untouched, lest a Three Mile Island, a Trojan or a Hanford, or a WPPSS, turn into another Chernobyl. There would seldom be a chance we would be downwind from those, so we are relatively safe. That's on the face of it, and that, in itself, is pretty selfish; since we are not in its path, let it happen. While it does not lend cogency to the argument, it does bias the argument." "But here I find myself arguing apples, when it is oranges that interest me most. Because they exist, I am obliged to notice and account the reality of apples. Fine, let's exhaust that whole theme; let's say we transform ourselves overnight into a most circumspect species; and because we do, know, never again, will 'Nuke' pose a threat to human life, of and in itself - in fact, 'Nukie' becomes *ad hoc* man's veritable handmaiden" "Should I add more?" "May we extend such circumspection to politics, to society, to philosophy?" "May I now speak of oranges, that is, may I now address the issue of converting the planet into a 'Standard of Living', a sociological phenomenon, apart from them apples, the little fissions?" "Because I know we have become circumspect, overnight, in the one case, with regard to apples, I put myself at liberty to assume that man is not so partial to a particular fruit that he will not extend to the one what he has to the other, that, in fact, he will extend circumspection to the orange." "That being the case, I would wish to establish, as part of that circumspection, an acknowledgement that the benefits of the Industrial proposition will be equally distributed to each and every member of the body social, not political. The argument put forth by the 'Captains' is predicated in lightening the burden of *man*, *man*, *man*, **Man**, **MAN**, as the inclusive Man. It has nothing to do with what be a man's occupation, or his station in life; at least, no qualifications have been included in the proposition. What might amend their statement later, that is, 'we cannot achieve this all at once', is not relevant in this particular discussion. The oranges exist as the argument that will be put forth as rationale for converting the planet into a 'Standard of Living'. Circumspection will not permit exclusivity; that is, it will assume 'what is for one, is for all', and there are no

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acceptable trite misconstruals of this concept, 'I'm not my brother's keeper', 'Each according to his abilities, each according to his needs'; rather we adopt, as the first 'Standard', 'all are equal, regardless, never to be negotiated or manipulated into any other relationship, or form of relationship' ". "Once we have established this 'Standard', maybe we will be able to wonder, and ponder, upon, and formulate a second. The second 'orange' might share some of the spirit that fostered the first. The first was born of a spirit that recognized human life in act as it has often been expressed in word. The surround, that is, the environs, in which this life is obliged to conduct its affairs appears an integral part, for the one cannot be without the other, that is, Man cannot be without the habitat. While one might make one kind of assumption he cannot afford to make another. While I might assume 'what is for one, is for all', I cannot assume what specific thing it is that 'is for one, is for all'." "But I will risk an inference; believing that Man adopts the circumspection, I extend the belief he will wish an equalitarian view with regard to other forms of life, at least as a matter of principle; if not as a deeply felt conviction - at least, because it is right as accords his sensitivity to the main theme - existence, a palpable existence." "All right, I have carried this orange factor far enough to want to assert something with regard to the conversion of the habitat into 'Standard of Living'." "Your argument proposes everything be allowed to run its course, because you say it is here, a *fait accompli*, and has a momentum of its own through the urgencies felt amongst all the developing Nations (not excluding those already developed). You claim that is fair; you are willing to believe man will account the dangers, you might even believe less harm will accrue from this source than, let's say, for example, any further reliance on fossil fuels. If we cannot escape the imperative of the Third World, whom it would be unfair to deny, (not excluding the First and Second Worlds), what do you envision as the final product; surely, you must envision something at the end?"

"I really don't understand most of your argument, except to say whatever it is you propose seems impractical; while I will admit to the circumspection necessary with regard to nuclear energy, I don't feel I can expand those considerations beyond what any self-serving individual will permit with regard to his fellow man". "Oh, I may be just as idealistic as the next, but I do not feel there is any evidence to support opinions that run counter to reality, at least none that I may rely upon." "That is, man is what he is; and suppose he does botch things up badly from time to time; I do not believe he will do irreparable harm to himself. You might counter that, 'nuclear energy in the hands of the Shiites would become the ultimate disaster'. But tell me now, as I must tell you what I should envision as the end (product), what can we do to prevent any particular scenario from happening; we have to believe that any scenario could happen; we have to be prepared?" "I think you understand my

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argument only too well, and cannot answer the question, and I cannot answer your question." "Prevention; as if the risks of what we do are not bad enough, we must concern ourselves that things do not fall into the wrong hands; hah!, we cannot include that which does not wish to be included, just as the People's Republic of China, so long excluded from membership in the United nations, felt no obligation to go along with the other 'we got ours' self-regulation of atmospheric testing (France didn't give a shit) Even that consideration is minor, if what we do in the name of subduing makes this habitat unlivable; and there are many more ways to make it unlivable than by destroying the environment. One saving grace, if we allow things to run their course, the Earth being finite, **IT** will tolerate only so much transformation into an idealized midden, or haphazard fossilized midden (the more likely), which ever the case may be. One other saving grace, No! it, will not happen within our lifetimes; but the trend will not permit an easy surrendering to the grave; leaving the planet in less than circumspect hands guarantees a restive sleep. It will not satisfy to say "I'm glad I got mine before it all changed".

"Small comforts!"