

INTRODUCTION

Now is the time for all good men to come to.

Walt Kelly

As recently as a mere century ago, we were an agricultural people who scratched at the earth much in the style of ancient Egyptians. Then, in extremely short order, the tractor and mechanized farming ushered in the greatest economic revolution in the history of mankind. Two percent of us now do what the overwhelming majority used to do, and we in the United States are at long last free from the anxiety and drudgery of finding enough to eat. In historic terms, this most modern of phenomena is a true lap of luxury.

The tractor released an immense cascade of creative energy into our cities and factories, and the washing machine and eight-hour day soon followed. Naturally, we went through the motions of obligatory political and theological warfare, but the economic logic of an eight-hour day and forty-hour week eventually prevailed. Leisure suddenly made sense.

Since the legal recognition of the eight-hour day, we've gone on to invent technologies which might have led to a further reduction of our tedium. Nuclear energy, the computer, and countless other minor miracles might have been open invitations to Easy Street. Abundant leisure could have been a foregone conclusion. Yet the stunningly obvious reality is that we're headed in the opposite direction. Modern life is a frenetic blur of long commutes, late nights at work, two-income families, and exhausting recreation. We accept this as a natural state of affairs. Nowhere do we hear a murmur of dissent. Frenchmen might strike for the thirty-seven hour week, but Americans seem determined to

proceed full-steam ahead. We go very much like a bat out of hell.

No one in his right mind would argue with the current social momentum for more and faster consumption. We've apparently made our collective decision, and that's that. I might as well argue with a very cantankerous tornado, and nothing I say here should be taken as advocacy. Neither you nor your neighbor is ready for the four-hour day, and I have no intention of persuading you to do anything uncomfortable. You should continue to do whatever it is you think you're doing, and I wish you godspeed.

Nothing about this book is fictitious, yet, in some sense, I do intend to follow in the tradition of utopian novels such as Edward Belay's *Looking Backward*. He enjoyed the great good fortune of writing in an 1890's atmosphere of both economic crisis and true social optimism. By crafting a sharply articulated vision of a radically different social order, he could provide direction to the hodgepodge of reformist inclinations buzzing around at the time. His bestseller took the country by storm.

Nothing of the kind will happen here anytime soon, but the principle's the same. Rather than discuss the minor adjustments of universal health care or a seven-and-a-half hour day, I'll proceed directly to one of the ultimate outcomes of the revolution we started two-hundred-twenty-five years ago.

But while we whisk through the democratic logic of the four-hour day, I would also ask that you practice with particularly private meditations of your own.

First of all, go to work tomorrow and then go home four hours later. What would life be like if you could do that every day? What would life be like if work were a five-minute walk away? What would you really do with all that free time? Is the prospect exhilarating or terrifying?

Secondly, think about the real economy. The mechanics of the four-hour day are extraordinarily simple. The United States now employs around 600,000 bricklayers, masons, and plasterers. Suppose we took 600,000 salesmen, soldiers, real estate brokers, and convicts, and

we taught them how to lay brick. Suppose that we then used these new recruits to build at the same rate we did last year. All bricklayers would then be on the four-hour schedule, but the national inventory of goods and services would remain the same. We'd be as wealthy as we ever were because the criminals and others weren't really producing anything useful in their former occupations. They might have been lubricating the wheels of money transfer, but they weren't genuinely productive. If fewer than forty million of us can grow all the food and do all the mining, manufacturing, and building, then anything is possible. We have successfully designed a system that routinely puts farmers out of work, so why can't we do the same for lawyers?

Then, too, think about the 1.1 billion people who now subsist on incomes of less than a dollar a day. What this means, first of all, is that we have a great many economists who desperately need re-training as bricklayers. And we also have at least 1.1 billion potential collaborators. That vast reserve of unrealized human potential makes the four-hour day feasible and the two-hour day thinkable.

Next, consider the labor we squander on entertainment, gambling, cosmetics, advertising, and asphalt. Weigh the trash you haul out to the curb once or twice a week.

Think about the true difference between a tractor and an automobile. How could one version of internal combustion generate immense wealth while the other serves only to drain oil reserves, patience, and bank accounts? Why does the computer intensify our labor rather than making it completely relaxed? What is the legitimate measure of wealth and productivity? What is the true difference between a tool and a toy?

These questions, of course, may be considered in the abstract with any of the large numbers available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but these issues have more to do with flesh and blood. Go anywhere you like and pay attention to the security guard or the toll-taker or the four-year-old pawing through a Brazilian city dump. Visit just one of our two million prison inmates. What would their lives be like -- and how would yours change -- if they could switch professions

and become truly productive? Why is it that so few of us really create the necessities of life in the course of an ordinary day on the job? Who's pulling his weight, and who isn't? When you finally make it to your deathbed, what do you really want to say about your accomplishments? What was it all about?

The central meditation of the four-hour day is that we face a certain amount of work that needs to be done, and we have a limited number of skilled people to do it. Any reduction in the volume of chores -- any augmentation of our skilled labor force -- results in more free time. And the exuberant exercise of individual creativity is what it's all about. It's as simple as that.

Yet, if we found ourselves with abundant leisure, most modern Americans would run out and buy more jet skis, big-screen TVs, telephones, video cameras, still larger houses, exercise equipment, and all the paraphernalia we associate with weekends. And we demonstrate no inclination to streamline health insurance, real estate sales, the legal system, or institutional gambling. We're addicted to those activities that bleed us dry, and the four-hour day will never be won through rational explanation or argument. The time has not quite arrived for all good men to come to.

But while the whole idea of debate might be absurd, I personally believe that certain subterranean forces now stir beneath us. Even a slave-owning Thomas Jefferson could say of slavery, "I tremble when I reflect that God is just." He could anticipate the impending social reversal and sense that his days were numbered. We can take one look at a whole generation of children coming home to houses empty of everything but television and games, and we can see the handwriting on the wall. The shadow of self-doubt permeates everything we hold near and dear. Certain critical decisions will be made over the next few centuries, and human success will depend upon the depth and courage of our first, tentative meditations. For the time being, the four-hour day is not a set of answers. The four-hour day may never amount to anything more than a handful of questions.

The four-hour day is a time whose idea has come, slightly

prematurely, and, as long as we honestly question the nature of labor, we're in good shape.

If you've received this copy of *The Four-hour Day* free of charge, either directly or through the internet, please understand that this does not result from a vast philanthropy. This is one of the first few hundred copies that I've created at my own expense. The funding comes solely from wages earned as a machinist. All the writing and agonizing has been done on my own time, off the books, with no compensation. This is a direct gift from me to you with no price tag attached. Neither money nor hard calculation plays any part in this transaction. Nothing is protected by copyright. I would ask only that you read as much as you like and then pass the gift on to someone else. Give it to a friend or leave it lying on a park bench. Sooner or later, these pages will find their way to a very few of you who are intrigued but skeptical. You'll like what I say on page thirty-two and think that I'm way off base ten pages later. You'll start to invent your own version of the four-hour day, and then you're really under some mutual obligation.

The Four-hour Day Foundation does not yet represent a mass movement, and that's something of an understatement. The honest truth is that we'll never attempt to recruit thousands of ardent ideologues. So, if you're at all motivated, write to me or stop by for lunch. Talk to me. What do you really think? Tell me about your friends and your organization. We'll figure out where to go from there. History is nothing if not hysterically peculiar, and the next few centuries -- the next blink of an eye -- promise an extraordinary adventure.

Please also understand that more copies need to be in circulation, so, if you could use an extra one, send a tax-deductible contribution of fifteen dollars or more to:

The Four-Hour Day Foundation
P.O. Box 10578
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Now, in the pages that follow you will find, an endless stream of critical remarks directed at bankers, capitalists, motorcyclists, five-star generals, car salesmen, priests, and mankind in general. I will issue sweeping generalizations about what Americans do and don't do, and most of these comments will seem to be disparaging. They aren't.

I did once believe that the United States would be the last country on Earth to adopt truly compassionate policies, and I still think that we come dangerously close to being a modern-day Rome. But, of all the world's cultures, which has the greatest respect for industrious creativity? Which nation has the longest history of anti-aristocratic sentiment? Which nation's women have climbed highest only to discover the hollowness of the victory? When all is said and done, we remain the country of Washington and Lincoln, and, as long as we retain the ability to laugh at our incredible eccentricities, we have hope. We may very well be the first people on the planet to set our clocks to the four-hour schedule.

And, finally, remember this. The concept of a four-hour workday will seem to be a proposal for improving our own American standard of living. And it is definitely that. But every single word is written with Africa in mind. Whole cultures now stagger towards annihilation in pandemics of AIDS, malaria, and unspeakable poverty. The history of colonialism, of slavery, and of bourgeois indifference presents all of us with the humiliation required for sincere thought. Where is the necessary atonement? What actions can possibly articulate the proper apologies? Where do we begin to construct a destiny of mutual respect and collaboration?

ONE

No member of my generation who was not a Communist or a dropout in the Thirties is worth a damn.

Lyndon Baines Johnson

For all intents and purposes, I was born fifty years ago at the midpoint of the Twentieth Century. My father had dropped a great many bombs on Germany, and he and the other veterans returned home hoping for a calm and prosperous future. They honestly believed that they had won the war, and they turned their attentions to personal careers and families.

My father and his father before him had succeeded in lifting our family into the middle class, and I grew up in the pleasant surroundings of suburban Washington. I was the best of boys, perfectly quiet and earning the best of grades. Neither my parents nor my teachers -- and certainly none of the girls -- had any indication of my true identity.

And neither did I.

It just so happened that I went away to college in the extraordinarily turbulent decade of the 1960's. The inevitable tensions of racism and imperialism erupted into full view. Certain cities and campuses received the full shock wave of social rebellion, and no one who lived through that time escaped untouched. By sheer accident, I had chosen Antioch College which was then in the forefront of liberal arts schools hellbent on achieving social justice, student control of curriculum, sexual liberation, and plenty of fun.

Despite all this raucous agitation for civil rights, peace, and

profound change, hardly any of us became communists. We screamed scathing condemnations of American policy at the time, but we generally remained loyal to the fundamental assumptions of capitalism. Not one in ten thousand accepted Karl Marx as his personal savior.

I did.

So, here we are, with the first chapter barely under way, and you and I already come to our first parting of the ways. Many more are yet to come.

Americans hate Karl Marx, and I can think of at least a hundred reasons why we've never seen eye-to-eye. For the time being, I'll simply state the obvious in saying that Mr. Marx strikes us as being outrageously abrasive and confrontational. His angry denunciations of church and state run counter to everything we stand for. The red banner and the red, white, and blue are at opposite ends of the spectrum. No American in his right mind would ever turn socialist. A man would have to be a complete renegade and outcast to do something that un-American.

And I knew all that. Even at the tender age of eighteen, I understood the implications of my conversion. In particular, I remember a relatively small anti-war march in Dayton, Ohio, where the people on the sidewalk were turning purple with rage. They threw all sorts of things at us and called us every name in the book. I wondered where they ever found such books.

But I listened to their advice, and I did think about going back to Russia. The big problem, though, was that Joseph Stalin had managed to screw up Marxist ideology completely and absolutely. He did everything absolutely and completely, and you have to understand that no one despised the Soviet monster more than I did. From the very beginning, I knew that the greatest enemy of true socialism was the socialist.

So, why in the world would a nice, quiet kid like myself ever join forces with an international conspiracy to overthrow everything that made him nice and quiet to begin with? Why would I do so if I already knew that the practitioners of my faith were dead wrong? Why would I

do so when I'd have been better off becoming homosexual or Congolese?

I've thought about this question a lot over the last thirty years, and I have to say that I admire the person I once was. I've always been a sucker for rational explanation. If I'm confronted with a panorama of seemingly random confusion and someone shows me the underlying laws and connections, I get goose bumps. If someone like Einstein can take contradictory data and invent a short, sweet theory, I grin from ear to ear. Call me an incurably romantic rationalist, but that's just the kind of fool I am. Generally speaking, if you want to whisper sweet nothings in a man's ear, you should try comprehensive insights.

Marxist theory is perfectly gorgeous. It looks very good on paper. Remember that the United States once pulled off the most profound revolution the world has ever known. We managed to dethrone hundreds of aristocrats and the very principle of aristocracy itself. Then, a century after this triumph, we murdered all resistance in the Philippines and made it a colony of our own. How could such a thing ever happen? What is it about a capitalist society that can cause this slide from progressive rebellion to stifling colonialism? Why do we, as a typical society do the things we do? Conventional bourgeois historians take things one step at a time as a succession of events, and that explains nothing. Marx, on the other hand, made certain acute observations about the internal dynamics of money. Because money is what it is, capitalists have no choice but to adopt a very strange persona and read the script. The Philippine conquest followed naturally. The war in Viet Nam was no accident, and a cease-fire offered no remedy. The only true solution lay in the certain self-annihilation of the existing order. In the 1960's, that final crisis of capitalism seemed to be right around the corner.

And besides being a dyed-in-the-wool rationalist, I was also a hopeless democrat. Call me subversive if you want to, but I've always thought it slightly immoral to have the richest one-percent of the population own half the country. And if a man does all the work it takes to produce coal worth one hundred dollars, why do we pay him fifty dollars? Why do we donate the other half to someone who does no

work and is already filthy rich? And I do mean filthy.

So, why not put it to a vote? Why not take the same principles we use in ordinary politics and apply them to the economy? We could let the people decide where to locate the next automobile factory. We could even allow ourselves the privilege of deciding whether or not we want cars or something else.

I actually thought we might be able to slip socialism in the back door by calling it economic democracy, but certain people had already tried that. These people were much more clever than I'll ever be, and they'd failed miserably. Americans would not let the wool be pulled over their eyes. We're nobody's fools, and we'd never allow this democracy business to get out of hand.

This then was the state of affairs in 1969. The world teetered on the brink of socialist revolution. I had been seduced by a foreign conspiracy and was prepared to answer the call of history. The triumphant end justified whatever means necessary, and the only problem was that I remained painfully, painfully shy and quiet. At college and on the marches in Washington, I could look around me at the bold, fearless rabble-rousers preaching hellfire and damnation through the bullhorns, and I knew I wasn't one of those. Under no conceivable circumstances could I ever hold a candle to Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, or the polemicists of the Black Panther Party. The ideas might be there, but the personality lagged far behind. How could I best express my newfound faith? How could a person as shy and reserved as myself ever find a role in the coming revolution?

As it turned out, Abbie Hoffman visited Antioch just as I was wrestling with my own indecision. He was a recognized leader of the outrageous Youth International Party. These were the people who had thrown Chicago into chaos during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. They'd petitioned to place a pig on the ballot for President. They'd encircled the Pentagon with people holding hands in an attempt to physically levitate the building. And, when Abbie Hoffman spoke at Antioch College, he said that the school was nothing more than "a kindergarten for the bourgeoisie."

A famous saying of the time was "Either you're part of the solution or you're part of the problem." Being an idle bystander was out of the question. All of us had heard Timothy Leary's advice to "tune in, turn on, and drop out." The bourgeois kindergarten reference was simply the last straw. I decided to leave college and find the front lines of social change. Midway through my third year, in January of 1970, I left Antioch for good and arrived at a commune in the rolling terrain of the Virginia piedmont.

As this story unfolds, I will present you with many facts that will seem utterly beyond belief. The events of my life are so strange, so far removed from business as usual, that you will consider them fictional. You will read of Aurora, and you will dismiss everything I say as fantasy. I understand this situation, and I accept the consequences.

But I will also point out that I've already mentioned two phenomena that are impossible but still true. It is inconceivable that the United States could be created by Paine and Jefferson and then go on to worship a business aristocracy. A democratic country cannot possibly be so morbidly fearful of communism. And it's also unthinkable that a Soviet Union committed to the rule of workers would then go on to rule workers so mercilessly. These things are self-contradictory and patently false. If you believe this, you'll believe anything.

Another truly bizarre occurrence is that there once was a behavioral scientist named B.F. Skinner. He thought that all animal -- and human -- behavior could be explained by the mechanisms of stimulus and response. He was able to demonstrate an extraordinary control of behavior through the manipulation of those rewards and punishments that follow closely upon defined actions. He could train pigeons to perform amazing feats by altering the schedule of positive reinforcement and its denial. Dr. Skinner then went on to write a utopian novel, *Walden Two*, in which he suggested that the application of behavioral methods to human society might produce a truly rational order of sensible design. He was one of many people, such as Buckminster Fuller, who believed that the future shone bright with the promise of technology, science, and logic.

This, in itself, is perfectly unbelievable, but the true contradiction was yet to come.

In 1967, just as free love, flower power, and civil rights were taking the nation by storm, people from all over the country met with the intention of putting *Walden Two* into practice. Some were true scientists who insisted upon waiting for the legitimacy of Skinner's approval and large amounts of philanthropic grant money. Others were ready to throw caution to the wind, and one of them had just received enough of an inheritance to make a down payment on one hundred twenty-three acres of Virginia clay. Twin Oaks Community burst upon the scene in June with a full contingent of seven members.

Now, Skinner's vision of social perfection comes with all the unemotional sterility of the hygienic laboratory. His order is one of law and rigid consequences. Yet, as a commune, Twin Oaks drew its members from the counterculture fringe of freethinkers who were fond of marijuana, rock music, and free-for-all sexuality. How could this be? How could a community ever survive with a scientific ideology staffed by long-haired anarchists who wouldn't be caught dead in a laboratory?

When I joined the three-year-old commune, I was as sophisticated as any new member because I'd actually read the novel when I was in high school, and I remembered parts of it. For some reason, the discipline of behaviorism fit in with my inclinations towards a lawful, fair society. But anyone who knows anything about Marx knows that he despised utopian socialists. Normally, it would be highly unusual for someone like me to join a commune so far from workers and factory. But this is not the strangest part of the story.

Nor is it the strangest part that Twin Oaks existed when it did. American history is full of dreamers who take to the land with every intention of ironing out the sins of the world. We've always done social experiments. We *are* a social experiment to begin with, for chrissake, so that's the normal state of affairs. If Americans aren't tinkering, we're not obeying our destiny.

It isn't even bizarre that Twin Oaks still survives thirty-three years after its birth. If the United States could tolerate the simultaneous

presence of both Jefferson and E.I. DuPont, then my old commune could survive the amalgam of Skinner and Abbie Hoffman.

The truly unbelievable fact is that the United States has now abandoned its search for the Holy Grail of human perfection. We have no serious attempts to hold property in common and realize the early visions of truly human relationships. We've forgotten all about Oneida, Harmony, the Shakers, and the International Workers of the World. We've stopped re-inventing ourselves. We happen to live in a time of unbridled pessimism where the status quo promises only more of the same. Everything I say from here on out must be taken in the context of this Alice-in-Wonderland reality. Our dismal practicality is the true delusion. Business as usual is the true exception to the American rule.

When I joined Twin Oaks, I had only the seventeen comrades, and nothing about the place conveyed any sense of the bustling beehive I'd hoped for. The only true income-producing activity was the weaving of rope hammocks, but any effort at marketing had been pathetic at best. At any given time, the hammock shop might see one or two leisurely people at the looms. Or it might not. Most money came from rotating shifts of members finding ordinary work in Richmond, and that meant a long commute, the absence of these people during the day, and their listlessness in the evening. My sharpest memory from the first two weeks is of an ancient pick-up truck stuck in the frozen mud of the front field. No one went to its rescue. Twin Oaks was going nowhere in no particular hurry.

Fortunately for me, one of the seven founding members was a blue-eyed brunette some nineteen years older than I. I thought she was pretty, and I took an immediate interest in her because of her sharp-tongued determination and because she had somehow befriended a local salesman for a drug-store distributor. This connection meant that Kat controlled an inventory of nighttime cold medication, and that was the only way I could get to sleep at night while I contemplated an early exit from lethargic communal living.

But before I could make good my escape, a water pipe froze and burst in the farmhouse crawlspace under the commune's only bathroom.

Someone had the presence of mind to close the appropriate valve and scribble an "out of order" sign, but that was it. No one moved a muscle to make the necessary repairs. I, of course, was in no position to intervene since I was middle-class to the bone and had never done a lick of real work in my life. Changing a tire on a Volkswagen was the limit of my practical experience.

Push, however, soon came to shove. After several hours of waiting around, I could stand no more. I eventually found Rudy in Kat's room where they were apparently involved in some sort of ideological gossip. I asked him where I could find a hacksaw and a propane torch. I wriggled into the crawlspace on my back, cut out the damaged section, and somehow managed to learn soldering under the worst of conditions. With the pipe a mere six inches above my nose and hard against the floor joist, anything could have happened. We all could have perished in the flames. But, as true beginner's luck would have it, I emerged victorious. Ever so cautiously, I cracked open the valve, and order was restored.

What actually happened in the mud and ice was that I discovered my true calling. Twin Oaks and I were no longer separate entities. I learned that I had the intelligence and heart to make the commune succeed, and I knew that any personal success would be inextricably linked with our historic mission. The aforementioned Rudy had written a manifesto of communal philosophy entitled "The Revolution is Over; We Won". The essential argument is that we may, at any time, engage in revolutionary acts without waiting for the proletariat to come to its senses. On paper, the concept is neither novel nor particularly profound, but if the idea is accompanied by a genuine rolling up of the sleeves and a practical, gritty commitment, good things happen. The fundamental conception only makes sense when flat on your back in the mud.

The other practical benefit of the Revolutionary Act -- besides running water -- is that the Promethean male becomes exquisitely attractive to the Promethean female. When Kat heard the shouts of joy from the farmhouse, she understood that she'd acquired a new comrade-

in-arms, someone who could be trusted to help turn her dreams into leakproof reality. The implications are unending.

The plumbing triumph was only the beginning, too, and, with an infusion of new members, Twin Oaks began to hum. The new dormitory opened, the hammock-weaving business found new life, the vegetable garden flourished, and even the pick-up truck eventually found its way back to the road. But as springtime turned to summer, one glaring omission haunted this picture of newfound prosperity. None of us were farmers, and none of us had given a moment's thought to the front thirty acres that straddled the road. The weeds and miscellaneous grasses of June soon yielded to the ragweed of August. All the marvels of our collective genius then lay in the humiliating shadow of this tangled mess. Who among us would rise to the task? Who would be the first to display a proper comprehension of history's dialectic?

I was a smoker at the time, so the morning routine meant hand-rolling a supply of cigarettes. These were safely stored away before setting out on the antique Ford tractor with the oversized bush-hog mower trailing behind. From a distance, I was simply a cloud of oily exhaust, smoke, dust, and yellow pollen. But, personally, I could only see the frustrations of a straining engine, a take-off shaft tangled with weed stalks, and suffocating heat.

By the end of the first week, I was very nearly a week behind schedule and at my wits' end. With things like frozen pipes and wayward pick-up trucks, one need only fake competence and relentlessness for a matter of minutes. But if those are sprints, then farming is a marathon. The eccentricities of old machinery demand incredible reserves of patience and inventiveness. Without a large supply of baling wire and scrap metal, without an arc welder and nerves of steel, agriculture is simply impossible. My buddies and I cajoled, jury-rigged, and simply willed the fields to be mowed. We improvised solution after solution until, at long last, the first stage was complete. We'd staggered through the first twenty percent.

Then came the plowing and the harrowing and, finally, the

moment of truth with the planting of winter rye. Twin Oaks had acquired an inventory of tractors and implements with the purchase of the farm, and I knew that we had a very old grain drill stowed away in the tobacco barn shed. I even knew that a grain drill isn't a drill. It's a machine for planting seeds, and the grain drill in this case was a framework riding on two widely spaced tires with a simple hitch completing the triangle. At the top of this monster sits a transversely mounted rectangular bin for the seed grain. Interchangeable wheels at the bottom of this bin rotate, driven by a gear train from the wheels, and they transfer the seed to tubes that end just behind steel tines furrowing the soil. Once the seed falls into place, it's covered by trailing disks, and the whole procedure is perfectly straightforward. Once the proper settings are made, everything is automatic, and even the most simple-minded farmer can set up one of these babies in his sleep. Once I had the grain drill out safely away from the barn, I used the bicycle pump to bring the dry-rotted tires back to life. I surveyed the levers and knobs essential to the proper functioning of the old, red McCormick, and I lit another cigarette. I did this to keep calm because the sad truth of the matter is that I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. I stood there in front of that grain drill with my red hair flying out in all directions. The cigarette smoke curled up over my thin moustache, and I was, at that moment, completely without a clue. The grain drill was an impossibility from any angle. So, with knees trembling ever so slightly, I studied every treacherous mystery of the mechanism and ultimately settled upon a combination of settings that seemed plausible. The time had come for the plumber's swagger: to take the best shot and hope for the best. We filled the bins with the most fragrant and precious seed that money could buy. My partner took up her post on the running board of the planter, and off we went. In a few hours, we were finished, and the amount of grain used had actually come fairly close to the book estimates. There was hope. There always is.

But despite our best efforts to pulverize the clay into something like soil, our seed now rested among clods as hard as any granite. The sun continued to roast everything in sight, and the birds were delighted

with the feast we'd given them. I might have planted the seed too deeply, too unevenly, or the rains might not come in time. What hope there was remained very much clouded by disastrous possibilities.

Farming, though, does wonders in producing a philosophical outlook, and I understood, even then, that technical success was not the heart of the matter. The meditation that comforted me most was this. Suppose that Lincoln had lived and that the United States had fulfilled its obligations. Suppose that every freed slave had received his just endowment of forty acres and a mule. The very farm upon which Twin Oaks rested its aspirations might well have been the site of such a radical transformation. Some newly freed black might have forced her crops from the same soil that resisted us so tenaciously. Of course, many of these new farmers could have failed. Farmers fail all the time. That's not the point. The essential element is the farmer's self-conception. The black man's exhilaration in ascending from serfdom to ownership counts for everything. Individual efforts might fall short, but the self-conscious evolution from yesterday to tomorrow remains intact. So what if the rye failed to sprout? We had taken possession of every acre of our birthright, and the overriding issue was never in doubt. Whether or not I succeeded, capitalism would eventually succumb to its own hard-hearted stupidity.

The other comforting consideration was that socialist farming is always done in the long term. Because we were not pressed by interest rates and falling prices we could afford the luxury of planting a cover crop to be plowed under in the spring. We could make a substantial investment in the health of the soil. We could even ride out several years of failure without the tragedy of personal bankruptcy. And we didn't have to drive into town to go dancing. Whatever the short-term loss or gain, we were prepared to revolutionize farming and to enjoy ourselves in the process.

So, with this in mind, I settled down to wait, and that's exactly what I did. For week after week, stretching into October, the fields continued to bake. When the sprouts finally did begin to appear, the true agony began. How could such fragile little things ever survive the

drought and the temperatures? How could I ever recover from the humiliation of an entire winter spent with haphazard patches proclaiming my complete incompetence? Better to have nothing at all than these half-hearted clumps.

Even when the approach of November brought days of rain, the new and bolder sprouts did nothing to relieve the specter of barren dirt spotted with barely perceptible green. I could almost hear our neighbors laughing themselves silly over the turn of events at the "hippie farm".

Then, on one particularly clear autumn afternoon, Kat patted me on the head and told me that I'd done the best I could. "Very funny," I said, and we somehow wound up strolling out to the storage barn on the western edge of my pathetic fields. With a crystalline wind straight from Canada and the sun just touching the horizon, we skirted the fields, reached the barn, and turned around. Before us, from the tips of our toes to the crimson and gold of the trees in the distance, lay a green and glowing sea of seamless rye. The angle and clarity of the sun obscured every imperfection. Each and every blade radiated its halo of liquid luminescence. Each and every blade shimmered in the caresses of wind and sunlight. Dirt and disappointment were nowhere to be seen. They'd vanished in the flood and in the kiss we exchanged there on the shores of the green and glowing sea.

We spent the entire winter in the company of this victorious rye that continued to radiate while everything around it withered and slept. By spring, the crop was so thick and luxuriant that the plowing under presented a real challenge. But it was nothing a true socialist couldn't handle.

There are, of course, any number of ways to talk about such labor. The Shakers were fond of saying "Hands to work; heart to God". Che Guevara speaks of the "revolutionary act". Marx discusses the alienation of labor and its opposite. And B.F. Skinner dismisses it as just another positive reinforcer, so my infatuation with rationalism suffered mightily. My experiences with the metaphysics of plumbing and agriculture taught me that Skinner fails to understand the first thing about anything remotely human.

Then, too, there was this to consider. Capitalism and its middle class constantly produce generations of disaffected, arrogant youth. Appalled by the crass materialism of their successful parents, these offspring set up shop in Greenwich Village or the left bank of the Seine. They wear strange costumes, their hair is weird, and they indulge in every artistic, pharmaceutical, and sexual deviation under the sun. They disdain ordinary routine like nobody's business, and they have large vocabularies. The modern American variety tends to concoct its own recipe of Native American ritual, ancient Oriental mysticism, medieval European folklore, and pagan astrology. And I like every single one of them. You never know what they're going to say next.

The only problem is that this intelligentsia isolates itself from larger currents. They're at a loss for words in listening to housewives or the working class. By definition, they're on the fringe, but it took a while for the lesson to sink in. Only after another four years of communal bliss did I regretfully conclude that Twin Oaks could not bring about the necessary revolution in class consciousness. Rye or no rye, we were forever relegated to the shadowy fringes of history.

TWO

Unless we do change our whole way of thought about work, I do not think we shall ever escape from the appalling squirrel-cage of economic confusion in which we have been madly turning for the last three centuries or so, the cage in which we landed ourselves by acquiescing in a social system based upon Envy and Avarice.

Dorothy L. Sayers

My mother had been raised in the strictly blue-collar environment of Rochester, New York. She'd been denied any access to the mystifying world of intellectualism, but she somehow understood my dropping out of college and taking up with communists. She'd known all along that I was an "idealist", and I suspect that she took some pride in knowing that I thought about morality and how things should be. I wish now that I'd taken her into my confidence. She might have appreciated a little respect.

For my own part, I understood the shortcomings of idealism and other forms of wishful thinking. The simple exercise of imagining our own perfection does a world of good, but it doesn't make the world any better. All good ideas must contain the method of their implementation, and that's what I liked about Karl Marx. Marxism is the scientific study of history, and history is nothing but the evolution of economics and the resulting conflicts among social classes. We can think of the Rocky Mountains as a really nice idea (and they certainly are that), but it turns out to be a little more productive to pay attention to the underlying geological tensions that created them.

Another good idea would be to have everybody sign a pledge to be sweet and polite to each other. We'd all promise to say "please" and "thank you", and that would truly be very pleasant. But the social reality

under our feet is one of intense and unrelenting competition. Simple bourgeois economics dictates that the people who succeed are the nasty, selfish ones. Any attempt to make our social relations more ladylike will have to address certain basic assumptions.

The reason I'm writing this book is to examine certain principles of the four-hour day, but I'm not trying to convince you that it's a good idea. You were born under the star of capitalism, and you believe in personal success, punishment, holy wars, and all the rest. Even if you were to shrewdly conclude that four hours is better than eight, that wouldn't threaten our competitive monolith. The four-hour day and the Rocky Mountains take their own sweet time and will only show up when they're good and ready.

And that's where Karl Marx comes in. Just as we can trace the development of the businessman from his lowly beginning as a not-so-glorified pawnbroker to his present exalted status, we can study the class tensions now building beneath us. Marx had every reason to conclude that the newborn industrial worker would eventually come into his own. The proletariat must inevitably realize its own power and proceed to establish a social order with but one class. Everyone would work; everyone would own.

This was not just another nice idea dreamt up in some ivory tower. The working class has the muscle to implement its own domination, and the impulse to do so was supposed to be natural and irresistible. Such is the nature of science.

Of course, now that the Soviet Union and China have successfully run Karl Marx into the ground, the notion of proletarian upheaval seems deader than a doornail. The only cataclysmic inclination of the American working class has to do with its credit card debt and gambling habit. Search the horizon as far as the eye can see, and imminent revolution is nowhere to be seen.

That was not the case in 1975 when every country other than our own boiled with radical tendencies. Part of the problem then was that Rudy had already left Twin Oaks to join one of the Marxist organizations that had sprung up amid all the campus commotion. He

sent me copies of the group's newspaper, and I told him I didn't believe it for one minute. I simply could not see the American working class rising up and installing a dictatorship of the proletariat anytime soon. It just wasn't going to happen.

Of course, all Rudy had to do was ask me how I knew. How could anyone sheltered away in rural Virginia ever keep his finger on the pulse of the masses? Then too, he had an ace up his sleeve in being able to recall for me the well-known fact that Lenin had about ten followers in 1915. Before anybody knew what was happening, the Bolshevik tide swept aside the bourgeoisie and the more dainty socialists. Such instant upheavals are a normal part of historical mechanics, and Rudy could suggest -- without being polite -- that the serious socialist had no choice but to follow Lenin's lead.

Added to all this was the certain knowledge that capitalism was long overdue for a stock market crash and another Great Depression. Ever since Nixon removed the dollar from any attachment to gold, the economy had flirted with complete bankruptcy. Those of us who were in the know understood that all hell was about to break loose. Under no circumstances could we repeat the mistakes that the Left had made in the 1930's. We could never allow another Roosevelt to sweet-talk his way through another bourgeois restructuring. This next crisis would be the last great death agony of capitalism -- provided, of course, that our leadership had the sheer nerve and audacity to succeed.

So, once again, I was faced with the choice of continuing as a schoolboy bystander or actually joining the fray. Rudy had me between a rock and a hard place, so the outcome was never really in doubt. I soon moved to gritty old Baltimore to join a dozen or so of my newfound comrades.

I should mention at this point that the national leader of this vanguard was one Lyndon LaRouche. Even as an older, somewhat reclusive Lefty, he had managed to find a following among the chaos of Columbia University in the late 'sixties. Starting out as a splinter of the Students for a Democratic Society, he went on to found the U.S. Labor Party and other permutations. He was a perennial candidate for

President, and it was in the midst of just such a campaign that I joined up.

In the back of my mind was the simple conception that I'd learned in the early days of Twin Oaks. If I didn't like the direction of this new organization, I could change it. Just as I had learned to become an intellectual force to be reckoned with on the commune, perhaps I would again discover some secret talent on the larger stage. If history required a Leninist will and hubris, perhaps I could rise to the task. Why, at the tender age of twenty-five, should I rule out any possibility?

Unfortunately, the next five years did an amazing job of persuading me that I had no political prowess whatsoever. Upon arriving in Baltimore, I was handed a stack of newspapers written in a style of polemical rhetoric guaranteed to remove the hair of any English teacher in the United States. The shrieking jargon was, in fact, unreadable for anyone outside the cult, and this was the material I was supposed to sell. I was "deployed" to busy intersections, shopping centers, and steel mills where I was to hawk the papers for a quarter each. The small cadre of leaders in our local could sit back in the comfort of our third-rate office and wait for me to come back with my tail between my legs. Some people in the organization had an amazing ability to sell papers and raise money, but I was certainly not one of those. Of course, any such failing must be the result of poor political comprehension, so I was forever condemned to the drudgery of distribution. Often this would mean putting in a full day as a machinist and then going off for four or five hours of revolutionary frustration.

What made it all worthwhile was the telex machine in the office. The organization maintained an extensive intelligence wing in New York City, and, if the finance minister of Guiana made a speech attacking the World Bank, we heard about it the next morning. We were privy to information not reported in the *Baltimore Sun*, and the overall gist of this insider news was that the world was on the verge of a revolt from the domination of New York and London finance. Leaders of Third-World countries and the socialist bloc gave constant indication of their willingness to develop new institutions and new trade

arrangements that would pull the rug out from under the Rockefellers and Bilderbergers. Our teletyped briefing overflowed with hints that LaRouche himself had met with this or that influential party. We were the conspirators leading the way in a revolt that would surely precipitate bourgeois self-destruction.

The key to success in this situation, then, was not so much winning over the American worker. Basically, all we had to do was keep a certain amount of literature flowing and provide LaRouche with the money he needed to run for office and appear well connected. Somehow, our glorious leader managed to maintain an air of constant crisis, keeping the entire organization in a state of perpetual red alert. The world teetered on the brink of nuclear holocaust, but just one more push on our part could turn the tide. At any moment, all of the behind-the-scenes activity would erupt into a full-blown vindication of my pathetic efforts on street corners and parking lots.

Of course, nothing of the kind ever happened, but I remained a believer for five long years. During this time, LaRouche discovered that his conspiracy theories were finding a receptive audience in the extremities of the Right Wing. Without any apologies whatsoever, he began writing articles in praise of Alexander Hamilton, not Karl Marx. We published endless denunciations of Queen Elizabeth and the whole British royal family as the principal conspirators of international drug operations. We became a brand new incarnation of the paranoid John Birch Society. And when the organization announced that LaRouche was moving to a mansion in Leesburg, Virginia, I'd finally had enough. I departed with no fanfare and no attempt to persuade me otherwise. I had become completely inconsequential.

It comes as no surprise that humiliation takes many forms and degrees of severity, but I honestly believe that mine was as good as any. Starting out as a nice kid with every good intention in the world, I'd allowed myself to be manipulated into a hideous distortion. Why had I never stood up at a meeting of the Baltimore local and challenged the stultifying hierarchy? Why had I accepted the lunatic style of our newspaper? Why hadn't I simply walked out after the first year, or the

second, or the third?

Or better yet, why hadn't I understood the unfortunate predicament of all left opposition? Capitalism manages to generate opposition from all quarters, but, all too frequently, that degenerates into simple negation. The Left denounces inevitable atrocities, but there are simply so many of them that there's no time left to articulate the positive alternative. Sloganeering takes the place of legitimate social redesign. "Make the bosses take the losses", and the end result is that the Left runs around like a scowling demon of raging negativity. No one is inspired, much less the leftists themselves.

When I finally came to my senses, I had every right to withdraw into a hardened shell of sneering cynicism. Even the erstwhile leaders of the New Left were then discovering new occupations as stockbrokers and purveyors of barbecue sauce. By far, the easiest way out would have been the course of outright denial. I could have surrendered with no conditions attached, and I very nearly did.

But, for reasons that still elude me, I continued to nurse my battered faith, and I think part of the explanation lies in the mysteries of proselytizing. Mormons send out their young men for two-year missions of converting the heathens. Jehovah's Witnesses publicly proclaim the Kingdom on street corners. And for five years, I preached the gospel truth to Americans from every walk of life. I talked to businessmen and priests at airports. I met steel workers at their check-cashing bars. I went door to door in every neighborhood of Baltimore, listening to veterans, welfare mothers, drug addicts, and state senators, without being able to tell which was which. Early on, I learned that if I succumbed to any temptation to pontificate or be coldly rational, I'd never get to first base. Or if I believed anything anyone said without noticing body posture and eye contact, I'd be sadly disappointed. I began to sense the unspoken assumptions that unite all businessmen and separate them from all black Baptist ministers. I understood in myself my deep-seated aversion to salesmanship and my overwhelming preference for listening.

If Rudy had once been able to accuse me of a fatal isolation from

the working class, I could finally say that I'd thrown myself off the deep end. I'd done five years of total immersion, and the end result is a clear-eyed affection for the individual American. In general, we tend to behave like retarded sheep who fall prey to every consumerist temptation under the sun. But, as lonely individuals, we are all struggling to comprehend the world and do the right thing. We may suffer from a vision limited by our identities as bankers, Latinos, women, or convicted felons, but we each do the best we can in trying to think through the confusion. Who can argue with that?

So, after five years of proselytizing, I can shake my head and say that the Catholic Church, as an institution, doesn't offer much hope for mankind. The Vatican may issue proclamations about forgiveness of Third World debt, but a nominally celibate priesthood remains impotent. I can also say -- without contradiction -- that I respect every priest I've ever met. Even the pedophiles retain some commitment to lofty ideals, and I can easily foresee those conditions in which these men will dispense with neurosis. Despite our collective addictions, there's nothing seriously wrong with us. We are -- each and every one of us -- sufficient reason for great optimism.

After retiring from the political arena, then, I had all the time in the world to reflect upon the human condition and the American predicament. Ever since my experience with the winter rye, I had understood socialism as the most democratic of all possible alternatives. Yet, any fool can see that the United States has nothing but contempt for anything even vaguely socialist. We truly, truly believe that we're better dead than red, and this is an astoundingly bizarre tendency. It's as if the Rocky Mountains simply decided to evaporate in the face of public indifference.

Something like this is enough to turn any idealist into an embittered old grouch, but I have thankfully avoided this fate. After five years on the front lines, I had no illusions about the intensity of our antipathy to collectivism, but I also understood this aversion as a particularly thin shell. The people I met all believed in a just and equitable society. They all sensed some violation of principle in our

current practices. If the armor of anti-communist rhetoric could once be pierced, anything might happen.

Of course, the Russians weren't helping any because they were still laboring under Stalin's dictatorship even while dancing on his grave. Brezhnev's ability to wrap himself in the vocabulary of socialism while practicing its opposite led to mass confusion on both sides of the fence. If Americans thought of East Berlin as the Workers' Paradise, who can blame them for saying "Thanks, but no thanks." For me personally, the amazing collapse of the Soviet empire -- with scarcely a shot being fired -- was not so surprising. I knew all about the remarkable effects of party hierarchy, so I could sit back and nod knowingly at the hollowness of the monolith. I hoped and prayed that there might be some remnant of genuine socialist sentiment amidst the rubble, but the capitulation to the "free market" seemed complete and instantaneous.

So, by 1990, I had been ten years retired from any active role in international revolution, imagined or real. I sat back watching the world go by and hoping against hope for some distant sign of impending change. I continued to listen for the rumblings of the class antagonisms that would usher in a new era, and I never once became depressed.

I was busy with another project. Even if no one noticed either one, I had a bee in my bonnet.

THREE

I began to think of time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away.

Margaret Atwood

When I finally abandoned my crusade for a rational economy, I knew that a return to the commune was out of the question. Too many changes had transpired in both me and Twin Oaks, so I settled into a new life of almost perfect isolation. I worked forty hours a week as a machinist, and I talked about baseball and the weather with the other guys in the shop. I bought a ramshackle old Baltimore rowhouse in a decidedly un-gentrified neighborhood, and I began the unending renovations. One neighbor made a point of stopping by to tell me what I was doing wrong, but that was about the extent of my social contact.

The honest truth of the matter is that I was happy as a clam. At long last, I had no obligation to peddle newspapers or save the world. At the ripe old age of thirty, I could live from moment to moment, doing anything I wanted without having to answer to anyone. Of course, many people who experience this version of the American Dream go on to commit suicide, but I wasn't one of those. I had an idea slightly larger than the Rocky Mountains. I was a man with a mission.

The absolute essence of Marxism is that any specific idea remains rooted in the culture that created it, and all cultures are determined by economic reality. If I hear the Cherokee version of Great Spirit creationism, I understand its commonality with the thinking of all

hunter-gatherer societies. People who hunt for a living tend to think in certain ways. Agricultural societies develop different worldviews. And capitalist, industrial cultures produce still other structures of belief. Capitalism even comes up with its own theory of "cultural relativism", but even that is a bourgeois conception.

Like any good Marxist, I'd always known that Darwin and his theory of competitive evolution were "wrong". Darwin is one hundred percent bourgeois. The idea of natural selection did not appear in Borneo three thousand years ago. The feudal clergy of medieval Europe would never say such a thing. Darwinism is the very specific product of England in the Nineteenth Century. Like Malthus and Adam Smith, Darwin is the articulation of all the underlying assumptions of financial elitism. That he was actually related to the Wedgewood family is simply icing on the cake. The bottom line is that the theory of natural selection is a capitalist idea through and through.

My guess is that ninety-nine point nine percent of early Cherokees were satisfied by their creation myth. For them, it explained everything. Americans aren't so lucky because of the ridiculously stubborn minority who cling to another creation myth from the ancient mid-East. Our Christian fundamentalists show that there is more to economic determinism than meets the eye.

But be that as it may, I personally became obsessed with developing an alternative to Darwin. Once humankind moved past capitalism, how would we conceive the beginning of life and the universe that sustains it? What words would a cooperative economy use to talk about our process of development? How could I, as a dues-paying citizen of a consumerist society, ever conceptualize a more advanced articulation?

Part of my problem with Darwin was simply practical. Since my early days as a plumber, farmer, and machinist, I'd had an intimate familiarity with the difficulty of fitting parts together. I knew that assembling a pocket watch, for example, would require a painstaking care and attention to detail. Murphy's law overrules all others: if something can go wrong, it will. If something can misalign, it will.

Under no circumstances could I imagine throwing the parts of a watch against a wall and having the thing put itself together by accident. Even if there were some mysterious force that held two parts together once they lined up, I couldn't conceive any form of ultimate success. Watch parts do not go together accidentally or willingly, no matter how long we wait for the succession of miracles to occur.

When the universe ignited, its inventory of parts was severely limited, to say the least. Not only did it have to concoct things much more complex than watches, it had to do so from scratch. I remember hearing someone say that the odds of life appearing on Earth were about the same as having a tornado assemble a passenger jet from the contents of a junkyard. The typical scientist has no problem with this, however. He simply accuses me of failing to understand the time frame involved. He says that five billion years of minute random mutations, properly rewarded, can produce anything. He's as happy as a Cherokee on his wedding day.

But if I were to go walking through the woods and stumble over a pocket watch, I personally would not tend to think that it put itself together. I would assume creative intention rather than happenstance. I would think hard and long about all other possibilities before resorting to something as far-fetched as randomness. Merchants have no problem with Lady Luck and Dame Fortune, but I still had my doubts.

In this meditation, I was profoundly inspired by Albert Einstein, because capitalism is a tremendous advance over its predecessors, and one of the things it gets right is the democratization of science. A hell of a lot of early observation was done by aristocrats with too much time on their hands, and that's still a problem. But the real strokes of genius came with the likes of Franklin, Edison, and Einstein. These were ordinary citizens who discovered the ethereal pleasures of unraveling nature's mysteries without benefit of pedigree or title.

So what did Albert Einstein really do? Basically, he managed to throw common sense out the window and simply imagine what it must be like to take a ride on a photon. If a person were traveling at the speed of light, and he were to take a look around at lesser mortals, what would

he see? Taking nothing for granted, what are the full implications?

Keep in mind that he did this while working as a lowly clerk in a Swiss patent office. Never forget that.

The upshot of this meditation was the famous theory of relativity which all of us know about and few of us comprehend. The bottom line is that time isn't what we think it is. Time has no independent existence. It's extraordinarily rubbery, and, if you follow this logic all the way to the end, you wind up with tens of thousands of corpses in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Whatever Einstein might have said about the nature of time and space, he said much more about the nature of humanity. All of us have the right and ability to think about nature and to perform thought-experiments to our hearts' content. Anytime we choose, we can simply turn off the television and take the next bus to the library. Once we open the first book, we're off and running on the grandest adventure ever known. We are free to speculate about the impossibly large, the ridiculously teeny-weeny, and everything in between. If Einstein and the Wright Brothers could take flight (at about the same time), then we are free to soar. This is the secret ingredient in the recipe for capitalism.

Two things stand in the way, though. If we once believe that science is only for geniuses, we're dead in the water. And secondly, if we work as long and stay as busy as the average American, we're finished before we start.

Fortunately for me, I suffered no such disadvantages. Ever since the business with the grain drill, I pretty much believed that I could do whatever I set my mind to, politics notwithstanding. And because my political career had deprived me of romantic involvement or any friends whatsoever, I had all the time in the world.

Because of Einstein's success, I knew from the start that the demolition of Charles Darwin would demand a brand new conception of time. If natural selection were to be replaced by anything, it would necessarily involve some notion of anticipation. A pre-human world have had to prepare itself for the next step, but it could never get everything in order unless it knew where it was headed. A universe in

one phase of existence would have to foresee its successor, and that could only happen if time were very strange indeed.

But Einstein had already demonstrated both that time is peculiar and that his idea of relativity was insufficient. He never got the unified theory, and that leaves the door wide open for the likes of you and me. A golden opportunity stares us in the face. Einstein's failure is even better than his triumph, and that realization was a big help.

The other inspiration was music. LaRouche might have been dead wrong about everything else under the sun, but he understood something about music. In steering his flock away from the temptations of counter-culture radicalism, he emphasized the importance of transcending common hedonism. The pleasure principle embodied by rock music was to be replaced by the rapture of Bach and Mozart. Only with an understanding of true musical genius could the political mind comprehend social change. Unfortunately, he at one time included Wagner in his pantheon of musical saints, so he even managed to screw up this one insightful moment.

The musical conception that really caught my attention was the art of fugue and Bach's mastery of it. A fugue is almost like a canon or a musical round such as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat". But instead of playing the melody back upon itself with some delay, the fugue employs a harmonic variation of the melody. A short theme is introduced by one hand on the keyboard, and this is soon overlaid by its repetition and the introduction of counter-themes in other voices. The overall result is unmistakable progress. The piece develops depth and resonance throughout its sustained elaboration. The whole business dances its way towards a natural resolution, and, if that denouement occurs as a monster chord on the right organ, the effect is breathtaking.

The critical insight into the nature of fugue is that it is not a pocket watch. It is not an assembly of parts. The temptation might be to pull out one note and say, "This is an 'A'. This is four hundred forty cycles per second, and this is an element which can stand on its own without a context." This is the first impulse of bourgeois analysis, and it's a big mistake. The notes of a fugue come into being only as

responsible members of the progression. Nothing exists independently. The 'A' may be simultaneously the dominant note of one chord and the tonic of another. Everything depends upon timing and position within the dynamic of forward motion. Fugue is the best, most sensuous, demonstration of a dialectical system there is. Conversation is another. Money is nothing but counterpoint. We'll talk about sex later when we're both more mature.

At any rate, in the dialectic of fugue, the individual notes are not constituent elements but temporal nodes which embody everything that has gone before and everything that is yet to be. Even the first tentative statement of theme contains within itself the ultimate chord of resolution. Every note remembers its former existence and anticipates its descendants, and the only way such a thing could ever happen is if time were non-linear.

It doesn't take an Einstein to see that this is precisely the form of development of life on Earth. At one time, the only variety of organic reproduction available was asexual. Then, in very short order, sex happened. A great many things had to be in place for this revolution to occur, and the only way to comprehend such a mysterious shift is through dialectical understanding. If a musical theme and counter-theme can meander their way through a logical elaboration and then become a single chord, then sex is as easy as rolling off a log. Sex is the natural resolution of a tension extending as far back as the Big Bang. Sex is also a dialectical node containing the whole kit and caboodle of future development. Sex anticipates whatever it is that transcends sex.

The central problem is that I could talk in this vein for days on end and never get anywhere. As a former philosophy major, I could recognize this sort of discourse as the idle prattle it is. As a one-time Marxist, I could write a four-volume treatise on revolutionary theory while the working class continued to slumber. Words, good ideas, and the U.S. dollar weren't worth the paper they were printed on. Something dramatically non-verbal would have to happen if anything were ever to come of my intuitive inklings of temporal dialectic.

I had no choice but to build a time machine.

FOUR

We are so saturated with the notion that Time is a dimension accessible from one direction only, that you will at first probably be shocked by my saying that I can see truly as far in front of me as I can see exactly behind me.

Mary Austin (1922)

The real reason for building a time machine is that I had to get rid of both Darwin and God at the same time. Because there's no such thing as a time-line, feudalism never really dies, and old superstitions live on. The intellectual marketplace seems to offer but two alternatives -- religion and science -- and, if I succeeded in vaporizing Darwin, I might get more than I bargained for. Old-fashioned creationism might rear its ugly head, be born again, and that's the very last thing I wanted.

Some native African once said, "When the white man came, we had the land, and he had the Bible. Now, we have the Bible, and he has the land." As a card-carrying progressive, I had long viewed the Church as the uneasy but steadfast ally of capital. By far the best method of dominating any given population is to tranquilize it with entertainment, alcohol, and the voodoo of religion. The Christian Church, in all its manifestations, remained Public Enemy Number One as far as I was concerned. The bland, unctuous piety of Christian acceptance was more than I could stand. Christianity is the self-indulgent belief in magical forgiveness for a lifetime of greedy acquisition. Christianity is the pair of holier-than-thou priests who bless the righteous troops of opposing armies. Christianity is a papacy open to the highest bidder. Christianity confers legitimacy on the worst sinners who ever lived, and, under no circumstances, would I provide it with any new ammunition. If I were to articulate an alternative to Darwin, I'd have to bend over backwards

to avoid people on their knees.

That's not as easy as it sounds because Bach himself was a true believer. My conception of fugue would have to transcend his and leave out the metaphysical hocus-pocus. A strictly mechanical time machine was the answer. If I developed a hard-nosed, no-nonsense, practical demonstration of the mutability of time, then God couldn't sneak in the back door. Nuts and bolts were the only things that mattered.

In retrospect, I can say that my vehement opposition to religion had everything to do with my disgust with all forms of self-indulgent hypocrisy. If an Andrew Carnegie aspires to commercial aristocracy, that's one thing. But if he also denies his true motivation by wrapping himself in a flag or holy robe, that's something else entirely. That sort of self-inflicted deceit is enough to send me up the wall, through the roof, and far into the future.

And while we're on the subject of neurotic duplicity, I'll confess that another issue intruded into my investigations. You will remember that my communal success with the winter rye was sealed with a kiss. Unbeknownst to you, there were other kisses besides that one, and the succeeding twenty years or so were interspersed with intimate adventures of one kind or another. Some were more kind than others. I took each one of them very seriously in the heat of the moment, but, after falling permanently and hopelessly in love for the fifth or sixth time, I started having second thoughts. Certainly by the age of forty, I could accept the disturbing conclusion that I was doomed to repeat the same silly mistake over and over again. I also freely admitted that I seemed to lack whatever it is that's required to make a marriage succeed.

My associates soon tired of my theoretical pre-occupations, and, no sooner than they walked out the door, I stumbled over some new object of profound and permanent desire. Even after I figured out what was going on -- even after I patiently explained my problem to each new recruit -- the difficulty persisted, and I grew weary of the whole cycle.

Work on the time machine became the only reliable way to avoid romantic humiliation, and I soon developed a new theory about the irritating persistence of capitalism. Besides being racist and

xenophobic, a competitive society is necessarily sexist. At best, capitalism allows women to behave like acquisitive males. So, the inevitable result is that relations between the sexes are somewhat strained. Typically, they're downright antagonistic, so the general level of sexual frustration remains at the maximum. Any more and we'd blow ourselves to smithereens. So, it could be that everything we think of as Yankee ingenuity is simply the result of this sexual dysfunction. Maybe all these men running around inventing everything under the sun is another form of manual relief. Maybe the Protestant work ethic is more than we bargain for.

So, with that in mind, I set about to explore the essential impossibility of time travel.

Given the bourgeois preconception of linear, directional time, we have absolutely no hope of building a time machine. We wouldn't even know where to begin, and the very idea itself embodies internal contradictions concerning cause and effect. Private enterprise can no more build a time machine than it can exceed the speed of light. The free marketplace turns out to be infinitesimally small and constrained.

But if the tiny fraction of time that we call a moment is in fact a localized infinity, then there is hope. There always is. If January 1, 1999 somehow contains every other January 1 there ever was or ever will be, then perhaps there is some possibility of filtering out everything but the date we have in mind. If we wanted to return to January 1, 1900, couldn't we take the present moment and discard from it everything that's not January 1, 1900? According to my dialectical way of thinking, every moment remembers every other moment, so the idea of filtration seemed perfectly plausible.

Finally, sometime around 1990 -- after ten years of bumbling around -- it suddenly dawned on me that such a natural sieve already exists. When we listen to a fugue, we hear a single entity stretched across time. We hear the beginning and the end simultaneously, because, if we didn't, we couldn't make heads or tails of it. Nevertheless, there is such a thing as a moment in time, and, during these intervals we hear the individual notes produced by the organ in

the here and now. We are refining the complete spectrum of reality to focus upon the immediate singularity. Obviously, that is the fundamental mechanism of our experience of time. We are continuously screening out everything that's not here and now. How do we do that? Can we develop techniques which would allow us to shift towards the here and then?

For the longest time, I wrestled with this preconscious intuition of a temporal filter without making any progress. I somehow understood that the machine could not be more complicated than a grain drill, once I buckled down to concentrate even harder. More than once, I opened my eyes on the city bus only to find everyone staring at me. Still, the necessary insight eluded me.

Then, the strangest thing happened. The Soviet Union simply disintegrated. It evaporated with less bloodshed than an average month on the Baltimore beltway. I'd never had any illusions about Stalin or Brezhnev, but I sort of thought that the dictatorship of bureaucrats would eventually yield to some fundamentalist revival of democratic Marxism. Yet, when the dust cleared, nothing remained but a hideous capitulation to the domestic military and financial mafia. Nothing else existed. The entire colossal machinery -- founded on the sacred texts of Marx and Lenin -- vanished into thin air. Twenty million Russians had died for the Fatherland and to defeat fascism, and it all came down to this. How could that be?

Because of this turn of events -- and because I needed a break from the time machine -- I went down to the library and started reading about Marx. I wanted to know about the man himself and how he came to be. I learned things I'd never known about his amazing wife, the shadowy figure of the loyal housekeeper, and the two daughters who committed suicide. I found out that Marx wrote *Das Kapital* while suffering tremendous bouts of boils, hemorrhoids, and middle-class aspirations. My old icon became a flesh-and-blood human being. He came alive, with all his frailties and faults. He, like Darwin, was very much a product of Nineteenth Century Europe. He could not see beyond a science of rigid frameworks. Victorian England contained

Marx and Darwin equally. And it did not.

So, of course, I'd made the same mistake. I'd focused entirely upon the rhythms of time itself without taking into account the full implications of space. An interval can be a physical space, if it's not busy doing something else. If something as massive as the Soviet Union could be there one minute and gone the next -- vanishing without a trace -- space could not be Marxist. But I, too, had fallen prey to some remnant of middle-class ideology. An honestly radical interpretation of simultaneity had been there all along -- right under my nose -- and I'd missed it. The single continuum of space and time implies a form of sifting that is patently obvious. A time machine and a grain drill are indeed almost identical.

But not quite.

Unfortunately, I am not prepared to reveal the secret of time travel. As a matter of fact, wild horses couldn't drag it out of me, and the reason for this is perfectly simple. The scientific and military community of the United States once decided to use atomic bombs on a civilian population. They did so with the broad and continuing support of the general population. We also once believed that slavery was natural, just as we continue to consider poverty to be unavoidable. We perpetrated an unblinking form of genocide on Native Americans, and we used the wanton slaughter of buffalo as the principal weapon. We gobble up more than the lion's share of world resources while we condemn most countries to perpetual indebtedness and disease.

Under these circumstances, a form of quarantine is most definitely in order. I would not like to see modern conquistadors go traipsing all over history, spreading the gospel of the marketplace. Until such time as we offer some true repentance -- until we understand that our sins are inherent in capitalism -- the genius of time travel is absolutely out of the question. You can take that to the bank.

Ironically, my oath of secrecy is redundant. If I were given a team of our best and brightest scientists, I could provide them with the plans, the aluminum tubing, and the frequency generators, and they still couldn't build the machine. I could even put the thing together for them,

and they couldn't make it work because their reductionist worldview is just too smothering. Einstein could never, in a million years, reach the Promised Land of a truly general theory. More importantly, he couldn't stop the atomic bomb because his pacifism was relatively feeble. He tried to plead innocence, but, because of ordinary shortsightedness, he could never defuse the bomb or start the time machine. You might as well give a computer to a hummingbird, or vice versa.

Be that as it may, even if the present moment is an infinite reverberation of all time and space, there remains the problem of directionality. The idea of one event preceding another -- of 'earlier' and 'later' -- remains an unavoidable fact of life. My initial researches into time travel assumed that the only possibility was a return to a preceding time frame. By unraveling the complexity of the here and now, I hoped to refine myself backwards in time. Traveling ahead, though, would involve something more than dissection. The future could only be reached through a nested series of temporal projections and inventions compounded in such a way as to make me give up hope altogether. That sort of autonomous acceleration remained a pipe dream, so I focused entirely upon the spatial filters necessary for hindsight.

Two weeks and four hundred dollars after my initial insight into how much space was occupied by the Soviet Union, I flipped the switch and became the first pre-existent human being.

There are two problems with retrograde motion of this type. The first is careening because, as soon as an earlier moment is reached, that becomes the present, and the machine begins processing that complexity. So, if I zoom back to 1860, the filters re-engage and kick me back to 1720, and so on and so forth. After a certain amount of experimentation with rudder design and by adding a pulse mechanism, I could slow the infinite regress somewhat. I could manage a stationary position for five minutes or more, but that seems to be the absolute limit for holding a paradox at bay.

The second problem follows hard upon the first. Or vice versa. Backwards time is a free-fall of terrible proportions inevitably producing a giddy hysteria. It is a white-knuckled, teary-eyed scream that knows

nothing of gravity, verticality, or common sense. As near as I can tell, I appear to the past observer as a kind of glowing, frantic ectoplasm, darting about and cackling like a madman. When I go shooting past my ancestors, they inevitably turn tail and run.

So, the natural limitations of time travel seemed to threaten the whole enterprise. If I couldn't linger in any one era or have a decent conversation with a dead person, what was the point? If I couldn't hold still long enough to learn anything of importance, why bother? I can sit here and smugly state that scientists have a lot to learn about dinosaur feathers, but how does that improve our chances of eventual success? For the longest time, I truly believed that the time machine could be nothing more than a carnival ride.

Of course, most of us would think that was just fine and dandy. Americans like to travel thousands of miles to line up at the gates of Disney World and make a mad dash for the best thrill ride. That's entertainment.

On my last trip, though, I chanced to zoom past a woman doing nothing out of the ordinary. She tended a pot over a fire, and I was there and gone before she had time to react in any way. But nothing is that simple. No one cooks without having some intuition about the past, the future, and the reason for all things. She had a million things to say about who she was and where she was going, but I couldn't take the time to listen. I hadn't the patience to linger, and that's simply not fair. If two people meet across a chasm of irreconcilable difference, the least they can do is talk sincerely. Without that ordinary honesty, the time machine became more than a frivolous waste of time. It was an injustice. It was unconscionable amusement.

Travel back in time was also fundamentally analytical. The machine succeeded in dissecting the present moment, and there are any number of ways to think about that. I could say that the device was left-brained or masculine or simply British. But none of that could correct the essential problem. Disney World is forever Disney World, hindsight is hindsight, and both succeed only in making us lonelier than ever. The machine and I wallowed in idle self-pity for several years.

Then, for no reason whatsoever, I again returned to the idea of going in the opposite direction. What could I do to the machine that would make it forward-looking, feminine, and Anglophobic? How could any machine be any of those things?

Proceeding directly into the future involved creativity. Such a machine would have to take every single strand of current development and project a necessary outcome to the nth degree. Only with intuition, wild imagination, and a few million leaps of faith could such a mechanism even come close. Control was out of the question. Forward motion is an infinite succession of blind dates all at once. You'd have to take all your lives in your hands without being able to see your hand in front of your face. Or vice versa.

Then it dawned on me that none of us is alone. And if I knew more about time than the first Pope Pius, there would one day be someone who understood a whole lot more than I did or do or will. Suppose that other eras are in fact looking for time travelers. Suppose that the future is strewn with magnetic attractors that draw in the temponaut? What if someone pulls while I push? What if there is help for the asking? There often is. If that were the case, then perhaps the idea of going forward in time was not so insane. Certainly, a post-capitalist culture would reach the necessary understanding of time and space, and those people would be on the lookout for mavericks like me. They'd certainly be reaching out in all directions.

Then too, the instability of retro travel depended entirely upon the dismemberment of the present moment, and that's messy. Forward motion requires a form of projected super-integration that ties up loose ends rather creating them. If the metaphor for going backward is the high-caliber laser blaster, then the forward image is the cradle. That's a maternal machine if there ever was one, and that's extraordinarily promising. That possibility offers every expectation of stable, controllable navigation. And the age-old opposition of analytic and creative talent is not as prohibitive as you might think. Even the British have hope.

At 8:35 PM on January 12 of 1994, I reversed the polarity on one

component and turned the key.

FIVE

We have no right to assume that physical laws exist, or if they have existed up to now, that they will continue to exist in the future.

Max Planck

Are y'been dead, sir?

I heard her question through the cramping of a fetal position held too long and too tightly.

Are y'been dead

Then

And deaf to reason

Not knowing

The nearness

Of a simple yes or no?

One eyelid quivered almost open, and, through encrusted tears and glaring light, I saw Avien for the first time ever.

Three times

And y'been out, sir,

But once again,

Are y'been dead and come

Besmirching

The peace and tranquil air

With moans and weary wailing?

Are y'been murdered foul,

*Fleeing out the mortal time
And come
To serenade
With the miseries?
Or are y'been breathing
Normal
In fine excursion
and amusement?*

Nothing about Avien is dainty. She is solid, emphatic, broad-shouldered, and her graying hair spirals out in all directions. Her face remains in a perpetual state of wide-eyed anticipation. Please, please, tell her a joke. Say something -- anything -- to launch her into hysterics, and she will be forever grateful.

"Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" were the first words out of my mummified lips, and the look of disappointment on Avien's face was enough to break my heart. She frowned.

*Alive, and sadly
Wanting brains
and inspiration.
Come on, then.*

She helped me unfold from the large stone beacon, and only then did I recognize the presence of several dozen onlookers. They stood among their looms in the splendor of great wooden beams and arches. Potted trees and vines reached up some twenty feet for skylights and carved ceiling panels. Their leaves danced in a sunlight and gentle air laced with a scent I almost recognized.

As I stood there, hobbled and blinking, I was obviously a source of great curiosity and amazement. Apparently, time transference produces a sort of inner luminosity in the physical dimensions of the traveler. If I see myself in a mirror, I seem perfectly normal. But Avien reports that I am actually lit from within by a cold, greenish glow. I

seem to be synthetically animated.

I also seem to have an odor that is not pleasing to our successors. A visitor has to pay strict attention to the most subtle clues, and no one could mistake the slight recoil as Avien introduced herself and asked the first question.

*So, of all the sundry
Times
Which ever were
Or could be, sir,
From the first turn
Of the newborn
Age to the bitter end,
Which would y'be claiming
As your own and rightful one?
When y'last took leave
Of your senses,
What day and hour
Contemporaneous
Been y'believing in?*

"I come here from the Twentieth Century," I said, and this produced a murmuring commotion of group confusion and calculation. The people gathered in Avien's workshop, in the year 482, had only the sketchiest knowledge of our existence, but they harbored no illusions. Our age is known to them as the Hundred Million Murders, and they know all about the tractor and reactor.

A voice from the back of the room demanded to know if I was a Hitler man or a Gandhi man, and Avien threw up her hands in exasperation. She turned on him in a flash.

*Ach, and what'd y'be
But great ignoramus then?
Are y'blind
As your dead Uncle Fred*

*In beholding
The poor bastard begging
Mercy?
Would y'veen poor
Olfactory ignorant
Detecting
The foul stench come
Emanating from him?
We're off to bath
Presently, sir, and
Food and drink
Undiverted
Till y'veen saying
Your name
As best remembered
And private melancholies.*

Out we went then, the whole mob, into the tree-lined lanes of sunny, springtime Aurora. We wound our way along narrow brick paths, twisting this way and that through a crazy quilt of housing, parks, and perfectly incomprehensible structures. In the center of town, on the summit of the one true hill, the Great Hall rises above the hustle and bustle of daily life, and in its shadow sits our first destination, the Store. When the chattering entourage burst into this establishment, I was wearing an old sweatshirt, jeans, and sneakers, and never in my life have I felt so completely out of place.

The Store is a cathedral of commerce. The inlaid mosaic aisles wind from one walnut and glass display case to the next. The high vaulted ceiling spans a sprawling cornucopia of clothing, footwear, linens, china, and adjustable wrenches. Carpets, furniture, toothpaste, and violins all bask in the soothing glow from stained-glass windows and crystalline wall sconces. The Store is opulence beyond anything known to the ancient kings of Europe or Byzantium -- without a single servant to be seen.

Avien whisked me into the clothing department, and in one

gliding sweep gathered up a bundle of undergarments, sandals, a pair of leggings, and an embroidered tunic. In less than five minutes, we were stampeding for the exit, and I mumbled something about payment. The herd skidded to a halt on the tesserae, and Avien's eyes glittered. I'd finally said something funny.

*Ach, and would y'been
Hearing
Such fecal farce in all
Your worst dreams?
Here he been coming,
Beggar and bum,
Nothing
To his unknown name,
And him wishing
Compensation.
A trifle in exchange,
He'll be having,
Now would he?
Well, sir, then reckon
Me this:
If I been building
The whole
Of what lies before ye,
Safe and sound,
If I been cutting
Stone,
Dead-level true,
Stitching seams
Right and proper,
Sowing seed in season,
Driving pegs straight...
If all every
Thing
Been carried out*

*Independent,
Then where been
Hard obligation?
All y'been seeing
Been mine
And mine alone,
Fair and square,
Free and clear
In the glory of time.
Would y'been having me,
Weak and weary, wasting
Lovely leisure
Printing promissories?*

For some reason, there among the laughing weavers gasping for breath, I did not conclude that Avien was the queen of all Aurora. Not for one minute did I believe that she had legal title to the Store. And, in fact, it turns out that all Aurorans speak in the first person singular when it comes to economic matters. Ask anyone who carved the ancient statues in the Hall, and he'll look you straight in the eye and claim sole credit. Ask her who's responsible for a locust invasion, and she'll accept full blame.

Nor did I believe that I was special. My new clothes were not free for the asking simply because I was a guest. Even in the hazy delirium of a brand new world, I guessed that Aurora had somehow dispensed with money, and that was indeed the truth of the matter. Just as most Americans don't force their infant daughters to pay for diapers and air, Aurorans don't keep accounts among themselves. Whenever someone feels a need for something they've made, they take it with no questions asked. There are too many other questions in life to waste time with trivial matters like shopping.

All of this would become clear to me in short order, but, for the time being, the bathhouse around the corner was the sole object of attention. A minute after departing the Store, my weavers were disrobing under the prism of a half-acre of pyramidal glass. Before I

could even find the first word of protest, they were diving and splashing in the blue-jeweled pool. Only a naked Avien remained on the dry tiles, swimming in pure, dry amusement. She barked the assembled multitude to order, and all eyes fell upon me.

*Gentlemen and ladies,
Saints and sinners,
Please,
Cease and desist!
Y'been laying down
Petty cares, mates,
For unto us this day
Been given that which
Been lying
Fallacious!
Rosy-blushing shame
Of days forgotten,
Bursting forth
Within the scope of
Fingernails and scorn!
Behold,
His honor,
His immensity,
Begetter of nations,
Fair maidens' salvation!*

With this, Avien commenced a rhythmic clapping of her hands, immediately taken up, with whoops and whistles, by the bathers. A guest has no choice in that situation. A visitor graciously accepts the outlandish customs of his hosts with a good-natured smile. I pulled off my shoes, and the crowd roared its approval. I tossed the sweatshirt aside, and they screamed with delight. I slipped out of my pants, and the silence was complete.

Apparently, they must have thought I'd been a prisoner of war or something. They took one look and concluded that my torturers had

been the worst of the worst. They assumed all of this because my middle-aged body had never accepted the boredom of exercise or senseless dieting. There was also the matter of the scars from a chain saw accident and a surgery. But it was mainly the circumcision that horrified them. That made them sit up and take notice. They could only stare in disbelief.

Avien took me by the hand, led me into the swirling water, and told me how very sorry she was.

SIX

Concern for man himself and his fate must always form the chief interest for all technical endeavors, concern for the great unsolved problems of the organization of labor and the distribution of goods -- in order that the creations of our mind shall be a blessing and not a curse for mankind.

Albert Einstein

The only reliable method of reaching the future is total immersion starting at the deep end, so I have no real chance of making this book comprehensible. No sane man credits the possibility of moving beyond time and capitalism. The idea is preposterous, and the best I can hope for is the internal consistency common to all psychopaths and bankers. I acknowledge my responsibility to tie things together in coherent order, but to do this I have to jump even further ahead of myself than I already have. Under current conditions, chronological order seems a little pretentious. You need to know certain facts about Aurora that I could not possibly have known on my first day there. You actually need to know things that I still don't understand.

When I pulled into the station in Avien's workshop, Earth supported thirty billion inhabitants which is a lot less than anyone has a right to expect. Projecting our current expansion over the time between now and then, we should anticipate a few hundred billion earthlings. The reason we won't have anywhere near that many has nothing to do with Malthus. Human beings will never encounter a natural or mathematical limit.

The real reason that the future population is sadly lacking is that we now face several impending crises. Our present course is a bee-line towards multiple disasters. These include inevitable calamities of

energy and water resources, several vicious diseases, and a monetary system designed by perfectly consistent bankers. The dangers confronting us are all political in nature, so solutions exist if we choose to think clearly. I'm not allowed to tell you what really happens.

The other important aspect of the population question is that we will divide roughly in half. Very roughly. Aurora is but one of well over a million communities participating in the loose federation of the Union. The remainder of humanity continues to huddle together in nation-states that live in perpetual warfare with each other and the Union. These die-hard capitalists call themselves the Free World, and everyone in the Union accepts this name although they can think of others. Unionists never try to humiliate the opposition.

We can comfortably house thirty billion people because the Union is willing to go to the ends of the Earth. You should see Sahara in full bloom with the thermostat properly set. Siberia is so delightful it melts in your mouth.

Economic security in the Union has nothing to do with the number of sons you can generate, so population pressures only apply in the Free World where cigarettes, alcohol, war and other diversions continue to be quite effective and profitable. The Free World is strictly limited by nature and mathematics, and it has lots and lots of cars.

The Union has no automobiles at all because they like it that way and because this leaves more room for human beings.

Geographically speaking, Aurora is right around the corner from my house in Baltimore. Aurora is ten thousand people, and its irregular borders enclose some twenty square miles of rolling farmland and forest. In the center, on the hills overlooking the Jovial River below the dam, sits the town of Aurora itself. Five large buildings surround the Great Hall atop the highest hill, and these are the Bath, the Store, the Library, the Hangar, and the Inn. From this center spreads the labyrinthine network of Aurora's houses, apartments, shops, barns, and studios. I'd later learn that the town forms a maze of irregular hexagons such that each of the minor buildings open onto parks and gardens, front and rear. In my first few hours, though, I had no such aerial

perspective, and all I knew was that Avien invited me to dine with her in a cafeteria of some sort.

The Inn is a cafeteria of some sort. But there were no canned mashed potatoes or fluorescent lights. Aurora has no fluorescent lighting whatsoever nor anything even vaguely incandescent. Aurorans design their buildings to catch every available sunbeam during the daylight hours. They don't think of a roof in the same way that you and I do. At night, their living spaces glow with a combination of candlelight and an artificial, ionic synthesis of moonlight, fireflies, and organic perfumes..

By the time Avien and I had finished in the Bath, evening had fallen. We walked the short distance to the Inn, entered the warm luminescence of the lobby, and I had the distinct impression that the maitre d' expected us. Despite the slightest hint of a doubletake at my alien appearance, she smiled and winked at Avien without moving a muscle.

*Y'been heartfelt
And welcome,
Sirs and madams,
As case may be,
For tables
Been cleared,
Hygienic,
Impatient plus
Eager as ever.*

Our waitress escorted us into the vast circular atrium rising some five stories to the glass dome overhead. We entered one of four spiral escalators, and, in no time at all, we were seated in a third-floor alcove overlooking the cavernous center and the musicians working there. All the accommodations on the east side are tables for two and very private. Other arrangements are available elsewhere.

The waitress lit the candles, introduced herself, and proceeded

to reach for my wrist and take my pulse. She then examined the palms of both hands, my tongue, and my retinas. She hummed a note, asked me to repeat it, and then said she'd return momentarily. I have no idea how she knew what Avien wanted.

So, there I sat, three floors up, in that awkward silence that sometimes occurs between a man and woman after the servants depart. Keep in mind that I knew nothing about my new surroundings. Even then, the cooks in the kitchen might have been preparing roast Norwegian following their latest military conquest. I might be next. I might have fallen in with snake-handling Christians or ardent bird-watchers. How did I know if these Aurorans were even human or true Earthlings? What prevented them from being automatons or aliens? What prevents any of us from being automatons or aliens? What exactly stood between me and certain death? What could explain my sense of foreboding three floors up?

Then, too, in retrospect, I have to admit that I'd done a poor job in preparing for a successful maiden voyage. I hadn't thought the matter through because if I had, I'd already know the first three questions to ask. I would have imagined touching down in a completely foreign environment, and then what would I do? What are the first three things to know about this or any other place? What are the first three things to know about ourselves? I thought about asking Avien if she were a pathological liar, but I realized that wouldn't work. What would?

I'd also not taken into account the obvious fact that we are who we are. Circumstances might alter certain behaviors, but there remains the problem of hard-core personality. Some things never change, and I should have known that I could go from here to eternity and still be susceptible to adolescent infatuation. Far from home and in possible mortal danger, I could think only of the suggestion that seemed to sparkle in Avien's smile. My first adventure into the not-yet became just another *deja vu*. In the blink of an eye, I regressed to high school, the commune, the Italian restaurant, and the cheap motel where I'd made the exact same mistake in endless succession. With Avien, I was right

back where I'd started and not one bit wiser. My pea-brain had just enough room for one single solitary thought.

If this is unbelievably stupid, it's still understandable. If I appear to Aurorans as somewhat green around the gills, the complementary truth also exists. From my point of view, Aurorans all exude a health and beauty beyond anything on film. You'd think they'd never heard of cigarettes, french fries, or stress. There at the Inn, I had no doubt that Avien was the most attractive woman I'd ever met. Or more precisely, Avien was the most attractive pair of eyes I'd ever met. Something about her wide-eyed look of expectation, of invitation, of eager listening conveyed an intimacy unlike anything I'd ever known. Avien could look at me -- or at a plate of food -- as if she were encountering a miracle never before known on this or any other planet. Every new moment became a fresh, sparkling delight. For Avien, it was breathless anticipation or nothing at all.

I would learn a little later that there is a perfectly logical reason Aurora constructed its Inn with lofty alcoves. They believe that a man and woman dining together do so on the very brink of an infinite psychological precipice. A man and woman dining together are doing so at their own mortal risk, and, if they're not acrophobic, they're doing something wrong. Precarious encounters are thought to be a necessary aid to digestion.

I also soon came to understand that dating in Aurora is radically different from what you and I did when we were younger. Remember that Avien and I had already seen each other naked, and that's not the sequence of events we're used to. Typically, in America, it's the dining that's the prelude to nakedness and not the other way around. This reversal tends to make more difference than you'd think because, once the nudity part is over and done with, dining is a lot more relaxed. Dessert selection and eye contact are greatly simplified.

The other big difference about going to Aurora for a date is that, in this case, the woman is on her own turf, and she knows everything there is to know. The man, being a perfect stranger, doesn't know much of anything. He can barely follow the language, and he understands

nothing of its context. He doesn't know the first thing about the customs and culture of this most foreign of countries. Basically, he doesn't know which end is up.

In America, it's usually the woman who's in the dark and insecure. The man at the table knows all the important things. He knows how much money he makes in a year, and he knows whether or not the woman is pretty enough for a person in his position. The woman is left to hope and pray that she's acceptable and not too pushy.

In Aurora at the very beginning, I knew two -- and only two -- things. I knew that I was falling prey to a very old addiction, and I knew there wasn't anything to worry about. My relationship with Avien could never turn sexual. That was a pure, unadulterated impossibility.

The first reason for this state of non-affairs was that Avien's permanent state of high expectation was too much for me. If she were endlessly seeking the next romantic, sexual miracle, I would prove nothing but a weary disappointment. If she were constantly demanding new wonders and death-defying stunts, she'd steer clear of anything remotely American. The very source of her insatiable beauty became, for me, the heart of impossibility. A man would have to be some kind of fool to think he'd ever be able to satisfy a woman like her. A man does not reach the age of forty-five without learning who's in his league and who's not.

And the other reason that intimacy was out of the question was that my time machine was connected to a timer. Even as the waitress delivered the two magnificent plates, a clock ticked steadily away in a Baltimore basement many years removed. Once the mechanism struck twelve hours, an immutable chain of events would deprive me of the power I needed to stay ahead of myself. Very shortly, I would be unceremoniously deposited back home where I belonged. I was a temporary tourist, and that status conveys the most exhilarating freedom a man can know. Whether he wants to or not.

I was, at long last, free to do anything I pleased, and that simple fact enabled me to meet Avien's gaze, face to face, without blinking. She thought I was actually a man of some courage, but that's because she

didn't know any better. She couldn't possibly know about the timer.

*So, Gabe
Expeditious,
What been the
Primary
Question?
Y'been startled,
Intrusive,
Oblivious,
So which
among many
Been doubted
Initially?
Which clue been
Number one,
Head and shoulders
Above?*

A man does not fall in love as often as I had without learning to take it in stride and laugh it off. He's forgotten how to take himself seriously, so he becomes an intellectual and an expert conversationalist.

"So, let's say that you were digging a hole in your back yard, for whatever reason, and you suddenly discovered a rich deposit of gold ore. Who would own the gold? Who would have legal title to the wealth that would result?"

This turned out to be a colossal mistake. Avien looked at me like I was from somewhere beyond Mars, and I had to spend most of our dinnertime explaining ownership and legal title. I had to start at the beginning and convey some notion of the personal possession of land and how this relates to the employment of human beings. I had to elaborate on the political necessity of paying miners something less than the value of their product. I had to take into account the mortality rates of lives spent underground and the fantastic expense of mansions. I had to backtrack and define money, market, and management. The more I

said, the less either of us understood. We were getting nowhere very, very fast, and I finally threw up my hands in exasperation.

"Avien, please, please, just tell me this. How does your economy work?"

*Poor darling Gabe
Bewildered,
But listen attentive
Presently,
For the method's
But mad
Arithmetical,
Cold calculation.
Supposing
We been yearly
Yearning
For thus and such many
Tons of hot steel
Distilled,
And thus and such many
Fine shiny apples
In storage,
And thus and such many
Bottoms of babies
Powdered and pampered
And such.
We been takin'
The aggregate
Number
Rendered condensed
And that being
One,
Pure and simple,
The number
In hours,*

*Been hard
Necessity.
Next then in
Succession been
Measured out,
Counting the singular
Heads numbered among us,
And that being
Additional
One,
The number
In hours,
Been flagrant
Freedom.
We been takin'
Adjusted totality
Divisive
Of labor unanimous
Over
The one-by-one count
Of persons enumerated,
And that being done,
Conscientious,
The answer been lately
Four,
Right and proper.
We been
Each and everyone
Charged and accounted
To the number of four,
Give or take,
Amortized hourly.*

What she meant to say was that Aurora and her sister communities simply add up all the work that needs to be done, and then

they divide it equally among all citizens. Everyone works four hours a day, and that polishes off all the necessary chores. They then proceed to use what they make with no intervention by brokers, middlemen, shortstops, or movie stars. That's the economy, pure and simple.

"Well, Avien, that's all well and good, but you haven't answered my question. If someone discovers a precious metal or a miracle cure for baldness, who owns it? Who decides how to distribute the benefit? Who's in control?"

*And who been
Rationing rainbows
Gabe Auditorial?
And who been
Doling out
Rainwater,
Breezes,
And kisses,
Sir?
The one generosity
Been this
And this only,
Parsimonious Gabe,
And the one been
Primarily
God.*

This was not my worst nightmare. That would come a little later. For the time being though, I'd have to deal with a devout woman, and that usually means trouble. Fortunately, it is nevertheless true that, when a woman laughs and tells you that she believes in god, it might mean nothing at all. You don't know if she's a born-again schismatic or an orthodox celibate. You don't know if she's lost in the rapture or obsessed by demons. You have no idea if she's even sane or whatever the opposite is. When a woman says that god owns all the property in the world, a man is under stern obligation to figure out what the hell she

really means. My one question had exploded into one thousand larger ones. Such is the elementary math of the four-hour day.

*Meanwhile,
Gabe hypocritical,
Y'been
Seething deceit.
Y'been flirtatious
Discounting
Plain honesty,
Sir.
So once again
And forever,
What been the
Primary question
Agitational?*

"Very well, then," I said, matter-of-factly, "Is there any chance that you and I could ever be lovers?"

When Avien laughs, she leaves very little doubt as to the fundamental generosity of the universe.

*O dear Jesus
Gabe!
This been strictly
Up to you
Sweetheart.*

SEVEN

In the field of economics, we maintain to this day some of the most primitive ideas, some of the most radically false ideas, some of the most absurd ideas a brain can hold... This gives no uneasiness to the average brain. That long-suffering organ has been trained for more thousands of years than history can uncover to hold in unquestioning patience great blocks of irrelevant idiocy and large active lies.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Human Work (1904)

Another way to learn something about another culture is simply to pay attention to the sorts of structures they build. If you see the gray concrete apartment blocks of Soviet Moscow or the vinyl siding of suburban New Jersey, you know right away that you're dealing with a monolithic social order. You know damned well that their radios will be filled with celebrity favorites or other propaganda. A people who will tolerate glass and steel high-rises are the same ones who flock to movie theaters, Disneyland, and party headquarters. A box is a box is a box.

No two houses in Aurora are alike, and, unfortunately, that's about the only thing I learned with any certainty on that first day. As Avien guided me back to her ground-floor apartment, I couldn't help but notice, even in the darkness, that her neighborhood was a little on the random side and that I was very, very tired. The travel and the perfect meal were taking their toll, so the cushions in the front room were an irresistible magnet. I yawned, apologized, and accepted her invitation. In a few minutes, I was nestled in, and Avien was out the door to do whatever it is that people like her will do at night someday.

I wanted to say goodbye properly. I wanted to tell her that I'd be home by morning and that I appreciated her patient hospitality. But

most of all, I felt an overwhelming urge to vent my frustration. After eight hours in Aurora, I knew less about the future than when I'd arrived. I didn't know if the four-hour day resulted from martial law or a democratic vote. I didn't know if Aurora worshiped high priests, celebrities, or five-star generals. I understood nothing of substance about their god, their education, their military budget, or their ingenious new inventions. For all I knew, the food I'd eaten came from slave-labor camps, and the waitress was a high-ranking official of the secret police. Did Avien use drugs to maintain her youthful enthusiasm? Was she even then off in the woods concocting some dreadful satanic orgy? Had I been abducted from the distant past to fulfill a sacrificial debt? Weren't all the people in the Bath just a little too perfect and happy?

Then too, when Avien told me that my future with her was entirely in my hands, she had thrown down a gauntlet of some kind. The unblushing slyness of her smile left no doubt. Something was expected of me. Something about our future would be more than I'd bargained for, and, if I chose to stay in Aurora, I'd better be prepared to suffer the consequences. The future is no place for sissies, and my naive innocence couldn't last forever.

Still, despite this trepidation and sense of impending doom, my curiosity got the better of me. I decided, then and there, to refine the time machine and include a panic button. On my next visit, I'd swagger into town and sort out all the closeted skeletons, knowing full well that I could beat a hasty retreat at a moment's notice. With that sort of safety net, I'd experience the full liberty of tourism with no qualms whatsoever. If they dragged me to the sacrificial volcano or to formal dances, I could pull the cord and vanish into thin air.

I drifted off to sleep in the dreamy reassurance of revised plans and the clock ticking away in my basement.

When Avien awakened me the next morning, I immediately knew that something had gone dreadfully wrong. My timer had failed. Now I'd have to face the poor woman at whom I'd made the most pathetic of passes. I'd have to apologize for both the indiscretion and the feebleness of the effort. I'd have to endure her giddy anticipation

without having the slightest clue as to what lay behind or ahead of it. Something had gone haywire.

Aurora at eight in the morning is not a throbbing metropolis of bustling activity. Many people are still asleep, many are already at work, and some are calling it a day already. What you don't see at eight in the morning -- or at any other time -- are people running to stay fit. The Auroran conception of physical health leaves no room for jogging or treadmills, so that was one less thing to worry about.

As Avien and I wound our leisurely way towards breakfast, I said, "About last night..."

She laughed, stopped dead in her tracks, and turned to me. Another small fact about Aurorans is that they are continually violating each other's physical space. If Americans are ever comfortable talking to one another -- which is almost never the case -- it's typically at a distance of three feet or more. Eye contact is a hit or miss proposition. Aurorans, though, think nothing of being nose to nose, and they don't seem to worry about their breath or about accidentally spitting on their opposite number. They take it in stride, but I personally found this to be unbelievably disconcerting. Try it yourself with someone you don't yet love.

*Yesterday been
Gone Gabe.
Y'been only
At present
Encumbered in two
Observations, sir:
The first been
In taking your
Own sweet time,
The one foot
Leading the
Other.
The second been
Paying*

*Attention to me,
For so long as
I been smiling,
Y'been safe.
So long as I
Been grinning,
There been no
Harm coming.*

Americans use "is", "was", and other fuzzy verbs to indicate existence in time, and no one can argue with that. It's an essential part of who we are. Aurorans, though, say "been", and they employ at least twelve different pronunciations and intonations. These range from the simple past-tense "bin" to "bean" to the full forward "bee-in". The latter could mean anything from "definitely will be" to "could be" to "I hope with all my heart it will be." Even this is an understatement, though, because even the idea that "been" is a verb is more than misleading. "Been" is not simply a device for separating subject and object. Aurorans go way out of their way to avoid separating subject and object.

Auroran speech is more like the chirping of birds than the reading of the Congressional Record, so, when Avien said, "As long as I been smiling", it was the "bin" with an optimistic lilt thrown in for good measure. The "as long as I been grinning" was a "bee-in" in a minor key with black overtones of dire foreboding.

I got the message because, even in the morning, Avien's breath is sweet and warm. We continued on our way. We had no other choice.

"Do you folks keep animals as pets?" I asked.

Of all the possible questions in the world, I don't know why this one should have popped into my head, but it makes sense when you think about it. Of the one thousand and one reasons Americans work so hard, a particularly sad one is that our houses leave something to be desired. Loneliness is epidemic, and who wants to come home to an empty house? Why leave the office early if the only things waiting are an exhausted spouse and kids impaled on a television set? Overtime

isn't such a bad option under these circumstances, so many of us hire dogs to generate a little enthusiasm. Other people -- who prefer cold indifference and random acts of understated nonchalance -- employ cats. I don't know what the iguana contingent is thinking.

*We been
Preferentially
Vegetarian,
As you been
Soon to learn
First-hand
Gabe.*

So she didn't understand my question, but it turns out that domestic animals will give way to deer, bears, and miscellaneous other wildlife. Aurora's thirteen thousand acres are a true sanctuary. Remember, though, that Aurora is but one of one million communities, and, believe it or not, there will one day be a town on the erstwhile Hudson with seven thousand women and fifty thousand cats, at last count. As a matter of fact, the future contains every possible combination of heavenly attributes along with the mandatory hellishness. The future is very strange.

What Avien meant with her suggestive reference to first-hand knowledge was that, after breakfast, I was deposited backstage with a peeler and a half-ton of potatoes.

Three points of explanation are in order.

America is a consumerist society. We believe that our happiness derives from enjoying the fruits of our labor. We also believe it's better to gobble up the fruits of other people's labor while we make a killing in the stock market. The bottom line is the bottom line which means that consumption determines everything else. That's basically why we can't have the four-hour day.

Aurora is a producerist society. They believe that human happiness comes from the simple exercise of social creativity. If an

Auroran is feeling a little down and blue, she doesn't take comfort in doughnuts or trashy novels. Instead, she listens to her friends' advice, and she finds something productive to occupy her time. She learns to weave or weld or cut stone. She signs up for a shift with the notoriously raucous apple pickers or she collaborates with a local iron smelter. Food preparation is considered to be among the best of therapies. As an honored guest, I was given the privilege of consorting with potatoes. I was special. And so was everyone else.

There's no getting around it. Americans think that Aurorans are nuts, and we believe that they're crazy. We come from opposite ends of the universe, and it took me a very long time to understand the unspoken ramifications of potato-peeling. A very long time indeed.

The second thing to understand is that Aurorans adore technology. The Union devotes huge resources to space exploration, and the future will spare no effort in devising machines to eliminate drudgery. The four-hour day can't happen when people blindly worship the mule and the spinning wheel. Nostalgia is for suckers.

Aurora had at its disposal any number of material beam gadgets that could have sliced through that mountain of potatoes in no time flat. Post-partum processors could have done the job with far less waste and bloodshed. Steel mills and lumberyards will use them all the time and no one will give it a second thought. But if there is one sacred thing in Aurora, it's the human hand and its connection to food. Americans take delight in brains and genitalia; Aurorans go straight for the heart and hand. If I were to cheat and use something like an omega knife, everyone in town would have been gagging and complaining that the soup tasted like something straight out of the sawmill.

And the third fact is that Auroran labor is classless. At one time or another, every citizen will peel potatoes, plant cabbage, clean bathrooms, and try their hand at inversion chemistry. A person gifted in math might spend most of his time doing that, but he'll also know how to maintain his cerebral skills. If he hits a paradoxical snag, he'll head straight for the foundry or the nearest construction site. Perspective is everything, and Aurora sees no particular need for ivory towers,

mansions, or ghettos.

In America, however, food preparation is such a distasteful business that we segregate out a very special class of people to pluck chickens and peel potatoes. We condemn them to permanent life in the slaughterhouse while the rest of us go free. The beauty of this system is that we're then fed by sullen people who don't really care, and this allows us to pompously assert that human nature is inherently lazy and shiftless. We're also nourished by businessmen who've been known to substitute colored water for apple juice in baby-food jars, and this provides us with new ammunition in our hatred of humanity. We devour such scandals as confirmations of everything we suspect. We eat them up.

It's Aurora's reverence for universal manual labor that made the treadmill obsolete, by the way.

Of course, on my second day in Aurora, I understood none of this. I thought I was being treated like a Puerto Rican or something. I saw only the mountain of potatoes and the skinny adolescent who was going to show me the ropes. I wondered how many days we'd be there.

It turned out that Miki was a boy of sixteen and no stranger to the kitchen. One secret of the four-hour day is that everybody pitches in. Once the nature of labor is properly comprehended, it naturally follows that children, octogenarians, blind people, and even American tourists can find something productive to do. Aurorans would never dream of denying this luxury to anyone anywhere between the cradle and the grave. At his ripe young age, Miki could help for two hours before rushing off for two hours of formal schooling. Such is the nature of the daily grind in Aurora.

When we finally set to work, I managed to get in a full five minutes before giving up entirely and staring transfixed at the kid. Miki sat in a cloud of flying peels laced with lightning flashes of razor precision. In the time it took me to fumble with one spud, he could do a dozen, which says a lot about me, a lot about him, and even more about the nature of time.

Of course, anyone who's really thinking seriously about social

design will say, "Wait a minute. Shouldn't Miki be paid more than Gabe? If one man can work twice as fast as another, shouldn't he have something to show for it? Why not at least let him quit a little early?" Personally, I'd like to take the time to present the perfectly obvious answer to this question. But the honest truth is that you can figure it out for yourself, and the potatoes simply will not wait.

"How the hell do you do that?" I asked.

He smiled, continuing to work and gaze at nothing at all. He told me that eleven years of practice would do wonders for me, too, and that sent a large shiver down the spine. I couldn't imagine. How the hell do Puerto Ricans do it, year after year?

I tried speeding up a bit and succeeded only in scraping a knuckle. Miki took pity on me without skipping a beat.

*The trick been
Simple mirrors
Gabe.
The principle
Reflection been
First of all
Death.
We been each and every
One
Upon the clock
A heartbeat
Only.
Been then the
Every thought
Of limitation
Gabe,
Of temporary
Matters.
Been then the
Every thought
Of waste and*

Necessary speed.

So I thought about my own mortality as I never once did when I was sixteen. Then I thought about the timer in the basement, and I skinned the second knuckle.

*Been then the
Every thought
Of death,
Then been the
The every other one
Of love,
For what been food
Contrarily
But nourishment?
What been otherwise
This love
Than sustenance
Right and proper?
What been the nature
Of mothers
In holiday mood
Invitational
And grand feasts
Laid on
Unburdened and
Non-irritational?*

In plain English, what the four-hour day is all about is an ordinary Thanksgiving dinner at Grandma's house. If you think about Granny getting up early on Thursday to light the oven and prepare the best of all possible meals, then you know everything there is to know about generosity. The reliable old American matriarch wishes only to celebrate prosperity and the health of her brood. She's not counting the minutes until her daily tribulation ends. She's not wishing she could

hire someone else to relieve her of the awful burden. Her effort eludes all calculation of time or money. She's in her element, giving of her own free will.

So, I tried being magnanimous. I tried thinking of how much people in general would enjoy these potatoes with just the slightest, festive touch of human blood. I tried thinking of how very much I adore humanity, and Miki fell off the stool laughing.

*Oh dear Jesus
Gabe
But been taking
The one step
In order please!
Been slowing
Down for Christ's sake!
The masses been
Shaky at best,
So then been the
Only thought lonely
Of one
And him or her
Separate.
Been holding the image
Steadfast
Of singular body.
Who been demanding
Attention
Of late?
Who been standing
In need
Of provisions and hungry
For labors of
Nurturing care?
Who been ravenous
Ravishing*

Different from anyone

Else?

Think hard

And godspeed.

We finished in something like two hours, and I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe that I'd actually hit a rhythm a couple of times. I couldn't believe I was taking advice from a sixteen-year-old or that he could be so stunningly bright and lovely. I couldn't believe that a relaxed reflection about Avien could produce such a flurry of activity. I couldn't believe that I'd forgotten all about my timer. And I couldn't believe that so many potatoes could disappear so quickly. The soup was a big hit which meant that we'd repeat the whole business again the next day. And the next and the next. I imagined Sisyphus in hell, deprived of his honorable stone, having to contend with giant vegetables instead.

So, at this point -- if you really are a grandmother -- you're probably thinking, "Okay, this all sounds cozy and wonderful, and eating restaurant-style in Aurora might be a welcome break from routine, but what if I want to cook up something special for somebody special? Does Aurora allow private banquets? Irresponsible snacking? Will I be free to do that?"

Remember that, in zooming ahead, I had one million possible destinations, and no two are the same. The future is anything but uniform, so if Aurora doesn't strike your fancy, change it. Think about who you really are and invent whatever you truly need. If you're modest, find a town where the bathroom doors have locks. If you don't like my use of potatoes, make them something else entirely. Remember only that you have to live with your own consequences. If you decide to eat meat, you can forget about using your land for parks and playgrounds because the pigs won't stand for it. Or, if you can't live without money, the bills will follow and the chickens will come home to roost. One thing occasionally does lead to another.

The single most important thing to understand about the four-hour day is that conformity is the kiss of death. If you're not marching

to the beat of a different drum, it's not the four-hour day. Unfortunately, there are other single most important things and other kisses of death.

And, no matter what, never forget that Auroran grandmothers enjoy extraordinary privileges. Their wishes, freely given, are our commands.

EIGHT

In this world, we live in a mixture of time and eternity. Hell would be pure time.

Simone Weil

Once upon a time, we Americans enticed ourselves with seductive stories about the future. Science fiction writers assured us that life would be glorious once we had superhighways, televisions, dishwashers, and moon rockets. The recipe for utopia was as easy as pie: eliminate tedious drudgery and spice things up with high-speed marvels. If everything could be done with the push of a button, what more could we ask?

Unfortunately, yesterday's future didn't turn out that way. Who could have foreseen the horror of eight-lane parking lots, obese children, and spotty glasses? We have more buttons than we know what to do with, and none of them seem to work.

If I were now to regale you with tales of wondrous Auroran technology, nothing would be gained. You wouldn't care, so I'm not going to waste time talking about syzygy drives or paranormal intimate apparel. I should, however, say something about computers because the ones we use are strictly from the stone-age. We think of reality as a bunch of on-off switches, and we call them neurons, semi-conductors, or women. Auroran computers, on the other hand, use the latest paradoxical technology. The heart of the machine is a self-reflexive, spiraled array of whims and ironies. The system is musical rather than elemental. None of the whims are ever on, off, or anything in between. The n-dimensional helical structure replicates the dialectical nature of galaxies, the human mind, and infallible dishwashers. Once some

amateur genius came up with the idea of harmonic obligation, the rest was easy.

The only problem in the beginning was that these machines were so smart that they almost always deferred to humans and turned themselves off. Ultimately though, just the tiniest pinch of nationalism in the circuitry provided the necessary arrogance, and the rest was easy.

If Aurora so desired, it could staff its factories entirely with chaste, devout, patriotic robots. But then they found out that Henry Ford had already tried to do exactly that, and he'd failed miserably.

The only things that Auroran computers are really good for are industrial processes, dishwashing, and the Clock. Straightforward, circuitous computation allows the Union to measure the four-hour day with extraordinary precision. It's child's play, and the way it works is this:

Aurora's pride and joy is its textile factory. Almost all of the one million towns in the Union are responsible for some aspect of basic industry or agriculture. One community might be a glorified steel mill while another will manufacture grapefruit. Mass production is considered only slightly less perilous than sex, but traditional forms of craft production are simply not up to the task in a great many departments. While weavers such as Avien might be able to keep up with the modest demand for nice clothes, it just makes sense to crank out sheets, towels, and underpants on an assembly line. The four-hour shift is considered the absolute maximum for any human being, and even that's pushing it. Aurora employs readers, singers, and massage therapists to lighten the unconscionable burden.

The big breakthrough in Aurora's productivity came when someone discovered a method of super-polymerization using a nasty waste product from the distillation of temporal cascades. The synthetic fiber, tintyllin, combines the sensuality of cotton with the temper of titanium, so the resulting fabric could last a century as a diaper. Or it could go a good ten years as an archery target. The roof of the textile mill is itself made of tintyllin. It is stain-proof, wrinkle-proof, and smells vaguely like autumn leaves and fond memories.

The invention of this one marvel took four-and-a-half minutes off the Union's universalized workload. That's where the Clock comes in. The Union constantly recalculates the ratio of work to be done divided by the labor power to do it. If a new invention comes along, the computers swing into action and take into account all sorts of factors. How much labor will be involved in re-tooling and re-training? What is the human cost of recycling byproducts and disposing of worn-out commodities? Which communities have enough free labor to devote to the new enterprise?

The calculation of the ratio is carried out to twenty-two decimal places, and this means that, when I showed up in Aurora, a difference was registered. I was one more mouth to feed and two more hands to peel. Just before my arrival, the individual quota stood at four hours and twelve minutes. Once Miki got me going, the number dropped ever so slightly. Many hands make light work. Many hands also make the Clock work.

The Auroran Clock has nothing in common with the ones we have. Our clock was invented in the early days of capitalism as a cultural necessity, and mercantile Europeans were the only ones who could have concocted something so diabolical. It's not that the Chinese or the ancient Greeks or Mayans were dumber than Elizabethan Brits. It's simply that those cultures couldn't have cared less about showing up at the mill on time. They had no compounding interest. It's only with the advent of a mercantile economy that you get things like mechanical clocks, double-entry bookkeeping, and useless buttons.

Aurorans don't wear wristwatches, but, anytime they want to, they can check the Clock and measure the true state of the Union. They can see both the current situation and the rates of change and acceleration. If anyone feels like doing something creative and productive, she can see the immediate results as a tangible number. Individual effort makes all the difference in the world. Any society worth its weight had better be able to measure that elusive commodity with some degree of accuracy, and dollar bills are of no use whatsoever in this department.

The other side of the coin -- even though there aren't any -- is that the Clock is a damned good barometer of stupidity. If someone gets the brilliant idea of making silicone breast implants, the Clock immediately goes into reverse, and everyone knows that someone's up to no good. Counterproductive nonsense is as plain as the nose on your face. And, if I even think about making cigarettes, the Clock displays the disaster for all to see.

The irritating thing about Aurorans, though, is that they don't even pay attention to the one timepiece they have. There's nothing like a clock tower in the town plaza. The actual time display mechanism is in the Library lobby, but no one seems to take it seriously. They also don't charge for overdue books, and no one's taken the time to put up an ordinary clock in the scullery. How is anyone supposed to know when his shift is up? If I'm responsible for four hours and twelve minutes, then how about giving me a simple yardstick? What's the point of dividing labor equally if I never know if I'm early or late?

I complained to Avien over lunch.

*Ach, Gabe,
Protestant,
What we been ever
To do?
Think ye then of
Antiquated ways
And habitual manners
Of marriage
In customary ages.
Think ye then of
Two wedded forever
Joined as one promised,
Thick and thin,
Better and bad.
She been weak and wonderful
Swollen in pregnancy,
So what been*

*He ever
But careful
Attentive?
Been the husband
Accountant
Surrendering
Measured attention?
Been the wife
Tepid in misered
Affection?
No, cold Gabe, and
A thousand times not,
For the two locked
In love
Been ever solicitous,
Gracious,
Dispensing reserves
Thoughtless irrational.
Think ye then this
Of two
Obligated, free
And clear,
And y'been
Liberally
Catching the drift.*

Aurorans always talk like that. They're forever confusing simple labor with the pleasures and obligations of marriage. One minute they're talking about grandmothers, and the next it's newlyweds which makes it hard to tell the difference. It's actually the equivalence of grandmothers and brides that gives the four-hour day that dreamlike quality.

I told Avien that I knew many people in the Twentieth Century (which was a bit of an overstatement), and I said that none of them were happily married (which was an understatement). I informed her that

romance in my day and age was a myth of steamroller proportions, forcing its way into every woman's magazine, movie, and deodorant ad. The idea of two people living happily ever after was trumpeted from every billboard and other bit of pulp fiction, but reality was something else altogether. Marital bliss remained a pure fantasy and nothing more. We were just too busy with other things.

Avien smiled and told me that was good enough. That was all she needed.

Aurorans marry whenever they feel like it, without benefit of clergy or clock. They marry many times or once or never depending on how they want to spend eternity. Mistakes are made, but there is no such thing as divorce American-style. A promise is a promise.

Speaking of clocks, I'd finally satisfied myself as to the problem with the timer in my basement. The pacing of time need not be identical between two separate frames of reference. I'd been silly to think that twelve hours here is the same as twelve hours there. It never is. Differences can never be random, however, and I had every reason to believe in the theory of frequency multiples that made the time machine feasible in the first place. Twelve hours in Baltimore might feel like eternal damnation, but that was impossible. An American twelve hours would have to be some even multiple of that in Auroran time, so my hope for rescue found new life. Under no circumstances could my vacation last more than the typical two weeks. Anything longer would be unpatriotic.

But what if the impossible happened? What if a genius like me had made a mistake? Did Aurora have the necessary means to send me home? Could they correct my miscalculation? Was there any way back to America other than the way I'd come?

Avien told me to relax. I didn't have anything to worry about.

*Are y'been
Retarded Gabe?
Are y'been
Bachelored?*

*Sure we been
Working hard
Yearly
Concocting
Machinery only
For men
In retrograde
Need.
We been keen
Engineering
Reversals perpetual,
And we been
Calling it
Death.*

I could go home head first or feet first.

NINE

Work is creativity accompanied by the comforting realization that one is bringing forth something really good and necessary, with the conviction that a sudden, arbitrary cessation would cause a sensitive void, produce a loss.

Jenny Heynricks (1866)

According to the law of frequency multiples, the next available window for my return home would be six days after my arrival. But before proceeding to that opportunity, you, the reader, have some right to know how far ahead I traveled to reach Aurora. How long will you have to wait before capitalism yields to something different? How many years will pass between then and now?

The short answer is roughly two thousand. If you think about the changes that humankind has witnessed in the last two millennia -- and you factor in a true dash of exponential acceleration -- that's about the same distance as from here to Aurora. If you consider that we were just learning to read and write five thousand years ago, you see that anything can happen in two thousand years.

Unfortunately, there's a problem with a short answer. There always is.

The Aurorans I met believe that they exist in the year 482, and that seems arbitrary. That's the number of years since Saint Number Twenty-eight first proclaimed the founding of the Union even though she didn't own any land. They remember the last earth-shaking revolution, and they count from there. We do exactly the same thing.

But if Aurora exists on one side of a revolution, and we happen to be on the other side, how do we measure across this Great Divide? If

a revolution makes the world a fundamentally different place, what is the distance between the two worlds? How can we talk about the magnitude of time when profound disruptions are constantly throwing a monkey wrench into the basic machinery?

Fortunately, we have more than one brain at our disposal. Given the present state of science and history, we can study the nature of cataclysmic change. We can scan the heavens for evidence of primordial creation. We can examine the fossil record for clues concerning the origins of life and the upheavals that made us what we are today. We can remember that the band at Yorktown played "The World Turned Upside Down."

The simple truth of the matter is that cataclysm happens. Apocalypse so frequently disrupts the even flow of history that I wonder why we even think there's anything like an even flow of history. One day, we'll be sailing along, just as we did the day before, and then something will happen that will make us lose count. For eons, life on earth remained nothing more than a stale soup of single-celled creatures. Then, a pre-Cambrian eruption of complex organisms changed all that in the geological wink of an eye.

At one time, primitive capitalists scurried through the alleyways of Europe, completely at the mercy of powerful landlords and clergymen. Before we knew what was happening, this new class triumphed, reinventing everything in its path. Not simply a coup, capitalism is a true overhaul of everything we hold near and dear.

And, as capitalists, we tend to think of these changes as phenomenal accelerations over constant time, but that's impossible. If we hang on to bourgeois time like nobody's business, we wind up back at the beginning. We end up starting with a Big Bang that occurred before space and time. Even a lunatic like Immanuel Kant understood the contradictions involved, but one thing led to another. Our scientists inevitably concluded that life is accidental, competitive, and really nasty.

Aurorans avoid this sort of paradox by careful observation of time itself. They understand harmonic compression and the futility of certain tape measures and bathroom scales.

So, if I say that we are two thousand years removed from Aurora, I'm not really telling the truth. What I should say is that the time between America and Aurora is one of calamitous change. Revolutions of Earth around Sun count for almost nothing. It's the other kind that make all the difference.

The genuine truth is that we are now on a path towards cataclysmic change, and we already know what possibilities lie in wait. We've learned that our atmosphere is extraordinarily thin and fragile. It's roughly equivalent to the skin of a potato, and it's cause for concern. Hitler taught us that barbarian invasions can emanate from the most advanced nations on Earth. Our genocidal neglect of Africa might backfire. Epidemic disease could overwhelm our system of medical care for the wealthy. The mythology of our money might fail and trigger economic chaos. The combination of growing population and volatile petroleum could prove disastrous. Asteroids or nuclear weaponry might stop time dead in its tracks. There might really be a War to End All Wars, and a holy crusade it will be, too.

Added to all these worries is the simple recognition that the United States is now an all-powerful empire. For whatever reasons, people in Rome tend to do as the Romans do. Greed and the maniacal pursuit of frivolous pleasure will one day get the better of us, and that could be hideous. The asteroid option might be preferable and far less messy.

I truly wish I were allowed to say what waits right around the corner. But suppose I were to throw caution to the wind and offer some incontrovertible empirical evidence. Suppose I were to consult the history section of Aurora's library and come up with the nature and timing of the next big historical shift. What if I told you when the New York stock market will finally collapse? What if I told you where to place your bets for the next World Series or Miss Universe pageant? Wouldn't Aurora and I gain tremendous credibility?

No, and the reason is simple.

Suppose, instead, that fifty college professors and fifty idiots were to come up with one hundred different predictions about the

future. Let's say that one of them gets it right, and his choice really does win the seventh game of the World Series. Does this make him a prophet whose word is to be honored above all others? Is this lucky guess any cause for respect? How does one really tell the difference between a professor and an idiot?

Or suppose that we release one thousand avaricious maniacs into the oil fields of Pennsylvania. Because there is no honor among thieves, one of them will emerge triumphant. But is this any cause to elevate John D. Rockefeller into the pantheon of autocrats? Are the skills of fortune-telling or stock manipulation any indication of wisdom or true authority? Why should anyone listen to me simply because I can recite a future event or purchase enough congressmen to get what I want?

Ultimately, the mysterious art of prophecy becomes nothing more than the simple detection of currents in the universe. Even a tycoon can see that we alternate between groundswell and stagnation. There are calms, and there are storms, so, if we now seem mired in paralytic sameness, we know what's coming next. Hold your horses a little longer, and then you'll be hanging on for dear life.

The sole important predicate of the future is the certainty of its existence. Precise timing means nothing. I could say that Aurora is ten thousand years away or ten decades away, and no true difference exists. Pressures are now building which make Aurora inevitable, and this clear and present dynamic counts for everything. Be here now, wherever that may lead.

Of course, the temptation to dabble in soothsaying is almost irresistible. When I'd finished lunch with Avien, I asked her to drop me off in the history section of the library. Even if I couldn't make my discoveries public, my own curiosity got the better of me. Then, too, a person can learn a lot about strangers by hearing them talk about how they came to be. And if I happened to benefit from any financial shifts on the horizon when I returned home, what harm could that do?

The difficulty with Auroran history is that it disregards the importance of kings, wars, and dates. For an American, these

conceptions are second nature. But without these landmarks, navigation through history becomes amazingly treacherous. Even the basic idea of sequence gets lost in the shuffle. One thing never leads to another except when you least expect it.

As nearly as I could tell from the primers, Aurorans care only for the history of labor, and they begin every story in the Garden of Eden. They constantly confuse sexual embarrassment and bad work. They conceive the story of humankind as an unwinding riddle blending drudgery and the loss of reproductive innocence. Progress means the pilgrimage towards a New Jerusalem led by Jesus, Gandhi, and the Thirty-six Saints who succeeded them. No one really seems to know who preceded whom because the spiral to and from Eden knows no chronology.

*For this been ever
The way of the world:
As in the beginning
Was then the end of god
In sad and sorry state lacking
Any simple tale to cleave
The dam of tears.
Nor
Been any jokes at hand
To lighten cold
Dead
Winter running,
Nor
Even any time to
Speak of
Nor
Any stage
Nor
Any retinue to cast
Whatever suggestions.
Such been god*

*Perpetual
And minuscule.
So, nevertheless,
Nevertheless,
The one thing leading
The other,
Been god unchanged
Into
Darkness and light,
Being ordained to one
Set of things
The great greedy cocks
And to others
The breasts and vaginas
Of occasional trade.
Hard beginning of ends,
So to speak,
For when we been seeing
Ourselves
Primarily
In grace and lusty
Amplitude,
We been blood
Red and running.
Chagrining
Ear to ear, tails
And accouterments
Dangling down
Trembling legs,
Taking to heels
Devilish
Groaning
Fear and desperation.
Aren't we been
Mortified silly?*

*Aren't we been working
Mighty hard, sun to sun
In shoving great stubborn
Mountains around,
Piling up blisters,
Red in the face,
Senseless?
Here we been
Turning
From god
Itself, bending down,
Hard toils and burdens
Screaming
Bloody murder
In the first degree.
What been commanding
A price as we paid,
Dear and precious,
Surrendering
Sons and fair daughters
Indentured
And having no will of their
Own?
The joke unfolding
In the nearness
Of time come,
Late and inadequate,
Jesus,
Unready and saying,
'Beholden the lilies in valleys,
Birds flying normally,
None compensated in wages,
And them knowing nothing
Of shame,
Dressing gaudy*

*Irreverent, parading
Their dandy selves
Flaunted.'
This he been preaching
The blind to see
Straightway
Laying down
Tools
Of retarded incarceration.
Therefore,
Jesus been
From town to town,
From time to time,
Of his own two feet
Walking
And speaking
All the while
Of that been parting ways
With fierce procurement,
And time and time again
Prophesies
The lions courting
Lambs on
Heaven scented,
Mortal-wounded earth.
But Jesus been whispering
Metaphorical
Parabolic
And never been able
To sing out direct
For one simple
Reason,
And that been the world
Been lately hard
Of hearing, having*

*No heart for
Lions
And lambs poetical.
Times been stinking of
Dead tribulation.
The riddle been hanging,
Cold-blooded,
The double cross
Fragrant as ever.
Then...
Lo and behold,
Here been oblivious
Gandhi
Repeating sweet phrases
In lullaby
Sleepy dreams,
Only now
Hard calculation
And empires ratiocinate
Capitulant.
Gandhi been taking Jesus
Upright and proper,
Him dotting I's
Crossing t's
Building
Flesh and blood
Structure
Antithetical bone,
Till conquest been shot
Through and through,
Naked exposition
Of nothing
Worthwhile.
From here been
Women and some men*

*Restored
In proper
Working order.
From here been
Routine lubrication,
Inspection and
Laughter.
God been lately
Feeling much better
And frisky.*

Of course, no American should ever read anything, especially this, without peeking between the lines with a grain of salt. Whoever wrote this chapter of Auroran history -- and they never sign anything -- never had any intention of talking about the history of humankind. He or she or whatever is trading in one commodity only and that's the history of god which makes no sense whatsoever. If god isn't the unchanging ground of all reality, then what good is he? If god does one thing one minute and changes his mind two seconds later, how do we measure anything? The writer doesn't even mention the two-thousand-year gap between Jesus and Gandhi because it's not important. It doesn't carry any weight. Much later on, she'll reference certain commonalities between the spacing of planets and the Thirty-six Prophets, but that's about it.

So how long will we have to wait for the next big mood swing? It's anybody's guess, but, as long as you're waiting around tracing nuances, remember to pay attention to the obvious. Aurorans never talk about labor or grandmothers or honeymooners without invoking an unpredictable god. So I knew I was in big trouble.

TEN

Art is right reason in the doing of work.

Thomas Aquinas

The reason that I knew I was in big trouble is that Aurorans make no bones about it. They're religious as hell, and they believe that history is peppered with salty old saints who parlayed their martyrdoms into profound social change. One cursory reading of this kindergarten textbook told me more than I wanted to know. Aurorans are devoutly unorthodox.

The real tip-off came in the illustrations because I don't know of any other Christians who have ever drawn pictures of a naked Mary great with child. Primitive Africans might carve outrageous genitalia and breasts. Oriental sects might ornament their temples with flagrant stone copulation. But Christians have forever demonstrated a prudent disdain for the subject. They invented profanity and then proceeded to remain perpetually jittery about it. Ever since St. Paul's epistles to the terminally bewildered, the mere mention of reproductive function is enough to send them into blushing faints.

The other thing that Christians never do is allow anyone to be like Jesus. Even though he promised a succession of Sons of Men, Christians don't believe it for a minute. They'd never accept the idea that a heathen like Gandhi might actually be worthy of equal respect. Priests always demand that the one true road runs straight through their sanctuary and through it alone. I wonder why that is.

Fortunately for me, I hadn't been born yesterday. I was definitely not a babe in the woods when it came to religious matters. By the age of forty-five, I'd long since come to the conclusion that no human being can exist without a metaphysical sense of his standing in the

world. There is a religion called Science that assumes universal logic and accident. There is a religion called Agnosticism that assumes fundamental and permanent ignorance. Scientists and Agnostics both make definite presumptions about the nature and origin of reality, and those statements are categorically the same as those of any other monk. Scientists and Agnostics are forever dabbling in theological speculation, and, while they might not genuflect, they often shrug their shoulders. That is a profoundly religious exercise. Anyone who says we don't teach religion in our schools fails to understand the nature of liturgy.

So, in one sense, I didn't care one way or the other about Aurora's inclinations. It's a free country, and they can believe whatever they care to believe. But I simply can't tolerate one very specific variety of self-deception. Way back in the Sixties -- while some of us were waging war on legalized injustice -- others of us were running around screwing each other silly while under the influence. If the hedonism of hippie counterculture had been an honest Bacchanalia, things might have been different. I can take naked self-aggrandizement as well as the next guy. But to have this orgy sanctified by the gloss of Eastern mysticism, Native American ritual, and cosmic astrology was something else altogether. That hypocrisy knows no natural limit, and neither does my impatience. If you truly revel in the thumping rhythms of rock and roll and casual sex, feel free to indulge. But please, please, leave out the part about the dawning of the Age of Aquarius.

Thank you.

Be that as it may, something about the drawing of adolescent Mary, pregnant and bare, reminded me of San Francisco thirty years before. If Aurora were just another version of the Flower Power hippie pleasure principle, I wanted no part of it. If they wished to stimulate their jaded Epicureanism with a dash of mysticism, I'd be gone in no time flat. If they toyed with lascivious orgies in the name of cosmic ecstasy, they were strictly on their own. Thanks, but no thanks.

There in the library, I stared at Mary and tried to remain calm. If Aurora were a kinky amalgam of the sacred and profane, how could I tell? Where were the essential clues hidden? Would they attempt to

recruit me through some pomp-and-circumstance ceremony of group indoctrination? Would I suffer some cabalistic initiation into the inner sanctum of their orgasmatorium? Would they ply me with narcotic texts? With occult fragrances? Would they invite me to dance?

I prepared for the worst, and, as if on cue, Miki appeared to ask if I'd join him for dinner.

Before the waitress could begin the thorough physical exam, I told her I'd have whatever Miki was having. When she returned, I managed to reach for the plate intended for Miki even though I knew I couldn't keep doing that forever. The potatoes were out of this world.

I came directly to the point.

"Do you believe in God?"

There been never

Nothing

Uncaused Gabe.

Premeditation

Been constant

Ongoing.

"No. I mean, do you believe in a personal God or a superhuman who sits above the clouds doling out punishment and benevolent favors?"

In his typically evasive poetic manner, Miki said

Huh?

So, round and round we went, and we never came to any mutual understanding. As nearly as I can tell, Aurora's god is never capitalized and never replaced by a pronoun. God is sexless, and god finds that frustrating. Aurorans speak of god as if god were a moron. "Why did god throw the clock out the window? Because god wanted to see time fly." There are five hundred variations on this joke, and the image of a clock flung from a window is a staple of Auroran art.

Aurorans believe that the human intellect was designed to ask questions, but they're not like us. They're not looking for answers but for more and better questions. They're endlessly rephrasing mysteries of various kinds, and god appears again and again as a riddle with no solution. "If god A left the train station in Peoria, proceeding due east at infinite speed, and, if god B left god C's station going twice as fast..."

Aurorans believe that the perception of god is a matter of perspective. The detection of god and the detection of motion in the universe are one and the same. Both are impossibly convoluted. God is never more than a fleeting glimpse or sneaking suspicion. God can best be seen by two people who only have eyes for each other. When Aurorans speak of god, they typically blush and giggle.

In the Union of fifteen billion people, there are approximately twenty billion versions of god, give or take. No one remains indifferent or aloof except perhaps for god on off days. Yet, despite this anarchy -- or because of it -- there remains a complete unanimity about the nature of justice.

Whatever the true nature of Auroran religion might be, my conversation with Miki soon degenerated into a vaudeville routine. We wound up right back where we started, and he didn't see anything wrong with that. He also said that we'd better get a move on because the dance was about to start in the Hall.

It turned out that this particular evening featured the debut of a chant by one of Aurora's better-known composers. All Aurorans sing. They believe that musicality can be taught as easily as welding or inversion chemistry. So they all sing, and they all read music and a special language of choreographic instruction. When all two thousand participants took their positions and lit their candles, Miki clasped me to his side. I had nothing to worry about; all I had to do was relax. Aurorans always say that.

The first arrangement in this and all such works features a complete segregation with men on one side and women on the other. The first movement then is the simple call and response from one camp to the other, and this proceeds with frequent pauses in which the

reverberation can echo and the singer can hear himself think.

The following three movements are elaborations or integrations or whatever you want to call them. The singers merely follow the step-by-step instructions on the paper, and they dance from one position to the next. The result is a dynamic geometry of interweaving basses and sopranos, tenors and altos in a minuet of shifting alliances. It's exactly like a square dance, only completely different. No two people hear the music in precisely the same way even if they're joined as intimately as Miki and I will be. In Aurora, there is no such thing as a passive audience. The one thing that Aurorans will never understand about Americans is that we like to sit around watching a celebrity do all the work. They think we're rude and lazy.

When the last thundering chord finally spent itself in the gathering hush, no one so much as coughed for a full minute. Then the first smattering of rhythmic applause began and grew into a cloudburst of frenzied demands for the composer's true identity. If he'd failed to come forward and present himself, the riot might well have brought down the roof beams. But, finally, two men seized Miki and hoisted him up on their shoulders. They paraded him up to the pulpit, and the crowd went wild. I was left wondering if Mozart ever had to suffer the indignity of peeling potatoes.

Now, in my youth -- once I got over my jealousy -- I might have accepted this spectacle as an impressive display of socialized creativity. But a man does not reach the ripe old age of forty-five without learning how to smell something rotten in the state of Denmark. Why was there a pulpit for this prodigy to stand upon? If a society has pulpits and Great Halls, then it must employ a priest class to torment the hoi polloi. When would I finally get to meet this aristocracy? And it's my understanding that capitalism virtually invented the concept of virtuoso or genius. Anytime I see that sort of adoration, I see a class society living a vicarious existence. The celebrity turns us all into fawning sycophants who forsake our own creativity.

Beyond all these misgivings, though, was the simple fact that the mass chant gave me a plain old case of the heebie-jeebies. No one who

has seen the films of Nazi rallies in Nuremberg can reach any other conclusion. Without any doubt at all, I can say that the Great Hall of Aurora on that particular evening was filled with unquestioning submission to the ecstasy of a mystical group unanimity. From the moment the singers received their marching orders, the dictates of the whole suffocated any possible resistance. No matter how aesthetically pleasing the work may have been, the underlying reality was one of mindless conformity. The Hall might not look anything like the monstrosity of an East Berlin apartment block or a house in the suburbs, but what's the true difference?

I couldn't wait to get outside for a little fresh air, and Miki had no trouble deciphering my agitation.

*Damn and double
Damn, darling
Gabe,
For it been me
And me alone
Been mistaken
In taking
Ye fast inside when
Y'been never
The singer and
Therefore never
The listener, properly
Speaking.
Here y'been heart-thumping
Apprehension
And wary of multitudes
Snatching
Your brain racing
Off to the laundry
In sanitary strategies,
Poor worrying Gabe.
It been never the case,*

*Sweetie.
It been only the two
Thousand or so,
Roughly attending,
And them of the fine
Free will and
Disposition.
Would y'been rather
Consorting
Intimate whispering
Nooks and alleyway
Crannies?*

Miki grabbed my hand and dragged me off to survey the other half of his nightlife. That was fine with me. There are many times when it's perfectly appropriate to take someone by the hand, especially when you're headed to a place you wouldn't ordinarily go on your own. But even when we reached the lobby of the Great Hall, he didn't let go. Of all the bizarre habits we will encounter when we meet our future selves, none is more disconcerting than physical intrusiveness. Aurorans are forever holding hands when they walk down the street. They are constantly combing each other's hair. And, when they have something really important to say, they avoid plain English like the plague. That takes a little getting used to.

Miki pointed out the bulletin board that occupied one wall of the entryway. Apparently, for the next four hours, we could choose any activity on the menu. The gym was open for everything from volleyball to Aurora's own version of roller derby. The Library never closes, and that particular evening featured the semi-finals of Aurora's tag-team, interdenominational chess tournament. We could catch an opening night performance of the latest Sicilian oratorio. Three venues offered lectures on interstellar exploration, enhanced zoology, and recent discoveries concerning Saint Number Seventeen. Miki thought I might really enjoy lending a hand in the human anatomy class because the dissection was getting to the interesting part. The dance hall, the poetry

bar, the violin parlor, the drama court, and twenty taverns patiently awaited our decision.

No one in Aurora sits at home watching television, and that's partially because of their morbid fear of passivity and brain damage. But there's more to it than that. If one human being is in the same room with another human being, there are all sorts of things going on between the lines. We perspire. Our scents intermingle depending on the moods we're in. Subtle variations in blood flow and skin color can speak volumes. And it turns out that we're highly electrical creatures who collide in atmospheres charged with ridiculously dangerous tensions. No televised image --- and very few photographs --- can capture any of these flagrant nuances, so why bother? Aurorans would much rather concentrate on the glistening tingle of direct intimacy, so they tend to throw themselves at each other in this extravagant nightlife spectacle of theirs.

I wasn't fooled for a minute. Just because Aurora offered a panorama of entertainment, that didn't necessarily make it any different than the good old US of A. We extend a seemingly complete freedom of the marketplace. We tell ourselves that we enjoy complete liberty and individual choice, but this only serves to disguise vicious social normalization. Women must find husbands. Men must be financially successful. We must give our children the things we never had. We must mind our own business. These pressures and a thousand others constrict our every move. Aurora might be very clever in providing a great many opportunities for citizens to exhibit their arts and interests, but that couldn't be the end of the story. The jury was still out. In Aurora, it always is.

"Miki," I said, "To tell you the truth, I'm dead on my feet. Maybe we could just go someplace for a nightcap."

He, of course, knew just the place, and, within ten minutes, we were seated on barstools in a cozy little cabaret. Everything in Aurora is within ten minutes. Miki introduced me to the barmaid.

Gabe visitational,

*It been forever
The permanent pleasure
Representing
The sane and
Priceless person
Of the one and only
Mother, Enid,
And Enid, here been
Temporarily Gabe,
Come crashing
Through dangers
Unspeakable,
And him now
Requiring refreshment.*

I offered my hand. She took it in both of hers and didn't let go. She examined the fingernails, the many nicks and scars, and the lines of the palm. Only when she was finished did she smile and tell me how very happy she was to meet me. Her breath smelled of gourmet potatoes. She asked me what my pleasure was, and I said a nice glass of red wine would be just what the doctor ordered.

Well, I might as well have asked for baby's blood because Miki and his mom both went pale as ghosts. She dropped my hand like a hot potato, and they looked at each other in a way that left no room for doubt. Their quivering nervousness told me that I'd better not let any Auroran policemen ever hear me say such a thing.

Then they told me that there are no policemen in Aurora, nor any lawyers or judges. There are no vigilantes, tenured faculty, or corporate executives. There are no PTA mothers, crossing guards, or literary critics. There is no system of justice whatsoever, so we all heaved a big sigh of relief. We were safe.

When Enid recovered her smiling composure, she said she'd be right back, and she disappeared through a door behind the bar. She returned wiping the dust from a bottle. She rummaged through a drawer until she found the world's rustiest corkscrew. She poured the

fragrant burgundy into a stein of some sort.

This she set slightly to one side on the counter between us. She then cleared her throat, leaned over the bar, cradled my ears with both hands, and kissed me. She was in no hurry. This was a smooch of such breadth and clarity I could almost smell the winter rye flailing in the autumn breeze. When the deed was over and done, she told me that I had two choices.

*Are y'been steady,
Gabe?
Are y'been lucid
Perceiving
God's great gleaming
Glory, plain
As the blushing
Nose on your face?
Or would y'been blissful
Anesthetic?
Would y'been
Keenly
Aware on the one hand,
Or on the other
Dipsomaniacal,
Lush,
And indifferently
Pickled?*

First of all, I was tired. Secondly, I was very much a stranger in a strange land without any understanding of Auroran customs or why Miki found his mother's behavior so hilarious. And thirdly, I believed with all my heart that the timer in my basement was about to whisk me back to reality.

Despite all this, I was again not fooled for a minute. Aurora had obviously swung the full weight of social pressure against alcohol and all other forms of narcotic relief. The legal code might not exist as a

written body of law, but the prohibition remained as ironclad as any. So what if they forgot the formality of stone tablets and official badges? A dictatorship of puritanical ethics doesn't really need robes, wigs, and other ostentation.

Then, too, Aurora had merely substituted one form of hedonism for another. They tend to believe that pleasure flows from creative labor and from loving relationships. They think that things like alcohol and golf interfere with our perception of a highly sexual reality. But basically, all they're doing is elevating one form of sensuality above all others, and, sitting there choosing between Enid and the wine, it finally dawned on me. Everything in Aurora's evening -- the chant, the library, the dancing, everything -- reeked of one particular overtone. It was all foreplay. An Auroran can't even look for a corkscrew without being suggestive. Everything they do points towards some mysterious consummation somewhere on the horizon or wherever they do such things.

Personally, I was not prepared for a lovefest or regular church attendance, so I smiled politely at Enid and her precocious son, and I stood up for my rights. No one was going to coerce me into any damned thing. I would do whatever I damned well pleased, wherever I wanted because you can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy. I drank the wine.

Amazingly enough, even in my short time in Aurora, I'd already grown used to the fact that there are no fluorescent lights. I'd already adjusted to the soft, crystalline warmth they use instead. And, by American standards, one glass of wine is nothing at all. But, within ten minutes, the cafe, the lighting, and even Enid lost the shimmering radiance I'd become accustomed to. The whole scene paled into the drab colors of an average high school cafeteria. And this despite my heroic defiance of the stifling moral dictatorship.

When a strangely silent Miki finally escorted me off to an overdue sleep, we walked past Avien's weavery. Even in my slightly bleary-eyed state, I could see her lonely figure seated at the loom, and I made a mental note to study a map of Aurora at the first opportunity.

ELEVEN

If we were logical, the future would be bleak indeed. But we are more than logical. We are human beings, and we have faith, and we have hope, and we can work.

Jacques Cousteau

When I awoke in Avien's apartment, I truly believed it was the next morning. I also thought that it's a pity Americans would rather drink alcohol than kiss one another. Then, I realized that we don't really choose to drink and drive rather than smooch on the basis of one being less dangerous than the other. As a matter of fact, we don't choose at all. Certain times allow certain options, and we haven't done any of the preliminary work that leads up to the kissing part. We can't put the cart before the horse. We don't understand shameless sobriety, so there's no point in torturing ourselves. We have to drink and drive all the way to the end of the road.

Because Aurora has not a single automobile, its streets are narrow lanes that are anything but straight. It's rowhouses drape themselves around parks, cemeteries, and gardens with ornate greenhouses. The houses themselves are so narrow and cramped that there's simply no room for a television, ping-pong table, interior door, or bathtub. Yet citizens such as Avien are somehow able to squeeze in lofts, porches, and windows of remarkable complexity. The scents of orchids, cedar, and morning coffee are perfectly stunning, and that's especially true when they come as a surprise.

Something was dreadfully wrong. Avien should not have been sitting at the table in the sunlight. The birds should not have been singing so happily. I should never be confined with lovey-dovey

Christians. And I should never oversleep because that meant I had to squeeze breakfast and a trip to the Bath into a scant hour-and-a-half. Somewhere in this mad rush, I tried to think about the timer and its malfunction, but I couldn't. There were too many potatoes.

At age sixteen, Miki was at long last face to face with one of the more momentous decisions that confront every Auroran. So while we slaved away, he told me all about the Agricultural-Industrial Army.

Despite all future efficiencies and technological wonders, there will always remain shit work. Steel mills, mines, foundries, sawmills, chemical factories, and hospital bedpans are perpetual necessities. Of course, the beauty of a class system like our present one is that we hire underlings to do all this and more. We also use the minimum wage to entice them to clean toilets and pluck chickens. Most of us never see the bowels of a factory or a hog. We can't be bothered, and we don't need to be. The lower classes don't seem to mind because they don't know any better. And there's always the state-run lottery and alcohol to keep them oblivious.

But this solution would never work in the world of the four-hour day, so what they do instead is draft every seventeen-year-old into the Army. Each new recruit lists his preferences for, say, logging in the Appalachians or dam-construction in the Northwest, and then he's sent for four years of eight-hour-a-day servitude in a fertilizer mill on the Potomac. There is no pretense of justice or logic. This is the Army after all, and every industrial soldier runs the same gauntlet of Neanderthal discipline, insane policy shifts, and backbreaking slavery. No one forgets the essential lessons of history. Every veteran really does remember how things used to be.

So, taking the United States as a random example, let's say that we have fourteen million people aged seventeen to twenty-one. At eight hours a day, that's a hell of a lot of chickens plucked, iron ore extracted, and trees planted. If we were to put all these fine young bodies to work in such a way, the rest of us could move on to better things, and none of those better things would include a state lottery.

But it goes without saying that we're not ready for such a

practical policy, and neither is Aurora. They don't employ the Agricultural-Industrial Army because of its pragmatic utility. Aurorans think that everyone emerging from the pain of adolescence should be free to experiment. That's the time of life when it does a person a world of good to get away from home and meet different people from all over the Union. That's the time to kick up your heels, sow a few wild oats, and experience the full exhilaration of working your fingers to the bone with no financial reward.

I told Miki that we did the same thing, but we called it academia and turned a blind eye to what really went on there. He thought that was almost as funny as watching his mom kiss a new acquaintance, so I asked him what he had in mind. Where would he like to go for his four years of indentured servitude?

Remember that half the world is still capitalist, but that's not as big a problem as you might think. As an incorrigible musician, Miki couldn't resist the twin temptations of oceanic voyage and sordid trafficking in mysterious commodities. He wanted to see the world, leaving out nothing, and the Foreign Service could provide the necessary access to both open seas and open sewers. He would not rest until he'd set foot on the exact places where Mozart and the Hapsburgs had played. The export business could make that possible even if Vienna remained in the hands of people who made the Hapsburgs look like rank amateurs in the aristocracy business.

So then, I asked him how he liked school. He said it was okay but that the two hours a day got on his nerves occasionally. That was the last question I managed to get in edgewise. Try as I might, I could never seem to get the upper hand in these sessions in the kitchen with Miki. The little whippersnapper was all over me, demanding to know everything I remembered about the Twentieth Century. If I told him one thing about the distribution of wealth or famine in Africa, he'd pester me with twenty more questions. The kid could peel both the potatoes and my brain without missing a beat, and, to tell you the truth, he had a better intuition than the adult scholars back home. Fortunately, we didn't get around to dating and contraception until the shift was almost

over.

I never did get all the details about Auroran education, but, generally speaking, Aurorans never really enroll in school, and they certainly never graduate. They are forever studying this and that, and it's not at all unusual to see an octogenarian and a four-year-old teaching each other Spanish or anti-mechanical engineering. There are, however, several points in life where the Auroran must set aside her dilettantish inclinations and make a serious decision. Following universal army service, the veteran reviews a list of careers the community deems necessary. The powers-that-be decide that, over the next forty years, they'll need two more dentists, ten temporal physicists, fifteen plumbers, and so on. The twenty-one-year-olds are then expected to rank these professions according to personal preference, and the die is then cast.

The interesting part of this procedure is the Auroran reverence for fidelity. When a citizen swears an oath to do something, you can take it to the bank, even if there aren't any. They are a tenacious and stubborn lot, and, once a woman signs up to be a dentist, she'll remain at her post, come hell or high molars, no matter what. A promise is a promise. Nothing can come between her and her sworn obligation.

Unless, of course, she changes her mind. At any point, she can swap careers with someone else, but both of them have to put in the extra hours, off the books, for retraining. This happens more often than you'd think. The original charm of dentistry might not survive the test of time, especially when you live in a society that flosses religiously.

As a side note, I found out that Miki's mom and dad had just celebrated their twentieth wedding anniversary and had received certification as a union of the Thirteenth Degree. This achievement allows either of them to kiss strangers when necessary, and most Aurorans aspire to this lofty status. The Thirteenth Degree is a form of permanent allegiance that is held in very high regard, as you might expect. The obvious irony, though, is that no one past the fourth level gives a damn about what anyone else thinks. All the admiration is pretty much wasted.

What isn't wasted, though, is the perfect concentration required

for both daily labor and infinite marriage.

By the time I'd told Miki fifty-three facts about life in America and he still hadn't told me how Auroran education works, our shift was over. I don't know where the time went, but Avien turned up at the end to bandage my fingers and invite me to join her for lunch.

I finally got around to asking what I really wanted to know. Like Enid, she too had been married for quite a long time, but her husband had been a casualty in one of the many wars between the Union and the Free World. She could not think of him without puddling up a little, so I knew better than to press her for any further details. She found that a bit confusing.

*O, dangerous Gabe,
Y'been flying hell
For leather thither
And yon
In exploration,
Now here y'been wetting
Your pants
Petrified
In perception
Of grown women weeping.
Y'been steering
Clear cerebral of
Tracherous tides,
Lately Gabe,
Yet here been the
Source steaming
Of true education.
There been more
In the warm liquid
Prismatic
Than all your damn books,
Thinker.*

If she'd given me a little more time, I might have taken her dare. I might have listened to her recount the story of her courtship, wedding, and grief, but she'd already decided that I should move out. I couldn't go on living like a pet dog, curled up on the parlor cushion. I'd be far better off living in the army barracks with other people who were still wet behind the ears.

To a certain extent, she was right. I did not want to spend the remainder of my short visit clinging to Avien's apron strings. I wanted to get out and experience the full spectrum of future existence. But at age forty-five, the military was an awkward fit. Life in the army was thought to be a time for young folks to throw caution to the wind. If they engaged in harmless social and sexual experimentation, the community generally pretended not to notice. Girls will be girls, after all. So, from then on, on most nights, I'd have to bury my head under the pillow to escape the racket of people reading to each other.

The other problem with this change of address is that I thought Avien was dismissing me. As an intruder into the unknown, I suffered an understandable inferiority complex. Avien knew things I could only guess at. She was wise, sophisticated, completely self-assured, and agonizingly beautiful. I felt like a high-school freshman suddenly thrown into graduate school. A situation like that doesn't even allow for a decent fantasy. So, when Avien packed me off to boot camp on my fourth day in town, I graciously accepted the expulsion.

What else could I do? In all of Aurora, where could I turn for advice or assistance?

Finally, the next morning, when Miki made the mistake of stopping to take a breath, I asked him what he thought about relative time. Suppose, hypothetically, that some time-voyager set an ordinary mechanical timer to go off in, say ten minutes, and he himself zoomed forward in time. If ten minutes passes in the new time zone, what's happening back home? Is the timer moving at all, or is it creeping ahead at some reduced rate?

He said he had no idea, but he knew someone who might know. And there, in a nutshell, you have the essence of Auroran education.

The only thing these kids learn in school is how to track down answers and better questions. They learn to access the collective body of knowledge, and they avoid electronic media like nobody's business. They are drilled in the art of direct human interaction, and that's about all they learn. Americans would rather die than do this for two hours a day.

Academically speaking, it turns out that there will be two schools of thought on the relativity question. The old women we talked to pretty much agreed that there must be differentials but the extent of divergence would depend upon tidal variations that were a little on the chaotic side. Basically, my guess was as good as theirs, and that's the other important component of Auroran education. Everyone is entitled to speculate as wildly as she cares to.

So, the next day, Miki asked me if I had any other questions. I squirmed and hesitated, but he wouldn't let go.

"Suppose," I said, "Just for the sake of argument, that a human being knew he had a very limited time left. Maybe he found out that he had a terminal disease or something. So, isn't this a license to be completely free and do something insane? Why would this guy care about physical danger or making a fool out of himself? And, if he could only do a very small number of things in the time remaining, how could he decide what to do first?"

*Are y'been meaning
Mortality
Or women, Gabe?
Are y'been speaking
Release or
Confinement?
Sure as you're born,
Y'been sniffing
The course of
My own meditations,
For here I been*

*Coming of age
And having a scanty
Hundred years left
On account, and me
Knowing neither
The right nor the left
Of mysterious
Girls.
I been hearing it said
On occasion
As how males stand
On icy clouds thinking
Of feminine pleasures.
Slippery
Questions abide,
Serious Gabe.
Life and somnambulant
Death
Been tenuous Gabe,
But Mommy says this:
She been often repeating
Instructions
For boys:
Never be blinking
Nervous
Except as required.
Never be greedy
Except as been necessary.
Never cease listening
Ever.*

Of course, taking advice from a sixteen-year-old is not always the best course of action. Miki actually spent most of his afternoons with his buddies building a treehouse where girls were strictly off-limits. What could he know about a predicament as mature as mine? How

could someone that advanced ever understand the first thing about antique retardation?

I also finally got hold of a map of Aurora, and, sure enough, if one were to set out for Avien's house from Enid's cafe, the logical road would not pass the weavery. I didn't bother asking Miki about the detour.

TWELVE

It is the steady and merciless increase of occupations, the augmented speed at which we are always trying to live, the crowding of each day with more work and amusement than it can profitably hold, which has cost us, among other good things, the undisturbed enjoyment of friends. Friendship takes time, and we have no time to give it.

Agnes Repplier (1894)

I woke up in the barracks at dawn on the morning of my fifth day, and as I made my way to the Bath, I congratulated myself. I had every reason to be satisfied with my mastery of time, with learning a great many things about Aurora in hardly any time, and with retaining my composure with Avien. I hadn't yet made a complete fool of myself. The cobwebs of radical dislocation were clearing. I was now relaxed, deliberate, and thoroughly poised. I was ready to correct my one oversight, which was that I'd learned absolutely nothing about the future.

As I floated on my back with the few other Aurorans in the pool, I smiled to think of how very little I knew about the inner workings of the future. I'd tiptoed around every single fundamental, demonstrating an amazing capacity to avoid asking the right question. If my timer were to yank me back to Baltimore right then and there, I'd have nothing to report. I'd mumble something about nice lighting and delicious potatoes, and that would be about all I could say. If someone asked me what really makes Aurora tick, I'd shrug my shoulders and scratch my head.

Basically, the only thing that you and I know is that Aurora is ready for the four-hour day, and we're not. They've decided to engage only in productive labor and to divide that burden evenly. That's all we

really know, but we also suspect that such a subversive conception must involve other implications. Americans know that everything comes with a price tag, and that scares the living bejesus out of us. So, here we are in the showroom, and we don't know why the salesman is smiling like that.

Fortunately, I'd spent the better part of my life trying to remain calm under conditions of extreme ignorance. Only once had I been born yesterday, and that was a long time ago. So I kept my head above water, and I thought about the shoe being on the other foot. What if an Auroran were to visit the United States? What would I tell her to shed the most light on the mysterious ins and outs of our culture?

I thought about Hollywood, Wall Street, and the Pentagon, but then it occurred to me that anyone who understands anything at all about making steel in the Nineteenth Century knows everything there is to know about who we are.

The recipe for making steel is absolutely simple, and the very first ingredient is the inventor, the technological wizard. Without our famous Yankee ingenuity -- without the Edisons and McCormicks -- we'd be just another economic backwater, and the distinguishing feature of the American economy of the 1800's is its wondrous industrial innovation. And, if we couldn't invent something ourselves, we'd simply steal it from unsuspecting foreigners. Bessemer, Siemens, and the other honorary Yankees gave us all we needed to become the world's number one steel producer.

The other raw material for steel is a skilled, industrial work force, and we had that in spades thanks, again, to the wizards. They'd already revolutionized agriculture with steel plows and mechanical reapers, so a fair number of us were free to head for the cities. We learned to measure, calculate, and operate complex machinery, and none of that would be possible if we were still chained to the land as serfs or hardscrabble owners.

Thirdly, American steel is unthinkable unless you throw in a heavy dose of capital. Someone has to organize the construction of factories, railroads, and barges. Someone has to put up the money to

buy the first furnaces and hire the first metallurgist and ladle jockey. Someone has to oversee the whole massive undertaking and snuff out bothersome competition.

Standing somewhat on the sidelines -- but still critically important -- are three other categories of humanity. You have the farmers who feed the wizards, workers, and bosses. You have the merchants and other producers who supply the wizards, workers, and bosses. And you have the women who created the wizards, workers, and bosses in the first place.

Making steel in America has always been an enterprise demanding perfect coordination and cooperation of this diversified portfolio. People from all walks of life make unique contributions within this elaborate interconnection. If anyone falls down on the job, the whole production line comes to a screeching halt. A drought in Kansas or a speculative bubble in railroad stocks can cripple steel production completely. Honeybees could learn a thing or two about mutual dependence simply by watching Americans pour molten iron.

So, if an Auroran were to vacation in the United States, I'd regale her with stories about Andrew Carnegie and the teamwork of perfect harmony that goes into every ounce of American steel. She then -- being sharp as a tack -- would demand to know the real truth. Where is the hierarchy? Who's on top, and who's on the bottom?

This is a natural question, but there are never any natural answers. If you were a complete alien, you might think it logical to have the wizards control the American economy. We did, after all, wisely establish the patent system to guarantee ownership of technological ideas, and, if the inventors could grant or deny use of these tools, they'd possess enormous power. With legal title to electric generators, open-hearth furnaces, and gasoline tractors, technical geniuses held the key to progress. They were the Prometheans lighting the way, so wouldn't it make sense that they would rise to political domination? Wouldn't you expect Thomas Edison to occupy the legitimate throne?

Or maybe the workers might rule the roost simply by virtue of overwhelming numbers. And when you meet these guys and see that

they've always been a rough-and-tumble, strong-armed bunch, you'd think they'd take matters into their own hands. A natural course of events would have them shut down every factory in the country if they didn't get their way. They'd simply list their demands, and that would be that. What social force could possibly resist the combined effort of unionized labor?

My shrewd Auran visitor would already know that social logic never makes sense, and that would ease the painful task of explaining that one man, Andrew Carnegie, called all the shots in the making of American steel. The industry had one autocrat, and he was the moneyman.

I'd then have to explain the presence of a seventh category of American society. Besides the owners, inventors, workers, farmers, merchants, and women, we also employed a substantial police force. We called them the U.S. Army, the Pinkerton Detectives, and clergymen of various denominations. At the first sign of trouble, Mr. Carnegie could rely upon goons and thugs to enforce his will with brickbats, fists, sermons, and guns. This, however, would never be possible without other gangsters who smothered the country in a thick blanket of ideology. Without the one true Church and its affiliate, the New York Times, no one could have swallowed a dictatorship masquerading as pious law and order. Without a propaganda machine whipping up fears of imported anarchy, making steel might well have become a truly democratic proposition.

An Auran on her fifth day here would already know that our economy is fundamentally cooperative. All economies are. But then she'd face the knotty task of understanding both the political reality we'd constructed and the political mythology we'd woven to conceal everything. She'd have to understand, for instance, that Carnegie really was a devout Christian who thought it a sin to die rich. He was a philanthropist who financed a whole library system for the working class, so why did he do that, and why don't modern tycoons follow suit? Is Andrew Carnegie calling himself a Christian any different from Hitler and Stalin adopting the socialist mantle? Is one outright lie any

different from another, and what social role does each one play?

The heart of the matter here is that an Auroran coming to the United States would be confronted with an impossible story. Once she understands the basic nature of steel-making, it's absolutely absurd to think that one man could emerge as an unchallenged dictator. That this should come to pass in a democratic country with elected officials is doubly ridiculous. But our guest -- if she has her wits about her -- will assume nothing. She'll be prepared for insanity, and she'll ask those questions that are most revealing about our perception of social order or the lack thereof. She'd ask the average American to tell her who runs our country, and she'd listen to descriptions of the Constitution, bicameralism, judicial discretion, referenda, and she'd take it all in with a large dose of skepticism.

Aurorans, by the way, recognize fifty-seven varieties of social myths, lies, whoppers, exaggerations, self-deceptions, and equivocations. Their catalogue is so Aristotelian it even includes Aristotle as a principle spinner of yarns.

Now, my first question to Avien had been the one about who owns what, and she'd responded with something about god. So what did I really learn? Right off the bat, I know that Carnegie, Hitler, and Stalin saw themselves as agents for divine justice. Avien's reference to god, therefore, meant nothing. It wasn't worth the paper it wasn't printed on. Her answer was part and parcel of Auroran mythology, and, if I were ever to dispel the mists, I'd have to pose question and after question, point blank.

The big problem was that I'd never before thought about social reality in the nude. I wasn't sure whether the Bath was helping or hurting. I asked my neighbor if she'd do my back for me, and I devised a fiendishly clever list of interrogatories for poor, unsuspecting Miki. The boy could try his best to fend off my attack with vague diversions, but he didn't stand a chance. Long before the last potato entered the oven, I'd have my answer about the true reality of Aurora's politics and smelting practices.

Before we'd even settled in, I said, "So, my friend, tell me this:

Politically and legislatively speaking, who rules Aurora? Who decides important questions of economic and social policy?"

I sat back and waited for the first circuitous recitation of theological claptrap. I expected a laundry list of formal procedures and appeals. The cloud of poetic propaganda loomed large and threatening, but he batted not an eyelash.

*Waitresses Gabe.
Waitresses been
Calling tunes
And we
Been dancing
Pretty true and steady.*

Of course, if you tell an Auroran about Andrew Carnegie, she'll inquire as to his relationship to his mother. Once she uncovered the well-known obsession, she'd be satisfied concerning other aspects of the case. She'd also be quick in concluding that a Carnegie required an environment of general servility. Autocrats thrive upon the self-effacing adulation of the masses, so the simple presence of a magnate means, necessarily, that Americans relinquish personal autonomy to distant celebrities. We humble ourselves in the presence of wealth. We even surrender unconditionally to filmed images of people who may or may not be real. We become slaves of our own free will.

Similarly, if I happen to learn that Aurora's waitresses are all-powerful, I immediately draw all sorts of other conclusions.

Remember that, in the making of American steel, we depended upon women to provide healthy workers for us to destroy. In another world at another time, these women might have leveraged their economic role into true political power. No natural impediment prevented them from going on strike to enforce their collective will on the general populace. If women stopped being women, all countries would grind to a halt, even the United States of America.

Obviously, they've never exercised their god-given muscle,

though, and, at the time of Carnegie, they couldn't even join in the charade of elections. Many states forbade them from owning property because it makes no sense for one piece of property to own another. What would we do if chairs took possession of cows or vice versa?

So, if you know that women have no power, that tells you that you're in one type of society, and, conversely, if they control everything, you're not in Kansas anymore. Does it make sense to let Andrew Carnegie be king? Is it logical that women should wake up? No, of course not, but, if either of those things is true, then there are other, very different, sets of things that are also true.

The problem was that Miki's answer threw me for a loop. All the questions I had lined up in rank and file battalions took to their heels. I was speechless, and, believe it or not, so was he. For the first time in five days, Miki sat quietly humming and going about the business of letting me stew in my own juices with the potatoes.

"And these waitresses," I finally managed to ask, "Are they elected by the general populace?"

*I been hearing
Of regions
Where such been
The case,
And people in secrecy
Choosing garbage men,
Nurses, and beekeepers
Collective.
But locally
Never.
Anyone wishing
The service of tables
Been free
To indulge.*

So then, I asked him if the position tended to be hereditary. Regardless of official laws, did the daughters of waitresses tend to

follow in their mothers' footsteps? No. Was the position truly open to males? Could I ever rise to a position of supreme political power? Yes. Was there a formal constitution, a set of written laws, and a history of legal precedent? None of the above. Could a decision of the domestic staff ever be overturned by public initiative? Impossible. What material or social advantages accrued to waitresses by virtue of their dominant role in society? Support stockings.

For a full three hours, I interspersed our silence with incisive and provocative questions, and I came away with nothing. By the time I met Avien for lunch, I'd concluded that Miki was toying with me and simply refusing to let me in on the secret. Aurora, it seemed, was no different than any other culture that ever was or will be. It defended its inner machinery from all foreign intrusion.

The funny part is that when the maitre d' seated us, I experienced an overwhelming urge to be on my best behavior. The tynyllin napkin went straight to my lap. I sat up straight with my elbows carefully avoiding the tabletop. I said please and thank you, and I couldn't help feeling as if I'd be held accountable by the powers that be. No waitress had repeated the brief physical examination I'd received on my first day, but that's because they didn't need to. The intensity and duration of eye contact told them everything they needed to know. An Auroran waitress goes straight for the retina, and she doesn't let go.

On this particular day, our server lingered a little longer in the gaze she directed at me. Then she bent over and whispered something in Avien's ear which both of them thought was amusing. Obviously, the world is made up of insiders and outsiders, and we should never forget which is which. I also realized that if I should ever decide to set up a police state, I wouldn't rely upon uniformed officers. I'd make collective dining the only option, and I'd let the waitresses keep tabs on any subversive tendencies. Nothing could escape detection.

By the time the food arrived, I'd explained to Avien my exasperation with Miki. What, pray tell, was the big mystery about Aurora's government? Why wouldn't anyone tell me the simple truth? Why would Miki dodge my every attempt to get to the bottom of the

matter?

Aurorans are generally Platonic in nature, and that will be extraordinarily irritating someday. They think every question deserves three more, so Avien completely ignored my polite request for information. She responded only with questions of her own about the distribution of political clout in America, and she would not rest until she learned everything there is to know about our method of making steel. We talked about coke ovens and stock proxies all through lunch. We discussed the relative advantages of basic oxygen and double-entry bookkeeping as we strolled out of town, past the farm fields, and into the deepest, darkest tangle of Aurora's forests.

Population density will not be an issue of any particular interest in the future. The Union aims for five hundred people per square mile, and that's about what we had in Maryland at the turn of your millennium. The numbers only become scary when you realize that this concentration results in a population of over one-and-a-half billion in what we now recognize as the United States. The amazing part is that, once you ditch the automobile, beef cattle, and the private lawn, we end up with an abundance of elbowroom. Aurora is able to maintain a nature preserve comprising about a quarter of its twenty square miles, and this wilderness is thought to be a perfect setting for political initiation.

When we reached the footbridge in the hemlocks, Avien finally asked about Andrew Carnegie's relationship with his mother. I told her what I knew, and she and the woodpeckers laughed.

*Ah Gabe
Providential,
Y'been stuck
Periodically,
Presuming on one
Hand
The one thing,
And me on the*

Other
Another one.
A wonderful meeting
Of minds
Been denied
Formerly.
So here been
The remedy ready
Available:
There been ever
Contending
Twin versions
Of politic ways,
And roughly the one
Being feminine
Mild while
The other encumbered
In penises.
So here y'been
Entering upright
And knowing but
Fatherly methods
In authorized murder,
Legitimate torture,
And righteousness.
But forever and always
Been balance Gabe.
From day number one
There been girlish
Ways learning insurgency.
Posthumous mothers
Been practicing
Certain techniques and
Tactical matters.
Meek men and weak

*Women both been
Conceiving inheritance
Outside the law.
Whereas
You and your kind
Been punitive stern
And hard-hearted strict,
We been emphatically
Cordial.
We been practically
Sweet.
We been mothers
Unlike Mrs. Carnegie.*

Rightly or wrongly, Aurorans believe that we Americans are paternalistic and strictly Old Testament. We believe that we need laws and police enforcement because we don't trust each other any further than we can throw one another. We write prohibitions against yelling "Fire!" in a crowded theater when there's no true danger.

Now, I personally have never once been tempted to yell "Fire!" in a crowded theater. Why would I ever do such a stupid thing? Do I not possess the brains I was born with? Am I not perfectly able to think about the well-being of my fellow citizens? Isn't it truly insulting to think that I need a gang of judges, priests, and policemen to keep me in line? But, of course, Americans really do mistrust each other, so this and a million other laws stay on the books. Such is the nature of fatherly authority.

The alternative conception is that we're all basically good creatures if given half a chance. From the moment an Auroran baby sees the light of day, she is praised to high heaven. Her cries, her tantrums, and her disregard for personal safety are all accepted as natural and honest. Auroran mothers listen to their children with complete respect. Auroran children are instructed in the fine art of making colossal mistakes. They don't even laugh at one another when they fail to make fools of themselves. Such is the nature of maternal authority under the

tutelage of Jesus, Gandhi, and the Thirty-six Saints.

I'll be the first to admit that I had a difficult time with this nonsense, and the part that caused me the most grief was the Store. So, okay, maybe they could make underpants available free of charge since no one in his right mind would take more than his fair share. And priceless underwear would negate the possibility of black market redistribution. But what about diamond rings, saffron, and lobster tails? What about someone deciding to panel his house with teak and ebony? What about fine art, silk, and cosmetic surgery? No matter how long we humans last, there will always be scarce, precious commodities and the necessity for justice.

The woodpeckers did not laugh. They simply continued doing what they would have done anyway. Avien smiled and told me that there was simply no way to predict what would happen if someone succumbed to greed or yelled "Fire!" in a crowded theater. Generally speaking, the lunatic's parents had the first say, but it could just as well be sisters or friends. Typically, someone -- whoever that might be -- would take responsibility for figuring out what was wrong. Every Auroran is a trained physician, but no two of them adopt the same procedures in the event of an emergency.

Ultimately though, the waitresses remain responsible for every sociopathic impulse. They're the ones who see trouble on the horizon long before it happens. They're the ones who diagnose and prescribe if all else fails. They're the ones who redesign the whole society if things get out of hand. They've even been known to disband communities that have come to the end of their useful lives.

Aurora's waitresses are not a flock of vigilante hens. They do not scour the community looking for secret stashes of teak and saffron. They never even give any advice. Every couple that wishes to marry checks with the waitresses first, but that's because they understand the wisdom of an understanding ear. Political power in Aurora is simply the science of listening.

I told Avien that I finally understood. The four-hour day and matriarchy go together like a horse and carriage -- like work and

marriage -- with neither one before the other, whatever that might mean.
She hugged me and told me I was halfway there, more or less.

*So what been
Sincere instigation
Of old justice,
Cold Gabe?
What been
Before time
Demanding firm
Jurisprudence?
Why been primarily
You and your kind
Unkind
And nervous?*

"Ha!" I laughed, "That's easy. When all is said and done, it been matters of hot sexuality."

Avien squealed with delight, frightened a woodpecker, and kissed me.

On the way back to town, Avien kindly informed me that Aurora's woods were crawling with bear. If I should go there on my own, I should not be surprised to see one. I should remain completely relaxed at all times.

THIRTEEN

The really efficient laborer will not be found to crowd his day with work, but will saunter to his task surrounded by a wide halo of ease and leisure.

Henry David Thoreau

I am now going to think of all the issues upon which Americans and Aurorans agree. I am going to add them all up in my head and tell you what the grand total is. Are you ready? The sum is absolute zero. No more, no less.

Even if you were to take a statement as simple as "A beautiful woman is a true treasure", you'd soon discover that Americans and Aurorans might both say something like that, but they're not speaking the same language. What looks like agreement isn't and never will be. In a society without beauty contests and millionaires, nothing is the same. Aurorans think that women are automatically lovely. Anyone, male or female, who can smile properly is a knockout. Their treasures are infinite and therefore far removed from the ones we know anything about.

Americans and Aurorans also seem to agree that there exists a thing called The Will of the People. We both think that the ancient Athenians were right on the money when they shrugged off their aristocrats and instituted democracy. When Athens and the United States went on to become powerful and prosperous, everyone hailed the new regime as the political key to economic success.

The beauty of democracy is that it's better than any steamroller for crushing minorities. Once that fifty-one percent vote is officially recorded, the party in power can run roughshod over the losers. If the

margin of victory is large and sustained -- as with American Blacks and Whites -- we then have a true landslide, and the minority becomes just so much rubble. To its everlasting credit, the United States has long recognized this critical danger in democracy, and we've taken measures to defend minorities. What would we do without our perpetual losers? We might have to pluck our own chickens.

But just when we legislate some nominal protection for endangered humans, the other beauty of democracy kicks in. Public office is open to the highest bidder. People with many treasures and beautiful women have learned to organize a political process of mass marketing. They employ expensive techniques of advertising and the mathematics of the lowest common denominator. As long as a class hierarchy is the fundamental economic reality, democracy amounts to no more than a feeble check on the worst abuses.

Personally, I also tend to think about what sort of personality throws his hat into the ring on the hustings. Why do our quiet, thoughtful women sit on the sidelines while glad-handing social climbers claim center stage?

But how can a society believe in the will of the people, and not resort to democratic pretensions? If Aurora doesn't use the ballot box to measure popular sentiment, what other alternatives exist?

Aurorans say that genuine self-determination requires four precious commodities, and the first is size. Aurora's population of ten thousand is a community. People bathe together, dine together, work shoulder to shoulder, and intermarry like crazy. Ten thousand is a manageable number, meaning that political life is highly personal and intimate. If there were edicts -- which there aren't -- they'd be coming from right around the corner.

The second pre-requisite is federated diversity. If Aurora commits itself to certain policies concerning the eating of meat or the style of living arrangements, any citizen may freely emigrate. With one million options on the social menu, social oppression becomes a thing of the past. Suppose that Aurora experiences a long-developing fascination with neo-Zen, and everybody starts spending every minute

of their free time obsessed with breathing technique. Suppose that every public policy decision favors that lifestyle. If I find that personally repugnant, then I have nine-hundred-ninety-nine-thousand-nine-hundred-ninety-nine other places to call home. I can relocate to a community of calculus aficionados on Lake Erie. I can move to an enclave of post-modern Cistercians. Or I can kiss the future goodbye and retreat to the Free World. This choice is a far cry from deciding which department store will sell me the least inferior deodorant.

(Yet another odd part about the future is that there's not a whole lot of hopping around. Young people go off for their army duty, and adults typically spend sabbatical years studying in foreign towns, but they usually come down with a bad case of homesickness. Politics aside, emotional connections will count for more than we ever thought possible. Aurorans have known each other all their lives, and you should never underestimate the dangers Americans risk simply because we live next door to strangers.)

Ingredient number three is prosperity, and nothing I say in this narrative is of greater importance than this discussion of the elementary concept of prosperity. If I had any brains at all, I'd leave out all the diversions about time, god, and sex. I'd spend the next three hundred pages lecturing on the one theme of true affluence.

When mankind first set foot on the plains of wherever, we were neither the fastest nor the strongest. We were poor climbers, our teeth were dull, our fur was insufficient, and we were badly outnumbered. We were also feeble-minded, so we accepted the difficulty of our situation. We thought that economic scarcity was natural, so we crafted weapons and used them mostly on ourselves. We were impoverished and therefore competitive. The distribution of scant resources was decided by violence. We were rude and ill-tempered, so we invented politics. With important exceptions, men did this, and women watched.

With the invention of armed politics, we divided ourselves into classes of have's and have-not's, thereby wrecking the productive capacities of everyone involved. The upper crust whiled away the hours in torture and treachery. The slaves scratched the dust with sticks

because they were deprived of the education and nutrition to aspire any higher. The politics of class dictated an artificial extension of the poverty that sustains the politics of class. With not enough to go around, we do our damndest to perpetuate the condition. We Americans know only one variety of political life, and that revolves around the unequal distribution of wealth. Congress, state legislatures, and the courts are all overwhelmed with deciding who goes to college and who goes to prison. There's no time for anything else.

Fortunately, the greed of the financial elite knows no bounds. The profits to be derived from steam engines far exceed the pittance extorted from peasants. A new class of manufacturing royalty leapt onto the stage, riding high upon yet another new class of inventors and technological geniuses.

By my birthday -- by the middle of the Twentieth Century -- the fundamental reality of human life on earth had changed. If two percent of America's population can produce everything we eat and more, then we are truly prosperous. For the first time in a million years, give or take, we have plenty to go around. We have everything we need, and that changes everything. We are at long last free to provide all the education and leisure necessary for the full development of every person on Earth.

But because we refuse to free ourselves from assumptions of scarcity, our political lives remain hideously distorted. Our protection of privilege generates ghettos of lead paint, drugs, and gang violence. Then we pile up vast bureaucracies charged with controlling the resulting mess. We concoct every adversarial relationship under the sun, and then we regulate like madmen.

Does Aurora's government craft careful legislation regarding grand larceny, higher education, inheritance taxes, property rights, and divorce? Did Adam and Eve do any of those things? In the Garden of Eden -- in the midst of honest opulence -- the state doesn't just wither away. Think of all the decisions we make in the political arena, and consider just how many deal with questions of "just" distribution and the fine points of ownership.

So suppose that Aurora's guild of weavers decides that it needs a new workshop or advanced machinery. In the United States, such an initiative would involve a supposedly private decision based upon future profitability. Will the weavers be able to take a large enough slice of profit from the limited supply? Will the market sustain this enterprise? Who has legal title to the land for a new building? How many Indians died in the original acquisition? Who controls the capital required? Will the new facility conform to pathetically weak legal standards in zoning, pollution control, and aesthetics? The construction of an American factory involves the twisted combination of anarchic self-interest and bureaucratic regulation, and the results are dismally industrial. Send in the lawyers, and nothing really changes.

The Auroran version requires that the weavers submit a plan to the waitresses. The one question on everyone's mind is the ultimate effect on the length of the workday. If the weavers can project some temporal advantage for the whole community, they're virtually home free. But let's say that this particular endeavor is simply for the benefit of the weavers. This is a straightforward improvement of working conditions that will not necessarily mean a dramatic rise in productivity. This sort of proposal is never decided easily. Nothing is cut and dried in Aurora.

Ultimately, every matter of the Auroran state requires the fourth attribute of self-government. Without humility, nothing is possible or even thinkable.

Apparently, when Gandhi attended his first convention of India's Congress Party, he insisted upon cleaning toilets. This happened a mere two thousand years after Jesus bathed somebody's feet. And it immediately preceded the Thirty-Six Saints who fully articulated the non-doctrine of true public service.

No privilege attaches to the career of a waitress. No material advantage accrues. The job is as thankless as motherhood. It carries with it no prestige, rank, or pedigree. Ask any American waitress. Therefore, these women are capable of listening intently to both the weavers and the general babble of public opinion. Maybe Aurora's

weavers have gotten too big for their britches. Maybe they're a clique and just a little too inbred. Perhaps the community would begrudge them a new palace for their arcane arts. Maybe some interpersonal squabble has confused the whole issue.

This is no time for legislation or other codes. Lawyers need not apply. Only the waitresses are able to sort through the full complexity of communal tendencies before arriving at a decision. The general rule for waitresses and all Aurorans is that, when given two choices, always take the third. Rather than sit back in stern judgment, Auroran government always looks for some innovation that will slice as many Gordian knots as possible. In this particular case, the decision was to build a separate facility to accommodate three more looms and double as ballet/choral arts practice room in the evening.

Everyone involved understood the trivial nature of the issue at hand. No question of life or death hung in the balance. No one was being sent to Liberia, Harvard, or the nearest penitentiary. Aurora's prosperity and personal freedoms would remain secure. Everyone except old Abdullah-MacGregor accepted the outcome with grace and humility.

The waitresses had all taken dancing lessons from the old geezer, so they made a special point of making sure the next casserole came out exactly like he wanted it. They asked him how it felt to find himself on the losing side of the last five verdicts. They wished him better luck next time, but it was all to no avail. Abdullah-McGregor continued to recall better days, to bitch about everyone and everything, and to repeat his threats to leave. He would not be consoled, so some things never change.

The other crucial aspect of Auroran politics is this.

Andrew Carnegie could rule the American steel industry and its workers because of certain general, unspoken sentiments pervading his culture. There might not be honor among thieves, but they certainly know who's on top when it comes to being lowdown. Carnegie earned authority within the confines of a game played by cattle rustlers, speculators, and assorted other greedy males. His legitimacy persists

only as long as the rules of the game continue unchanged. His very existence depends upon an environment of violence. The universal obeisance to violence demands a Carnegie or some identical twin.

Violent domination, however, is not the only force in the universe. As soon as economic scarcity falters, another power discovers itself. Aurorans all defer to the overwhelming might of non-violence. Women have replaced the soldiers and penny-ante bankers who sustained Carnegie. The meek get what's coming to them, and feminine principles rule. The waitresses are the natural articulation of that omnipotent presence.

A government of mothers bears no relation to a paternal tyranny. A society of selfish aspiration has nothing in common with a publicly held cornucopia.

After a few days of sifting through all the evidence and putting two and two together, I was personally subjected to the full weight of Auroran administration. I met Avien for dinner, but, within seconds of being seated, our waitress appeared, told Avien to leave, and settled herself into the newly vacant chair. Waitresses often do this sort of thing, but no one underestimates the significance of these interventions. Other people in the room sit up and take notice.

Are y'been happy Gabe?

Are y'been sweetly

Complacent?

Are y'been welcomed

Approximately?

I said, "I'm fine. How about you?" but Thea, at the time, was one hundred and eight years old. In America, she'd be a miracle, but in Aurora, she's simply an ordinary treasure.

I should explain, first of all, that the United States, in an average year, manufactures thirty thousand suicides. It goes without saying that our senators and mayors do nothing because it's none of their business. Business does its level best to sell stupefying drugs because that truly is

their business. When suicides occur, we're often taken by surprise because we weren't paying attention. Thea can smell a suicide coming a mile away, and when she sees the unmistakable signs, she consults with her colleagues. Appropriate measures are taken, and never once do they repeat what they've done before. Thea wonders why we even bother having a government if it can't tend to details like this.

Thea has devoted one-hundred-and-eight years to the improvement of her physical appearance. She's carefully cultivated laugh lines deeper than those of the Grand Canyon. Through painstaking effort, she's erased all impurities from eyes that make the laugh lines look like shallow flirtation. She's reached her prime, and she knows it. She understands authority.

*There been never
Any secrets between
Gabe
And your clock mechanism
Been impractical
Recently.
Deliverance been
Strangely postponed
Gabe so here y'been
More or less
Permanent,
Still always
Forever embraced
Invitational.
Y'been safely received
Having nothing
To fear.
So once again
Exile,
Are y'been happy?*

Even though the United States is nowhere near ready for the

four-hour day, we might want to try taking a page or two from Aurora's book. The least we could do would be to ask each other if we're really satisfied with our lives. We could try taking each other by the hand and waiting for a complete answer.

I don't know how Thea knew about the failure of the timer in my basement, and I don't know how she did that thing with her eyes. For whatever reasons, the dam burst.

"Happy!? You want to know if I'm comfortable!? You people are too much because if you had any brains at all you'd have some conception of what it's like to be jerked across two thousand years without it really being two thousand years and land in a godforsaken religious looney bin where there is no up or down or left or right. I am unceremoniously deposited, told that I smell funny, stripped of my clothes, forced to work without compensation, and where in all of this am I told the simple ABC's of your ways? Who has taken the time to even explain that you people have bears in the woods for chrissake and that I'd better watch my step? And why is it that the first thing any of you do when I first get here is ask me if I'm dead? Am I? Is it possible that I no longer really exist and how the hell am I supposed to know that when I have to spend all my time figuring out why the potatoes are so damned important, and you being a woman would have no idea what happens to a man's brain in the presence of someone like Avien but you take me to dances when you know damned well I can't dance and you know I can't sing and you know I have no idea what Avien expects of me or any other male. I've gotten two kisses since coming here without having any idea what that's all about and I think that Miki's gorgeous and you're stunning but why can't you see this when you don't miss anything else? If you're so damned smart, why can't you give me something for this vertigo because at this point my nerves are just about shot and if I had any trace of rationality at all I'd stay the hell away from Avien until I get my bearings which brings me to the question that you already know I'm going to ask. If you know about the timer then you know everything there is to know about the time machine and you know that I could never in a million years come here of my own volition which

means that I was sent for. You people probably do this sort of thing all the time which means that you have a constant stream of immigrants who look like they just stepped off the boat and you toy with them and see which of them can pass the test because that has to be what's going on. You have to be sitting back waiting to see what I'll do next and if that conforms with your fiendish plans for a grand crusade of Christian conquest but you can't run around doing this to people because it's not fair. I have a right to know what this is all about because unlike me you probably know what I'm going to do next and if that's your idea of compassion I'd just as soon be back in Baltimore thank you very much because there I know where I stand and I don't have to put up with women who pretend to care about me when they don't."

Thea's eyes actually puddled up a little which I didn't expect, and she squeezed my arm once I stopped flailing around.

*Y'been justified
Gabe and
Pretty much right
On the nubbin.
But secrets been
Necessarily following.
Time been necessarily
Slow lately so
Think only of this:
Y'been doing
Just fine as any
Man ever,
And question young
Miki concerning
Cassandra.*

With this, she got up and left. She told me that her shift was over, and I couldn't believe it. I thought we were finally getting somewhere. I thought I'd finally found someone with enough innate wisdom to see my predicament and lend a hand. Apparently though,

Aurorans really do believe that the government which governs least governs best. I was left to my own devices, to my meal, and to the curious stares of the other people in the room.

Before I forget it, though, there is one other difference of opinion between Americans and Aurorans. As much difficulty as I had trying to decipher the real Aurora, Avien had almost as much trouble figuring out America. All the information about steel-making and sexual discomfort had helped somewhat, but she still fumed and insisted I was holding something back.

So, one day, while I was minding my own business on a park bench, she sat on my lap and told me to try really, really hard to relax. I laughed and told her that she didn't know the first thing about American males, but then it all came out. I told her that we frequently spank our children. We hit them, and we say harsh things when they make a mistake. We use blood-red pens to teach them about the consequences of failure. We control them because we know what's best, and it hurts us worse than it hurts them. They must learn the cruel facts of life before it's too late.

I told Avien that a friend of mine had had her collarbone broken by her dad when she was four-years old. She'd made an unforgivable mistake, so Avien painted a picture of the punishment and placed it in the Library where it hangs to this day. All of Aurora came to understand.

It could well be that everything I say about the four-hour day is a waste of breath. The United States might proceed directly into oblivion obliviously. But if nothing else, you need to relax and listen to this. The time has come to stop abusing ourselves at any age, especially if we happen to be childish. We have to start treating our children with endless respect and admiration.

This will not be easy because of three beliefs that permeate the heart of modern existence. We think that human nature is very bad and that children must be taught to behave properly. We think that the world is merciless and that, if they can't learn to sit still for six hours at age six, they'll suffer the consequences later in life. And we think that

kids can get by on fifteen minutes a day of truly human interaction.

You want to know what the four-hour day is all about? The four-hour day is nothing more than a young girl turning to her dad, saying “Look what I did” and trusting in him to take the necessary time. The four-hour day is nothing but the time it takes to say, “Holy cow, that, my friend, is spectacular! That takes my breath away.” When a parent can say this with no distraction -- with no concern for money, status, personal security, mortality, or anything else -- we have a fully functioning economy.

So why can't we do something that simple? Why is it that Bible-thumping champions of family values dole out the worst cruelty? Why do softhearted liberals bribe their offspring? How do you really spoil a child? What has television done to us?

If nothing else, please understand that punishing the abusers won't do the job. That would accomplish only the perpetuation of evil which is what most of our jobs do anyway.

FOURTEEN

You have riches and freedom here, but I feel no sense of faith or direction. You have so many computers, why don't you use them in the search for love?

Lech Walesa

Most Americans don't know this, but it was impossible to be a socialist in the Nineteenth or Twentieth Century without thinking a lot about sex. We thought about it seven days a week with no time off for good behavior.

The Marxist conception was that women had been nothing more than chattel in most early cultures. If a primitive man wanted to know how filthy rich he was, he added up his pigs, goats, wives, and the male heirs she could manufacture. Women were not peers, and heterosexual relations never took place between equals. Then, along came capitalism which revolutionized everything under the sun -- except for sexual relations. Men remained on top economically, and a typical woman was graciously allowed to market herself to multiple partners as a prostitute or to one man as a wife. But, wife or slut, it was all the same politically. Voting privileges and other so-called rights might be extended, but, in the end, capitalism is a man's world. A woman's only hope is to become a copycat male and, in so doing, she must play the game one-third better while earning one-third less.

Socialism would spell the end of all economic dependence. The ultimate demise of the marketplace would free us all to rise above the status of mindless commodity. Women would finally enjoy a social status and freedom of choice independent of financial considerations, and this was true revolution. Most of us thought that marriage -- as

defined by capitalist values -- would wither away like the state. But what would replace it? If the contractual obligation of marriage became obsolete, what other model could we invent?

The rise of socialist thinking also coincided with the startling discovery that the female of the species possesses a libido. She is a highly sexual critter, given half a chance, so the specter of unleashing this potential savage on the general public caused quite a stir. When radicals talked about free love, we did not usually have orgies in mind. We had them elsewhere. Ideologically speaking, free love simply meant associations that were un-coerced by economics and unenforced by church or state. These alliances might look a lot like traditional marriages, with the significant addition of honestly mutual consent. This might mean long-term, monogamous arrangements, or it could mean something else.

The bourgeoisie overheard these discussions, and when they heard the words "free love", they went bananas. They accused the Left of proposing a "community of women" as if there would be a giant herd of girls from which men could take their pick on any given evening. The commies responded to these idiotic accusations by denouncing the Pope as a sanctimonious pimp. The discussion of free love and true fidelity become so raucous that no one understood what she herself had in mind, much less anybody else.

One huge problem was that a great many men on the left really did want a flock of free-range women. They saw nothing wrong with migrant labor as far as females are concerned. Sexual liberation meant the ability to swap partners at will, so the Left suffered mightily under the weight of so many revolutionary Cassanovas. There were more than you can shake a stick at, and some of them turned out to be female. That was a hell of a problem.

Deeply embedded in some socialists' notion of sexual liberation was the assumption that love is fleeting. Love can be here one minute and gone the next. Love the one you're with. Why should we enslave ourselves to boredom when the next Juliet is waiting right around the corner?

Long before Aurora was even a twinkle in my eye, I'd concluded that the sexual revolution of the Sixties was nothing more than a sleazy fraud. My dearly beloved commune was probably the worst of the worst, combining mechanistic behaviorism with touchy-feely sensualism. When all is said and done, the bottom line is the bottom line. Temporary love is a capitalist conception. Temporary love is a male-centered self-deceit. The idea of multiple partners is the idea of consumerism, pure and simple. Hedonism is hopelessly reactionary.

Of course, in saying this, I simultaneously confess that I personally never managed to master the art of permanent affection, but it's not my fault. No one ever bothered to let me in on the secret. Contrarily, most women in America come pre-packaged with the idea of permanent love. They cry themselves to sleep at night with the romances of novels and movies. They know what they need.

I'll say that again. They know what they need.

Yet who among them succeeds? How many of these aspiring women actually assemble all the parts necessary for genuine marriage? More often than not, they compromise by accepting a system of half-hearted associations that end up in court half the time. What happens to the other fifty percent is a permanent mystery.

But it's not their fault either. We just happen to live in an era of unapologetic, neon self-interest. Epidemic avarice might be an aphrodisiac for many, but it's hell on marriages. None of our time zones is truly erogenous, and, the sooner we accept this brutal fact, the better off we'll be. It's not our fault.

The other truth is that neither Aurora nor I have any earthly use for Eastern mystics, because they have no earthly use for Earth. Buddhists seldom lift a finger to alleviate suffering, so, in that respect, they're honorary capitalists and no help whatsoever. But even a broken clock is right twice a day. Eastern Philosophy somehow managed to stumble over the correct realization that the universe is a confusion of male and female energies. The harmony of yin and yang serves as a reliable poetic device in talking about time, space, and infinite arousal.

So, if even an impotent monk can recognize the possibility of

feminine ascendancy, what can we smart people know about the nature of sex in the future? Fortunately, modern nature is loaded to the gills with weird reproduction, so we can study everything from hermaphroditism to animals that change sex midstream. And we have any number of matriarchies to learn from. We have elephants, bees, certain sects of chimpanzees, and many other examples at our disposal. And we're doing our best to dispose of them.

Whatever the precise nature of natural matriarchies, we start out by observing that they're natural. There is absolutely nothing extraordinary about feminine domination. It can happen anytime, anyplace. It could happen to us if we're not careful. If the earth's magnetic poles can decide to turn themselves inside out, so can men and women. So what would that look like? How would we behave under conditions of perfect inversion?

This is not an easy question to answer because sex is anything but symmetrical. Roles cannot be thrown into reverse. Auroran women will not sit around watching sports and drinking beer. Auroran men will not primp and cry themselves to sleep any more than we do now which is a more serious problem than you'd think.

At the time of my arrival in Aurora, the world teetered in transition. The Union and the Free World clung to a shifting, precarious imbalance with no clear winner. The Union itself amounted to one million experiments in free love with no obvious indication as to the ultimate nature of human matriarchy. Homosexuals were less confused than anyone else, and that says more than anything about how different the future will be.

Yet despite this chaotic jumble of aimless realignment, certain patterns emerged. If nothing else, the one unifying factor among all Union communities was the courtship supremacy of girls. Once the four-hour day demolished economic classes and dependencies, women were free to pick and choose as they saw fit, and the results were dramatic. Auroran men will act a lot less like bloodthirsty barbarians and a lot more like bowerbirds.

Male bowerbirds each claim some bit of open space on the forest

floor, and they proceed to build elaborate structures to catch the eye of some passing female. They expend huge amounts of energy in collecting sticks, blades of grass, string, and bottle caps to decorate tunnels of love for a consummation that will be over and done with in the blink of an eye. Females flit around observing each architect's effort before making any decision. Male losers then redouble their exertions by stealing from the winner's bower in a last-ditch attempt to gain approval and affection. No doubt remains as to who's in charge. Girls throw down the double-dare, and boys accept the challenge to be their most creative and lavish.

But how do males determine the exact nature of feminine inclinations? How does the bowerbird builder know what she'll like and what she won't? How can he possibly anticipate the treacherous winds of tempestuous fashion? This mystery is the essence of Aurora and the four-hour day. If it's not a mystery, then it's not the four-hour day.

So, I looked Miki straight in the eye, and I asked him why Aurora had practically no mirrors of any kind. Potato peels continued to fall like summer rain.

*Right been right
Perpetual Gabe,
And left left,
So why been deception
In images rendered
Backwards?
Why been I
For instance
Concerned in
Perceiving me
Twisted around?
I been ever
But that seen
By others
And this only.*

What Miki meant to say is that Auroran males are always on the make. They're forever trying to win favor with the better half, and Auroran females despise vanity. A guy who cares about his own appearance is not thinking about the welfare of his beloved, so he's pretty much useless. If I'm on my way to see Avien, and I stop at a mirror to make sure every hair is in place, I'll never get there. I've taken a wrong turn into a very dead end. It's a hideous insult to Avien to believe that she would care about tonsorial matters. Aurorans relieve themselves of temptation by not bothering to make mirrors in the first place, so that's one more thing you can scratch off the commodities list, and that's that many fewer minutes we all have to work each day.

Once I had all this straightened out, I let my eyelids droop to a sly, fiendish grin.

"So, Miki," I said, "Who is this Cassandra person?"

The summer rain came to a precipitous halt. Miki blushed wholeheartedly and glared at me with pure hatred. Such is the nature of bowerbird camaraderie.

Supposedly, Jesus instructs us that the Kingdom of God will open for business when we regain the innocence of childhood, but I don't think that's any help. By the time Americans reach adulthood, we've been cheated and brutalized so often that none of us can remember the first thing about youth. By the time we reach maturity, we've become solidly and staunchly immature. We get all mixed up about innocence and gullibility, so I honestly believe that Jesus is wasting his breath as far as we're concerned. What in the world was he thinking?

Personally, I'd forgotten all about the importance of differences in age when you don't have much age to begin with. Miki was sixteen, and Cassandra was only the one year older, so you and I think that's immaterial. But in Aurora, girls come of age early on, and Cassandra was, after all, already in the Army, fresh from her home in the Caribbean, and stationed at the tyntillin factory. She was light-years ahead of poor Miki who had been aging right on schedule until being derailed and stunted by the arrival of an ordinary girl. This, too, turned

out to be right on schedule.

As a mature and sophisticated man of the world, I could objectively study Cassandra at the Bath and wonder what the big deal was. Naked, she was no more or less beautiful than any other nymph in the full blossom of unblemished naiveté. Her perfection was no more emphatic than anyone else's, and I didn't have the heart to tell her that she'd yet to acquire the electric aura of someone like, say, Avien. Just to pick a random example.

In any event, being average in Aurora is no handicap, and that, too, is the sole essence of the four-hour day. Cassandra's everyday, humdrum beauty still entitled her to the universal rights and privileges accorded to her class. She was the devastator, and Miki the devastatee. No one entertained a contrary opinion, and Miki himself had no doubt whatsoever.

But before Miki and Cassandra can go all the way, we have to back up just a bit. Sexual love will be extraordinarily important throughout history and far beyond. Nevertheless, there remain other forms of intimacy right at the edge of our vision. Because the Union is a producerist culture and because creativity is in a class by itself, Aurorans value collaboration above all else. If the whole idea of life is to make a permanent contribution to celestial harmonics, then you'd better start asking for help. The capitalist myth of the lone genius won't get you anywhere, and this should give you a big hint concerning me and the time machine.

The best thing that can happen to an Auroran is to show up for work on time and find a couple of true friends who understand their responsibilities.

The best form of work is parenting, and this can mean a collaboration of any number of people of any sex they choose to be.

It turns out that the best thing that can happen to a woman in America is to acquire a bosom buddy. If an American woman has a true sister or a female friend for life, she can survive all the imbecility we can throw her way. She has a fighting chance, and the same is true in Aurora. The only difference is that, in a genuine matriarchy, feminine

friendship is guaranteed. Young girls travel in packs which makes it a lot harder to pick off stray victims like we do in Chicago. If a young Auroran man approaches the object of his imagined affection, he wades through a crowd of her allies who are watching his every move. They notice things she might overlook. They are providing the emotional security required to head off any wayward inclinations. They are a pain in the neck, as far as we men are concerned.

So here's Cassandra, a complete woman, and she's brought her best friend with her because the Army always assigns friends together. The two of them are splashing and laughing in the Bath, and what, may I ask, is a boy like Miki to do? He's been around girls all his life. Girls are no strangers to him. He's read all the books about famous courtships and marriages. He knows all the rules, and the only problem is that Rule Number One unequivocally states that there are no rules of any kind. How is he, as a boy child, supposed to approach a pair of complete and self-sufficient women? What does he have to offer them? How does he or the bowerbird become the other side of the mirror?

The situation is truly hopeless, but fools believe in the pregnancy of possibilities. All Auroran men are fools. Miki remained enthusiastically and steadfastly despondent.

*I been dreary Gabe.
I been lax and
Intermittently
Stupid.
I been thinking
Of finding a mountain
Someplace alone
And one by one picking
Up
This stone and that
And lonely transporting
The whole kit and
Caboodle someplace
Else*

*Where me nor
The mountain
Been ever.
I been dreaming of
Pent up fluidity
Gabe
And waking up ready
And willing to
Burst and me
Having no single
Thought of
Endurance.
I been sure as hell
Clobbered Gabe.*

"Miki, Miki, Miki," I consoled, "Think about it, buddy. You're a fine, handsome young man, a great dancer, a genius composer, and you can peel rings around any other man, living or dead. Take it from me because some things never change: you're everything a girl could ever hope for in this world or any other. So you just march right up to that Cassandra person and invite her to go for a walk or see your treehouse or whatever. So what's the worst that can happen? So what if she laughs in your face? You take your best shot, and you do the best you can."

Depending on the time and place, Miki had different reasons for thinking that I was crazy. In this particular instance, it turns out that Miki wasn't really worried about personal embarrassment. Aurora recognizes only two forms of sin, and the first is to reach out and grab something. It doesn't matter if this hypothetical object belongs to you or not; no one in his right mind grabs anything or anybody. But, more than anything else, Miki wanted to reach out and grab Cassandra, and no camouflage could disguise this fact. He had no money, no car, no college degree, and no title to hide behind. His passion was as palpable as a tongue tied in knots.

*She been farsighted
Gabe and large
In heart and mind.
She been sharp
And me dull-witted
Greedy groping
Ingestion.
She been sweet
And me bitterly
Wanting.
She been alert
And me drooling
Aspiration.*

Of course, the other sin in Aurora is cowardice, so Miki knew he was between a rock and a hard place. Either he drew closer to Cassandra so she could see what a lustful, selfish bastard he was, or he kept his distance so she could smell his fear a mile away. Damned if he did, and damned if he didn't.

But the saving grace is that Aurorans don't believe in damnation, and I'd already figured that out. The absence of cars and mortgages was a dead giveaway.

"Miki, Miki, Miki, Miki," I pleaded, "What is it that every woman has ever wanted from her man from time immemorial? What is the one key to every woman's heart, buddy? What do we have to offer, eh? Isn't it heroism? Isn't it self-sacrifice and devotion to the best and brightest ideals available? Isn't it the ability to forge ahead, suicidal, and do what needs to be done without being asked?"

"A very wise woman once told me that, if given two choices, always take the third. This, my friend, is the masculine obligation, pure and simple. Be yourself and her simultaneously, and you can't go wrong. Be in the right time at the right place."

The great advantage of a cooperative society is that it's always easy to see other people's mistakes and give them free advice. Americans think that's incredibly rude, but Aurorans always help each

other with crossword puzzles, interior decorating, and sex. Miki drooped his eyelids.

*Just like you
And Avien, eh?
You been wanting
Me wetting pants
Likewise?*

FIFTEEN

I go on working for the same reason that a hen goes on laying eggs.

H. L. Mencken

While we're on the subject of time and sex -- which we'll never leave anyway -- I'm reminded of an old American euphemism. Some of us used to observe someone suffering from sexual frustration, and we'd say, "Boy, that guy really needs to get his clock cleaned." What the hell is that all about? Clock cleaned? Why that particular association?

For some reason, even while the United States drowns in a swamp of pornography, we continue to skirt the issue of sex. We even skirt the issue of skirts, and we do that with endless innuendo and euphemism. This one, though, comes with the not-so-subtle implication that sex might boil down to a service performed. Maybe sex could be done by trained technicians as part of routine maintenance. Maybe sex could be offered with the innocence and professionalism of the ordinary journeyman jeweler.

Of the one million or so communities that make up the Union, there will be a fair number that believe in Eden. They commit themselves to a goal of perfectionist naiveté in which sex becomes as casual as an ordinary haircut. If you think you're familiar with public displays of affection now, you haven't seen anything yet.

At last count -- which is a long way off -- none of these experiments have succeeded, and Aurorans think they know why. Human nature is the same thing as nature nature, and, besides being divided into masculine and feminine, it's also brimming with good and evil. Aurorans believe that the brightest illumination produces the

darkest shadows, and that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. They believe this even though they can't remember what hell or pavement are all about. At any rate, human nature depends upon a harmonic suspension above the unspeakable chaos of our lower selves. Aurorans don't think that sex is as innocent as anything else. They think ordinary labor and creativity are as dangerous as sex. Everything we do should be done in private consultation with a true collaborator.

So, here I am telling you that Aurorans can take a dim view of the human condition, and you finally find something you can agree with.

Most Americans, if asked, will say that human nature comes with a lot of laziness built in. Tell them about the four-hour day, and they'll deny the possibility. For one thing, they tend to think that people will continue to over-consume. They also believe that we'll cheat on our labor responsibilities or flat-out refuse to work at all unless forced. Americans devoutly believe that sound work habits result from a combination of sumptuous reward and merciless punishment, and it's frequently hard to tell which is which.

Personally, whenever I'm tempted to believe in laziness, I think of the American middle-class male who pours huge sums of labor and money into his lawn. Here's a guy who holds down a full-time job, spends hours in traffic, devotes himself to being a world-class lover for his wife, sets aside infinite time and patience for his daughters, and then manages to top it all off with precious weekends given to domestic horticulture. How does he do it? How can any one man pull off such Herculean endeavor? If anyone should believe in the native industriousness of the human spirit, he should be the one.

Yet this is precisely the person who is most likely to rant and rave about welfare cheats, shiftless bums, and union organizers. He's enraged when some poor person from the ghetto is offered a minimum wage, dead end job and doesn't report for work with a smile on his face.

He's convinced that the world is crawling with irresponsible jerks who neglect their lawns, and he lives in mortal fear. What if one of them moved in next door? What if the crabgrass and dandelions were

allowed to run rampant? What if human nature prevailed and the neighborhood went to hell in a hand basket? How far away would he have to move to be safe?

Whether this man goes to church or not, he is religiously obsessed with the Protestant Work Ethic. But the sexual and psychological intricacies of this worldview defy easy explanation.

And I'm far too busy to give it the treatment it deserves.

The bottom line, though, is that the American workaholic will tend to believe that the pyramids of Egypt were built by slaves. That makes sense to him. Hollywood told him that was true.

And it could very well be that the Egyptians employed slaves. But the larger truth is that empires rise and fall, and, while things are on the upswing, monumental effort happens. Newfound prosperity releases immense quantities of free, creative energies. Greeks build the Acropolis. Romans build cities and roads. Americans invent telephones and tractors. These accomplishments are possible only with a visionary consensus and a labor force feeling its own glorious, liberated muscle. The men in chains are a distraction.

If you visit Easter Island, you see the flip side of the coin because there, in the quarry, you have a fair number of unfinished statues. Apparently, people just woke up one day and discovered that they'd lost interest. Carving colossi seemed like a waste of precious time. Cultural stamina petered out, and the weeds took over.

Aurorans are different from Protestants in that their capacity for labor does not stem from sexual frustration. They do other things with that particular commodity. And Aurorans do not build shopping centers and highways, so they have a hell of a lot of free time for galactic exploration. Aurorans are mad about space. The whole Union buzzes with the latest reports from distant vessels. They all study the newest designs for lighter-than-time clippers. The Hangar on Aurora's hilltop is a monument devoted to the machining and assembly of spacecraft components.

None of this is part of the four-hour system. All the extraterrestrial labor is volunteered, and here we come to the really

tricky part of the four-hour day. Aurorans are free to take all the material stuff they need largely because it's so easy to make material stuff when you don't use slaves and you let women do what comes naturally. The distribution of food, clothes, and medicine is a walk in the park. But everybody and his sister want to work on the latest space engine. With only so many machine tools to go around, how do you decide who has access to a limited privilege? How do you elect those people who actually get to take a ride on one of these inspirations? A producerist society runs smack into its own version of scarcity, and there's no easy way out.

But if you think about Rosie, the riveter, and how we geared up for World War Two, you have some notion of Union policy. Avien and her friends could count five hundred ships plying the ether with another three hundred somewhere between the drawing board and the dock. Think about something you've made with your own two hands being integral to the first contact with alien intelligence. Think about that, and you have the four-hour day.

So, if you remember Rosie the riveter, World War Two, and the excitement we once felt for our own dinky little space program, you see that indolence is the least of our worries. Does this mean then that every Auroran is a buzzsaw of hyperactivity? Do they throw themselves at every weed and errant blade of grass with a fury that hell hath not? Absolutely not. In fact, overwork is considered to be a form of gluttony. Breaking an unnecessary sweat is a definite no-no, and the chief librarian will intervene in no time flat. She'll load you down with so many books that are right up your alley, you'll be occupied for a month of Sundays. Aurora frequently has months of Sundays.

Another significant aspect of daily life in Aurora is the nighttime, and I don't mean the nightlife. I slept like a baby. I slept like there was no tomorrow, and the reason for that is perfectly simple. As a machinist in Baltimore, I'm on my own. Economically and socially, I'm left to my own devices. So, suppose I make a mistake, and I lose both hands. Or suppose I have a nervous breakdown or let the bottle get the better of me. There I am, with my mother and father long gone and with

no brothers or sisters this side of Peoria. I might or might not have a friend in the world. Of course, with insurance or Social Security, some safety net exists. Some bureaucrat might program a computer to send me a few paltry checks with my number on them. Or, at least they'll do that if I know how to work the system and fill out the right paperwork. But then I open the morning paper and see that forty percent of us have no health insurance. I see another copy of that same morning paper sheltering a homeless neurotic. How can anybody sleep under these conditions? How can we get any rest knowing that this precipice might be waiting for us in the morning?

Without money, though, there's not much fear of losing it. And with no government agents, Aurorans don't worry about deportation, marriage licenses, welfare checks, or loitering charges. I could continue to be the worst potato-peeler north of San Juan, and I'd still be able to keep body and soul together. So, I slept and dreamed as I've never done before, and I even did that in broad daylight. Someday, people will understand the importance of naps. Someday, they'll even build special rooms and mats for the purpose, and they'll employ napmasters who conduct relaxation exercises and play the right lullabies. It'll work like a charm.

Aurorans don't commute either, so, with that, the naps, and an average of nine hours sleep every night, they are well-rested in a way that we can only dream of, if only we had the time. When Aurorans finally buckle down to serious work, they're not jittery. There's very little wasted movement and practically no mistakes. They hum, they whistle, they chat, and they think about love and death. The potato peels fall like summer rain.

When they're not working, they're even less jittery. And if they're named Avien, they tend to stop by the kitchen and ask lazy, subversive, illegal immigrants to go for a walk. If the chief responsibility -- the main job -- of Auroran males is to wrestle with questions of greed and bravery, it's the women who supervise leisure. They're the ones who are supposed to take men by the hand and tell them they think too much. They're the watchdogs constantly on the alert for unwarranted

Protestant intrusion.

By the end of my first six weeks in Aurora, I'd relaxed enough to take almost everything in stride, including these nerve-wracking strolls with Avien. I'd learned that holding hands does not necessarily produce perspiration as long as one remembers to keep breathing. I'd satisfied myself that the bears represented no true threat. They represented something else entirely. And I'd figured out that Aurorans don't handle snakes, speak in tongues, or dismember heretics. Once I got over my fear of missing naptime, I accepted this particular walk with Avien with grace and dignity. I even accepted the presence of her two best friends and the incomprehensible chatter.

Summertime had replaced the Protestant Work Ethic. We headed out far past the tyntillin mill, past the wheat pyramids, took a left by the mango hybrids, and made a beeline for the orchard. Ninety-nine of these trees were apple varieties laboring mightily under the burden of tiny green fruit. Ninety-nine of these beauties belonged to Avien's garden club. The trees themselves had been planted some two hundred years previously in the sort of spiral maze that was then all the rage. A gazebo sort of thing ringed with beehives anchored the center.

So, pardon me for asking, but how do these people keep track of what's on the four-hour system and what's not? If I stop by the Inn at the crack of dawn and pick up an apple for breakfast, how do I know where it's been? Has this fruit figured in the Union's calculation at all? How do they decide what's leisure, what's labor, and what's in between?

Obviously, we have the same problem because we can't tell anything about a dining room table just by looking at it. We don't know if it was made by slaves in Timbuktu, by union misfits in a factory, or by an old man in his basement. We don't know if it's wage labor or a labor of love. We don't know if it's profession or hobby. We don't know much of anything.

But, chances are, if the table is wobbly and on its last legs one year after leaving the store, it's a factory job. If it glows with a patina of careful attention, it's homemade by someone taking his own sweet time. And which is more economical? Is it cheaper to have a craftsman build

one table to last three hundred years or to employ an assembly line to make a succession of temporary models? Where's the true laborsaving?

Obviously, the more things we make recreationally, the better off we'll be. The quality will be guaranteed, and the person doing it won't mind at all. She'll be grateful for the opportunity.

But how, exactly, does Aurora accomplish this goal? How is the necessity of apple production transformed into a sensuous pleasure? How the hell do you harvest apples without reaching out and grabbing?

Rule Number One is that there are no rules. You can't script recreation.

It helps that the trees are very old because it's easy to slip into a reverent sort of mindset. It helps that the trees are trees because that also packs a wallop in the reverence department. It helps that the trees live outside because there's always something in the wind whether or not we notice it. It helps to work with lifelong friends who know what they're doing. It helps to work with lifelong bees who know what they're doing. It helps to have a nose to catch the scent of friends, bees, and trees. It helps to have a brain to anticipate autumn and fruition. It helps to have muscles that scream bloody murder but still do what they're told as long as the culture is not in decline and fall. It helps to have eyes to see the deadwood neatly stacked and weeds completely under control.

And, if you're of the male persuasion, it really helps to take a minute to weave a garland of blossoms for the unmanageable hair of someone you might or might not love someday. It's well worth the effort, and it adds nothing to the community workload.

Six weeks into Aurora, however, meant that I still had trouble with rhythm. I was ever so slightly off the beat, so, when Avien and her pals collapsed into a heap and proceeded to nap, I missed a golden opportunity. The jumble of interwoven femininity left no space for me, with them or without them. True leisure went on without me, but I did remember to keep breathing, and that helped.

I also remembered that Aurora has lawns not so very different from our American greenery. As a matter of fact, the hexagonal, beehive

arrangement means that every living space opens onto public grounds, front and back. These areas are actually fairly extensive and require a lot of upkeep. Who applies the fertilizer and weed-killer? Who decides between lilacs and whizzerball courts? Who defends pristine theology from unpatriotic indifference?

On the way back to town, Avien managed to detach us from her friends, and I almost kissed her for that and other reasons. We approached her door from the east, and I had an opportunity to witness firsthand an important use of the Auroran lawn.

*Gabe Arrhythmic,
It been the first
And foregone pleasure,
Presenting himself,
The one and only
Husband
Dismantled lo
These ten and seven years.*

Avien gestured towards her husband's grave, to the bed of flowers with no marker evident. The tears welled up in Avien's eyes beneath the floral tiara. I had long since given up hope that anyone would ever weep for me in such a way. I even accepted the fact that I had no words to comfort someone with that ability. To my everlasting shame, I said nothing. A man's work is never done. And, to be perfectly honest, there's no such thing as Rule Number One.

SIXTEEN

Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live and act and serve the future hour,
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, through faith's transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know.

William Wordsworth

No one in his right mind believes that the rule of women guarantees anything. Not even Auroran women believe that.

If you ask an American woman about the possibility, she'll most likely frown and tell you that the meanest, nastiest, back-stabbingest people she knows are often female. What they are the rest of the time is anybody's guess.

I respond to that by saying that, if you take anybody -- male, female, white, black, or what have you -- and immerse them in a competitive, hierarchical cesspool with limited resources, you'll end up with rotten workers and administrators. The people who suffer the worst humiliation then turn around and perpetrate still greater abuses. They may or may not wear dresses in public or in private. I believe that simple economic changes will allow all of us to be sweet, intelligent, and generous.

Aurorans believe that I am grumpy, shortsighted, and miserly. They think that economic reform means nothing without a rigorous apprenticeship in the art of non-violence. They believe that Jesus invented the trade, that Gandhi elucidated the principal strategies, and that the Thirty-six Saints hammered out the tricky details. Aurora is governed not by women, but by the feminine dynamic of nurturing, iron-willed, take-no-prisoners non-violence.

Aurorans rarely use the term "non-violence" because it's obviously a definition by negation. It's the opposite of something, whatever that might be. Americans use the word because we don't have any other choice. Violence, for us, is the tangible reality that we smell and touch every day of our lives. In the modern world, violence defines everything else. Non-violence, then, is nothing more than a hazy, amorphous whatchamacallit.

But what's so bad about that? Maybe we should think of violence as precisely defined and therefore limited. Maybe non-violence should remain completely mysterious and unending. Maybe non-violence should be perpetually more than we can dream.

Aurorans don't think so, though. They consider non-violence to be the positive entity and violence the empty negation. They use the word "love", and that's a bitter pill to swallow for most Americans. We have mass-produced and discarded too many sappy Valentine's Day cards. We have regurgitated too many corny, happily-ever-after fairy tales. We have divorced each other far too often to conceive of love as anything but a dewy-eyed, temporary delusion. Love's been bought, sold, and mortgaged too many times to have any erotic or political kick remaining.

When an Auroran says "love", there are no soft edges. Love is a razor-sharp, crackling shot across the bow. It is fair warning. It is the recognition of hair-raising tension. It is a fierce declaration of impending engagement. On any given day, an average Auroran might turn to his fellow citizen, and, out of the blue, say

I been recently

Bored.

Life been currently

Flaccid.

Remedial measures

Been strongly suggested

By others concerning

Concerns of love

*Possible 'twixt
You and me
Which never been
Entertained previous.*

They'd flip a coin if there were any, but somehow they decide which one goes first, and the contest proceeds from there. Auroran love is adversarial with each combatant daring the other to ever more dangerous heights of reckless devotion. No holds are barred, and Auroran love is pretty much unconditional which makes the whole idea of opposition seem a little ridiculous.

The simple truth of the matter, though, is that you can't pack ten thousand souls into twenty square miles without having some people get on other people's nerves. There will never be a shortage of humans who detest one another. In the United States, if we really dislike someone, we sell him something or persuade him to drink or gamble. Or we grade his performance, show her a fashion models, or talk a judge into killing him. But, in Aurora, antagonism is considered to be a golden opportunity even though there's no gold that we would recognize. Domestic hostility is a welcome relief from the tedium of four-hour drudgery. When an Auroran can't stand to be in the same room with someone else, she makes a point of standing eyeball to eyeball with this idiot and giving him a piece of her mind, free of charge. The top ten romance stories of Auroran literature all start out with sworn enemies who sincerely believe that, down deep, the other person is really shallow.

Of course, when I uncovered this secret of Auroran amour, I wondered if the only reason Avien spent time with me is that she thought I was something the cat had dragged in. That was more reassuring than I can possibly express.

But more disconcerting than even this, Aurorans seldom chat about love, hate, or the tactics of eroticism without throwing in something about god. At the time, I was not quite prepared for this, and neither are you.

But while we're on the subject, I'll take the opportunity to make this one observation. Aurora is one of over a million communities that constitute a true rainbow of social and political opinion. Currently unthinkable combinations of tone, texture, and innuendo will someday come into being. A hare-brained scheme can turn into a whole new city overnight. But not a single one of these pioneers pursues the four-hour day because Jesus told her to. Cooperative economics and non-violence stand at the heart of Jesus' thinking, but this practical reality is not the result of commandment or scriptural authority. Aurora is not Christian for the simple reason that Jesus was only the beginning. We all have a responsibility to be wiser than any ancestor. Hero worship is the kiss of death as far as the four-hour day is concerned. At any rate, Aurorans like to practice the warfare of love because they are surrounded and outgunned by the capitalist Free World. Whatever truce might be formally on the books, the hard political truth is that the Union is under siege and frequently beset by eruptions of violent attack. Seventeen years before my arrival, Avien's husband had died in the defense of his homeland. As an ordinary militia member, he had engaged in the standard practices of passive resistance and had paid the price. He'd also won a crucial victory.

Whatever else you want to say about the metaphysical substance of non-violence, the practical reality is that it often does the trick. Gandhi really did befuddle the British. Martin Luther King managed to carry out a tremendous campaign against racism with very little loss of life. The achievements of the Thirty-six Saints are obvious facts of history. Time after time, non-violence can often beat the pants off supposedly superior forces.

When I said this to Avien, she smiled and told me she loved me which didn't make me feel any better. Neither did I understand her permanent affection for her husband.

All of this comprehension -- or lack thereof -- formed over the course of the spring and early summer as I settled into future existence. Simple common sense told me to give up on the timer or any hope of rescue, so I did what anyone else in my position would do. I accepted

the hand dealt, did the best I could, and made myself comfortable. Aurora -- and even Avien -- became routine.

I'd often thought about what makes our economy tick, and, of course, the myth is that the whole business is driven by a population aspiring to ever greater riches. Yet, which of us drives to work in the morning in the hope that this day will be any different from any other? Maybe some tiny minority is hoping to make a killing, but the sad truth is that the overwhelming majority does what it does because that's what it does. We are creatures of habit, we're deathly afraid of unemployment, and we like stability. Think about the daily reality of a steel mill, and you'll see a mixed population of skilled and unskilled labor tending the furnaces because that's what they're supposed to do and that's what they've always done. Take away the shareholders, tycoons, and speculators, and the whole process continues of its own momentum. Substitute public ownership, and nothing changes either. What does a steelworker care if his check comes from mega-business or mega-government? Every culture creates routine patterns, and we accommodate. We think we're comfortable, and we fall into predictable, easy routines.

So even the potatoes ceased to bother me. Without expending any effort at all, Miki and I could talk our way through four hours or four tons of potatoes, whichever came first. An unexpected consequence of sex inversion is that males will learn how to speak with other guys, heart to heart, and even that becomes ordinary and routine after a while. Thoughtless labor can be extraordinarily pleasant, and, when Avien found out, she hit the roof.

One thing that I deliberately left out of my story about me and the commune was that I generally did what everyone else did. I couldn't help myself. At that time, guitars were selling like hotcakes, so I'd gone along with the trend and acquired one sometime in high school. I tried to sing the same folk songs that everyone else was singing, and I continued to do so without ever becoming very good at it. That was true of a great many people. Hundreds of years later, I told the wrong person, and Miki blabbed to Avien. He also betrayed me by telling her I

seemed happily resigned to my fate.

On one fine summer's morning that was just like any other, Avien clamped on to my left ear and dragged me all the way to the Store. She ushered me inside and told me that the time had come.

*Are y'been ready,
Sir?
Are y'been resolutely
Prepared
In taking the weapons
Of love?*

She shoved me over to the music department and told me to take my pick. There on the wall were displayed ten of the finest guitars I'd seen in either life. One featured a bordering inlay of ebony and pearl depicting Gandhi's Salt March.

Aurorans consider shopping to be, on the one hand, tedious, but also somewhat risky. First of all, one must take the precious time to study the myriad options available. One must carefully compare the relative advantages of different models and come to some well-formed decision. This procedure eats into the time available for other things, like naps, and, if a mistake is made, there's the humiliation of having to trudge back and exchange an item for one more appropriate. Life is thought to be too short for such nonsense.

The real drawback, though, is that shopping means eventually reaching out and grabbing something, and Aurorans are typically hesitant to do that in public. A mutual understanding and discretion exists between clerk and customer. The consummation occurs with a minimum of fanfare or verbalization.

When the woman behind the counter saw that I was frozen stiff, she frowned and said, "Hmmm."

*I been thinking a man
As you*

Been harboring
Antique
Proclivities.
I been judging
Ye fanciful,
Gabe Ornamental.

She pulled the inlaid guitar down from the wall, and gently nestled it into a magnificent case. She told me that it was some three hundred years old and had once been considered the height of fashion.

This was too much. It's not as if I really knew how to play the damned thing, and I certainly did not deserve to march into the Store and make off with a beauty like this, scot-free. I had nothing to offer in return -- nothing in the way of remuneration.

In some ways, Americans believe that it's okay to get something for nothing. It's all right to take other people's money in a state lottery because it's their own fault for being stupid enough to play in the first place. Car dealers and shortstops have a legitimate right to overcharge. And rich people and royalty can do whatever they bloody well please because that comes with the territory.

But, for the rest of us, shoplifting is a crime, pure and simple. We must all earn the rewards of life and pay the going rate. We must work our fingers to the bone and save and invest prudently. We must forego all passing temptations and live our lives in anticipation of the one or two purchases that will make us truly happy. The financial transaction, as we know it, requires strict accountability. When I finally walked out of the Store, nervously clutching the guitar with both hands, I fully expected alarms to sound.

I finally hit Avien with the question that had been plaguing me from day number one, even though there never will be any such thing.

"Okay, Miss Generosity, suppose somebody -- maybe someone who's six years old or hopelessly neurotic or someone who's not even a citizen in good standing -- walks out of the Store with all ten guitars. Maybe he wants to display them in his bathroom or burn them for

firewood or ship them off to Timbuktu or wherever. I don't care what he wants them for, but he wants them, he takes them, and I want to know what you're going to do about it."

Nothing, Gabe.

"Well, for chrissake, Avien, that's just not fair, and, if there's nothing to prevent that, then what the hell's going to happen if some Hitler decides to surround himself with stooges and start appropriating everything including the kitchen sink? What are you going to do about that?"

*For Christ's sake, Gabe,
Unfairness been ever
Conditioned.
Unfairness been stitched
In from time
Immemorial, and
Judicial measures,
The harsh prohibition,
Been sad
Inefficient.
There been love,
Unblinking,
And that only.*

Americans, of course, have a really hard time with the idea of free distribution, and, if you're anything like me, you'll try to figure out a way to have the four-hour part while still retaining the safeguards of money, security guards, and electronic surveillance. We all know what would happen in the United States if we decided to give out free underpants. People would line up at the warehouse and carry them out by the armload. We'd hoard. We'd retail them to unsuspecting Palestinians for whatever the market would bear. We wouldn't take care of something that's easier to replace than clean. We'd worry

ourselves to death that Big Brother Government would force us to wear boring, olive drab skivvies instead of the oh-so trendy foundations that make life worthwhile. The very idea of underpants -- much less free ones -- is more than we're prepared to handle.

The United States is not ready for the four-hour day.

If I were to walk up to you, smile, and hand you a pair of underpants, you wouldn't know what to do. You'd be certain of ulterior motives and hidden strings attached, and I don't blame you one bit. No one in his right mind would accept underpants from a stranger unless that alien happened to be a corporation who entices with clever advertising, a brand name, and a genuine price tag.

But what if you and I were the best of friends? What if I were an extremely skilled lace-maker? What if I thought long and hard about who you are and what harmless neurotic tendencies lurk in your closet? What if you and I both agreed that it's high time to make your husband very, very nervous? Under these conditions, even the most hardened of Americans might see the logic of a simple gift. And that's what the four-hour day is all about. If commodities aren't simple gifts -- and if husbands aren't suspicious -- it's not the four-hour day.

Remember, too, that every adult Auroran has done his share of factory work. No one can put on a pair of underpants without remembering the hideous drudgery of four years sacrificed on the altar of mass production. Aurorans often brag about the age of their underpants and how many times they've mended them. Aurorans often smile when they take off their underpants. No Auroran cares what her underwear looks like as long as it comes off easily with no strings attached.

But the pure truth of the matter is that free underpants fly in the face of traditional logic and every legal protocol in the book. No American can think about un-encumbered underpants without his jaw dropping. How can such a thing ever be possible? How the hell could human nature change so drastically? No matter how I rephrased the question, Avien and everybody else dodged any responsibility and proceeded to talk about something completely irrelevant. Miki once

asked me what I'd do if people started walking down America's main streets bucknaked. I said we suffer from far too many internal codes to ever have that be a problem, but we could always try prison or electroshock in the event of such an epidemic. I asked him why Aurorans didn't parade around nude outside the baths, and what he said made no sense whatsoever.

As nearly as I can tell, Aurorans calculate that it's far cheaper to replace the ten swiped guitars than to start building prisons, colleges, and office buildings. That's the simple reason for having no enforcement apparatus, but there's quite a bit more to it than that.

When I first thought about the United States switching to the four-hour schedule, I considered the laborsaving expedients of demilitarizing and of promoting mass transit, but that doesn't come close to buying us the time we need. The labor we waste militarily and transportationally amounts to chump change. But at least thirty million Americans now serve as wholesale and retail functionaries which means that they're wasting their lives away as security guards and bean counters. The only way we're ever going to see a four-hour day is to engineer a thirty-million-person shift into productive enterprises, and you can check the numbers yourself. The pomp, circumstance, and pageantry of a sales economy will always be more than we can afford. The free distribution of Aurora's Store makes all the economic sense in the world, but economic sense is not their strong point. They simply believe that retail sales are a complete violation of everything Jesus, Gandhi, and the Thirty-six Saints stood for.

And free distribution tends to exert a dampening influence upon crime. For an American like myself, the four-hour day is one startling surprise after another. From the dance hall to the Bath to the bears, every subtlety of future existence causes a complete re-thinking of everything we hold near and dear. But the absence of anything remotely criminal is simply stunning. All the human history we know centers upon the appropriation of social wealth by a tiny minority. And when one percent of us gobble up half the money, certain tensions arise. When the bottom twenty percent endures permanent humiliation,

something's got to give. Throw in an underground economy, and you have the perfect recipe for a society held hostage by its minority of violent offenders at the top and at the bottom. We become prisoners of our own worst suspicions, but this can't last forever.

For the time being, Avien escorted me and the stolen guitar to her house, and she introduced me to an Auroran ceremony I'd read about in the Library.

As you've probably already guessed, Aurorans are masters of relaxation. They approach the discipline with the same thoroughness and ferocity that we apply to busy-ness. They understand that human thought always occurs in a chaotic cauldron of boiling ideas that often seem random and contradictory. Our brains are forever seething with incoherence, but Aurorans don't seem to mind. They would certainly never obscure this reality with anything like our naive belief in rationality or drugs. They think that our not-so-cerebral bedlam is the source of all creativity.

However, they also think that too much is too much. At breakneck speed, we miss and dismiss critical insights, so a form of mental relaxation is just what the doctor ordered. By slowing down the white water of human mentation, concentrated non-effort allows the patient to focus upon details that would otherwise be no more than a blur. The effect upon memory is completely miraculous, and, with a little practice, Aurorans can access any nook or cranny of their past with twenty-twenty hindsight. The only problem is that the tonic only works in conjunction with a relaxation therapist who knows what she's doing. Nothing in Aurora works without someone who knows what she's doing. The charms of nostalgia are so seductive that some care must be taken to avoid dwelling in the past. It's not anywhere near as dangerous as sex, but the same rules of safety and common sense apply.

Within no time at all, Avien had me seated comfortably, recalling every song I'd ever learned, word for word. I could reconstruct the car I was in when I first heard a particular tune. I could smell the people I was with. And, most important, I could remember, with razor-edged clarity, that we were going to change the world. Like a tree

standing by the water, we would overcome and cross the Jordan, chilly and cold, to Beulah Land. Union maids, in the sweet by and by, saw Joe Hill last night, and I had forgotten all about that. We once believed that paradise was at hand, but that had slipped my mind completely. Music and optimism were once one and the same, and the joy of that sudden remembrance is what the four-hour day is all about. The future is frequently nothing more than a surprising recollection.

Virtuosity plays no part in Auroran music. They don't seem to notice if you toss off an arpeggio of thirty-second notes or sustain a high C for thirty seconds. The audience only cares about virtue and its cousin, honesty. The audience also knows that it bears half the responsibility. Listening counts for as much as performing, and nobody does it better than Avien. I actually have no idea how she coaxed the first song out of me. I don't understand how I could be so calm and so attentive to the tune and its meaning. And I'm not sure why she liked the old stuff so very much.

For whatever reasons, before I knew what was happening, I was performing at Enid's cafe to rave reviews. The enthusiasm could have been due to the fact that there really is such a thing as renaissance. Cultures really do derive new energy from remembering antiquity. Or it could have been the fact that Avien is a hell of a harmony singer, so I just held on to the melody for dear life while she did all the work. Or it could have been because the songs that first came to mind were vulgar old bawdy things. Aurorans will one day think that "Barnacle Bill, the Sailor" is the funniest thing they've ever heard, and that says a lot about them and a lot about us. So much for the renaissance.

The problem with being a celebrity in Aurora is that people there can detect the slightest hint of vanity. The minute someone starts to get a little full of himself, the popular mood shifts, and the prima donna will find himself in an empty room someplace. Any departure from modest sincerity will be greeted with a collective shrug of the shoulders and a yawning exodus. They don't even bother heckling.

Fortunately, this wasn't a problem for me because I could go all the way to the end of time, and I will never, ever really believe that I'm a

good singer. American schools did their job all too well. And then there was the matter of the guitar.

Aurorans don't have inheritance taxes partially because no one has any money to pay them with. But, more to the point, they simply don't accumulate wealth, and, even if they did, they wouldn't want to burden their descendants with all the guilt. Aurorans don't believe that anyone should get something for nothing. All personal blessings flow from god and the community, and, in the timely event of death, all property reverts.

The plain, unvarnished result of this extra-legal system is that I found it impossible to pick up my old guitar without thinking of death. A dead person had once poured his heart and soul into the making of this instrument, and some unknown number of other dead people had fleetingly called it their own. I could never know who these men and women really were. I'd never know so much as their first names. Their identities and the nature of the death that united us remained infinite mysteries.

Yet each and every one of them had left some mark and the instrument still reverberated with their presence. By any other name, my guitar was a coffin. It was haunted, anonymously, and that went a long way towards nipping vanity in the bud. Death is nature's way of telling us to slow down and live a little.

Still another problem with the guitar was part and parcel of a producerist society.

Consumerism encounters suicidal difficulties because the pathology of greed generates everything from air pollution to toxic french fries. You know that already. But what you don't yet know is that producerism runs into its own self-contradictions.

Aurorans believe that happiness derives, not from consumption, but from creative expression. So suppose, hypothetically, that someone works himself to death in building a guitar and adorning it with elaborate inlays and filigrees. That's considered appropriate because this person is engaged in the physical expression of her true soul. She's doing the thing that humans were put here to do, and she has every

right to be deeply content. But who is the recipient of her gift? No one in Aurora believes that having a fancier guitar will make him one whit happier. No one is going to go out of his way to acquire the ornate model when a plain one will do just fine. And in fact, at the time of my visit, luthiers only produced understated models. A sort of Shaker revival had taken hold, and my richly ornamented masterpiece had been in the Store for more than a year with no takers.

So isn't this stultifying to the truly flamboyant artist? How can there be jewelers in a population that wears no jewelry? How can there be plastic surgeons when everyone's happy with their god-given noses and breasts? Doesn't the natural restraint of a producerist culture tend to stifle the wilder impulses? Does socialist realism muffle all renegade opinion?

The answer is that Aurorans cheat. They avoid the issue altogether by cleverly separating the public from the private. As long as the artist is creating public works, he doesn't give a damn about the shortage of private patrons. When he's donating his work to the general good, the sky's the limit. The end result is that the exteriors of Auroran houses tend to be brightly colored, intricate, patriotic expressions of collective exuberance. But private interiors are almost Spartan. If it weren't for her houseplants and flowers, Avien's rooms would appear virtually uninhabited. But everything spared in private acquisition is lavished on public spaces. This is the way they get around the fatal flaw of producerism.

Producerists also believe that only writers can read, that only painters can see, and that only singers can listen. The active form of any endeavor is the pre-requisite for the passive side. So, by the end of my third month in Aurora, I was fairly well pleased with myself. Miki told me that, as a potato man, I was really, really average. My singing had earned me admission into the social whirl. And I honestly believed that I understood all the fundamental tenets of future life. I had settled in, and I was so busy thinking about the death-guitar that I hardly ever gave a thought to the timer. Except for Avien's incessant disruptions, I was comfortable.

*Are y'been cozy,
Gabe?
Are y'been snuggled
Up, intimate?
Are y'been satisfied
Knowing the ways
And means practiced
Here lately?
Then reason me this,
Gabe Sagacity:
Speak free and
Extravagant:
Are y'been thinking
Me pretty?
Are y'been dreaming
Of me
And me lonely?
Are y'been tending
To love,
Sweetie pie?
Are y'been
Getting any?*

SEVENTEEN

Our duty, as men and women, is to proceed as if limits to our ability did not exist. We are collaborators in creation.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Meanwhile, Aurora's physicians had long since figured out that germs are no more or less real than ghosts. The modern notion that healthy bodies may be invaded by hostile, independent pathogens had given way to new theories of harmonic imbalance. The same antagonisms found in love and politics also appear in the internal machinery, so Auroran doctors write very different prescriptions. When an epidemic breaks out, they do not declare war American-style. They don't try to annihilate the intruder.

Militarily speaking, you and I already know that good guys have been executing bad guys for at least ten thousand years. And, at last count, there are still as many bad guys as there ever were. Ask anybody, including the bad guys, and they'll tell you the same thing. Evil persists everywhere we turn.

But Auroran doctors have another diagnosis. They see a germ as a manifestation of larger processes, a singularity generated by universal tensions. If future physicians were to confront something as deadly as our current anti-immune viruses, they'd look for certain poetic justices. What has the world done to Africa which could so destroy the most fundamental sense of identity? What processes of global disintegration are at work? How could morality so unravel as to allow a society to spend more on gambling and cosmetics than on African health?

The really tricky aspects of Auroran health care, though, are the

methods for treating dead people. They think that humans are basically no different than germs or musical notes. We're all microscopic articulations of the grand design. We exist as twinkles in the eyes of lustful parents, as active creators, and as powerful memories. We spill out of our borders in all directions. We are reverberations that extend from one end to the other.

And this obviously has to be true because, if I really were an isolated, discrete American, I could never have made the jump to Aurora. The whole theory of time that underwrote the venture depended upon a harmonic notion of existence, and, unbeknownst to me, that was a big problem. When I first arrived in Aurora, the scientific establishment -- which is everybody -- stayed up late at night trying to figure out if I was a germ or not. A few women thought I must be dead if I could retain my composure around Avien. A lot of people wanted to have me quarantined right away, but cooler heads prevailed, and no one told me about these deliberations, thank god.

Still, maybe all of us should take a minute and think about whether we're germs or not. And how do we really know if we're dead or alive? And how does anyone ever figure out if he's sane or whatever the opposite is?

The bottom line of health care, then, is that Aurorans don't believe in heaven or hell per se. They don't think there's a life after death, but they think there's a death after death. Our spirits continue to monkey around long after the kidneys fail, and every Auroran accepts full responsibility for maintaining dead people in good working order. Memories must be preserved at all cost which is easy when there's no money. And show me a culture where no one fears death, and I'll show you folks who cannot be conquered by germs, capitalists, or their own neuroses.

Anyone who scoffs at the silly idea of ghosts should remember Avien's husband. Despite all my personal insecurities and other distractions, hope beats eternal. I might have entertained some dream of romantic success with her if it hadn't been for the looming presence of heroism long dead. Avien's marriage had outlasted anything the Free

World could synthesize. Avien's wedlock contained a permanence, a determination, and a wisdom that precluded any monkey business on my part. The honest truth is that no one -- not even an American -- can do anything behind a ghost's back. And the nearest cheap motel was five thousand miles away.

The other difficulty is that Avien's husband is still a very likeable guy, even as we speak, and I would never do anything to hurt him. Never.

So, I accepted the impossibility of my situation except for two nagging doubts.

By the middle of summer, I couldn't help but notice that suitors were not exactly buzzing around Avien. Aurorans are always flirting like crazy, and they can't do anything that isn't suggestive. So why did Avien remain so aloof? Could it be that Auroran males suffered my same intimidation in the presence of the never-really-dead? And if that were true, wasn't that a terrible predicament for Avien herself? How could we males allow the perpetuity of her mourning to interfere with her future comfort? Maybe poor Avien was secretly lonely. Maybe I had some obligation to forget my modern incompetence and think only of her for a change. What a radical concept!

Then, too, remember that Avien had said early on that the possibility of romance was "strictly up to me." What the hell did that mean? Then, she'd said that, as long as she kept smiling, everything was fine, and I was right on schedule. What schedule? What progress had I made in the first four months? Were we any closer than we'd been on that very first day in the Bath?

Frankly, I became weary of the whole subject. Deliberation produced nothing but the same old circular pimples and boils of middle-aged adolescence. I was, very simply, too old for aspiration, and, when all is said and done, Avien and I were wonderful friends. We walked, we talked, we worked, we sang. We held hands and shampooed each other's hair. We did all the things that friends do, and I found that so immensely satisfying that I lost all ambition. I thought that was what people in Aurora were supposed to do. Isn't the four-hour day

necessarily the end of personal ambition?

And I also had Miki. We walked, talked, worked, and sang, and I never once agonized about issues of sexuality. I had a few bizarre dreams about him, but that's only because dreaming is a routine part of Auroran etiquette. And Miki didn't have Cassandra because he couldn't seem to straighten out his tongue problem. I had him all to myself which meant that we soon did what men in our position always do. We became infinitely bored. We looked at each other and at life, and we couldn't stop yawning.

I've mentioned before that the Union has no automobiles or other private transportation. There are a lot of reasons for that, and we'll get to them further down the non-existent road. For now, suffice it to say that the future knows much more than we do about gravity. They also know how to make gravity think it's doing one thing when it's really doing the opposite. This does wonders for transportation because it's possible to move one thousand gallons of orange juice without loading it into a vehicle. You don't even need to pour it into a container. On any given morning, I could stand in awe as a sphere of orange liquid floated in from points unknown with no noise or exhaust fumes. You'd almost think that the cargo arrived before it left, but we all know that's impossible.

For those of you who've experienced flying dreams, there's no need to discuss the dizzying exhilaration of Auroran mass transit. Flying in Aurora means engaging your credit-card-sized control box and hanging on for dear life. For those of you who haven't dreamed, there's no point in discussing true technology.

The one and only thing to understand about the four-hour day is that Auroran mass transit is the thrill of a lifetime, but it still doesn't hold a candle to walking hand in hand. That is absolutely the only thing you need to know about the four-hour day.

But what if walking hand in hand is temporarily out of order? What if two ordinary guys find themselves deprived of love with too much time on their hands? After all the singing, reading, working, and lofty stuff, how do two human males pass the time of day?

Boys will always be boys, so Miki and I decided to build a motorcycle. For the next two months, through the laziest days of total summer, we poured all of our sexual frustration into a machine.

In the United States, constructing anything is easy because sexual frustrations are a dime a dozen and we have lots of trash resulting. Back in Baltimore, I could spend a day hitting my favorite junkyards and dumps, and I'd have everything I needed to throw together a motorcycle, a TV set, or an ocean liner. Baltimore has more valuable flotsam, jetsam, and junk than I knew what to do with, so there was never any problem. I had to sift through the human wreckage to find it, but it was always there: plentiful and there for the taking.

In Aurora though, there's simply no place to get parts because what little garbage there is goes straight to the fusion torch for instantaneous reduction to basic elements. Now, you'd think that something as insignificant as solving the trash problem wouldn't mean much for any given society, but you, as an American, should try a little experiment. Take your bathroom scale and use it to weigh the garbage you take out once or twice a week. Think about all the extra tonnage added by packaging everything in gaudy disguises designed to catch the eye and thwart shoplifters. Think about the man-hours wasted in manufacturing useless trash and think about the fact that you're not really thinking about what happens after it leaves your property. Think about the collective weight of shortsightedness, and you'll see what a relief it will be to tackle the problem sensibly and responsibly. And Aurorans don't even need the bathroom scale because they never, ever weigh themselves. No one would be caught dead weighing herself, and I think that has something to do with the fact that they all sing.

Be that as it may, however, without a dependable dump to draw upon, Auroran men are denied a fundamental American joy. The rewards of scavenging and reassembly might be sorely missed, and here we come to a real sticking point with the four-hour day. Let's say we're discussing the future with two very different American males. One of them is a craftsman who works with his hands, and the other is an executive who works on paper and in the abstract. We tell each of them

that the thrill of consumption will soon give way to the pleasures of creation, and you'd think that the manual guy would respond better than the other one. Shouldn't the person who's built a house or a ton of steel be in a better position to comprehend the delight of practical accomplishment? Absolutely not. Karl Marx notwithstanding, a working class status guarantees nothing. Anyone anywhere can fail to see the forest for the trees, and the reason for that is what makes life extraordinarily difficult and interesting.

Meanwhile, though, Miki managed to come up with an old air compressor because such things are typically taken out of service after one hundred and seventy-five years even if they're still in fair condition. New machinery is pressed into service, because the old stuff needs too much attention, and time is money. Never forget this first rule of maintenance. Time really is money, and it always has been.

Miki grabbed this one-cylinder compressor before it got atomized, and then it was off to the machine shop. One important thing to remember about the future is that children have the run of the town. If my hypothetical daughter disappears for the afternoon, I have no doubt that she's somewhere safe and that someone is keeping an eye on her. A teenager might hop a levitain and be gone for days without causing any particular alarm, and that's a hell of a big change from the present. So, basically, Miki had been free to roam to his heart's content ever since he could put one foot in front of the other. He and I could burn the midnight oil on this project without having to answer to anyone except the dorm mother back at the barracks. If I failed to be where I belonged at lights-out, there'd be hell to pay in no uncertain terms..

The problems in converting an air compressor into an internal combustion engine are manifold. But other than the intake and exhaust, we also had to reinvent the camshaft and magneto, the clutch and transmission, and the license plate. I truly believed at the time that I knew how such things were done, but, when push comes to shove, the devil's in the details. Most evenings would find Miki and I scratching our collective head with greasy fingernails in trying to jury-rig this or that. But when two guys look at each other and say, "Your guess is as

good as mine", the ball starts rolling. Once we had the carburetor problem ironed out and were not horrified by the brakes, the rest was easy. By the time we learned how to make alcohol out of potatoes, the thing that had once been a bicycle, a pump, and several kitchen utensils was ready to roll.

An unforeseen difficulty with the four-hour day will be that it's never easy to remember which day is which. I think it was a Saturday afternoon, or maybe a Thursday, but whichever it was, Miki strapped on the padded colander, coasted down the hill outside the shop, and popped the clutch. In the following weeks, we would come up with a decent muffler, but the maiden voyage could not remain a secret for long. Within minutes, the entire population of Aurora stood blinking in the bright sunlight while Miki roared his way through the lanes and alleyways. Every man, woman, and child in town was jumping up and down, waving this or that, and shouting encouragement. The hysteria and cacophony continued for a full fifteen minutes until something came loose, and the bike sputtered to a halt within ten feet of a smiling Cassandra.

In the next few weeks, the old-fangled motorcycle became the talk of the town. When Miki and I weren't in the shop hammering out the remaining bugs, we were out among the general citizenry giving rides and detailed explanations. Certain times, though, were reserved for special activities. Every day, just as the second shift let out at the tyntillin plant, Miki took the machine over to the barracks where a certain someone was waiting. Cassandra even wound up being the one who reinvented overdrive. She was very good at that.

I knew it would happen sooner or later, but Avien chose sooner.

*Are y'been proud
Of yourself,
Gabe mechanistic?*

She'd caught me alone in the shop on that evening because Miki still wasn't back. I knew that I didn't have a leg to stand on because, at

some point in the grand project, I'd realized I was creating a monster. Not only would the perfect tranquility of Aurora be drowned out by tailpipe pandemonium, but there would now be an extremely limited resource to be shared by too many people. No one in Aurora would argue with the fact that the motorcycle belonged to me and Miki. The creator always retains first rights with the creation. But could we possibly keep the thing reserved for our own private use while everyone else stood around, green with envy? Would the community decide to raise the collective workload in order to provide motorcycles for everyone through the Store? Would reactionary forces decide to pass Aurora's first law, banning internal combustion?

All these reservations were compounded by the simple fact that my treasured naps were often cut short by the infernal buzzing and by the guilt that was steadily taking hold. Here I was -- an intruder into paradise -- and I'd brought with me a contagion that could very well topple the whole idealistic structure. Like a conquistador with smallpox, my mere presence was pathological.

But before I could stutter out my first words of apology to Avien, Miki came trudging through the garage door, pushing the motorcycle and looking for some place to hide. Whatever had happened between him and Cassandra had set his lower lip quivering, and he could barely get the words out as he let the bike fall.

*It'd rather been
Shit Gabe.
It'd rather been
Never seen
The light of day,
So best ye be
Taking
Your treasure,
Personal Gabe,
Now yours and yours
Alone.*

I found out later that Cassandra had finally learned about Miki's talent as a musician and composer. He'd been keeping it under his hat out of some sense of misplaced modesty. And their newfound relationship had been so dominated by the motorcycle that he didn't want to interfere with that playfulness. For whatever reasons, one thing had led to another, and an honest-to-goodness, knockdown, drag-out quarrel had ensued. She told him to grow up, and, in Aurora, this is hitting below the belt. But, also in Aurora, hitting below the belt is held in high esteem.

The upshot is that Miki decided to grow up. He was a child no longer, so he left behind his toys, his tree house, me, and other childish things. From that day forward, Miki threw himself into his music, and he and Cassandra became inseparable and very nearly indistinguishable. I really mean that. From that exact point on, nothing could tear Miki from Cassandra or vice versa.

The funny part is that I didn't mind losing Miki at all, and that wasn't altruistic or unselfish or anything else. We still had the potatoes, and there were a great many of those. And seeing Miki and Cassandra together made my life a lot more interesting. Seeing Miki and Cassandra together made the summer luminous beyond all measure. Boredom was out of the question from that point on.

EIGHTEEN

When a society fosters as much crime and destitution as ours, with ample resources to meet the actual necessities of everyone, there must be something radically wrong, not in the society, but in the foundation upon which society is reared.

T. Thomas Fortune

The road to the four-hour day is anything but straight and narrow. Detours, shortcuts, and dead-ends abound. Yet all roads lead past Adolf Hitler and Albert Einstein.

For years and years and years, humanity sailed along with a relatively low level of mindless violence and barbaric cruelty. One penny-ante army of a few thousand might massacre another, then rape and pillage to their hearts' content. One set of holy men might disembowel other holy men. One race might humiliate and enslave another. One man might sell automobiles and steel to everyone else. But, on the whole, humanity's inhumanity to humanity remained below the level of unblemished genocide. While our method of writing history dwells entirely upon warfare and the struggle for empire, most people have died of natural causes, and they should be proud of that.

Then, in the dead center of our vaunted Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, post-Enlightenment civilization, Hitler appeared. Our worst fears are now confirmed. If the land of Bach and Schiller can disgorge Nazi atrocities on such a monstrous scale, then none of us is ever truly safe. If fascism can happen once, then no one may be trusted. Our dearest friends and relations could be sadistic villains in disguise, waiting for the next blue moon to turn impossibly ugly.

Aurorans believe that Hitler won World War Two and most of Three and Four. They believe that he was the personification of holy war, of extermination in the name of moral renewal. The essence of Hitlerism is that, if you have an enemy, you kill him. Roosevelt and Stalin couldn't have agreed more, so that principle emerged from World War Two in better shape than ever. Everyone agreed that Hitler was the source of evil and that killing him solved the problem. Everyone congratulated himself except Jesus and Gandhi who believe to this day that, if you have an enemy, you do something very weird and illogical.

For as long as there is time, Hitler will always be new. He is not simply a variation on the old theme of murder in the name of moral re-armament. Nor will he ever be simply a nasty, mean person. The Hitler phenomenon is a conspiracy of infinite dimension that leaves no one free from blame, now and forever more.

To top it all off, one of the smartest people in the world had earlier stumbled over the equivalence of mass and energy. Thanks to the logical, gentle pacifist, Albert Einstein, there will never be a technical limit for the next incarnation of Hitler. The logistics of murdering tens of millions presented a real headache for certain Nazi authorities, but we won't have to worry about that in the future.

Albert Einstein, the committed pacifist, once said that, if he'd known his theories would produce nuclear weapons, he would have been a tailor, which is a clever sort of way to phrase an apology. That, however, cannot disguise the fact that all our scientific genius is of no use whatsoever in the face of true political evil. Hitler could brush aside all intellectual resistance with a casual nonchalance.

So, here we sit at the beginning of this or some other millennium, and we have seen to the very depths of human depravity. We know everything there is to know about ecstatic religious devotion to morality. Generally speaking, under perfectly ordinary circumstances, human beings will stop at nothing.

This makes talking about the four-hour day really, really difficult. A very few of you -- probably no more than one in ten thousand -- will read this authentic, eyewitness account of the four-hour

day and think that Aurora is a wonderful place. Thank god for people like you because, otherwise, there'd be no hope at all. But the problem is that you'll turn to the people around you and start talking up the four-hour day. You'll rephrase the idea into whichever language you find most comfortable, but no one will understand a word you say. No one will be particularly interested in undressing in front of other people. No one will jump on the idea of communal dining or surrendering his car or living so damned close to strangers. No one will believe in the free distribution of the things we make because they know that someone -- somewhere, somehow -- is cheating. Maybe you'll walk into the next PTA meeting and try to imagine who among the crowd would be open to public bathing or strolling hand in hand. Very few Americans will thank you for your fervent suggestion of human perfectibility.

And why should they? The genocides of the Twentieth Century actually extend far beyond Germany. From Armenia, to Rwanda, to Ukraine, to Cambodia, the story's the same. How can anyone think ahead in the midst of such astounding disintegration?

So, if you start talking about the four-hour day, people are naturally going to assume that you're saying that people are capable of making rational choices about the management of their own lives. Because of Adolf Hitler, this is a patently absurd suggestion. We now have proof-positive that our depravity extends far deeper than we care to imagine. And we also know that the calm rationality of an Einstein does nothing but provide our demons with more and better ammunition. And, if you're talking to an American about the four-hour day, your audience knows -- at one level or another -- that we're the ones who used the logical bomb on tens of thousands of innocent Japanese men, women, and children.

We will never argue, explain, or debate our way to the four-hour day, and, if you're tempted to engage your neighbor in such a discussion, pay attention to one thing only, and that's eye contact or the lack thereof. If you are thoughtfully patient and exceptionally lucky, there will be some kindred spirit who will not blink for love nor money. Between the two of you, there will exist a mutual receptivity and soft

acceptance, and it's hard to tell what's really going on in a situation like that. Obviously, there's the number problem because four eyes can't simultaneously engage one another. Choices must be made about which opposing eye to settle in on, and then you have figure out which one of yours they're interested in and make adjustments. And, if you're really paying attention, you'll see that you're not focusing on the surface of their cornea but on something far beyond that prism. It helps to be smiling or grieving, but it doesn't matter which.

If you don't have such a companion, then we're both in big trouble, but, with a little practice, you should be able to win the occasional fleeting glimpse. Once that's accomplished, you're then in a position to measure and compare the typical exchange in which eye contact never happens. If you really follow through on this, you should brace yourself because one look at the blindness of alcoholism is enough to send most people running for cover. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. In the United States, you have a hell of a lot of people who are glazed over from addictions to alcohol, gambling, caffeine, firearms, money, sports, lousy sex, cars, tobacco, shopping, and personal power. Throw in the other millions who suffer from the bleary-eyed fatigue of a ridiculously long workweek. Throw in the millions who suffer from the mind-numbing tedium of a ridiculously long workweek spent on nothing genuinely productive. Throw in the murderous confrontations on our highways. Then, add the crowning glory of a population so fixated on watching violent television, movies, and computerized pornography that it's developed a permanent myopia.

The real killer, though, is that the true student of eye contact will detect not only the blind translucence of addiction but a jittery, darting nervousness born of fear and frenzy. Without detailing the full catalog of anxieties, I will say only that Americans are so out of practice in things human that we are now deathly afraid of our own children. And with good reason.

We all know that, no matter how far or fast we run, there will forever loom the ghost of Adolf Hitler and the cries of "never again" which means that we arm to the teeth and thereby guarantee a repetition

of the tragedy of moral cleansing. Sooner or later, our multiple terrors will coalesce in a blind rage directed against a foreign threat. Lingering gazes become very nearly impossible.

So where is the hope? What conceivable reason is there to wonder about the four-hour day when it's so hard to find anyone able to see us clearly?

Aurorans believe that there is only eye contact. There are no galaxies, no planets, no time, no space, no nothing other than eye contact. Aurorans have thoroughly researched the concept of window and the simple optics of infinite focus. They conclude that we are all refractions of a common soul and that this ocean is one of extreme volatility. We are cast adrift upon a storm of such liquid fury that anything can happen at any time. Hitler and Gandhi possess equal potentials for realization. The universe can spin out of control in either direction.

The impossible part of Auroran philosophizing though is their conception of size. In making eye contact or in considering the colossal extent of the universe, there is an overwhelming temptation to be overwhelmed. The idea of free-fall into a bottomless, gargantuan void is almost inescapable and most of us start worrying about nonsense like death, humiliation, and complete disorientation.

But if Einstein had had any brains at all, he would have followed Aurora's lead. Their mathematicians do not waste time with mere numbers. They specialize in various forms of mundane and exotic infinities, and it turns out that you and I are roughly the same size as each other and the whole damned cosmos. All the non-numbers add up, so, really, in the end, there's nothing to worry about. Our fears tend to be misplaced.

The bottom line is that we see what we choose to see, and we can detect impending shifts in the amorphous, chaotic blob that makes us who we are. If senseless fear and apprehension begin to get the upper hand, each of us has the god-given god-knows-what to shift the balance. We can figure out which oil to pour on which troubled water. We know that any attempt at the violent annihilation of evil will

backfire, but we don't know this just because we say we're Christian. There's something else going on.

Or, to put the matter another way, we Americans tend to look around and see two hundred seventy million individual countrymen and two hundred seventy million different neurotic responses to modern life. Just look at how much time and money we waste in private wars against obesity. The idea of correcting that many deviations is ludicrous. Aurorans, on the other hand, look around and see one overriding fear which is one and the same with the single impulse for violence. The defusing of a single antagonism spreads like wildfire, and the key to this insight is the sight for sore eyes where two people meet and eventually stop giggling. And that's why they don't waste precious hours in making, buying, and obsessing about bathroom scales.

So, if you find yourself intrigued by the four-hour day and you receive blank looks from everyone you know -- if you suspect that there's more to the universe than first meets the eye -- do what I do. Find the oldest waitress in town and let her have her way with you.

Besides believing in the equality of the very large and very small, Aurorans also think that timing is everything. Nothing can be rushed, and, in all honesty, there are times when certain catastrophes must be accepted. But eventually we grow old and set aside our childish whims and immature attacks of panic. If you're like Thea and you're over a hundred and have seen everything under the sun, you're finally capable of listening without any inclination to interrupt.

So, what actually happened on many afternoons in Aurora was absolutely nothing. Thea and I could while away the hours in chatting about her life, the latest gossip, politics, or the ultimate meaning of life, without batting an eyelash. This sort of thing is particularly difficult to write about in English because people who are fluent in English tend to be too busy to read and too busy to grasp the concept of doing nothing. Not to mention the Hitler problem.

Remember that eye contact in Aurora is slightly different than the Protestant form because the maximum Auroran separation is something like eighteen inches. Thea preferred a much shorter working

distance and a lot of casual touching, so conversation with her is actually more like a proper tango where there's improper contact from breast to knee and everywhere in between. A Baptist would blush and suddenly remember some very important chore he'd left undone.

The other problem with doing nothing with someone that close is that you can't think of what you want to say. You can't if your life depended on it. You simply can't force a conversation under these circumstances, so there's no point in resisting silence. You have no choice but to readjust the focus, go a little deeper, and let things rise to the surface. Our fears are always misplaced.

"The motorcycle's a big mistake, isn't it? The motorcycle is a form of motion away from where I belong. It's one thing to build a time machine or a spaceship because those are contributions freely given as a part of a natural and common destiny. But the motorcycle's a toy and a diversion of normal time. I can either sit quietly with you, Avien, and Miki, or I can run around like a maniac. It's strictly up to me, isn't it?"

At some point, the gun owners of the United States will surrender their weapons. They won't do so because of new laws or a liberal-Jewish conspiracy to burn the Constitution and install a one-world dictatorship. Gun owners will gladly beat swords into plowshares the moment they realize that their fears are misplaced and their toys are both suicidal and genocidal. In all likelihood, American disarmament will occur under a Christian banner. Revolutionaries -- who are probably mostly women -- will engage heavily armed men, eyeball to eyeball. Smiling people will tell nervous people that they'll never find Jesus on the safe end of a gun. When the time is right -- when the accelerating frequency of the Thirty-six Saints sinks in -- the right people will realize a truth they've known all along. If fear can be misplaced, it can also be lost.

Every Auroran knows that she's all-powerful. She understands that she can't even smile at someone without setting off a chain of causality with no end in sight. A single frown can break a heart or start a war, and the acceptance of this responsibility is only the beginning.

I invited Avien over to the shop where I proceeded to find a

wrench, remove the spark plug, clean it thoroughly, and hand it to her.
I said

*It been better
Off dead.*

What happened next is probably inevitable where there's a lot of eye contact. For the first time in my life -- with no warning whatsoever -- I found myself overwhelmed by a craving for babies. I, who had never succeeded with marriage, never dreamed of fatherhood, never loved without careful, rational precaution, suddenly desired nothing other than a baby of my own to have and to hold. I wanted sons and daughters to forget about while they were running all over town getting into mischief. I started ogling the women at the Bath who were one hundred percent pregnant and bursting with aspiration. I stopped dreaming about Miki and chose instead to dream of an Avien who was bigger than a house but could still fly.

My biological clock started going a mile a minute, so there must be more to this sex inversion business than meets the eye.

So, in the end, Avien was delighted with the gift of the sparkplug. She laughed and said the whole episode reminded her of something her husband had done. Then I told her that I loved her in a brand new way, that I was a part of Aurora forever, and that I loved her husband and enjoyed his company. I also told her that I stood prepared to do the necessary things, whatever they may be, to help her become thoroughly expectant and once again maternal.

I expected her to laugh. I had every reason to believe that I would once again bathe in the luxuriant cascades of her sweet humor. More than fatherhood, I yearned for her laughter. But she did not laugh, and she did not smile. For the first time -- when not with her husband -- Avien stopped smiling. The black chasm which threatens and sustains all love loomed in the deepest recesses of her sad eyes.

O, Gabe Promethean,

*Y'been stealing
Time
In leaps and bounds.
Y'been presently
A matter of months,
And here y'been
Already
Halfway
Home.
Ambition been
Nearly
Impetuous
Darling Gabe.*

NINETEEN

It takes a lot of time to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing, really doing nothing.

Gertrude Stein

Believe it or not, I've tried to make this as easy for you as I can. I haven't once referred to Aurora as communist or even socialist. But the time has come to quit gelding the lily, and I'll now confess that the people and bees of Aurora are ardent, passionate communists. Their conception of self is so damned big, it even includes you and me.

I'll also remind you that Karl Marx is not one of the Thirty-Six Saints. He won't even receive an honorable mention because he and Darwin accepted violence at face value without considering the larger reality. Any attempt to install economic democracy at gunpoint results in the dismal catastrophe of Stalin. Aurora and Leningrad are at opposite ends of the spectrum, but, no matter how many times I say that, Americans will hear what Americans want to hear.

Even if you concede that non-violent socialism is a gentler form, you'll still distrust the ominous shadow of Big Brother bureaucracy. You'll think of welfare states and the endless red tape that stifles all personal initiative. You'll smugly point to the sad example of a nationalized British railway. You'll bemoan the fate of rich Canadians who have to come to the U.S. for expensive cosmetic surgery.

I understand, and I approve. I'll remind you that you're not ready for the four-hour day, and I have no intention of persuading you to do anything other than what comes naturally. Work hard, get rich, and die, just like you would normally. But please, please, do it just a

little bit faster so we can get on to the next part.

When Miki and I killed the motorcycle, all hell broke loose. We'd confronted the Hitler problem by accepting blame and taking the necessary steps towards self-perfection, but that's a thankless occupation. The seven- to ten-years-olds were up in arms and screaming bloody murder. They said that the bike was community property and we had no right to deny them access. An angry, blistering mob of them stormed the Inn and demanded satisfaction from the waitresses. Their petition cited forty-two legal precedents which confirmed my suspicion that lawyers and eight-year-old boys are absolutely indistinguishable.

At this point, the entire, cumbersome machinery of Auroran socialism swung into motion. Thea rose from her chair.

Basically, what happened is that no one could find a law book anywhere, so the parties of the first and second parts were locked into a padded room in the Library where we discussed the matter at the top of our lungs. I should explain that Aurorans never avoid anger, which I personally find infuriating. They can fly off the handle one minute and laugh it off the next. Emotional repression is considered dishonest and therefore horribly impolite, so they're forever yelling at each other over the slightest infractions. The truth could well be that they simply like kissing and making up, but, for whatever reasons, they're constantly running very hot and very cold.

The juvenile delinquents ranted and raved till they calmed down a little. Neither Miki nor I budged, so six of the opposition decided to build a motorcycle of their own. Without a lovelorn American, though, they didn't stand a chance, and they soon got bored and gave up.

The day after I killed the motorcycle, Avien stopped by the kitchen and dropped off three books without saying a word. I started reading, which is always a good idea when you're not sure about the nature of true socialism.

It turns out that Aurorans do not think of god as a bearded man sitting on a heavenly throne dispensing goodies. God isn't a man or superman of any kind, nor is she even the least bit effeminate. God is

not made in the image of any man or woman. God is always called "god" and never "he", "she", or "it".

Apparently, god is not particularly bright, but god is much smarter than god used to be. God is the genitalia of the universe and exists in a perpetual state of yearning. God is volcanic, magnetic, and a storm of impossible strength. God is so subtle and bashful that god can penetrate anything. God is a bull in a china shop. God cannot create without destroying, and god requires the eternal supervision of thoughtful humans. God needs us as much as we need god. Turn your back for one minute, and anything can happen. Don't turn you back, and anything else can happen. God's stupid irrationality occasionally makes sense.

Prayer is the fine art of paying close attention. Prayer is the ability to relax and put one's finger on the pulse of all creation. It's the detection of forward motion. It is the conformity of personal creativity with the universal whim. Prayer is nothing more than music and good timing. Prayer is a gift to god, so it's best not to whine, beg, or implore.

The only authentic remnant of Jesus' teaching is the Sermon on the Mount. The essential idea is the realization of god's kingdom on Earth through the exercise of non-violence. Personal salvation counts for less than nothing outside this context. The only person to understand Jesus for the two thousand years following his permanent death was Gandhi. Gandhi articulated the military reality of Christian ethics, and he was followed by the Thirty-six Saints who spell out all we need to know about the conquest of love. The only part they leave out is the bit about what any of us should do next.

In all fairness though, I should mention that there's more to this sainthood business than meets the eye. Americans see a two-thousand-year gap between Jesus and Gandhi, and we don't think that's unusual. Someone like Tolstoy or King might see a line, but we see a gap, and we take it for granted. Aurorans see Jesus and Gandhi as more or less simultaneous, but the "less" part means there has to be a harmonic interval of some sort. Only with the appearance of thirty-six more nodes or notes or intervals or what-have-you do you begin to get the picture.

Sainthood, therefore, confers no beatification upon the individual personage. Three of the Thirty-six were blithering idiots who sinned like it was going out of style, which it was. It just so happened that they were in the right time at the right place which means a compression of rhythm the further you go. Any of us at any time could be saints, but that doesn't mean what you think it does because you still look at Jesus and Gandhi as being dislocated in time and space. The chances of your becoming a saint are slim but increasingly urgent.

That's it. That's all there is to it, and, once I actually sat down and read the three books Avien gave me, I could accept it. Aurorans are light-years ahead of Lutherans, even if they both agree that Darwin is a disagreeable savage.

So how did I find out about Aurora's god? What clues were in the three small books? The first one was an ordinary marriage manual. The second was a primer in etiquette containing a detailed account of Lazarle's triumph in the Twenty-Second Peloponnesian War. She was the seventeenth saint whose simple good manners resulted in the unconditional surrender of three divisions of hostile Turks.

The third book was the autobiography of old Abdullah-MacGregor who, you will remember, was the famous loser of every political battle ever fought in Aurora. He was the old grouch who'd fought tooth and nail to halt construction of the weavers' new facility.

The next day, Avien reappeared and ushered me off to attend the funeral of the aforementioned Abdullah-MacGregor.

On the way, I'll point out that many people entertain a sad misconception about the future. They believe that humankind will eventually come to its senses and forget all about narrow ethnic and racial biases. Humans will intermingle in a color-blind magnanimity that will produce homogenous children. We'll all tend towards the middle ground of being medium brown, of medium height, with medium curly hair.

This might happen, and it might not, but, as far as Aurora is concerned, that particular town is filled with nothing but oddities. Abdullah-MacGregor's combination of Semitic nose and flaming red

hair was perfectly ordinary. Aurora's palette outdid the typical rainbow, and you will notice that I have given no indication of Avien's coloration or ethnicity. For all you know, she could be white, black, or something else altogether. This omission does not result from my liberal transcendence of such considerations. There is another -- far more logical -- reason that we'll come to further along.

Meanwhile, back at the funeral, it is the custom in Aurora for each and every citizen to write an autobiography. Everyone is expected to give an account of herself, and I personally believe that the United States would do well to implement a similar custom. Maybe we'd think twice about watching so much television if we knew that we'd have to record that fact for all posterity to see. Maybe we'd spend a little more time thinking about the importance of money if we knew we'd have to write down that we'd wasted the one life given us. Autobiographies tend to slow us down to the point where we can honestly assess our own natures and the sources of true fulfillment. We could definitely use a little of that.

Everyone who filed into the Hall for the last rites carried a copy of the deceased's writing, and the whole idea of the funeral is to make any last-minute additions or corrections before the work is consigned to the library. While the coffin sits open in the middle of the hall, hymns are sung, and the congregation is invited to speak candidly. In the case of Abdullah-MacGregor, the solemnity remained intact until his wife rose to speak.

Begging your pardon
Collectively ladies
And sometime gents,
I been scratching
My gray head
Concerning
Contentions
Expressed in chapters
Numbered three and

*Parts of four,
Wherein
The corpse been
Speaking
Of sexual feats
Performed routinely
In the course
Of normal
Domesticity.*

A murmur rippled through the assembly.

*Truth been told
Complete,
It never been,
Sirs and gentle
Madams.
He been ten times
Sweet, but
Negligent
More oft than not,
Between.
He been honestly
Deficient
In speaking tender
Words
As please and
Thank you.
He been even
Sometimes shy
And not
Putting out.*

The whisper of scandal spread in all directions. The titters and sympathetic undertones threatened to overwhelm the whole proceed-

ings, and Abdullah-MacGregor could stand it no longer. He sat bolt upright in the coffin, taking his wife to task, because there's no point in having a funeral where the deceased can't make amends. In the event of a terminal illness -- or in this case, at age eighty-five -- Aurorans go through the motions of death as a rehearsal for the real thing. What good is death without thorough preparation?

Technically speaking, there's no such thing as retirement in the future. There is no time in which someone is thought to be useless and unproductive, no matter how young, old, or dead they might be. Everyone contributes until the day they really die or even longer. But even with this in mind, there comes a time of life in which labor turns from the physical to the metaphysical. By the ripe old age of eighty-five, everyone has the right to some relief from the rigors of the four-hour day. Proper arrangements must be made for the hereafter even if no two Aurorans agree on what the hell that means.

Abdullah-MacGregor and his wife screamed at each other for a full half-hour until order and civility were restored, to everyone's great disappointment. In the end, the two antagonists went off together, arm in arm, to hammer out the final wording of both their autobiographies. Like most Aurorans, they eventually decided to employ a professional poet with long diplomatic experience in splitting hairs and making molehills out of mountains. Such is the nature of death, marriage, and poetry.

Now, in presenting this account of future life, I've gone out of my way to record the relevant facts in the fine tradition of modern anthropologists and sociologists. I've carefully observed the quaint customs of Aurora and what these people say about god, masturbation, life insurance, warfare, the price of tea in China, and so forth and so on. This impeccable empiricism, however, leaves a lot to be desired. It actually leaves about ninety-percent to be desired because the most important thing about Aurora is not to be found in data.

I could have taken precise measurements -- in parts per million - - and conclusively proved that socialist air is a lot cleaner than ours. But that would only serve to obscure the obvious point that Auroran air is

uncontaminated by fear. No one worries about pedophiles or alcohol. No one lives in fear of bankruptcy or her own anger. No one is afraid of petty, vindictive gods or petty, vindictive sex. No one wonders if some corporate power shortchanged her or used imperfect ingredients. No one in Aurora is about to be run over by an aggressive driver or shot by a trigger-happy Republican. No one worries about something distasteful spilling out of the ghetto. This fearlessness colors every particular fact of daily life, but it isn't contained by those facts, if you know what I mean.

Aurorans might put their pants on, one leg at a time just like you and me, but they aren't afraid of death, and that makes all the difference in the world. Because we, as Americans, define ourselves as consumers, death is absolute, final, and complete. Because we accept the logic of science and Darwin, death is obliteration, pure and simple. Death is cold oblivion, and, if that doesn't set your knees to quivering, you haven't been paying attention. Or you've latched on to the fairy tale of harps, halos, and a ridiculously forgetful god.

Aurorans have an opposite self-conception, so death is nothing to lose any sleep over. So, in deciding to become a full-fledged member of Auroran society, I looked death squarely in the face and laughed. I did this exactly as the marriage manual said I should. Then I memorized the speech on page fifty-three before cornering Avien after the funeral.

*Dear sir or madam,
As the case may be,
I been lately
Forlorn.
I been dismally
Terrified,
Mortally
Squeamish and
Petrified.
I been dreadfully*

*Nervous.
So been ye duly
Alarmed and fore-
Warned,
I been thinking
Of love and
You
Necessarily.
I been swearing,
Aforethought,
Whole-hearted,
Affection of
Permanent duration.
I been hoping to
Learn
Love,
And you
Preferentially.
Please.*

Avien giggled, so I had no idea what to think.

TWENTY

In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart.
Anne Frank

Even though the Twentieth Century was one of straightforward, unparalleled genocide -- and the Twenty-first promises more of the same -- humankind now winds its way toward racial harmony. This has nothing to do with the electronic village or the globalization of our economy because, the more you know about other capitalists, the more reason there is for murderous hatred. Familiarity really does breed contempt.

Yet, while international competition rages on, the Dr. Kings and Mr. Mandelas of the world continue to nudge us towards an atonement which will be more or less complete with the timely appearance of Saint Number Ten. At long last, white people and black people will call a halt to age-old antagonism, and it'll be not a moment too soon. Once we decide that competitive economics is more trouble than it's worth, everything will be just fine. Whole new possibilities will open up, and one of them will be named Calypso. She and I were minding our own business in the Bath just after dawn towards the end of summer when we struck up a casual conversation. In the United States, of course, this would mean something related to meteorology, movies, or sports, but Aurorans possess a true gift for gab. Normally, I'd swim right up to Calypso and ask her if I'm handsome or not because I've always wanted to know. Or she might put her hand on my shoulder and start telling me what she hoped to accomplish before dying. Small talk will be very popular someday.

This sort of thing is possible in Aurora despite the fact that

Calypso is black, female, and naked. This sort of thing is possible in Aurora precisely because Calypso is black, female, and naked, and because, if we were all the same, we'd have nothing to say to each other. We'd all want to die in the same way, and that would be tedious and boring. We'd have no choice other than weather and avoiding eye contact like the plague.

The big problem with small talk in Aurora is that it's all extraordinarily intimate, so there's always the possibility of missing a nuance here and there. If everything is flirtatious and suggestive, how do you recognize the real McCoy? How do you tell the difference between ordinary etiquette and shameless invitation? How can anyone avoid jumping to conclusions? Fortunately, Aurorans never, ever leave anything to chance. Leaving something to chance will soon be unthinkable, so Calypso made her intentions perfectly clear. Some people really do think I'm handsome, and that hardly ever happens to normal Americans.

In dealing with the future, though, it often helps to back up once in a while, and you'll remember that my first experience with Aurora was with the weavery and the Bath. Nothing is accidental, and the point is that most Americans would shudder at the thought of any nudity that's not been filmed and touched up. Either we think it's a primal fear or we're a little nervous about how much weight we've gained. And, of course, with men, it's the whole business of comparison with other males.

This first thing to say about all this is that public bathing is the single most perfect form of complete relaxation. Most of what makes us tense is the incredible burden of maintaining certain pretenses, and, once you simply decide that you are what you are, everything else follows easily. The act of undressing might involve a touch of complete embarrassment and Herculean determination, but, once done, you'll wonder what all the fuss was about.

So, there we were, Calypso and I, in the pool exchanging pleasantries and giggling like a pair of adolescents. Somehow we got on to the subject of cars in the United States, and I said something

exquisitely clever about autoeroticism. Then, I offered some more insightful analysis concerning my homeland's addiction to internal combustion, road rage, and other thinly veiled forms of anger. I told her all about the public display of prestige, which she thought was hilarious, and then she said that a car is nothing more or less than an article of clothing which made me say something about steel straightjackets. This became a big mistake because I then had to explain asylums and pharmaceuticals which Calypso did not find amusing at all. The mood turned decidedly asexual, and it wasn't until she dunked me that we got back on track.

The extreme difficulty of things like automobiles and anger is that they're invisible from the inside. You'd think that objects that massive would present the clear and present danger, but somehow Detroit makes us think that we're safe when we're the opposite. The unvarnished truth is that we have a choice between being wet with the Calypsos of the world or being in solitary confinement well above the speed limit.

None of this nudity, though, should obscure the obvious nature of intellectual effort. Put two people together and have one of them say something that's true. "Statistically speaking, the sun will rise tomorrow, and human beings can be mean and thoughtless." Nothing happens. There's no spark, no flirtation, and no alteration of course. But if a man tells a woman that he's prepared to park his car forever because his brain has penetrated the fundamental danger of toys, then we've got ourselves an intellect in full gear. We have a highly sexual zinger with all the political and emotional oomphh required for the task at hand. We're ready to buckle down and work.

The best part about being wet and highly intellectual with Calypso was that we lost track of time completely. The sad truth, though, is that potatoes can't be kept waiting forever. Four hours is four hours, but Aurorans can't simply say goodbye and leave it at that. In keeping with local tradition, I wiped the silly grin off my face.

"Calypso," I said, "In this tiny fragment of time, you have succeeded in making me feel hopelessly young, frisky, and renewed in

my determination. For this kind favor, I been permanently indebted, although you have no idea what that means.”

She, too, stopped smiling, and I knew what was coming next. I knew what she was going to say, and there wasn't a damned thing I could do about it. When an Auroran says “Amen”, she really means it. She is, at that particular moment, Lincoln at Gettysburg, accepting both life and death with a melancholy reverence and solemnity. She is, at that particular moment, eternal and prepared for true joy. And if she, like Calypso, whispers “Amen” in recognition of a genuinely profound connection, the goose bumps and embrace never end. Some things are not about time.

So much for racism. So much for idle chitchat. So much for uncontrolled sexual responses. So much for proper attire.

I flew over to Avien's in a cloud of exhilaration. I wanted to tell her all about my new discoveries in the field of human intimacy and artificial locomotion. I'd come to certain conclusions about automobiles and original sin, and I wanted her to be the first to know. I'd even figured out why she, and she alone, must be the first to know.

Normally, Aurorans knock on each others' doors before barging in because they're typically so unpredictable that you never know what they might be doing in private. Intrusion is never taken lightly, but Avien and I enjoyed a special, unspoken relationship. I can say with some confidence, that, by the end of summer, we were the best of friends. We knew each other like the backs of our hands, and friends like that will someday drop in on one another unannounced. They don't stand on formality, so it was perfectly acceptable for me to rush into Avien's house on Cloud Nine.

The unpredictable part, though, was that Avien was still in bed -- which was highly unusual -- and she was there with a godlike young man who might or might not have been African, and I'm not going to tell you which because it makes no difference whatsoever. The only thing that matters when jumping to conclusions is the first available exit. Gracefulness and race play no roles now or at anytime in the future.

So, now, at long last, we come to the heart of the book and the

four-hour day. In fact, this is the impossible part because a book is just a book and a story is just a story. Several thousand years ago, humankind learned how to write, and what this means, basically, is that we became self-conscious. We put ourselves into black and white and were then able to take a step back in cool deliberation. We became our own first person which means that Odysseus can't die before the end, and nothing disastrous can happen to me. If I can write about my own history, then chances are I'm not dead, which is a big relief except for the fact that hindsight tends to obliterate the clear and present pain. If I were to write a true and accurate account of my mortification in Avien's bedroom, I'd moan and whine for a few hundred pages, and you'd be bored to tears. You'd have to think, "What's the big deal? He obviously survived the ordeal, and why the hell should I feel sorry for someone who committed the trite sin of believing in a special relationship when no such thing ever existed? Americans do that every day of the week and twice on Sundays, for chrissake."

The other insurmountable difficulty is that, because I am a writer, I think I have a sense of humor. For all the wrong reasons, I find it really and truly funny that we now hang suspended in a precarious balance between the four-hour day and the near-death experience of capitalism. Like my Jewish brethren, I can't help turning heartless persecution into a running monologue of self-deprecating jokes. God forbid we should ever take ourselves too seriously, and I can play the schlemiel if that's the only choice. Americans can do anything if that's the only choice.

So, the personal agony of that particular day in Aurora remains inexpressible, which would not be the case in other societies. If Avien had betrayed me anywhere else, I could have invoked the whole creaking machinery of misogyny. Men and writers have always hated women because they're capable of anything when you least suspect it. So, normally, I'd have been able to storm away from Avien's place and seek out the nearest mob of celibate priests to denounce her lustful ways. I could have buried her under a heap of sacred texts specifying precisely the correct prescriptions, proscriptions, and private mutila-

tions. I could cite precedent after precedent or make her watch television until she herself believed she was a slut beyond redemption. I could have done any of those things, and I would have done so without a second thought. Or a first one.

If only I'd been in another place entirely...

But if blind rage is inexpressible and not visible to the naked eye, it still stinks. Miki watched in disbelief as I flayed the first few potatoes without saying a word. Without so much as a please or thank you, he took my knife, tossed my work into the compost bucket, and told me to go away. Laboring under misconceptions will someday be impossible. He tried to make a joke about diesel fumes, but I didn't get it.

Before being dismissed though, I turned back on him, glaring.

"Okay, Mr. Big Boss, I'm out of here, and I frankly don't care whether I come back or not, but tell me this, Mr. Wise-beyond-his-years: how the hell do you know what Cassandra's doing right this very minute? And don't tell me you haven't noticed her and her bosom buddy splashing around and laughing like maniacs and sharing everything in the barracks. And don't tell me that the foreman pays so much attention because she's a little slow on the uptake at the loom. And don't tell me you'd just laugh it off if she took up with somebody who's taller and smarter and not like some funny little Jew-boy who's so far from home he doesn't know the Diaspora from a hole in the ground, for Chris sake! And while you're at it, you can quit pretending I'm incoherent and wipe that bland, patient non-expression off your little peach-fuzz face!"

Miki told me to go away and come back when I'd grown up, and the single greatest problem with anger and cars is that the advice which really makes the most sense is the advice that's impossible to follow.

I regained my composure because that's all that most Americans have on the best of days. I calmly sought out Thea and asked if she could spare me a minute or two which she thought was a little odd since that's her job anyway. I told her the whole story and said that I felt bad

about yelling at Miki and for feeling so upset when Avien really had every right in the world to do exactly as she pleased. I told her ten jokes and that I was sorry for being so silly, but what did she think was really going on between Avien and this Adonis person? Aurorans tend to be outrageously Platonic, so maybe I'd blown this thing way out of proportion when there really wasn't anything to worry about. Maybe everything was perfectly innocent even if Americans have a really hard time ever believing that. I told Thea that I was a man and that I could accept whatever truth she told me which was a lie, and we both knew it.

Thea said that it was none of her business, and I was right on the verge of getting really mad at her. What's the point of having a government if it can't address the most vital concerns of a nation's health and well-being? If this was none of her business, then what the hell was?

But, of course, she was right. Being right was her job, and she'd spent decades learning her trade. Aurorans defend each other's privacy as if their lives depended on it, which they do, and neither Thea nor I had any right to meddle or snoop around where we didn't belong. She was right on the money in dismissing my curiosity as an intrusive, inappropriate attempt to control the raging hormonal tides of another human being. I was the one who'd overstepped. I was the one who'd assumed an unspoken fidelity. I was the one who'd dragged the torture chamber of misogyny past its expiration date. All I can say is thank god for self-consciousness, thank god for perspective and penmanship, and thank god for the end of all religion. If we can't laugh at ourselves, what's the point of living?

Thea -- bless her heart -- had brought me to my senses because few Americans past the age of thirty expect to be loved. We wake up each morning in the sure and certain knowledge that love is for movie stars, lust is for kids, and dignified frustration is the best we can hope for. We pass through an endless succession of traffic jams, performance reviews, and checkbook balancing without experiencing anything close to human intimacy. And why should anyone love us? What have we done to inspire respect or infatuation? Where, in modern life, is there

any of the courage and heroism necessary to perfect sex? We wind up accepting the necessary evils of money and cars which only compounds the self-degradation.

Ha, ha, ha.

So, I told Thea that she was right and that what Avien did or did not do was none of my business. She got really mad.

*Jiminy criminy,
Gabe Somnambulant,
Y'been forecast
A career of sticking
Your nose in
Unwarranted
For this been the honest
Vocation of one
Such as you,
So here y'been
On occasion presented
The foregone conclusion
Of love.
Y'been given
Outright the one
Opportunity, so
Would y'been dainty
And circumspect?
Would y'been outcast
And mercantile?
If she herself been
None of your business,
Then what the hell
Ever been?*

Once a government official, always a government official, and, if the average citizen ever expects redress of grievances or simple justice, he'd better steer clear of the proper authorities.

The other reason that Aurora doesn't use automobiles -- other than sanity -- is that walking does wonders to clear the head and the air. Aurorans frequently measure the depth of an idea by adding up the number of miles walked to come up with it. So mathematicians pace back and forth in chaotic offices, waitresses ply the corridors of power between kitchen and table, and angry Americans march out to the frontier to consort with bears.

By all rights, sex should be as easy as falling off a log. Bears have no problem whatsoever because they play by the rules and disputes between males are settled quickly through the simple expedient of brute force and intimidation. The biggest and strongest male procreates, and the other boys wait patiently for any sign of geriatric inclinations. Everyone knows the script. Everyone knows his place, and the sexual confusion is kept strictly within reasonable limits. Why should humans be any different? Why not put all the cards on the table and play the hand we're dealt with no cheating allowed?

And why should sexual activities be relegated to their own special category? What if I'd interrupted Avien and her consort in the heat of a game of poker? Would that cause any distress? Or think about Avien and her husband. Was I jealous of him? Did I resent his interference into my hopeless bewilderment? Or think about me and the winter rye and the part I glossed over about Kat being nineteen years older than I was and still am. Am I any different from Avien's paramour? Will I ever change? Will I ever grow up?

I had my doubts because I suddenly remembered Calypso and man's amazing ability to kill two birds with one stone. Not only could I take legitimate pleasure in the company of another woman; I could use that company to exact a well-deserved revenge on the first woman. Companies are often formed to teach women a lesson.

Fortunately for me, after chatting with Papa Bear and after storming back to Avien's and changing my mind and slouching back to the forest, I remembered that Karl Marx was Jewish. He didn't really want to be, but, if ever there was a man of the Law and the Sacred Text, he was the one. His righteous indignation was pretty much of the

flaming sword variety, and his god did not suffer fools gladly. The other thing that occurred to me was that Mr. Marx never indulged in social fantasy. Neither he nor his disciples ever took the time to paint a vivid picture of exactly what a socialist order would look like. He traded entirely in abstract conceptions of justice and power without giving anyone a clue concerning the feel, smell, and rhythm of radicalized life.

The reason that any of this is important is that Aurorans place great emphasis on finding one's place in the world. Proper timing doesn't amount to a hill of beans if you're incorrectly situated or off in Wonderland. Every citizen faces the crucial decision of precisely where to put down roots, and, even if you're born in Aurora, it might not be the right place for you to do what needs to be done. The Union contains one million variant communities because that's the minimum number required. You need that number to provide the right accommodations for all persuasions. So there will be lots of synagogues and kibbutzim because there's no other choice. We'd all be poorer without them, and that's simply not acceptable.

The beauty of future life, though, is that bloodlines and breeding count for nothing. After talking honestly with Mr. Bear and his wives, I decided that I'd be far better off in a community with a greater respect for law and order. I am not now -- nor will I ever be or was -- an anarchist. I will never, ever be prepared for the Auroran style of making it up as you go along. I expect expectations, and I prefer to have things in writing -- preferably in stone. The bears and I decided that I was Jewish, and everybody concerned was comfortable with that conclusion.

The nearest kibbutz would welcome me with open arms because my Scottish ancestry had lost all meaning. History is history. The past will someday be dead and buried, and like-minded personalities will gravitate. I even discovered that there will be a few communes of Jews who hate being Jewish, but I wasn't ready to go that far. Leaps of non-faith are not my cup of tea.

I'm not an anarchist, so I returned the guitar to the Store because it was the right thing to do. I picked up a road map and consulted the

township directory in the Library. I chose carefully, and I decided to walk because there's no point in rushing such things. Travel will someday be wonderful because everyone along the way will be delighted to have you and your four hours, if only temporarily. And they love itinerant stories, and they like nothing better than giving contradictory directions.

So I walked and worked and worked and walked for several days in a perfectly straight line with no deviation to the right or the left. With no distraction possible, I was headed to where I truly belonged, and I fairly flew. Unfortunately, the end of capitalism will also mean new road maps and a purely seat-of-the-pants navigation. I arrived at Avien's doorstep with plenty of time to spare.

The practical reality of having one million options is that there's no place like home. Americans buy and sell houses like they're going out of style -- which they are -- but the price we pay is astronomical. The idea of home might haunt a few remote towns in the United States, but the rest of us are so busy jumping from job to job and city to city, we can't remember what life will be like eventually. Aurorans like to die stylishly, and that means they prefer to be surrounded completely by people they've known and disliked since kindergarten. They like to make permanent contributions to the soil they've nurtured from the beginning, and they don't mind the inconvenience of neighbors who can't mind their own business.

"Avien," I said, "I know that there is something proper and just that I should say, but I have no idea what that might be. I do not know what I'm supposed to do now or in five minutes or the day after tomorrow. I've tried and tried to persuade myself that there is nothing special about me or my love for you. But I am wrong, nervous, angry, and extremely childish. I can only promise that I will continue to be all those things -- with no failure of nerve -- until I get it right and am permanently yours, one and the same."

She said "Amen."

TWENTY-ONE

In the things of this life, the laborer is the most like to God.

Huldrych Zwingli

So, once I decided to pull out all the stops in courting Avien, peeling potatoes, watching Miki and Cassandra, and doing absolutely nothing with Thea and Calypso, I had no time to call my own which is the way it should be. The loss of the motorcycle, though, had left something of a gap, and that's what Americans really hate about the four-hour day. How will we survive the tedium of a life without the recreation we're accustomed to?

Personally, I threw caution to the wind, and, when Avien wasn't looking, I found my way over to the machine shop in the Hangar. With any luck at all, I could find an idle lathe or mill, and there was never any problem with the availability of raw material. There never will be. I could light the work lamp over the machine tool, adjust the coolant pump, and proceed to transform lumps of nothingness into gleaming shafts and ribbons of curling surplus. I could grind and polish to five decimal points. I could hold tolerances finer than anything the modern age could imagine. I could coax a thing into being which had once been a mere suggestion of black and white. I could be a machinist of my own free will and schedule, but how was this any different than the motorcycle? Was I not engaged in precisely the same precision as with the old chain sprocket?

In all honesty, the only real difference was that, in the Hangar, whenever I got to a stopping point, I could gaze up some seven stories at the sweeping curves of the gigantic ion brake destined for use in a

galaxy several time zones removed. I could volunteer my time and skill to the most distant horizon imaginable. I could make a free contribution to space exploration and leave all primitive forms behind in the dust.

The awful truth about Auroran communism is that what looks like labor might be something else entirely. I decided to give up motorcycles in favor of spaceships, even though most Americans think that one vehicle is pretty much like any other. An Auroran space cruiser might be 43.7 billion times faster than my motorbike, but the principle's still the same. This sort of thinking, though, leads to colossal blunders because a motorcycle is nothing more than a toy. A motorcycle is no different from a car or a car phone or a television set or a personal computer or a fashion model. They're all toys, and the basic reason that the United States can't have the four-hour day is that we're wedded to our child's play.

A spaceship in the wrong hands could also be a toy, especially if it's a weapon and therefore the worst sort of toy. But the spacecraft I helped to build was destined to join the Union fleet of five hundred or so that had made profound discoveries concerning the most distant reaches of our intimate universe. Every day brought new reports of daring adventure and rude surprises concerning the nature of alien intelligence. Throw in the rude surprises concerning the nature of domestic intelligence, and you're a long way from the playground.

The final truth is that the only reliable method of understanding true labor is to focus entirely upon an insignificant cylinder of neo-steel turning and gleaming in your lathe, and then to look up at its intended destination. The tempodynamic curves of the ion brake reached for the stars there in the hangar, and, once we finished and delivered this component to the assembly station, anything was possible. The Union agenda for exploration left nothing and everything to the imagination.

So, basically, the reason that even the most skilled of American machinists fail to understand the four-hour day is that they piddle away their talents on projects that cannot stir the blood. With the exceptions of our own pathetic space program and of gearing up to defeat Hitler, the modern American worker has never experienced the exhilaration of

genuine labor. Because we build shopping malls rather than cathedrals and pyramids, the four-hour day seems abstract and impossible.

Of course, you'd think that, without adult toys and video games, every Auroran and her sister would be lining up to work on the latest model space galleon. Wouldn't this cause a problem? What if there weren't enough lathes to go around? Who would decide who gets to work, and, more importantly, who would decide who gets to take a ride on one of these new-fangled gizmos? The beauty of the universe is that there are a couple of trillion stars for every man, woman, and child on Earth, so there's no shortage of places to explore. If more people want to devote their free time to building sleek new vessels, more power to them. So be it. We'll build more recreational vehicles than you can shake a stick at, and we'll not include any of the time in the four-hour calculation.

And because I'm getting a little tired of doing all the work here, I'll let you decide how to ration space travel.

Meanwhile -- just in the nick of time -- I decided to grow up and older. Birthdays are a big deal in Aurora, much more so than back in the United States. This is because they respect and celebrate the individual far more than we ever did, and it's also because they have no other holidays. Christmas, Easter, and Columbus Day are just like any other day for them. Or, conversely, every day is just like Christmas, Easter, and Columbus Day. No extra shopping, and, generally speaking, life is a feast.

Birthdays, though, are special, and, when Miki found out that mine was right around the corner, he told everybody. They thought it was real funny to think that I was born in 1949 and had finally made it all the way to 482. By their calculations, they figured out that I was about to turn minus 1467. They told me I was no spring chicken.

Because Aurorans do most things backwards or inside out, the approach of my birthday meant that I had to think of something to give everybody. Typically, this might involve some new ornament for a public building or an innovative mathematical proof or simply bursting into tears. I was preparing myself for the third alternative when Miki

offered to help me write a song. I dared him to try, and we were actually making progress when we were interrupted.

Shortly after dawn on the morning of September 18th, Aurora awakened to the roar of Free World missiles circling overhead. Four distinct and deafening explosions brought us to full consciousness, and we ran for all we were worth to the flaming ruin that was once the tintyllin factory.

I am not writing about the deaths of Cassandra and the twenty-three others. I'm waiting as long as it takes for Miki to recover and fulfill that particular obligation.

I am not writing about the death of Cassandra or of anyone else because Americans can no longer think about such things. We have squandered the lives of so many young people in so many insane wars that death itself means absolutely nothing. We spend other people's lives as if there were no tomorrow. We fritter away so many possibilities on bleeding highways and alcohol and drugs and racism that there's nothing left to say.

The historical truth is that America could once mourn as well as anyone. A death in the family once demanded an honest display of black clothing, armbands, and natural anguish. Unfortunately, the influenza epidemic of 1918 caused so many casualties that grief became universalized and therefore indistinct. Mourning went out of fashion.

But the main reason we're able to accept so many mindless fatalities is because it's just a story. By the time the average American registers for the draft, he's seen thousands of murders on one flat screen or another. We have invented so many fictionalized Hollywood deaths that the genuine article never penetrates the social anesthesia. We have industrialized the creation of synthetic humans who aren't worth a single tear. We manufacture grief by the trainload, then deny its legitimate expression. For the time being, Cassandra is strictly off limits.

As long as it lives, Aurora will never stop weeping. It will never rest until untimely death is consecrated. Cassandra will exist forever as an intimate human being, as music, and as that which remains undone. They simply won't allow her to die.

The political truth of the matter is that tintyllin had been invented by an ordinary worker in a Free World lab. Capitalism comes up with all kinds of wonderful innovations, and the miracle cloth was but one of them. Aurora had stolen the recipe. Or rather, the inventor, who had signed over his rights to the company, finally got fed up. The traitor had defected and brought with him the secret formula.

The legal owner had sued in a court of international law, but the Union congress told the three judges they had no jurisdiction. Anarchists never recognize royalties of any kind.

The General Secretary of the Free World had appeared on omnivision to express his profound regret and to say that Union belligerence left him no other option. The following morning witnessed the simultaneous bombing of all fifteen Union tintyllin facilities. They were reduced to rubble along with one asylum, three schools, and a museum. Sincere apologies were offered.

Eventually, Avien regained enough composure to begin eating and getting through the day without breaking down too often. I waited until the right moment, and I told her that I thought I could adapt the particle beams used in logging. With retrograde lenses and a little time, we should be able to come up with an elegant, inexpensive weapon that could swat down missiles like so many flies. We might even be able to take the offensive.

Americans know all about non-violence because we worship Christ and we read about Martin Luther King. Dr. King said that, for a people struggling against oppression, he knew of nothing better than "the weapon of non-violence." To some extent, he learned this secret from Gandhi who was a master of non-violent tactics. He also took a page out of Jesus' book.

So the civil rights activists practiced and practiced. When they were ready, they sat down in the wrong seats at lunch counters, and white people thrashed them verbally and physically. The insurgents sang songs and prayed and never once struck back against the mob. This worked wonders up to a certain point.

Dr. King and his colleagues understood the urgent necessity of

educating their children properly, and this could only be achieved through the racial integration of public schools. A handful of high-schoolers in Little Rock volunteered to take the first step, and the ugliest photographs ever taken are of these kids being abused by ordinary, run-of-the-mill white people. No one who has seen the film footage will ever be the same, and the brilliant bravery of black children is what makes the four-hour day possible.

No one who has seen the photographs of Little Rock will argue with the necessity of federal intervention. The Arkansas rabble had whipped itself into a rabid frenzy, driven on by duly elected officials, and the venerable old Southern tradition of lynching beckoned from every light post. Something had to be done because there was no alternative. American troops descended upon the city to escort each black child to class and to enforce the laws on the books.

The soldiers did not shoot anyone, so you'd have to say that they were non-violent, and eventually blacks and whites learned to tolerate each other to some degree.

A very long time later, I would learn that Aurorans shed a tear when they think of Little Rock, and they forgive Dr. King for missing a golden opportunity. Non-violence is not a weapon in Aurora. It is not a tactic to be employed when convenient and discarded when dangerous. The presence of federal troops in Little Rock served to coerce and humiliate the opposition, and that is violence, pure and simple. That's what violence is all about.

By the same token, I'd be guilty of extreme cruelty if I were to sit here in the comfort of this nice, warm bus station and condemn the black citizens of Little Rock for any mistake whatsoever. The collision of violence and its opposite is a treacherous business, and hindsight is of no use whatsoever.

So, in the day-to-day practical reality of Aurora and Little Rock, wouldn't it make sense to rebuild the tyntillin factory and send the proper diplomatic envoys to the Free World? We would tell them, right to their faces, that, if they sent another expedition against us, we would respond in kind, with all due restraint. We would attack no civilian or

intrude on any enemy territory. Our sole purpose would be defensive and we possessed the necessary technology to preserve our natural independence. Is this not the most logical course of action imaginable? The only alternative would be to sit back and do nothing, and that would be Neville Chamberlain and Munich all over again.

I found Avien sitting with her three best friends, and I explained all the details of converting a beam saw into a medium-range, prudent, precautionary agent of death.

She didn't cry, and she didn't fly into a rage. She stood up and hugged me. She embraced me from head to toe, and we rocked back and forth -- with her purring almost inaudibly -- for a great many minutes. Auroran women are difficult to decipher, but she made herself understood in no uncertain terms.

*Where been
Retaliation Gabe?
Where been
Instruction
As to right and proper
Methods,
Angel?
Where been
Swords sharp
Enough?*

When Avien makes up her mind to do something, she is -- for the most part -- serene and smiling. But she's also capable of lowering her eyelids ever so slightly and tightening certain muscles of the jaw.

*They been scared,
Gabe.
They been peeing
Their pants,
For hadn't it been
Several years now*

*They been losing
Territory?
Hadn't it been
Foretold
As dust to dust
They been sinking?
They been wary
And vigilant,
Putting down fierce
Rebellion and still
On the brink
Trembling.
The very end been
Approximately
Near.*

Jesus, Gandhi, and the Thirty-six Saints all say the same thing. If two armies collide, the one more prepared to die will triumph. The soldier who's more comfortable with the idea of her own death will always conquer. Superior numbers or murderous weapons count for nothing. Neither the Persians at Thermopylae nor the Americans at My Lai could secure a permanent victory. Even bourgeois strategists have some dim perception of this military reality.

Somehow, Gandhi managed to carry this logic all the way through. What would happen if an army abandoned standard armament altogether? Could the spinning wheel ever replace the cannon completely?

The sad truth is that Mr. Gandhi fell short. He thought that the spinning wheel would automatically generate a self-reliance and thoughtfulness that could immunize India from British militarism. He believed that the campaign could so transfigure India that it would rise above fratricidal hatreds. He conceived his own sacrifice as a method of welding India into a hardened unity impervious to violence. The bloodbath of India's partition and its subsequent development of nuclear weapons proved him wrong.

And because Gandhi failed -- and knew that he'd failed -- the door was then open for certain compromises with U.S. marshals in Little Rock later on. The world watched Gandhi die and then went back to business as usual.

Then the Thirty-six Saints demonstrated certain innovations of timing. They proved conclusively that Gandhi and Jesus had actually won -- in overtime. They re-wrote the book on tactics, strategy, and the all-important endgame. What happens when you have the enemy on the ropes? What if he sees that you are capable of shedding infinite blood without surrendering an inch of moral ground? What happens when his days are numbered, and he knows it?

Avien would settle for nothing less than a full-scale invasion. She demanded a Union-wide call for volunteers who would penetrate Free World defenses -- unarmed -- and undermine everything the enemy stood for. She and her comrades would organize internal resistance, agitate, and teach people how to work properly. They would seek out minor uprisings and turn them into full-scale eruptions. They would tell the truth about the four-hour day. They would bore from within and topple the last remnant of commercialism -- without firing a shot.

The council of waitresses told her to forget it. They had taken the matter under consideration and had concluded that neither Aurora nor god was ready. The tide was against her, and she would have to wait for a more propitious time.

The Union had burst onto the scene four hundred and eighty-two years before this last bombing. The balance of power had shifted back and forth between competitive and cooperative, but the overriding trend remained obvious. The Free World continued to bleed and to lose territory and credibility. Capitalism hunkered down, and the danger of this situation cannot be exaggerated. Weapons of universal destruction remained in the hands of desperate men who owned so much pornography they'd forgotten what death is all about. The unthinkable seemed perfectly logical, and no waitress worthy of the title would take the risk.

The other consideration was that Aurora itself was more than content with the status quo, and this point is of critical importance. All

revolutions are forged in the fiery crucible of spontaneous self-sacrifice, but this can't last forever or we wouldn't get anything done. The inferno expends its fuel, and things settle down. A mere hundred and twenty-some years after our revolution, we were busy murdering Filipinos who possessed irreverent aspirations of their own. Our revolution had dwindled down into its opposite because that's what always happens, time and again.

Aurora and the Union remained vibrant and thoroughly committed to the eventual victory of four-hour philosophy, but they'd become somewhat practical. To Avien's complete horror, Aurora often betrayed signs of being politically sensible. So what if they had to export something to pay for the rights to tintyllin? Wasn't that a small price to pay for peace? Or what would be so bad about going back to cotton and wool? A lot of sentimental people actually romanticized that option.

The will for war simply did not exist. Waitresses all over the Union could sense complacency, and every empire in history had demonstrated that a poorly timed war is outright suicide. Ask the czar.

The upshot was that the Union quickly negotiated a ransom it would pay for tintyllin. A legally binding contract was signed guaranteeing strict observance of the compromise on both sides. Everyone went away satisfied except for Avien and her three buddies.

They stopped eating. They took up residence on rugs and blankets on the terrace outside the Great Hall, and they simply stopped eating.

Most people think that Gandhi used his fasts to bludgeon the British. The colonial powers understood that they'd have the devil to pay in the event of Gandhi's demise, so they took great pains to avoid that calamity. Even a completely brainless Churchill knew better than to mess with a half-naked guru.

This version of history just happens to be a fully naked lie, but the honest truth is slippery. Suffice it to say that a hush fell over the city.

While still reeling from the fatalities of Cassandra and the others, Aurora now confronted four women discharging the most sacred of

religious obligations. Avien and her accomplices prayed with a silence that contained their full, screaming demand for perfect understanding. Their fast became a mortification, a humiliation, and a promise. No one who passed by could refrain from thinking twice about the nature of human existence and its inherent responsibilities. The ghosts of the dead, the not-quite-dead, and the unborn haunted the women's songs.

It's not that Avien shamed any of us into doing something. It's not that her suffering elicited the compassion demanded for war. It's not that she brought god any closer to Auroran alleyways. It's not that she elevated herself above us mere mortals. None of that is true, but, by the fourth week, Aurora had been through a wringer of some kind. No one could bear it any longer, and no one wanted it to end. As painful as the meditation might be, no one shied away from it.

Finally, old Thea hobbled over to the terrace, and sat with the dissidents. They chatted and hugged and wept and gossiped and did all the things that women do, and this continued for a week with Thea also fasting. She deliberated, and, on the evening of the thirty-fourth day, she said it was no use. Aurora remained immobile. Its heart could not be broken by the women's suffering, and that was that.

This was not an edict. This was not an instruction issued from on high. The duty of every waitress, every woman, and every citizen is to penetrate the complexity of social reality and make some assessment. America is not ready for the four-hour day, and Aurora did not have the heart for protracted warfare. Any idiot could see that, and Thea was nobody's fool. Her pronouncement was a somber reflection on a sad state of affairs. The lines on her face grew deeper.

Avien's three friends -- being very nearly delirious -- gave up and went home. Avien smiled and said she owed Cassandra the simple favor of continuing all the way to the end.

Aurorans never talk about changing someone's mind. They don't waste precious time debating the merits of this or that issue because life is too short. They do, however, speak of changing someone's heart, and the pre-requisite for an intervention of this kind is simple relentlessness. Nothing is withheld. Any hint of wavering or

compromise is the kiss of death. Suppose Jesus had marched on Jerusalem, sniffed the political winds, and wisely concluded that he didn't have a snowball's chance in hell. Suppose Gandhi had accurately measured the temper of the times. What if the ninth saint had listened to what the women of Mongolia were saying about themselves? Where would we be tomorrow?

So, Avien refused to let Aurora off the hook. She would throw down the gauntlet of her own mortality as the only available method of putting the Free World out of its misery. She would follow the necessary logic to its bittersweet conclusion.

By this time, of course, Avien was no more than a shadow of her former self, but the frailty of body served only to emphasize her resolve. Unless some extremely smart person came along with a better idea, her fate was sealed.

So, what exactly was the nature of relations between the Union and the Free World? The obvious question is this: since the four-hour, cooperative economy is so clearly superior to capitalism, why didn't the Free World collapse instantaneously? Why didn't people all over the world compare the two choices and make a rational decision? Why would anyone continue to work eight hours when they could easily do otherwise?

I, personally, entertain no illusions whatsoever. All of you continue to believe that this narrative is a fairy tale, and very, very few of you think that it's a nice fairy tale. A voice deep within you warns against seduction and reminds you of the hard reality of human nature. If I tell you that Avien is sweet and kind and smells like earth and apples, you will, that same day, dream about the car salesman who humiliated you. If I talk about the sacred warmth of a public bath, you will suddenly remember the smelly old lech who leered at you while you were tying your shoelaces. For many of you, if I suggest melting down your revolvers and sedans, you will panic and break into a cold sweat. That psychological suicide will continue for many, many years. The Free World will forever articulate our worst fears and insecurities. People living in the stench and smog of Free World cities will peek over

the fence at Aurora, and they won't be able to focus. Some will denounce the Bath, the dancing, and the intimacies as tools of the devil. Others will be horrified by the undemocratic nature of social wisdom. The majority simply cannot see themselves deprived of cars, drugs, obedient women, prestige, and all the other comforts of home.

In the beginning, when Avien and her friends first began the fast, I understood that my presence was condoned but pretty much unnecessary. I slept in the barracks just like I always did, and I tried to keep up with my social responsibilities. Miki and I continued to peel potatoes, but we had a hard time thinking of anything worthwhile to say. When Avien then proceeded to go it alone, I couldn't bear to be away from her for a minute. I started thinking about what Avien's husband would have done in my position. If he could return from the dead and witness the senseless sacrifice of his dearly beloved, what would he do? Wouldn't the walls of Aurora tremble with his wrath? Wouldn't this decorated veteran of glorious war rally the wayward and weak? Wouldn't he lift them bodily onto his magnificent shoulders and carry the day?

Or maybe he'd take his rightful place beside his lawful wife. Maybe he would accept the natural consequences of love and join her fast. Maybe he, too, would decide that death was better than lazy acceptance. Why couldn't I do that? What was I thinking? Isn't an eternity with heroes better than a single day with cowards?

The specific nature of the conflict between Union and Free World is perfectly straightforward. Imagine a diamond mine in Africa that remains under capitalist control. Imagine yourself an ordinary worker there. Who controls your access to information? Who tells you about Aurora and the Union? How can you make an intelligent decision? And after a lifetime of subservience and alcohol -- after years of straddling the fence between old tribal patterns and gaudy modernity -- what determines your preferences? Remember that no man who's really a man wants to be bossed around by women.

It could well be that Nineteenth Century patterns of diamond mining continue for another two millennia. Men could continue to leave

their families behind in villages while they go off to lives spent underground. There might always be prostitutes, whiskey, and every other temptation under the sun. Wives and mothers might wait patiently for another two thousand years simply because that's what they've always done.

And I might let Avien go without lifting a finger.

The practical reality is that leaks develop. The women back in the villages and suburbs eventually learn the truth about what it might mean to secede and join the Union. First of all, the mine would probably close down entirely since the demand for gems in the new order is practically non-existent, and perfectly good synthetics handle all the industrial tedium. This idea throws everyone into a tizzy at first because the hellish mine is their only source of income, for Chris sake. Then, they learn that the Union is always desperate for new sources of labor. No one in Aurora is happy with the ungodly length of the four-hour day, and they want to see it shortened. So maybe the miners will become tyntillin weavers and relieve Aurora of some of the responsibility. Or maybe the Africans themselves will decide to revive ancient crafts or launch a new spacecraft facility. It's up to them, and anything they do will help lighten the load for those already in the Union.

Do you really have any idea of how much difference it will make when the world finally ceases its systematic looting of Africa?

But the actual commitment to join the Union represents such a radical departure from African tradition, that the decision cannot be merely rational. A profound re-conception of self will be required. Africa will hesitate, exactly as I did when wondering if I should join Avien in her fast. For whatever reasons, I simply could not force myself past unspoken assumptions. I looked around and saw that I was in the majority, and that was no help at all. That actually hurt like hell. A man who finds himself in the majority is not where he belongs.

Then, too, there's this to think about. Ask anyone you know, and they'll tell you that the four-hour day is impossible because people are selfish. They'll never give up their cars and lawns because they're just too damned greedy. But, if truth be told, I happen to be the most

selfish man on this or any other Earth, and I would not trade one hour with Avien for all the Cadillacs in the world. I would not exchange Miki and the goddamned potatoes for any amount of money, and the reason is that I'm a self-centered male who cares only for his own happiness and smug self-satisfaction. The four-hour day is selfishness incarnate.

So, what if the opposite is true? What if modern Americans and future Africans aren't selfish at all? Isn't it possible to explain everything we do as a consequence of some dark, primordial urge for self-annihilation? Why else would we choose the solitary confinement of suburbs? Why else would we spank children and drop atomic bombs on ourselves? Of course, if we construct an economy dependent on the humiliation of both buyer and seller, then we shouldn't be too surprised to see a population suffering the after-effects. There's only so much degradation and embarrassment a person can stand before going over the edge like a suicidal lemming.

In converting anyone to the four-hour day, we don't waste time persuading her that she'd be better off. Our sole responsibility is to convince her that she deserves a reprieve. We show her a world of possibilities and then seduce her into believing she's a worthy human being. It's as simple as that.

On one particularly crisp autumn morning, I sat talking quietly with Avien about the possibility of unionizing African prostitutes because I couldn't think of anything else to say. Then, I told Avien I'd be right back, and I ran over to have a word with Thea. I wanted to see the reassuring smile of ancient wisdom and rejoice in her unflinching optimism. Thea, though, had taken a turn for the worse and could no longer work. She had come closer than ever to the bitter end, and she wept when she told me that her hands were tied and that no Auroran could possibly intervene.

The diamond mine will eventually see the formation of a secret organization that understands what the four-hour day is all about. A minority of people will whisper and conspire. Non-violent strikes will erupt of their own accord. Mothers will give birth to the necessary number of martyrs, and it never ceases to amaze me that that number is

always very small. If you don't count Jesus, Gandhi, and King, the actual number of non-violent casualties in our history is infinitesimal. Even if you do count Jesus, Gandhi, and King, it's still a trifle. Non-violence is superbly economical in that respect.

The owners will respond with every sadistic trick in the book, but they will never, ever come up with anything new. We've seen the same tragedies played out time and time again, and their efforts are permanently pathetic. Personal acquisition cannot stand the test of time, and the diamond miners will join the Union and cease to live underground. By chipping away in this manner, the Union will force selfish people into a corner, and the real danger will begin.

I might actually be forced to stand up and do something.

But the agonizing truth of the matter is that nothing can be forced. And neither is it the case that I, as the highly intellectual white male that I am, can waltz into Africa and teach the natives how to live properly. Each of us confronts uniquely personal warfare against private demons, and there is very little that you can do for me or me for you. I can guard your flank and love you like the dickens for your courage, but that's about it.

On one cold evening very near the end, Avien asked for a drink of water. She'd long since come to the conclusion that sitting up was out of the question, so I held her head and the glass, and I have no idea whether she was shivering or I was trembling. A trickle of water dribbled from her ashen lips, and there was nothing left to do. Time stood still because there was just no reason to go anywhere else. With no open space available, what else could it do? Why bother?

I started crying like a baby, and I said

Are y'been

Dead, Ma'am?

Are y'been

Helpless?

Or are y'been

Given

*Two legs fine
And dandy
Requiring no armies
Or nothing?*

The beauty of future government is that it's powerless. No policeman nor magistrate nor any force on earth could prevent Avien and I from starting a war of our own. All we had to do was pack up a few belongings, infiltrate an antagonist's factory, and go to work. If she couldn't stir up enough benign trouble, no one could. I thought she possessed more power than Dwight Eisenhower ever had, and I told her so. Why waste time in self-indulgent martyrdom when Africa was right around the corner? Why go to all the effort to kill ourselves when there were any number of rich people happy to do the chore for us?

The thing that finally got her was when I said that she could stay there if she wanted to, but I, personally, was headed off to start trouble elsewhere, and she could come along if she wanted. She knew it was a bluff, but that didn't seem to matter. She smiled anyway.

The very first problem, however, was that I couldn't claim credit for the idea. The words had left my lips before I could stop them, and that gave me some cause for concern. I simply wasn't smart enough to dream up a solution like this, so the invention had to come from someplace else, and I didn't like that idea one little bit.

The next problem was that my brilliant plan left me no choice but to follow through. Africa was the only place for Avien to be at that particular moment, so even a prospective husband has no choice whatsoever. That's the main difficulty with socialism. Life without her was less than meaningless.

And the third problem was that we'd certainly be shot on sight. My green tint and her glaring intelligence would be dead giveaways, and we could never get far enough underground to escape detection. The chances of success were absolutely zero.

Nevertheless, I gathered up what remained of Avien's body, and I took her home and nursed her back to health. After two weeks of

recuperation, she was back to her old frisky self, mapping out the details of our impending deaths.

One notably brilliant aspect of capitalism is that -- however prosperous it might be -- it never dispenses with the lumpen-proletariat. It always maintains an army of uneducated riffraff who stand ready to do whatever dirty work is required. So, if a factory owner needs to have union organizers roughed up, or if Hitler could use a Krystall Nacht, there's always someone ready to step in. Goons are a dime a dozen, and the prospect of being lynched by this mob could cause many a revolutionary to think twice. Avien and I had every right to be concerned about what the dregs of society would think about our waltzing into their territory. We should have been scared to death.

And we were, because we both knew about the middle class.

In some variations of capitalism, class rank remains pretty much assigned at birth, and there's not a whole lot anybody can do about it. A British factory worker tends to have kids who will also be factory workers, and this rigidity causes a certain amount of relaxation. Without much in the way of social climbing, why worry about your position in the pecking order?

But other countries are like the United States, and they provide no security or definition whatsoever. You can be up one minute and down the next. Everyone is painfully conscious of securing a step up the ladder for himself and his children. Everyone knows that one lousy mistake can cost him dearly. A man might be the first one of his family to attend college, but the achievement might not last through middle age. He might get laid off and have to sell shoes for a living. There's a fifty-percent chance his wife might leave him, and it might be for someone richer. His daughter might be plain, and his sons might be gay and theatrical. The ice is thin, and the water cold.

The other complicating factor is that the Free World of the future will use the standard top one percent of the population to own almost everything. The aristocracy will attempt to maintain order but will screw up in the usual ways. The humiliation of having to put up with a numb-skulled hierarchy will irritate the hell out of lesser humans.

Add to this the obvious fact that the guy in the middle tends to be a paper-pusher who possesses no practical skills. He knows marketing, amortization, and the nuances of real estate. He can finalize a contract, propitiate a computer, and play golf, but the path is treacherous. A middle-class man might work his whole life through and have nothing concrete to show for it. The rewards are so ephemeral, it's not funny. A life in a bureaucracy is no life at all, but it's all he has. Such are the dangers of mediocrity.

And if you think the modern middle class is hopelessly nervous and insecure, you should see the future. With the Free World limping along on its last legs, the poor petty bourgeoisie is battered by one speculative bubble and collapse after another. Fortunes come and go in the wink of an eye. Whole empires of corporate reorganization explode on the scene only to disappear in the next combustion. Careers are lucrative on Monday and obsolete by Wednesday. The turmoil of an economy on the brink means a middle class of extremely high-strung, jittery people. If they could think about the four-hour day at all, they saw only their own annihilation. Like bourgeois Parisians of 1870 or Berliners of 1938, they were capable of drastic, unmitigated violence. Or worse.

They could be mercilessly indifferent.

Avien and I might walk into the enemy camp, threaten to set them free, and the middle class wouldn't care. They might not even look up from their omnivision sets. They might not roll down their car windows long enough to figure out what's going on outside. They might not be able to slow down in their perpetual race from dining room table to exercise machine and back again. The best we could hope for from them would be yet another lecture on human nature and how the four-hour day might look good on paper, but blah, blah, blah.

Avien and I agreed that we'd rather be drawn and quartered by high school dropouts than to endure the pompous placidity of the better classes.

At any rate, after several weeks, we were making our final preparations. On one morning in particular, I sat on her parlor floor,

minding my own business and studying Free World dialects. Basically, all I had to do was reduce my vocabulary by eighty percent and leave out multi-syllabic adjectives. Avien started to tell me how much she appreciated my presence, and I told her to leave me alone because I was busy. With that, she was on me like a cat, laughing and tugging on my ear with her teeth. Without saying "please", I reached out for her with selfish intent, and that's a mistake. I forgot myself for the briefest of moments, and, while there's no such thing as punishment in Aurora, there will always be natural consequences.

When I awoke, I was back in my basement. The timer had counted off seven minutes.

TWENTY-TWO

But what we strive to gratify, though we may call it a distant hope, is an immediate desire: the future estate for which men trudge up city alleyways exists already in their imagination and love.

George Eliot

When human beings first enter this world, we're terribly shortsighted. Our horizons begin and end with our immediate cravings for food and attention. If we could speak, we'd yell, "Me! Now!" because we have no true conception of time or the existence of other people.

In the normal course of development, we learn consideration for others, and we discover that we can postpone gratification. We're finally able to say, calmly, "Us. Sooner or later. Please." Some people mature faster than others, and some never leave their diapers behind.

When I entered this world for the second time, it wasn't really an expulsion from someplace else. None of us arrives here by that route. Neither Avien nor god had decided to expel me because of my transgression. The sin of sexual greed does not invoke any higher power whatsoever. It's simply that morality seeks its own level. Anyone who reverts to the infantile state of me-now automatically gravitates towards his own kind. If instant gratification is my cup of tea, then the United States is where I belong. All punishment is self-inflicted. Even god shoots godself in the foot more often than you'd think.

When I first found myself exiled to my basement, I understood perfectly well what had happened. I'd been in Aurora long enough to know that, when I see a three-month-old crying her heart out, I don't spank her. I simply lavish her with unconditional love as the surest recipe for speedy maturation. And if I stumble across a forty-five-year-

old roasting in the hellfires of lust, I simply let him go back to where he belongs and think about it for a while. Sin is its own reward. I am responsible for everything that happens to me. A very wise waitress once told me so, and that wasn't even in Aurora.

Because there's no such thing as hell, my exile could not be permanent. And because the universe is seamlessly flexible and forgiving, I could always make up for past infractions. If Aurora had taught me nothing else, I'd learned that every problem contains within it at least sixty-four solutions. There was no reason to panic. As long as I remained calm, there was no earthly reason to panic. Panicking is the worst thing you can do in the United States.

I did not panic. I went upstairs, showered, and dressed. I walked down to the corner for coffee and a newspaper, and, sure enough, almost no time had elapsed since my departure. No one had missed me. Of course, I could have been gone for five hundred years, and no one would have missed me, but that's neither here nor there. That's normal and no cause for panic. Never, ever think about the consequences of your own sudden disappearance.

With great calm and deliberation, I returned home, smashed the timer to smithereens, and climbed back into the time machine. I turned the key, and nothing happened. I took a deep breath and tried again. Still nothing.

Any American worthy of the name has tinkered with something electrical or mechanical, and he knows all about Murphy's Law. If something can go wrong, it will. Veteran mechanics regale each other with horror stories about some unnoticed glitch that had ruined a month of labor, and they laugh like crazy. This is what humor is all about because there is no pain like the pain of frustration. There is no agony like the agony of personal failure stemming from an inability to pay attention. If you've built a machine, the machine is you, and it could collapse at any minute. Murphy's Law is gallows humor. It's whistling past the graveyard, and I was in no mood. I apologized for every joke I'd ever told.

The time machine was my only accomplishment, and, with

eighty-three components, there were three million possibilities for bad connections, corrosion, short circuits, invisible misalignments, and bad luck. It might take some time to sort things out, and it's always darkest before the dawn. I armed myself with every cliché in the language, and I considered the two alternatives. Either I would succeed or I wouldn't. Try, try, and try again, and never, ever panic.

The only way to remain tranquil in the United States is to medicate and accept the possibility that there is no escape. You might not be eligible for your form of heaven, and I might not live long enough to enjoy a reprieve. In these circumstances, one must assess the options available and make the best use of limited time.

After a month of jiggling, refitting, kicking, and screaming, my money ran out. I went back to my former employer, and the beauty of being a machinist in the United States is that we're vastly outnumbered by college graduates. If a company is old-fashioned and wants to make something physical, it has to scrape the bottom of the barrel to find someone like me. My month-long absence was nothing to lose any sleep over, so they took me back without any explanation whatsoever. A blue-collar tradesman can go anywhere he damned well pleases except forward or up.

I went back to work in the normal way, and this is proof positive that this book is not fiction. Novels are never about ordinary Joe's who punch a time clock. Novels concern themselves with aristocrats, soldiers, and honeymooners who never do a lick of honest work. What idiot would ever want to read about the eight-hour day?

I went back to work, and the hardest part was the time clock. No one trusts the American worker. No one will believe a thing he says, so we punch time clocks and bring in notes from our doctors. And after enduring this humiliation for one day, I began to see the wisdom of strict supervision. I lost all faith in myself.

I went back to work making microwave antennas without ever being consulted as to the wisdom of such production. I do know that the Swedish Air Force bought several dozen, and I'm sure they're indispensable.

I went back to work without panicking, and I did that for a year while I stayed up till all hours poking and prodding the time machine. Then I stayed up even later dreaming the scents of apples and irreverent women.

None of us knows the extent of the time we have left on earth, but what if I had the reasonable expectation of another thirty years? What if I never succeeded in returning to Aurora? What could I do in that span that would be the most productive? How could I put my limited talents to the best use while waiting for god-knows-what?

You should never, ever forget that Avien was most certainly dead by then. Her invasion of the Free World would have gone on without my dead weight. She would surely have been found out by the merchants and been dispatched in a thoughtless manner. Without her, Aurora would succumb to its complacency. Smug self-satisfaction would have crept into every honest profession, and the downward spiral of all mature civilizations would accelerate. I actually came to believe that returning to Aurora would be more depressing than being here in Baltimore.

So what other choice do we have? We have to buckle down and bury ourselves in our work, and what the United States desperately needed at that point was a pair of books. Americans needed to know about the possibility of the four-hour workday, and they could also do with a thorough analysis of Gandhian strategic thinking.

The other possibility is that Avien was still alive. If six months in Aurora equaled seven minutes in Baltimore, then maybe the opposite was true. It often is. So, maybe things had come to a standstill or crawled to a snail's pace back where people are truly free. If that were true or even thinkable, then I'd have to get back as soon as possible, and the only way to do that was to stay calm. An emergency like that dictates a clear head, so it was urgently imperative that I retain some modicum of decorum and composure. Avien was screaming for me to remain absolutely steady and unswerving.

In one dream, Avien kept repeating her assertion that she noticed a high percentage of god, and she shifted the emphasis from one

word to the next until she finally found the melody.

I decided to write this book. That was a simple contribution I could make because I was uniquely qualified to write about the four-hour day. Writing also demands nerve and serenity. You need large quantities of those things. Of course, it goes without saying that I couldn't say I'm a communist. That would never do. And I could never tell the truth about building a time machine and flying off to Aurora. People would get the wrong idea, so I decided to take it one step at a time and be thoroughly rational.

Think about it, I wrote. Two percent of us do all the farming and thirty million do all the production of goods. Thirty million others are stuck in retail trade, and those jobs are generally dull and of little social utility. Suppose we take just one of those shoe salespeople and teach her how to weld aluminum. Then she could have the pleasure of building spaceships or something, and we could reduce the workload of every welder by a teensy-tiny fraction. Do that a few thousand times, and we have the seven-and-a-half hour day. Keep going, and there it is: the four-hour day. Doesn't that make sense?

After writing this paragraph, I remembered where I got one of the solid-state relays for the time-buster. I made a long-distance call to get one that hadn't ever been in a trashcan, and I waited an eon for two days and the brand new part. At long last, this had to be the inspiration I was waiting for, and the book was the greatest waste of time I could imagine. What was I thinking?

Without bothering to breathe, I soldered in the relay, but nothing happened. Nothing happened very frequently over the next year because I tended to wake up in the middle of the night with some new blinding revelation that would solve all my problems. After more than fifty brilliant insights, the machine stood completely rebuilt and totally useless.

I had to focus on the book and nothing but the book. With each passing minute, Avien became more and more dead. I had to do something, and it suddenly dawned on me that the writing might go a little more smoothly if I discussed my ideas with real people. When I

wasn't weeping or tinkering, I was talking to a great many people about the four-hour day. I told them in no uncertain terms that humanity was destined to enter a new era of matriarchal peace and luxuriant leisure. They told me I was mistaken. They informed me that human nature prevented us from ever leaving capitalism behind. People are greedy, through and through, so the best you can hope for is a tough mayor and no-nonsense cops.

At first, the sheer stupidity of this viewpoint made me really, really angry. Americans understand that any mother worth her salt will sacrifice everything for her children. We have no problem accepting the clear fact that our soldiers will die in the defense of inalienable rights. We regale ourselves with legends of love and its selflessness. We sing the praises of Abraham Lincoln. Yet all this palpable evidence counts for nothing. Americans cling to their mule-headed cynicism as if their lives depended on it.

So this drove me crazy for a while, but then I thought about it. When an American says, "People are shortsighted and stupid," that is prima facie evidence that certain people are indeed shortsighted and stupid. The person making that argument is himself demonstrating the truth of his proposition. He is regurgitating all the selfish and moronic situations this society has thrust upon him. This is rationalism taken to the nth degree, and I made up my mind not to let it bother me anymore. The worst thing you can do is panic in the face of practical rationality.

Then one night, the potatoes started bleeding like stuck pigs, but Miki and I took it in stride. We did what had to be done, and Avien said I was getting warmer. But how does anyone survive without hope? How do we make it from day to day without the heartfelt suspicion that tomorrow could be radically different?

The plain, unvarnished truth is that daily life in America demands cynicism. Going to work everyday, eight or more hours a day, five or more days a week, fifty weeks a year, for forty years, requires a thick skin. If we ever allowed ourselves to compare normal life with reasonable hope, we'd go mad. We have no alternative but an orthodox belief in the essential evil of human nature. We're addicted.

When I wasn't writing, talking, or dreaming up hare-brained solutions, I'd often visit the time machine and simply sit. I'd ease back into the cockpit and let old memories do the rest. Avien's apples, Miki's fugues, and a profusion of clean potatoes lay just beyond a membrane of impossible composition. I could sit there and cry like a baby for a murdered girl who wouldn't be born for hundreds of years, and that's precisely what I needed, I suppose. All of us get around to doing what we need to do, sooner or later.

Eventually, it hit me, and I laughed. How could I be so stupid? Nothing about time travel or Aurora is technical in nature. Nothing about nature is technical in nature. Nothing about technique is natural. No machine of mine ever needed fixing because I myself was the one who was almost beyond repair. I slumped back into the seat of the time machine, and I closed my eyes and prayed. I prayed for the first time ever.

"Dear Jesus, Gandhi, the Thirty-six Saints, Avien, Cassandra, and even god: I am sorry. I am very, very, very sorry, and I mean that from the bottom of my heart. I will never do that again, and I cross my heart and hope to die. Please let me go home."

For three years, I tried this and every other appeal I could think of. Time after time, I thought of some new theological stratagem and allowed myself to feel the full measure of optimistic exhilaration. Time after time, I fell back to earth with wings singed and hope smoldering. I dreamt that I saw Avien at a great distance in a hallway of some kind, but, after running in slow motion forever, she told me I'd dropped something behind me. I couldn't do anything else. I had to turn around to look at nothing, and I had to have this dream another twenty times or so.

A lot of people in my position embrace religion, and I'd always thought that was the only self-deception worse than rationalism. Aurora, of course, had changed all that, so I started going to church with an open mind. Maybe some kindred spirit would be waiting. Maybe there were true sanctuaries after all, and there might be a little Bach.

Of all the bizarre phenomena the world has ever known,

Christianity is the strangest of all. Jesus preached one thing, which was non-violence, and he did so in a world that accepted the exact opposite. Of course, they killed him. What other choice did they have? Then they buried him, and that should have been that. His message was such lunacy that he should have been dead, buried, and promptly forgotten. Non-violence was of no conceivable use to anyone, so the only logical option was to deny that he ever existed.

This did not happen. Priests dug him up and spent the next two thousand years distorting everything he ever said. They turned him so completely inside out that they used his blood and flesh to consecrate every Western army known to man. Christian holy men developed a true thirst for blood, and they eventually made even the Pharisees look good. Military crusades against the infidel?! Christianity is the cruel art of making Jesus turn in his grave. Christianity is the tortured effort to turn the perfectly natural into the impossibly supernatural.

The only Christians who ever had a clue were Tolstoy and Martin Luther King, and I just don't understand it. Why has so much time and effort been expended to mangle something so elementary? Where's the attraction? Who is the moth, and what is the flame?

Out of sheer desperation, I talked to forty-one men of the cloth, and I met forty-one smarmy, bland anti-personalities who had never dreamed of America's disarmament. They wouldn't think of such a thing. These are Christians?

I went back to the book knowing full well that no orthodox audience would accept it. I would stick to sensible arguments about the practicality of reducing our dependence on the automobile. Liberals love mass transit. Then I'd say something about how much our international influence would be enhanced by de-militarizing and using the money to aid poor countries. Liberals and a handful of Christians think charity is a good thing. Then, I'd suggest some rational approximation of the four-hour day. As I said before, how about we start with seven and seven-eighths and see what happens? Liberals and unions might go for that. Then I'd say that big, bad corporations are the reason for all our troubles, and maybe black people would buy into that.

But I knew from the start that there was simply no secular constituency for the four-hour day. Once upon a time, America was overflowing with visionary activists. If my time machine could have whisked me back to the early Twentieth Century, I could have allied myself with anyone from Emma Goldman to Big Bill Haywood to Edward Bellamy to Sam Gompers to Margaret Sanger or dozens of others. My best guess is that I'd have booked passage on the first ship bound for Rosa Luxemburg. But whatever the truth might have been at one time, the present reality is that the United States is dead in the water. Leftover radicals from my youth are all busy dying, marketing barbecue sauce, or sincerely pouring blood on submarines. The bumper sticker replaces the manifesto. The slightest whiff of legislative reform replaces all revolutionary dreams. If there remains any forward motion at all, it is pathetic beyond belief.

Then too, if I were to lose my brains entirely and write a book exhorting America to seize its destiny through the four-hour day, I'd be doing everyone a colossal disservice. I'd be injecting false hope into a vacuum where it does not belong. I'd be tormenting innocent people with the same irreverent dreams that were tearing me apart. I had no right to do that. Who did I think I was, anyway?

One night, Avien said this:

Been patient Gabe

And slow

For god been

On occasion

Imperceptible.

Motion been

Serpentine or

Still

At times

which, of course, contradicted everything she'd said earlier about the high percentage.

I went shopping for a guitar and found the experience so

disgusting that I wound up making one myself. I tried to make it the way they do in Aurora, as if I had all the time in the world and was in no hurry. I tried to think about building it to last two thousand years so that it might really end up in Aurora's store eventually. I tried singing and listening for echoes. I forced myself to relax, spread tentacles to the edge of the universe, and wait for a sign. I also made the mistake of reading newspapers which ended up defeating the whole purpose of music, relaxation, and fond memories.

So, if Christians and high-minded rationalists could yawn at the four-hour day, maybe I could soften the opposition with a discussion of Gandhi. Who could argue with a simple recounting of historical fact, as long as it didn't involve Jesus? Reading Gandhi in the original, though, demands a lot of careful attention because the language, the culture, and the rhythm are so completely foreign. Only after repeated references to satyagraha and ahimsa -- from every conceivable angle -- does the essence of his single idea come through. Americans typically don't have the patience for this sort of strenuous exercise, so we go for the Eastern mystics who offer the cosmic buzz. We tend to think that Zen and Kundalini are cool because their practitioners feel real good about themselves and aren't pushy.

In all honesty, I barely had the patience to read Gandhi myself. Nothing about it is easy when there's someplace else you really should be. But, if there's anything that will make an American sit up and take notice, it's Gandhi's insistent desire to take on Adolph Hitler. Common wisdom holds that Gandhi was lucky to have the high-minded British as his enemy. He could count on the restrained, dainty civility of British colonialism, whereas the Nazis would simply have taken Gandhi out and shot him on the spot.

Mr. Gandhi, though, made no fine distinctions among imperialists, and, the more I read, the more I agree with him. A German invasion of India would have done more to consolidate Gandhi's position than anything else I can think of. If non-violence had been allowed that theater of expression, we might well be five hundred years ahead of where we are now.

To this day, I do not quite understand what it means to have a "capacity for infinite suffering." And what exactly is the opposite of humiliation? Gandhi remains as much a mystery as ever. But my reading soon produced a dramatic turn for the worse as far as my dreamlife was concerned. One recurring dream was of walking down a littered city street only to be approached by a smiling African-American who put his arm around my shoulder and stuck a pistol into my ribs. Either that or I was the assassin who fired indiscriminately into the crowd. Or I was transported back to Aurora, to the Bath, to Miki's music, to Avien's giggling embrace, to the scent of the death-guitar, and eventually back to Baltimore. So, which was worse, the nightmares or waking from bliss? I honestly don't know which was more infinite.

TWENTY-THREE

We have much studied and much perfected of late the great civilized invention of the division of labor; only we give it a false name. It is not, truly speaking, the labor that is divided but the men -- divided into mere segments of men -- broken into small fragments and crumbs of life, so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin, the head of a nail.

William Morris

Of course, at one level or another, we're all mystics. We all believe in things that aren't really there. But the great advantage of believing in a glorious future is that it might be there eventually, and that's a step up from believing in something that never was nor is nor could be.

Believing in the four-hour day is a lot better than being a modern scientific mystic because they believe in reductionism. They think that the universe and life are a lot like Oldsmobile's. If you want to know what makes a car tick, all you have to do is take it apart. Once you understand the details of spark plugs and carburetor jets, then the whole thing starts to make sense. So our scientists rip apart animals and sub-atomic particles in the fervent conviction that all secrets will be revealed in the minutiae. They conveniently forget the fact that all true progress derives from the Newtons and Einsteins who re-conceptualize everything all at once. They continue to seek their Holy Grail in the depths of arcane dissection even though it isn't really there.

That's a lot better than being a banker, though, because they're certain that profit exists. If you insert a dollar bill into the free market machinery, it comes back to you larger than life. Money men never once consider the big picture. They don't think about the fact that we humans

produce a yearly inventory of goods and services pre-packaged with a retail valuation. Among other things, we manufacture cigarettes with a price tag of, say, three dollars. But we didn't pay the worker three dollars for the time he put into them. So, maybe this guy dips into his food budget to make up the difference when he buys the cigarettes, but he can't keep doing that forever. If you think about the total inventory of goods and services, the total bill for labor costs, and the total amount of profit demanded, then certain discrepancies raise their ugly heads. As long as the economy continues to expand, highly imaginative credit policies can postpone the day of reckoning. But the so-called profit derived from cigarettes, alcohol, gambling, and jet fighters isn't really there. Only a raving occultist would believe in the profitability of psychological and physical devastation.

Still, that's better than being a Christian.

If truth be told, I really didn't have to go to all the trouble of building a time machine to understand the fundamental structure of life.

We are all so interconnected, so intertwined with each other, that it's virtually impossible to make heads or tails of our heads and tails. We are the totality, and we are not confined by any limitation of time or space. Once this observation becomes self-evident, then certain hard-boiled, no-nonsense conclusions follow. There is never any reason to stone a bad woman because violence is ridiculous. There is never any reason to accumulate wealth because it's harder for a rich man to understand the universe than it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. It always makes sense to give a beggar your shirt in addition to your cloak. Death is not what you think it is. And the simple principle of meek, feminine kindness will come into its own, sooner or later.

Humankind has understandable difficulties in hearing this message, so what we do instead is appoint a special class of priests to interpret for us. Jesus then becomes a sideshow freak in the magic pageant of personal redemption through spiritualistic phantasmagoria. This is the third form of modern mysticism, but it's no different from the other two.

Aurora taught me none of this. All the necessary evidence is available in the here and now. But, if we all labor under such bizarre misconceptions, where is the crack in the armor? If I wish to talk to a scientist or a banker or a Christian, and I see the telltale glint of metaphysics in his eye, what do I say? Where do I start?

What Aurora did teach me is that all mysticism is simply sexual dysfunction. The turning away from the obligations of love produces hallucination. We begin to see things that aren't really there. Even Isaac Newton ended up writing far more pages about Biblical prophecy than he did about gravity, but I'm not sure which was worse.

So, if I wish to communicate with a biologist, a mortgage broker, or a nominally celibate cardinal, I have to begin with a sexual dysfunction that runs far deeper than ordinary impotence, and that is simply more trouble than it's worth. Thanks, but no thanks. I'd rather watch television.

What Aurora taught me is that all mysticism is sexual dysfunction, and all sexual difficulties belong to me. I own all of them, lock, stock, and barrel. I have the market cornered. My only option in the ancient, modern, and undreamed-of world is to locate within myself a capacity for hard-core love. Only through a careful nursing of that fragile ember could I ever hope to communicate with another human being -- or even to continue being a human being.

So, at various times during the first five years away from Aurora, I'd remind myself of this nearly meaningless truth, and I'd eventually conclude that Avien probably wouldn't be enough. Loving someone who's not really there is probably not the best antidote to sexual shortcoming. So, every once in a while, I resolved to find someone of the flesh and blood variety to love. I read the personal columns in the paper, hoping against hope to read the words, "Single professional female seeks visionary male who desires only the end of capitalism and all things violent and crass, for permanent alliance. Looks unimportant."

I am dead certain that such women exist. As a matter of fact, the only reason I write this book is to find you, wherever you may be.

But earlier, I simply failed to find the enormous energy required for dating and sifting through all the make-up and insecurities. And, in the back of my mind, I suspected that I would be doing it for the wrong reasons.

When the dream Avien who is not real told me I'd dropped something behind me, she meant that I hadn't thought about the Jovial River. I woke before dawn on one Sunday morning realizing that the waters of Aurora were really the Jones Falls River. Any Baltimorean will tell you that this is a trickle that runs due south through the city all the way to the trendy shops of the Inner Harbor. The Jones Falls is famous for the sheer volume of urban trash that washes down after a heavy rain. It washes without cleaning.

I found a ten-year-old map, noted the distinctive bend, and, in no time at all, I stood on the cracked asphalt where the tyntillin plant had been before the bombing. I could have gone up the hill to the television station where the Hall would be, but I wasn't ready for that. I crossed the bridge from what used to be a white, industrial center to the Black neighborhood that I think was Jewish at one time. History is very confusing, but I looked neither left nor right nor anywhere else until the city was behind me. Beyond any conceivable doubt, I ended up standing on the golf course where the elder bear belonged. I did that with painstaking precision. All the coordinates were right. I was in exactly the right place at the wrong time, so I started the necessary repairs. I used the shovel I'd carried through the city to begin uprooting obstructions. I could give the bears and the ancient trees a head start, and everyone would be better off. But the scent of promising earth overpowered me, along with the policemen.

The pain stopped completely at that point, and I was able to find a new employer with very modern machine tools controlled by computers. All I had to do was wait for the green light, load in a new chunk of aluminum, and push a button. The shop was air-conditioned, and the health plan covered all the necessary medications. They continued to think that I was a skilled machinist, and I joined the union.

I also forgot how to dream, so that was a big relief, along with

the new television set. Everything we say about our own past is colored by the fact that we didn't quite die.

What happened next was that I thought about taking the time machine apart and hauling it off to the dump. I also thought about taking the guitar out of the closet and exercising and losing a little weight. So, nothing happened for the longest time, I think. I had no complaints, and I thought that was normal.

Then, at some point, a new cook showed up at the restaurant around the corner. Someone had apparently decided to replace the splendor of Aurora's dining hall with an endless succession of greasy spoons, and this was one of them.

"You all right, Mac?" she asked. "Can I get ya somethin', Hon?"

No one is named Alice anymore because it's too old-fashioned, which means that it will soon be back in vogue, and every girl in every private school kindergarten will be named Alice. This one, though, had fallen out of favor a long time ago. At age thirty-eight, she had narrowly escaped eleven years of heartless schooling, a nightmare of a marriage, and years of migraines and menial jobs. She had gotten a son off drugs and through school while working fifty hours a week and kicking a cigarette habit. She firmly believes that she's twenty pounds overweight and equally convinced that she will someday find the will power to reclaim her girlish figure. She bites her fingernails, reads voraciously, and cries over the romances. She went to New York once and plans a trip to Florida with her girlfriend as soon as they have the money saved up.

I learned all this and a lot more over the course of the next several weeks. I also learned a hell of a lot more about eye contact.

Even then, I knew full well that I didn't want Alice to know anything about me. I couldn't tell her about my invention of a time machine or about Aurora. I had no intention of confessing the sin of my exile. I didn't want her to see what a pathetic failure of a revolutionary I was. And, most of all, I hated my vocabulary. I'd spent thirty years accumulating all the paraphernalia associated with self-styled intellectualism. I knew all the words by heart. I could regurgitate Hegel and

Marx, Darwin and Einstein, and the words were nothing more than battering rams. The arcane vocabulary served only to bully and intimidate others, and Alice deserved better. She might want to feel thinner, but certainly not smaller.

The problem with overt or covert lies is that you can't do either one while looking the other person in the eye. Subterfuge means someone's got to look the other way, and, with Alice, that's not possible. If a word like "subterfuge" comes to mind, and you decide to use "lying" instead, she sees you glancing at the wall, and she knows. She also knows damned well what "subterfuge" means because she's a reader, for chrissake. She also thinks it's hysterical when I slip up. She started referring to scrambled eggs as "dialectical" eggs, and she went directly for the retina when she did it.

She soon demanded to see the slum I called home. She stopped by for a visit and did what any other woman in her position would do. She gasped and seemed, for all the world, to be completely horrified. She wasn't really, because she finally had the chance to roll up both our sleeves and whip me into shape. She was in her element. This was her true vocation.

I didn't bat an eyelash when I told her that the thing in the basement was an exercise machine.

As stupid as it might sound, love is the answer, but it's not necessarily what you think it is. It's not necessarily what I think it is. It isn't necessarily anything, but it definitely isn't a dead Clark Gable making goo-goo eyes at a dead Vivien Leigh. Thirty thousand Americans kill themselves each and every year, and that's simply one indication of the swamp of depression undermining our so-called prosperity. So what you have, basically, is an increasing population of people who have lost all enthusiasm while trying desperately to maintain a certain pretense. Love is often nothing more than the opposite of pretense.

The beauty of time is that Alice and I might have been lovers as teenagers. We might have collided head-on or in every other juxtaposition teenagers can dream up. That could have happened, but it didn't. We both patiently waited until we'd been hideously deformed by age

and capitalism. We held out long enough to forget all about pride, ambition, and success. We had eliminated all possibilities other than love.

The problem is that, if I were now to regale you with the details of our whirlwind courtship, you'd be bored to tears and asleep in no time flat. Over the course of months, we tended to the business of life. We shopped, we cleaned, we did laundry and paid bills. We prepared the requisite number of potatoes. But we did all these mundane things with a fair amount of tenderness, consideration, and ordinary good humor. The only incident that stands out in my memory is the purchase of a refrigerator, and I remember that partially because it was a real steal but mostly because the salesman was a curiosity. Neither his suit nor his skin seemed to fit properly, and his smile must have come from an overheated wax museum. Back in the car, Alice said, "Oh, that poor fellow...", and she did not laugh. She didn't make fun of anyone. She didn't see anything funny about having to work for year after year without accomplishing anything.

At her restaurant, she and I would play our favorite game of guessing which of the clientele were gay, which were married and to whom, and which were about to do something criminal. That was a lot of fun until the day Alice whispered that the young man in the corner would commit suicide within a week, and there wasn't anything we could do about it. There wasn't, and he did.

So, one thing led to another -- which I took as an omen -- and Alice finally did what had to be done. She had to be the one.

"I've been thinking, Mr. Gabe, that you and me have been hitting it off pretty well, but we're neither of us getting any younger, now are we? To be perfectly blunt, I'd allow you the privilege of making it legal if you told me the one thing you're not saying."

She said it just like that, word for word, and just because it's horizontal rather than vertical, it's still the same rhythm. She stopped me dead in my tracks, and I lost my train of thought. I asked her to repeat what she'd said which she did but she changed all of the words which didn't make any difference.

I kissed her much more than most Americans do, and I said, "After all you've been through and after all the abuse and miscellaneous crap, you don't know enough to quit and go home, do you? You're not going to give up, are you? You'll never say never, so is there anything you can't do?"

"Absolutely nothin'" she smiled.

So, the upshot is that I grabbed her by the hand, dragged her down into the basement, and told her everything there is to know about time travel, Aurora, and Avien. I didn't leave anything out, and I didn't bother with punctuation. I got to the end in no time at all and decided to inhale.

"The whole point, Alice, is that there exists between you and me a very high percentage of god, and it's not something that's been here all along that I've missed completely in my impatience to be somewhere else. This section of god is brand new and fresh as a daisy which means that everything's that's gone before is temporary which might sound obvious, but it's not, and we're not talking about things changing but a collapse of everything that makes anything possible which is very good news because we're now free to move mountains and dig up golf courses and go wherever the hell we need to go to do the things that need doing because they're going to happen anyway, don't you see? Something big is about to happen because you won't take no for an answer, and the only thing between us and paradise is our own non-existent and patently obvious stupidity!"

Alice again brought me to a dead halt because she looked at me with complete faith. In her precious heart of hearts, she believed everything I said, even if I wasn't so sure.

"I think she'll be madder than a wet hen, Gabe. I think she'll be wondering what took you so long."

I should have said goodbye properly. I should have taken the time to get it right and say everything that needed saying. I should have told her that, one day, her perfect eyes would be reborn in the person of someone else to whom I owed an endless obligation. After so many romance novels, she would have understood, and her tears would have

sped me on my way. Alice would never stand in the way of true love, and I consoled myself with the certain knowledge that she would someday read these words I now write with perfect pride and comprehension. I am forever in her debt.

After five years of stumbling around in the wilderness, I had found the opposite of what I was looking for. I climbed into the time machine and was soon racing through the Auroran moonlight towards an apartment that might still belong to someone named Avien.

TWENTY-FOUR

Give me a man who sings at his work.

Thomas Carlyle

Dare to be honest and fear no labor.

Robert Burns

I have always liked people capable of working and doing their work properly.

Peter Kropotkin
"Memoirs of a Revolutionist"

I have seen the future, and it works.

Lincoln Steffens

I have seen the future, and it works less than we do.

Gabe Sinclair

Unfortunately, what actually happened can't be translated into English. Alice proposed marriage in the United States of America, and, because that's still possible, all sorts of other things are also thinkable if we do it really, really hard without panic or rationality. Alice is inexhaustible, and women are getting a little sick and tired of sexual dysfunction, and Jesus and Gandhi did exactly what they were supposed to do, right on cue, and god can't go on being so unbelievably retarded forever even though god's done that more than once, and there's nothing seriously wrong with either you or me, and, because of all these amazing coincidences, I was able to restart the time machine and return to Aurora. It's as simple as that.

But for five long years before that, I'd fantasized day and night about the complications of something that's not a maiden voyage. Going home is one thing, but going home again quite another. Because of

possible mismatches in time frames and because the time machine defied absolute precision, anything was conceivable. Avien could be merely dead, long dead, or unborn. My second excursion might undershoot the first one, in which case I'd return some time before I'd left initially. Maybe I could warn someone about the impending bombing. Maybe I could advise Avien's husband against certain courses of action. Or Avien might be a four-year-old who'd be a little confused by my declaration of permanent love.

Even after safely landing in the beacon of a very familiar weavery, these terrors continued to pound relentlessly against throbbing hope and leaping joy. You'd think that breathing clean air for the first time in five years would help, but that only produced hysterical giggles. I stood up in the darkness and set out for the final answer.

Einstein says that the reason he was the one who came up with the relativity theory is that he was slightly retarded. He says that every child thinks about time and space early on, but they soon grow up and learn to accept certain things without question. He, on the other hand, never matured, so he continued to be mystified by the elementary. And we already know that Einstein didn't start speaking until he was four years old, if I remember correctly. Hardly anyone today can make heads or tails of anything Einstein ever said.

Most people don't know this, either, but Gandhi was agonizingly shy. When he first passed the bar and became a lawyer, he couldn't even bring himself to speak in court. He had no swagger or charisma whatsoever, so you'd think he'd be the last person a desperate god would choose. You just never know. You never know when an infinitely moronic universe will flip and require the services of some nobody like you. It will happen anywhere, at any time, and you'd better be ready.

The other encouraging sign was that it was cold without being really freezing. Because I can't run very fast with my heart in my throat, I had time to reflect on the miraculous possibility that Aurora had waited patiently for me. I'd expelled myself in late November, and this night smelled correct. The moon looked absolutely perfect and exactly

as it should look in November or December.

The big mistake that I'd made was to think of the Thirty-six Saints as ordinary human beings, which they were, but an Auroran would never say that. Jesus, Gandhi, and the Saints were articulations of temporal impatience and irrational anticipation. They were and will be discontinuities of a space and time which are only smooth when they're in a good mood, and that's once in a blue moon. The important thing was to forget about the human qualities and pay attention to periodicity and arrhythmias. Once you do that, then you can go ahead and get close enough to Gandhi or Alice to smell their courage. Abraham Lincoln is a good person to practice on because he's a good person.

Einstein thought that it could all be reduced to mathematics, which was not true in the Twentieth Century, so he proved his point. He really was retarded. But, later on, he might not be.

The other mistake I'd made was the golf course. At that point, I really was so close to the bears that I could reach out and touch them, but I wasn't ready. Because the location was exactly right, I could glimpse them in the corner of my eye, but I hadn't grown enough to contain them. By the same token, the United States is too small for the four-hour day because that's a universal. Still, we're in the right place at the right time, and so was I. I danced through Aurora and saw no changes whatsoever. The city glowed with moonlight and unbounded hope which meant that Avien had to be somewhere in the vicinity.

I slipped through the door and made sure to stand where I could be seen. Generally speaking, Aurorans take everything in stride, and they're hardly ever startled by anything, but Avien made an exception in my case.

I cried, "Avien, do you know who I am?"

*Y'been clearly
One
Of two possibilities,
Gabe.*

*Y'been either
Demented or
Lovely and I
Can't care which.*

"Then are you now still preparing to attack the enemy, single-handedly, and how long have I been gone?"

*Certain Gabe,
I been absent
Soon,
And here y'been
Disappeared
Clandestine
A week or more.*

"When I first came to Aurora, did you send for me, or did I arrive uninvited?"

She smiled her best smile.

*O, darling Gabe,
Y'been primarily
Called upon
To me as I
Seen fit,
But no more.
Y'been presently
Present
Intrusive and
Independent.*

"There's nothing really wrong with me, is there? I really do deserve Aurora, don't I?"

Y'been misdemeanored

*Only Gabe
And normally
Safe and sound.*

"Will you please marry me?"

Avien lit the candle and placed it and her eyes very close to mine. She studied me as I am and am not. She examined my every hope and intention, and she burst into laughing tears.

*I been yours
All along
Forever Gabe.*

She gave me something to put on, and we held each other all the way back to the weavery. We embraced one last time, and we kissed as if there were no tomorrow. I twisted myself into the beacon and returned to where I really and truly belong, to where I am fully human and no longer green.

TWENTY-FIVE

For one human being to love another, that is perhaps the most difficult of our tasks, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Avien and I are combined forever as is appropriate for men and women, but she's far shy of legal age as things now stand. The law would never recognize our legitimacy, especially since I'm also married to Alice, and the baby's due whenever she's good and ready.

At long last, I am finally in a position to offer Avien the gift she deserves. By making minor adjustments in the contours of present space and time, I will guarantee her ultimate triumph. If I have anything to say about it, she will not die in the back alleys of Africa. She and her infinitely glorious husband will undertake even more dangerous assignments, and we'll all be better off.

I intend to be careful. If I push too hard and too fast for the four-hour day, Avien might be born prematurely. Or she might be so beautiful she'll scare away all the so-called men in town. She might even be born male which would definitely complicate my life.

So where do we now stand?

First of all, at long last, I'd like to apologize for all the mean-spirited, wicked things I've said about salesmen, motorcyclists, television viewers, bankers, and college professors. Gandhi says we should never try to humiliate anyone, and I really am the last person on Earth who should be casting the first stone. If it's taken me this long to realize that the only way I can hang on to Avien is to let her go (without

really letting go), I'm in no position to make fun of anyone else. But the real reason that I'm sorry about my catty witticisms is that none of them are as sharp as Jesus' comment about camels and rich people.

The honest truth is that all Americans are perfectly capable of taking the first step towards the four-hour day. If you and your family could sit down with a family from Congo, I'm sure that you could hammer out all the details of magnificent cooperation. In no time at all, both families could articulate their most sincere aspirations, and we'd be off to a flying start. You'd immediately see the logic of mutual disarmament, forgiveness of debt, and the urgency of developing vaccines for AIDS, malaria, and colonialism. The idea of investment in the future would suddenly make sense. Their water wells and their tractors are your ticket to the four-hour day.

One theory about why this doesn't yet happen has to do with the concept of boredom. If a human being fails to exercise her god-given creativity, a kind of rigor mortis sets in almost immediately. She's bored silly, and the overwhelming temptation is to find some idle diversion. She shops, watches a movie, rips all the hair off her legs, works overtime or undergoes cosmetic surgery. None of this works, and the end result is an increasingly frantic spiral of sheer desperation. No one can think straight under those conditions. Ask her if she's bored, and see what she says.

The problem is that I come along and offer her the four-hour day, and all she sees is more time to kill. If the boredom theory is correct – if Americans really do believe that time is something to kill – then I could turn out to be a very unpopular person.

And, of course, the other theory is the one about fear. Take one look at Israel, and you'll see what happens to a beleaguered people surrounded by enemies. They end up humiliating Palestinians and eliminating all possibility of the very cooperation that could guarantee their security. So what are Americans afraid of?

But whether it's boredom or paranoia or whatever, something interferes with our ability to think about a concept as radical as human interdependence. The four-hour day is the delicate interweaving of

three distinct strands. Non-violence, the ascendancy of the feminine, and the sheer abundance of producerism conspire to rewrite all rules of human association. Beyond this, the recognition of these three elements as a unified triple helix demands dramatically different conceptions of time, space, and causality. The mechanistic cosmos of the businessman surrenders to a universalized creativity only vaguely reminiscent of earlier gods.

So, there's no getting around it. The four-hour day is the opposite of what we're doing now, and its advent requires a revolution of prodigious depth and clarity. Because we're hopelessly ill prepared for such an overhaul, we're simply going to have to sit tight and wait for the next high tide. Any genuine prospect for dramatic change depends entirely upon the timely appearance of the next messiah, the legendary Saint Number One.

Or, at least, this is what Alice believes. She thinks that we've already done everything that can be done under present circumstances. According to her, the best we can hope for is to plant the seed of the four-hour day. She thinks that simply posing the question represents a true germ of an idea. We will succeed in enticing Americans to think about paradise for two seconds instead of the necessary seven minutes. They will deny the possibility and rattle off many sound reasons why such a thing could never happen. They will walk away, seemingly indifferent, and nothing will change for the longest time. Then...

Despite this bleak prospect, Alice refuses to allow me a moment's rest. She's the one responsible for bringing this book to press because she thinks it's enough. She believes that these words and god will hibernate for another century or two. She thinks that someone will find our literary remains in the rubble and will use us to start from scratch. Alice takes an extremely dim view of modern Americans.

In the short term, two significant events loom on the horizon, and the first is the cataclysm which has so captured Alice's imagination. The first truth of modern political reality is that the United States now occupies a position once held by Rome. We pursue all the policies associated with the imperial marketplace, and this is emphatically

suicidal. The more dominant the dollar becomes, the nearer we approach collapse, without understanding exactly what that means. We don't know if the final straw will be oil, water, nuclear weapons, barbarians, floating currencies, or the bread and circuses. Should the world lapse into full-blown depression and economic chaos, the resulting panic would not guarantee the success of the four-hour day. In fact, the opposite reaction would be far more likely. Nervous Americans would undoubtedly retreat into the hard shell of reactionary truisms and hard-nosed militarism. Hitler will do exactly what Hitler has always done.

But the other development in the offing is the birth of the first of the thirty-six saints which could happen any day now. Sometime in the next two hundred years, we'll see a profound crystallization of hope somewhere in the world. Based on the fact that both Jesus and Gandhi arose in distant colonies of colossal empires, I have every reason to expect the same next time. Poor, bloody Africa is my own best guess, but you never know. She might be born in New York after all. All of us should start taking another look at our children. Please, please, pay close attention to your children. Listen intently. You never know.

So, for the time being, anticipation is everything. The faint flicker of social optimism needs all the air we can give it. And, luckily for us, we now know a lot more about the messiah business than we used to. After all we've been through, we can safely conclude that there can never be one messiah, one revolution, for all time. Every social collapse demands a fresh resurrection. We have no choice but to re-invent ourselves time and time again. And we also know that individual personality counts for nothing. Simply try to imagine that one person -- that unique combination of human characteristics -- that could now fire the American psyche and lead us into the Promised Land of the four-hour day. We are simply too busy to listen to the immense depth of a Lincoln or Paine or Gandhi. Moses wouldn't last a week on Broadway. The time has not yet arrived, but that's the key conception. A messiah is not so much a person as a radical transformation of time itself.

Of course, I'm not terribly excited by the idea of sitting around

twiddling my thumbs for the next two hundred years. That's not what four-hour leisure is all about. Unlike the endlessly pregnant and patient Alice, I'm champing at the bit. If the four-hour day is to happen sooner or later, I pick sooner. If I had my choice, I'd throw the necessary tools into the back of the truck and head off to the nearest vacant lot. Aurora's foundations could take shape in no time, and Avien would agree that bricks and mortar are often the best form of prayer. It might also be true that there are more of us than I think there are. Suppose that one person in ten thousand is currently able to keep her wits about her and accept the four-hour day. What if one person in ten thousand were to drop what she's doing and jump on the bandwagon? What would happen if twenty-seven thousand honest people banded together?

Alice -- who has forsaken all fiction in favor of history -- accuses me of Leninist tendencies. She thinks I'm still hoping for a cadre of elite intellectuals who will conspire to overthrow this and every other government before anyone knows what's happening. She's convinced that I'm male after all.

She also reminds me of one critical Biblical insight. According to the story, poor Jesus managed to recruit only twelve men, and these dozen had more than their fair share of neurotic disabilities. They squabbled about who should walk next to the master. They denied any association with him towards the end. And they sold him for whatever the market would bear.

Gandhi, too, attracted hordes of lunatics who thought that touching his feet would guarantee god-knows-what. So what may we legitimately anticipate with the dawning of the four-hour era? The American constituency for peace and generosity remains hopelessly scattered and misdirected, and the time has come for you to know the full catastrophe. The Four-hour Day Foundation is not a burgeoning political tidal wave. As of this writing, you can count the number of members on the fingers of one hand, and that will be true for some time to come. Nevertheless, within a very few years, we will stage our first national convention. Sympathetic souls will descend upon St. Louis or

Chicago, and we'll find out who we really are. My suspicion is that it'll be a circus. We'll have a large contingent of sixty-year-old Flower Children, an assortment of renegade Quakers, and a mix of quarreling fundamentalist Christians. No-nonsense lesbians and gays will turn out in force to antagonize the veterans of Zen, yoga, and the Grateful Dead. The Bakuninists will continue to torment the Kropotkinites. Apostate Jews will dance around in Native American headdress. Catholics will promise to do anything for non-violence as long as they don't have to leave the one true church or irritate a veteran. Vendors will make a mint selling crystals, herbs, and astrological charts.

And I don't even want to think about the theatrics of the Free Lovers.

So, maybe we'll do this national convention, and maybe we won't. But out of this conglomeration will emerge a pragmatic faction prepared to engage traditional centers of power in American politics. We'll draft a nuts-and-bolts platform for the United Steelworkers Union, and it will include modest proposals for the six-hour day, the organization of an international union reaching all the way to Timbuktu, and the complete disarmament of all nations. These most basic of demands will not center around silly wage hikes but will focus instead upon the inalienable rights of all steelworkers to decide who makes steel, how much we make, and what it's used for. This is the simplified version of four-hour philosophy, and there may very well be some union who will someday embrace this sort of agitation. Nothing is out of the question.

Another temptation for four-hour pragmatists will be utopian ventures of one sort or another. What if we set up a four-hour clothing factory right in the middle of crumbling old Baltimore? What if we recruited employees from the ranks of disadvantaged minority populations? What if we provided great schools and organized an agricultural cooperative to provide real nutrition? What if the clothes we made were distinctive and purchased by people who understood all the implications?

Nothing is out of the question, but the first thing to understand

about Gandhi's campaigns is that he was never the instigator. Only when certain conflicts had erupted into grassroots ferment could he intervene. Only when he was invited could he provide the leadership and spiritual guidance required. Sadly, America's underclasses now passively accept the full package of capitalism, including the sports, the cars, the Pentecostalism, the entertainment, and the violence. As a middle-class, white intellectual, I'm not about to go waltzing into the ghetto to inform black people that they're making a big mistake. Not even Saint Number Twelve could get away with something like that. So, we have no choice but to wait for someone who combines the best qualities of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Then, we're in business.

Ultimately though, the once-reliable forms of labor and minority organizing will yield to the concerted initiatives of women. If ever there was a natural political fit, it is the match of feminine priorities with the goals of the four-hour day. Not every woman will choose leisure and family time over slavish acquisition. Not every woman will oppose the patriotic slaughter of wars and highways. Many women will remain addicted to sexual submission without once comprehending its opposite. Nevertheless, the four-hour day could strike a very sensitive nerve. The penny-ante reforms of bourgeois women's liberation fall pathetically short. The legitimate aspirations of mothers and daughters deserve more breathing room. Alice is sick and tired of business as usual.

So, we have every reason to expect that the women's movement will adopt some variation of the four-hour platform. Maybe they'll join forces with the steelworkers to legislate the six-hour day and complete disarmament. Maybe Christian women will start collecting handguns and disposing of them properly. Perhaps women will rehabilitate Christmas by removing its price tag and boycotting all holiday shopping. What would happen if we gave each other time instead of neckties?

And while this overtly political activity gains momentum, we should expect advances on two other fronts. In all likelihood, women will soon come to understand what their hands are all about. If we encourage an emphasis upon productive, manual occupations as

doctors, plumbers, carpenters, and welders, we can put an end to any lingering sense of economic subservience. We need to repeat certain aspects of World War Two by getting women out of the office and the kitchen. You can't reach the four-hour day with flabby biceps.

Neither can you achieve a sane economy while spousal abuse continues. So the second initiative should be ordinary conversation. Women really ought to start talking to each other about what goes on behind closed doors. The modern tendency is to accept certain marital forms of verbal and sexual interaction as normal when they are in fact senselessly cruel. Seemingly casual indifference may turn out to be naked humiliation, and only when women talk honestly to one another does this truth become self-evident. The best thing that could happen for the prospects of the four-hour day would be the immediate establishment of a universal, conversational network designed to rescue both men and women from routine domestic torture. The dependable old Greeks once told a story about Lysistrata and her campaign of sexual abstinence to force an end to murderous warfare. As simplistic as this might sound, it's basically right on the money. No true progress can be made until women come into their own and achieve a confidence that is economic, emotional, intellectual, and highly sexual.

On the other hand, the worst thing that could happen for the prospects of the four-hour day would be any reliance upon the number of adherents we can muster. Conventional political muscle counts for nothing. A million-mom march would be nice, but nothing more than that. At this stage of development, the single urgent priority remains the depth of our individual meditations. Political agitation will have to take a back seat to relentless reflection upon some of the trickier aspects of the four-hour day. The time has come for a proper study of Mr. Gandhi because the more I think about non-violence, the less I understand.

Several years ago, a man protesting the shipment of nuclear material in the American Southwest sat down on a railroad track. The train did not stop, and he lost both legs. With all due respect to this gentleman's grim determination, there remains a world of difference between this near suicide and Gandhi's Salt March. But what exactly

separates the gruesomely sacrificial from the truly inspirational? How does a bus boycott or a lunch counter sit-in relate to earlier initiatives in Jerusalem or South Africa? Does the exercise of non-violence obey any internal laws or formulae?

Part of the difficulty has to do with the idea of passive resistance. With Thoreau and others, we are left with the image of a pouting child who digs in his heels and will not budge for love nor money. When confronted by unjust government policy, the passive resister simply refuses to cooperate and will often chain himself to some immovable object. Or maybe he'll steal onto an army base and pour blood on a piece of artillery. If this were all that Gandhi and Jesus had to offer, we'd have no hope whatsoever.

Another problem has to do with the history of pacifism. At the turn of the Twentieth Century, socialists very nearly ruled Germany. Social Democrats basked in the broad support of a population committed to liberal ideology and an antipathy to militarism. They stood foursquare against the xenophobic tide sweeping Europe towards World War One. And they collapsed with the first breath of patriotic fever. Liberalism proved to be too soft, too thin to withstand any opposition whatsoever. Much the same thing happened in this country towards the beginning of World War Two. The peace petition that had circulated throughout much of the 'Thirties evaporated into thin air. If non-violence is conceived of as a simple opposition to war, it may receive all the lip service in the world and still amount to nothing.

If non-violence is to mean anything at all, it must embody more than resistance or opposition. Gandhi's spinning wheel and King's campaigns for poor people both emphasized positive initiatives for cooperative economics, and that conjunction of morality and money will be crucially important over the next few centuries. The four-hour day is both ethically and economically sound because you can't have one without the other.

The four-hour day is simply a way to begin thinking about the positive affirmation of non-violence. It's one way to stimulate the deepest possible meditation, and that's necessary because of the

complex nature of the business at hand. One of the intellectual forefathers of the four-hour day turns out to be Peter Kropotkin, a Nineteenth-Century Russian anarchist. Historically speaking, anarchists have always relied upon bombs and assassinations to prove their point, so why in the world would I ever mention Kropotkin in the same breath with Jesus? Or Marx with Tolstoy? Or Tom Paine with Johann Sebastian Bach? None of the political categories we've inherited makes any sense at all, and only when we make some accurate assessment of human personality do we see any momentum towards the four-hour day.

In his own articulation of non-violence, Gandhi coined the word "satyagraha" or "soul force" to distinguish his non-violence of the strong from earlier expressions of passive resistance. This concept is so far removed from any Western sense of ideology or philosophy that it is very nearly inaccessible. Only with repeated readings in the daily expression of satyagraha does the rhythm of Gandhi's thinking start to make any sense at all. But the effort required is exactly what the doctor ordered. If certain men and women now decide to honestly tackle the ninety volumes of Gandhi's collected works, good things will happen. Nothing is out of the question.

For me personally, one tiny facet of non-violence became apparent in deciding to refrain from copyrighting this book. The honest truth is that Avien did all the work, but the actual writing is mine. All the mistakes and failures are mine, so shouldn't I protect them? What if you turn out to be an unscrupulous marketing genius who intends to steal what is rightfully mine?

First of all, I'm simply not interested in forcing you to be something you're not. And, if you really are evil, the remedy for that is not a court of law and a gang of lawyers standing ready to beat you into submission. Secondly, very few brain cells are required to see that your thievery would be a great service to me. If you choose to relieve me of marketing responsibilities, feel free. You should always feel free. And thirdly, if I think long and hard about what I really want to hang on to, it's the labor of writing itself. The printed version is nothing more than a

by-product, and, try as you might, you'll never succeed in swiping the true possession.

Then, too, remember what I said earlier about the possibility of a stranger giving you a pair of really nice underpants. Please understand that if this book remains a gift freely given -- without copyright protection -- then it packs as much wallop and intimacy as any other true gift. Such is the nature of non-violent economics.

But don't forget to send the fifteen-dollar contribution, and remember to stop by for lunch. You and I have things to discuss.

Alice thinks I'm a worrywart. She reminds me that our baby is a girl who'll be named Avien, which is an amazing coincidence when you think about it. Either the new Avien will be a messiah, or she won't. In either case, as long as some of us continue to marry and have babies, the nature of time itself will change. The first of the thirty-six saints is well on her way, even as we speak. Continuing on our present course is out of the question, so all we have to do is create an atmosphere of expectation. Nothing can be rushed. Everything happens right on schedule.

Alice is completely feminine, but, if there's one thing we agree on, it's our mutual road map to the future. If you really believe in the four-hour day -- or even if you're simply intrigued by the distant possibility -- do us a favor. Carve a few minutes out of your hectic routine and just sit down. Once a day, whenever you can manage it, sit down and do absolutely nothing. Don't meditate with the hope of a blinding flash of enlightenment. Don't struggle for control of your breathing or your brain or your virtue. Simply sit back and see where your mind and your heart tend to run, and don't be surprised by anything. This is going to take more time than you can imagine, but you have all you need.

When I think back to the actual process of conceiving the time machine, everything became possible by virtue of a daily routine. For day after day after day, I woke up at five o'clock on the dot, ate breakfast, and then sat in the dark with a cup of coffee. After working my way up to an hour or more, certain nonsense happened. Just when I

least expected it, ideas huddled together, patterns flirted shamelessly, and fear exhausted itself. I might not have been completely conscious every single minute, but that doesn't seem to matter. You will not have the same experience I had, and that itself is cause for outrageous hope.

The other thing that you could do which would be a big help would be to pick some appropriate candidate and figure out the best way to love him or her as the case may be. Make no assumptions, and never forget to say please and thank you.

The reason that I never visit Aurora to check up on Avien is that there's too much to do here, and time is more precious than you can imagine. And, in all honesty, the present potential for disaster remains all too real.

I did not return to the United States because of something pre-ordained. There is no sequence of events, past or present, written in stone. Just between you and me, there isn't a sequence of events of any kind. Nothing I say about the future is immune to alteration. I might change my mind tomorrow, or Earth could collapse under the sheer weight of so many televisions and bad debts.

Neither did I return because of abstract principle. Jesus promised eternal life to true believers, and, if anyone should understand the transcendence of time, I'm the guy. But I'm no mystic. All I know is that being separated from Avien and Aurora is extraordinarily difficult. I am a stranger in a very, very strange land. There is no theological theory in this or any other world that can justify this loss. You can nail ninety-five theses to the door or come down off the mountain with ten reasonable laws, and none of that means anything to me.

And I am not here out of a dreamy love for mankind.

The simple fact of the matter is that I'm back in Baltimore, in August of the year 2000, because I love two-and-a-half women. I love them beyond any consideration of time or rationality, and this means I have a job to do. I am gainfully employed, and it's as simple as that. It's about time.