

"I know it looks pretty dismal," I said. "Especially when you see how the human population is caught up in this sway of excess. It's a diseased attitude, a psychological pandemic. It can't last. It's bound to crumble sooner or later."

"The sooner the better," said Ed. "If I was a praying man, I'd pray for it to fall apart this minute."

"Remember when we knelt on the bridge and prayed for an earthquake to take out the Glen Canyon Dam? It didn't work."

"Maybe we didn't pray hard enough. Maybe prayer doesn't work. Who knows what works? Revolution works, but it's hard to get people to revolt when they're too comfortable. There are just too goddamned many of us, and we have no sense of balance. We're stripping it all away to satisfy a cultural gluttony. What was it Dave Brower said? 'We're stealing from our children.' It's true. Even you and me. We're too lazy to actually get up off our asses and go to war. All we do is sit around and talk about it. At least most of the time, anyway. We should be busy throwing a monkey wrench into the endless gears of bureaucracy. Christ. We're anarchists. We're supposed to be out there dismantling bureaucracy and ensuring that it can't be recycled. Bureaucracy is death to the human spirit and brings death to this poor helpless planet, this organism that has its own life and its own reasons and to which we are incidental, maybe accidental, maybe fatally accidental."

Ed was sweating even though the air was cool with the coming of evening.

"Ya know, Jack, it's as though we've lost track of our origins. We've hidden our origins or maybe buried them, killed them and buried them so we don't have to look at them and honor them for what they are. Instead we've created the illusion of purpose, which is false. At least it's false from any biological point of view unless our purpose really is to kill off this planet. To be a cancer that eats away all that is alive and healthy."

"Do you really believe that? That we're a cancer eating away the planet?"

"Who wants to believe that? But when I sit up on Muley Point and look out over the desert that we've known and loved our entire adult lives and see how Navajo sheep have overgrazed it, or when I look at that dismal agglomeration called Page, Arizona—shithead capital of the Colorado Plateau—or that fucking Glen Canyon Dam, or Phoenix, or any number of similar disasters, I certainly see a corollary. I certainly ain't saying that all humans are like cancer cells. Some are and some ain't. The ones that are are the ones that love power

for the sake of power. Power for its own sake. Generals. Dictators. Many politicians. Who knows. Maybe most politicians. And the developers. And the technocrats. There's something insidious there. The techno-military-industrial complex. It's like a giant octopus or squid. And the more it grasps, the greater it grows. The greater it grows, the more it grasps. Most politicians serve it, are its lackeys, are mastered by it. Its mind is like a computer, apparently incapable of fathoming anything organic. And we're its slaves, its serfs. Most of us live in this serfdom, dominated by a system controlled by the power mongers. Now, we're all slaves to financial necessity—money. We earn just enough money to buy food and basic necessities. TVs, pickup trucks, motorboats, houses—and we pay it off on the installment plan. Rarely have any money to spare. Some of us don't have enough to live on. But a few of us have vast resources of money. Have specialized in the acquisition and control of money. Gain money by stripping our planet—this wonderful, tiny, fragile living organism—of its resources. Why? Because money buys power and more power. Power is the root of all evil, for chrissake!”

“Jesus. You make it sound hopeless. Do you think it's hopeless?”

Ed looked long into the fire. “No. I don't think it's hopeless. I think on some level or other, life will survive. Probably man will survive. But I don't think that humanity can survive within these conditions too much longer. Sooner or later the techno-military-industrial system and its overreaching oligarchy must fail and break down. The sooner it does, the better the chances we'll survive. But the first order is to decentralize. That would neutralize the current power base. Centralization of power, political power, military power, corporate power is what sustains oligarchy. Decentralization into modest communities where individuals assume responsibility and the community is directed by consensus seems to me to be the most sensible way. Get rid of the police state altogether. Stop hiring thugs and giving them badges. Instead arm everybody. Give everybody a gun and teach him or her how to use it. And assume responsibility for policing our communities ourselves. It seems to work in Switzerland. Decentralize into communities of freeholders, free men and women whose communities are founded on mutual aid, like Kropotkin said. Therein lies the true spirit of anarchism. Anarchism in its highest sense is synonymous with democracy in its highest sense. We don't live in a true democracy—we live within a system of standards that has shifted far away from Jefferson's

ideas. It didn't take long for that early government to be manned by politicians first, citizens second. That was a critical time in American history. America has been on the wrong track ever since."

"I can imagine the megalopolitan areas breaking down and becoming totally chaotic," I said. "Actually, I can't imagine them not breaking down. But I think it'll take a long time for a collective sense of responsibility to evolve so that autonomous communities founded on the principles of mutual cooperation can prevail. First, the human population of this country far exceeds the optimum population. To me, the optimum human population allows for a state of balance between our species and all other species within a given biotic community. There probably shouldn't be more than fifteen or twenty million humans on this whole continent. We've probably got twenty-five times that many of us as we sit here drinking beer. Pray for a pandemic, goddammit! We'll take our chances. Shit, man, we've gotta really thin ourselves out or the planet's fucked!"

"Well, Jack, could be the planet is fucked. But just imagine a given watershed. Like the Upper Rio Grande. Your watershed. Imagine small communities based on family and traditional ties. And as you say, an optimum human population is maintained. There is no centralized power in Washington, D.C., or even Santa Fe. Geopolitical boundaries no longer exist. The only meaningful boundaries are watershed boundaries. And the concept of wealth is based on the health of the watershed. Not money or excessive possessions. From each according to his means. To each according to his needs. Anarchist communism. Not bureaucratic communism. Any governing is by committee. Rotating committee. Like jury duty—it's a community service, not a profession, not a career. Old Prince Kropotkin had a pretty good definition of anarchist society. You've got it written on your wall at home. Where did it appear originally?"

"In his essay called 'Modern Science and Anarchism.' Do you know where I first saw that?"

"Nope."

"In 1972 you gave me a copy of *Anarchism*, by George Woodcock. It's a copy you got in Hoboken in 1964. Woodcock included Kropotkin's definition near the beginning of his own book. Kropotkin wrote the article about anarchism for the 1911 edition of *Britannica*. Woodcock wrote the article for the current edition."

"I wrote my master's thesis on the morality of political violence," said Ed.

"What were your conclusions?" I asked.

"When all other means fail, I believe the true patriot has the right, is obligated to defend his country against the government. When a government terrorizes its people and, by extension, terrorizes living creatures to serve its own ends, I believe violence is justified. The violence of self-defense. I would defend Clarke and Becky and Susie, and even you, you old fart, from a criminal who was threatening bodily harm. You defend your loved ones. And you can extend that protection to include creatures who live free in the wild. To include all life. All life is kindred, and all life belongs to this living organism that is the Earth. You defend the Earth from exploiters who want to turn its life and its so-called resources into money."

"How do you distinguish between terrorism and sabotage?" I asked.

"That's simple enough. To me, terrorism is the act of threatening or committing violence against living creatures. Could be planting a bomb in a plane. Could be strafing villages in Vietnam. Could be chaining piñon or juniper trees to make way for cattle grazing or strip mining. Could be setting cyanide traps to murder predators that pose a threat to ranchers. These are all forms of terrorism: terrorism against life, terrorism against the planet. Sabotage is the dismantling of the tools of terrorism. I believe that the government commits great acts of terrorism. And they justify these acts of terrorism through legislation, calling what they do legal.

"Yet eco-defense or monkey wrenching could lead to a whole new level of police action. Police are hired by an oligarchy for protection—someone to do their dirty work for them. It's called fascism. Fascism is when a government becomes fully centralized and autocratic and develops enough power to oppress the opposition. Finally it totally controls industry, finance, and commerce. You know the process is complete when they start burning books and breaking up public demonstrations that denounce their own principles. Censorship. Regimentation. Death to outlaws like you and me. You can bet that the FBI has kept track of us and our friends for years. Still and all, we have to resist the bastards. 'Resist much, obey little,' as old Uncle Walt wrote."

"Great man, old Uncle Walt."

"I've always looked forward to the time when the system itself collapses, whether from its own accord or from a nudge here and there from the likes of

us. We have to go back to a more natural, more normal life. Get rid of this seemingly boundless capacity for technologizing ourselves into a corner so that technology finally serves only itself and enslaves humanity. We really are slaves, you know. Even you and me. We're slaves to a system that we can't get away from no matter how hard we try. And this system becomes ever more insidious, more self-serving, more greedy by the minute. There's no real solution. Humanity has to reduce its own population by several magnitudes until we're more in balance with the rest of the species so that maybe some of them have a chance to eat us for a change. I really believe that we took the wrong fork in the road when we invented agriculture, when we tamed some beasts. When we stopped being hunter-gatherers. That's when we invented the system that would eventually enslave us, every last one of us. And I'm not talking about just our bodies being enslaved. Our minds are enslaved as well. Television, for example, has been the greatest force of centralization so far invented. That kind of centralization leads to the most insidious form of slavery of all, the enslaving of the human mind, redirecting this wonderful product of millions of years of evolution toward the most banal, shallow, meaningless level of intellectual and spiritual ineptitude. One of most wonderful sights I've ever beheld is that wonderful scene in your friend Godfrey Reggio's film, *Koyaanisqatsi*, where a huge pile of television sets was blown up in slow motion. That inspired me to go home and shoot a hole right through the screen of the TV set. That's a great film. Maybe one of the greatest."

We ruminated on the embers for a while, both of us frustrated at having been born into a time when the cloud of human bureaucracy cast its shadow ubiquitously, relentlessly across the land.

"We have to fight back, Jack. We can't ever give up the good fight of free men. We have to fight for wilderness if for no other reason than so we and others can have a place to disappear into when they come looking for us. We have to fight to preserve islands of diversity. We have to fight to maintain what little self-esteem we have left. Christ, we can't let the bastards have it all. We have to stop 'em somehow."

"I know we have to fight," I said. "But we have to watch our step. It's really easy to get busted. Especially you, goddammit. Why the hell did you have to go and get famous? It really crimps the style of the silent revolutionary."