

Where to?

“What’s past is prologue,” the Tempest (II.1.253)

Thomas A. Carothers

Budget Paper

February 22, 2021

***There once was an Englishman, Sir Thomas More,
Who thought class structure quite terribly poor,
And imagined an island with ideal society.
Whose citizens act with sincere piety,
And its leaders are endowed with noble grandeur.***

Larry Bergstrom had changed. He was no longer the somewhat pudgy freckle-faced farm boy from Wisconsin. He was harder; his eyes had lost their sparkle; and he felt lost. The country had changed too: race riots; police with attack dogs; national guardsmen patrolling inner city streets in armored vehicles; whole neighborhoods in flames; people spitting on returning vets. He had seen too much death over the past year. He wasn't going back to the family dairy farm. He just couldn't go back. But where to?

The skies over San Francisco in the summertime were always a deep blue. Structures of various sizes and colors bathed in unfiltered sunlight cascaded like icing down the hills toward downtown. Traffic exiting the Golden Gate bridge seemed to melt into the tree covered coastal mountains. The bay shimmered in the mid-afternoon sun. Within days of his return, Larry had met a girl in the Haight-Ashbury district. She had long dark brown hair and arresting blue eyes and wore a loose tie-dyed coarse cotton blouse with no bra, an ankle length multi-colored Indian skirt with sparkling bits of metal, and water buffalo sandals on her feet. Man, he had never met a girl like this back in Wisconsin. They hit it off and soon were spending all their time together. Their days consisted of meandering about, checking out various wares offered by local artisans and street vendors, and commiserating with other recently discharged veterans in coffee houses. And the nights... oh the nights: Jimi Hendrix, thick clouds of pot wafting through the apartment, wildly other-worldly psychedelic trips, and lovemaking. He was living the dream! From time to time, Larry attempted to wrestle with reality and the realization that his little

Where to?

Thomas A. Carothers

February 22, 2021

stash of cash saved up from last year's pay wouldn't last indefinitely. At some point, he would have to find a job, but the thought of having to work for someone like Sergeant Burkhardt was more than he could tolerate. Anyway, with all the flashbacks that were tormenting him almost daily, he wasn't sure that he would be able to hold down a job.

One day, while he and Sarah were in the Blue Unicorn at their usual table with the usual group, someone started talking about some crazy farm up near Sebastopol in Sonoma County. This old farmer, Lou Gottlieb, called it LATWIDNO which stood for Land Access To Which Is Denied No One. Everyone else called it Digger Farm. If the vibes were right, the land would let you live there. Sweet pungent clouds of weed and Bob's lilting recitation of living off the land, sharing chores, sharing food, sharing girlfriends, participating in mystical earth rites, spending hours in meditation, and just simply grooving carried the group far, far away in a collective trance. Larry and Sarah were all in!

As Larry and Sarah walked up a gravel driveway on a beautiful early summer day with the typical deep blue skies and a gentle wind rustling through junipers, cottonwoods, and live oaks scattered throughout the property, they noted a group off to the right obviously in deep meditation, a girl, totally nude, picking flowers in a garden further up the hill, tents and huts of various sizes and shapes scattered about the property, and a farm house painted red, orange, green, pink, and yellow at the end of the driveway on the top of the hill.

"Fucking A", exclaimed Larry, "we're in fucking utopia!"

Well... not exactly. Somehow, it seemed that Larry always pulled farm duty. Even though he was obviously the strongest in the commune, did others think that he didn't have any brains and couldn't meditate? Lou walked around as if he owned the place, and the way he looked at all the girls, especially Sarah, really bugged Larry. Overall, though, everything was generally hip. That is, it was until the police

Where to?

Thomas A. Carothers

February 22, 2021

started coming to the farm. After the first visit, rumors spread like wildfire. Was there going to be a drug bust? Were they looking for draft dodgers? Gary Williams was said to have had a police record- were they looking for him? After a few more visits, a sense of dread began to grip the community. Meditation groups struggled to meditate. Everybody wore clothes. Then one day a bunch of police cars showed up, and one of the officers barked through a bullhorn "VACATE THE PREMISES IMMEDIATELY. REPEAT, VACATE THE PREMISES IMMEDIATELY" or face jail time. "Bummer! So much for so-called fuckin' utopia!"

Back in San Francisco, Larry and Sarah settled into their previous routine only in a different apartment. Even though life seemed to return to normal, concerns about the future continued to stalk Larry unbeknownst to Sarah. Late one night, unable to sleep, Larry drifted off into drug-altered musing:

***Garden of Eden perfect in every way.
Fruit for the taking from almost every tree.
No worries, no planning, no fears to allay.
No consequence is money since all is free.***

***Digger Farm not perfect yet oh so good.
A time to plant and time to meditate.
Organic crops generate wholesome food.
The world outside aflame in turmoil and hate.***

***Almighty God all dangers can dismiss.
Woman and man unable to just say no,
Eviction result of serpent's smooth bribes.***

***Could anything destroy such bliss as this?
Everyone protected by LATWIDNO.
Police, laws and zoning destroy good vibes.***

Over the next few months Larry and Sarah dabbled in this and then tried that, but nothing seemed to be a good fit. Larry knew that his honorable discharge qualified him for the GI bill. Perhaps he should go back to school and get a degree. Maybe if he did well enough, he wouldn't have to get a factory job and end up working for some asshole like Sergeant Burkhardt. Late one afternoon as he pondered his options, his mind wandered:

Where to?

Thomas A. Carothers
February 22, 2021

***There once was a young man named Larry
Who found life's prospects rather scary.
'Twas Utopia he sought,
But the search was so fraught
That he gave up and decided to marry.***

Twenty years later, Larry and Sarah were still together, had a family, and the kids were hitting the teenage years. The first week in March had been tough: Larry's firm lost a major account, and he was taking the heat. Sarah was in the midst of a weeks-long raging power struggle with Peekabo, their older daughter. It was late Thursday night. Larry had a headache. He poured himself a stiff one and lay back in his recliner. Since he had already drunk two very generous glasses of wine, he fell helplessly into a lurid nightmare that he and Sarah had barely escaped:

***It was surreal how things almost transpired.
A perfect society had existed millennia before.
Jim Jones assured the crowd it was not folklore.
Early church needs were doled out as required:
Apostolic socialism a new model thus inspired.
Armed with seed and shovel, rake, or hoe,
Warm clime, crops plentiful surely would grow
To feed, to nurture folks all they desired.
Guyana jungle truly was no paradise.
Daily harangues to promote joys of socialism.
Bland food and grape Kool-Aid each meal's buffet.
Showers were sparse and plentiful were lice.
Leaders revel in sadomasochism.
Enough! cried Larry, so they escaped doomsday.***

He came to in a cold sweat. "Shit, I can't believe how close we came to disaster in that hell hole! Another month in Jonestown and we would have been toast. What a bunch of losers Jones' goons were. Did Jim Jones think they could track down a bad ass marine in the jungle? Man, that whole ordeal was fuckin' scarier than Nam with all that voodoo shit goin' on."

Where to?

Thomas A. Carothers

February 22, 2021

Larry and Sarah trudged on through life. Larry's career survived the crisis, and he achieved professional and financial success. Peekabo matured and went on to college graduating summa cum laude with a degree in psychology. The other two kids graduated as well, and all were on their own establishing their places in society. Now Larry and Sarah were empty nesters, somewhat freer to pursue interests long set aside:

***There once was an older man named Larry
Who about life's promises had become wary.
If something offered seemed too good,
The elixir proffered was likely wormwood.
Is life a big joke worthy only of hari-kare?***

As Larry aged his wistful reminiscences about that magical summer in San Francisco and Digger Farm only grew more arresting, but the nightmare of The Peoples Temple always brought him down. He wondered, "Is utopia even a possibility?" Now that he was retired, he decided to return to his youthful quest, this time limited to study and research from the safety of his den. He took courses at the local university and read books of philosophy, history, literature, and political science. What really struck him was an almost insatiable quest for the perfect society throughout the ages. This especially seemed to be the case in the United States as each succeeding generation spawned yet another model to try out. Each of these social experiments, especially the Shakers and Heaven's Gate, seemed to contain a kernel of self-destruction, sort of like the *Mission Impossible* tapes that went up in flames at the end of the message.

"How in the world did the Shakers think their society could thrive. No sex, can you imagine? And those looneys in Heaven's Gate hoping to be teleported to a comet. Marshall Appelwhite, the clown who started Heaven's Gate, was even crazier than Jim Jones." His mind started rambling, and he imagined what it must have been like to have been an actor in each of these farces:

Where to?

Thomas A. Carothers
February 22, 2021

***Jebediah on one wall, his heart aching
Across from him a young girl did he espy
A most lithesome beauty was Tabitha Blythe,
And Jeb's emotions started him a-quaking.***

***Luther had this sense not of his making:
Upon this earth he could no more abide.
"Was there nowhere to live?" Luther sighed.
Setbacks too many, romances heart-breaking.***

***Furtive whispers, subtle touches ignite.
Frenzied shaking no longer can thwart desire.
The Shaker couple so enflamed take flight.***

***Perfect bliss preached Marshall Appelwhite.
Bunk beds to serve as cosmic flyers,
Heaven's Gate crew raptured from their sorry plight.***

As far as Larry could tell every attempt to create the perfect society was a bust, a joke, a bummer. Even though religion may be the opium of the masses, the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem sure looked more appealing than Uncle Joe's gulag or Mao's re-education farms.

"It's amazing," he thought, "what a wild goofy goose chase this imaginary society conjured up by Sir Thomas More has sent us all on."

***Topos in Greek means place, and ou means not.
So, 'tis nowhere we seek: what a bunch of rot!***

Larry lowered the back of his recliner, took another drag on his medical marijuana vape, and drifted off into a deep blissful sleep... replete with fantastical dreams of Utopia.