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A GARLIC TESTAMENT

Seasons on a Small New Mexico Farm

STANLEY CRAWFORD

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To Adam and Kate

together. My spirits will rise as the shadows lengthen and the day begins to cool. Back from the river, showered and dressed, I'll ramble through the gardens and walk up the road to the other field, which will need to be tilled or mowed or cultivated or planted or irrigated tomorrow or Monday or Tuesday, and there will seem to be easily enough time for all these things before the four-day market cycle resumes again on Wednesday—though I secretly know, even as I try to hide the knowledge from myself, that those three days will be far from enough time.

Night descends. The crickets sing. I learn to hope again, and to know the restoration of the strange faith in the fragile endeavor of raising things from the earth, to accept the fragility, to accept the abundance.

I can feel the days ahead stirring in my body. They are connected, these fields, these high sunny days and warm nights, and this creature that plies them endlessly through the days.

I am awake again. It all makes sense again. I know I can go on.

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THE ATOMIC BOMB RING

THE THURSDAY MARKET is another matter. It takes place in another town. And I go there for other reasons.

Where I live, you go "to" Santa Fe, Española, Taos, or even Albuquerque. But when you go to Los Alamos, you always go "up to" it. And when you refer to it from my village or Santa Fe or Española you always refer to it as "up there," "up in Los Alamos," "up on the Hill."

The preposition marks the fact that Los Alamos perches above its surrounding communities on the slopes of an ancient volcano, at an altitude of seven thousand five hundred feet. The preposition also marks the town's cultural remoteness from the rest of northern New Mexico as an overwhelmingly Anglo settlement, less than fifty years old, ringed by Pueblo Indian and Hispanic villages that have been there for centuries. It may also touch upon the apartheid-like structure of the town, which is made up of a resident white scientific and managerial elite served by a largely Hispanic blue-collar work force that commutes up a twisting mountain road from the Española Valley and its many surrounding villages, including my own forty-five miles to the northeast.

Roughly the same rules apply for selling at the Los

Alamos Farmers' Market as at any other farmers' market, more or less. And the reasons for growing for such a market, and for selling at one, remain the same as elsewhere, namely that buyer and seller stand on an equal footing as producer and customer, that the selling farmers and gardeners are not agents or representatives or employees of institutions or corporations, that they are likely to be in possession of more information about their produce—and be generally willing to impart it—than the entire staff of a supermarket; and that the give-and-take of buying and selling takes place without the intervention of corporate advertising machinery, in an open space, under the sky, in an atmosphere of enhanced sensual alertness. A good market is an information system where fruits and vegetables are exchanged along with lore about how they are planted, grown, stored, cooked, and in this the Los Alamos Farmers' Market is no exception. It may also be the most beautiful farmers' market in the whole country.

The market takes place on a graveled clearing amid a grove of ponderosa pines, and everywhere you look there are pleasant views. To the west the eye sweeps through the pines and across a grassy clearing to the fitful traffic of Central Avenue as it crests a gentle rise, the highest point of the downtown area. Just beyond, in a bowl-like depression of well-trimmed lawn and weeping willows, there lies a circular pond where swim municipal geese and ducks. To the north, through the pines, there rise the steep wooded slopes of the Jemez. The mountain air of the seven-thousand-foot town is clear and crisp and often scented with the early morning smoke of piñon and juniper and pine burning in the local fireplaces.

And to the south 150 yards, across the grass, through the elms and cottonwoods and spruce, there sits the dark shape of Fuller Lodge, a splendid old building of huge logs

laid flat and stood upright and bridging across each other for two stories up. It was designed by the architect John Gaw Meem in the 1920s as the centerpiece of the posh Los Alamos Ranch School which catered to the sons of wealthy easterners. The market side is the Lodge's backyard; if you go around the other side you will find a stately front porch which gives on to a band of lush grass and trees, beyond which is the downtown business district of the town of ten thousand—which for the past forty years has obstructed the view of the downward sloping Pajarito Plateau as it drops off into the Española Valley and gives way to a sweeping, a breath-filling expanse of the whole of the Sangre de Cristo Range from the Colorado border to where it ends at Santa Fe and beyond, to the Sandia Mountains above Albuquerque. There are arguably better panoramas in northern New Mexico—the view of the Jemez from San Cristobal or from Truchas, or coming down the Peñasco highway, or entering the basin above Abiquiu where Georgia O'Keeffe painted—than the one so commonly available in Los Alamos (except now from the front porch of the Lodge), but in any list it would be near the top. The school and its Lodge were taken over by the United States Army Corps of Engineers late in 1942; on one of the log columns of the porch of this rustic version of a Greek temple you will see the letters "T-81" stenciled in white, its official name and address from then on, through the rest of World War II.

The Lodge was the first headquarters of what is now Los Alamos National Laboratory, and many of the first wooden lab buildings were built around the old sinkhole that has been known as Ashley Pond ever since the mischievous Ranch School boys named it after the first director, Ashley Pond. All is lawn now, and trees, and sidewalk, paving, picnic table, street lamp, in that rough circle that touches the Lodge,

and then the Community Center, a former lab building—postwar, second-generation, built in concrete; the hundred-foot diameter Pond now banded by a neat cement sidewalk; and the Los Alamos County Building, which looks like a high-flying savings and loan from the early seventies. And then our farmers' market of some twenty to fifty pickups and station wagons that assemble in a roughly oval form in the pine trees, on the sloping ground, from around six in the morning each summer Thursday. The little gathering completes the circle, an area of perhaps five or six acres, one of those nodes of extraordinary historical intensity which is belied by the apparent calm and even peacefulness of the present-day site.

The passer-through could miss it all. The sheltered brass plaque on the far side of the Pond. The tiny Historical Museum next to the Lodge, a kind of shrine to the good old days of total secrecy (*pace* David Greenglass and Klaus Fuchs)—or the illusion of it. And your standard innocent would know little or none of this. He or she could drive across this expanse in ten seconds, see nothing. "What, the atomic bomb was invented here?"

Twenty years ago I was such an innocent, breathlessly driving my VW van toward the legendary laboratory salvage yard in search of bargains—or whatever you call the expensive-looking debris that sells by the pound, which enthusiastic scavengers believe surely can be made useful again. I was young or youngish, I had a wife and child, I was going to build a house, which meant that I had license to become a pack rat. Those first visits yielded some wide redwood boards, one of which I still use for various purposes, and other odds and ends that have since blended into the landscape. My desk is spotted with demobilized or outmoded office fixtures from Los Alamos. The chair I sit on to write

once served the back and bottom of some laboratory physicist or bureaucrat or flunky. And for years I banged away on a giant wide-carriage Royal that had, by all evidence, been little-used before being sold for a tenth of its value.

My first memory of the atomic bomb connects to something other than Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I was seven in the summer of 1945, probably too young to understand what adults were having to learn about and imagine among themselves. News of the end of the war in Europe came over the radio. It meant that my mother had hope of eventually receiving word of her father in Stuttgart. I was home sick from school that day. My mother let me go out in my bathrobe into the dark garage and sit at the wheel of our green Ford sedan and honk the horn. But for VJ day several months later, the Japanese surrender, there's a blank in my memory.

A couple of years later a breakfast cereal company began selling through the mail a toy called the atomic bomb ring. It followed a long line of Captain Midnight and Superman rings which featured magical emblems or secret compartments or compasses or magnets. They were brass-plated pot metal and plastic creations advertised on the evening radio serials and the backs of breakfast-food packages. To obtain one, you had to send in a quarter or thirty-five cents and a box top or coupon. The first kid to get one in the mail commanded waves of interest at school for a day or two, until the flimsy plastic fittings broke or until the varnish wore off the brass plating to leave a greenish band on your sweaty finger.

The atomic bomb ring represented a startling departure in the ring market from the usual hidden compartments and emblems. It consisted of a bullet-shaped form about the size of a .22 cartridge, mounted atop a brass

ring, with a finned red plastic cap that covered a tiny lens. You were supposed to step inside a darkened room and hold the lens to your eye until you saw dimly pulsating greenish spots. The ring cost a dollar, a large sum for a middle-class nine-year-old.

I dutifully taped my four shiny quarters to a piece of shirt board and mailed it off. But the ring didn't arrive in the expected month or six weeks, a blow to my status at school—where Kip and Jimmy were parading their atomic bomb rings up and down the covered boardwalk that ran alongside the classrooms, until Kip lost his down the wide cracks between the boards. The school had been hastily built late in the war. Shortages dictated that the porch boards be laid not side by side but with lumber-saving gaps which also happened to be wide enough to consume coins, pencils, and atomic bomb rings. Fishing out lost items was a regular recess pastime.

My mother finally sat down and wrote a letter to the atomic bomb ring people demanding satisfaction for her disappointed boy. Not long after that I became aware of the fact that at least one adult in the family circle regarded the ring as controversial when he forbade his daughter Rowena to order it. This was a new and interesting breeze crossing my world; I made note of it without having any idea of its meaning. Eventually my atomic bomb ring arrived. In all I probably spent no more than a few minutes staring into its lens in my closet among boxes cluttered with electric trains, or in the hall closet with the vacuum cleaner, pushing aside overcoats no one ever seemed to wear. I probably lost the red lens cap too, and my finger started turning green, and the ring ended up in a box of childhood treasures of the sort that time speedily devalues.

It seems strange now that a toy introduced me to the nuclear age, but then that is what toys also do: they carry the

news in the coded way of all artifacts. This was the first message I was to receive from Los Alamos, sent by way of various intermediaries all struggling to imagine and represent a new element of civilization.

As a freshman at the University of Chicago, one of my classes was in the basement of the West Stands next to a green-painted space, aquarium-like, illuminated by sunlight reaching down from windows set at sidewalk level, where Enrico Fermi had created the first sustained nuclear reaction only eleven years before—though it seemed a lifetime then for this particular seventeen-year-old.

There followed the usual experience of the fifties and sixties, by the end of which I was protesting the war in Vietnam by marching in the streets. That war was comprehensible in its way and arguably wrong, while the Cold War and the nuclear arms race seemed more like a disease, a systemic pathology of the body politic with no known cure. I spent the seventies turning away from it all to raise children, build a house, grow garlic.

In March 1982 I received a visit from a federal investigator seeking background information on a woman who had recently worked for us on the farm. The visit would have been innocuous had I not just returned from a long walk in which I was puzzling through my inability to write a chapter about Los Alamos for a book I didn't yet know I would never finish—tentative conclusion being that I was largely ignorant of Los Alamos even though it was only an hour's drive away and even though it was where most of my neighbors and a couple of friends worked, and where—had I forgotten?—I had done a brief stint as a technical writing consultant for a solar project around 1972. The security investigator was oddly

terrified at our dogs, and I was afraid of him; but the interview proceeded politely if a little strainedly; and no, Orlina didn't drink, didn't use drugs, had surely never belonged to any subversive organizations, she was one of the nicest people in the universe—which she happens to be. But inwardly I raged. What is this, 1954? Subversive organizations? I thought they had long ago stopped asking these questions. I had visions of security investigators plying the villages and towns of northern New Mexico, the schools, the offices, the businesses, asking their questions again and again, year after year, turning neighbors and friends and relatives into informers and snitches. I could not call this a police state, but I could call it a functional blueprint for a police state should one be found to be politically expedient; the machinery is there for keeping track of large numbers of people and for making everybody believe that it's for the larger good, which is the better part of the substance of any such apparatus.

But true, I could forget that the money I had saved twenty years before to go to Europe and become a novelist had been earned as a technical writer for a missile firm, and that once I had filled out all those forms, and that once I had worn a badge to work, that I had had a secret clearance, that at the nadir of that experience I had been asked to show films (having skills as a projectionist) for a chemical-biological warfare conference, to project in the early morning hours U.S. Government Savings Bond commercials centered around gruesome clips of Fidel Castro's firing squads, inspiring government contractors to invest in their ultimate employer.

I can't say why I stopped being a believer, perhaps then, in a cold sweat in the dark auditorium of Norton Air Force Base. Later, surely, I became weary of the leverage of fear that the arms race exerted on all who could bear to think of it.

The winter after the federal investigator's visit, the winter of 1982–83, the next writing season, I spent a day a week up in Los Alamos poking around. I went alone some days, took friends with me on others. I read in the Lab's vast technical library, the two floors of it open to the public, I ate in the cafeteria with its stunning view of the Sangre de Cristos, I drove around the public roads of the Laboratory grounds, I went to the Science Museum, the Los Alamos Historical Museum, talked to friends who lived there or had once lived there, I looked at street maps and Geological Survey maps, Laboratory maps and environmental impact studies, drove around Los Alamos and down into its bedroom suburb of White Rock, week after week; I read novels set in Los Alamos, articles about the town, watched TV documentaries, read through histories and memoirs.

But I was no journalist. I had no head for the scientific and technical intricacies. I was too partisan. I was sure all those around would hear the axe grinding in my questions and remarks. At the center of it all was death, the vast inescapable fact that this was a tunnel into which one would enter with little hope of seeing any light again: nuclear weapons were supreme instruments of death and destruction, and there was no way I could think of them as anything else.

And this was what I had moved within forty-five miles of, this was where Rose Mary and I had built our house of mud bricks, this was where we were raising our children, this was where we had made our little garlic farm: on the lee side, downwind, of the radiant brain of the nuclear arms race.

The Los Alamos National Laboratory is a big place. A billion dollars gets zapped, boiled, cooked, banged, boomed, copied, faxed, fiddled, stolen and given away up there every year. Seven thousand men and women think and calculate and scheme and lobby and write studies and conduct tests and

adjustments, build things and tear them down, radiate everything in sight and then try to de-radiate it, invent and dis-invent, eat lunch, jog, play volleyball, receive regular paychecks and generous benefits up there every year, as they have for nearly fifty years now, as they plan to for the next fifty years as well.

This is why I sell garlic and flowers at the farmers' market in Los Alamos. On the gravel, in the pines, a stone's throw from where Oppenheimer and his colleagues thought out the details of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs.

You may say that the place gives you the creeps. I understand. It once made me angry to the point of speechlessness. And true, if some scientist or engineer or janitor presses the wrong button in the Plutonium Facility across the canyon a mile from where I sit on the back of my tailgate with my onions and garlic and basil, I'm a goner as surely as most of the city of ten thousand—or much of northern New Mexico, for that matter. This is alarmist conjecture, to be sure. But there's much secrecy at the Lab, which no doubt allows for a lot of sloppiness and for bad science or non-science masquerading as science, secrecy which generally makes it impossible for anyone to accurately assess the risks of selling flowers a mile downwind from the Plutonium Facility or growing garlic forty-five miles downwind either.

Creepy, yes, in that sense. I used to take naps on the grass next to the Pond after the market until I realized what had been there in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Then I decided it might be more prudent despite the heat to take naps inside the cab of the truck. But not creepy in the other sense, of inventing diabolical machinery. What I came to understand was that the United States of America is the biggest gun-runner in the history of the world. We've armed

ourselves privately and publicly to the teeth and armed the rest of the world as well: for the past fifty years we've invented, tested, manufactured, distributed untold billions in armaments. Besides being used in the wars we ourselves have fought, the guns and bombs we make have largely served to make repressive governments even more repressive, simply because governments are better customers for armaments than individuals, except perhaps in the USA. Which is to say that there is an inherently authoritarian, anti-democratic bias to virtually all weapons work.

Los Alamos is where the best bangs are invented. You can hear some of the smaller tests going off in the arroyos at noon. Yet in this work you may argue that it's unfair to single out for criticism Los Alamos or the Department of Energy or the University of California, manager of the Lab, because so much of this work is carried out in virtually every major city in the country.

This as I say is why I sell garlic in Los Alamos. The place is really no worse than anywhere else. And in many respects as a community it is far better than most: wonderful views, clear air, good schools, no crime (in the usual sense of the word), fine libraries, excellent swimming pool, mountain walks and skiing just up the hill. And you can argue that its citizens have fewer illusions about the central business of the nation, to develop and manufacture the world's best weapons. Elsewhere it's much easier to turn your back, go about your own private little business, pay your taxes, trust in the wisdom of those who guide our nation, and believe that all is well.

But in Los Alamos the question must be constantly addressed or excused, or rationalized, or put aside, because it so constantly forces its way into view in the large and small ways of any town. If you want to know what military socialism looks like, come to Los Alamos. If you want to

know what the future could look like for all of us—supposing the nation finally acknowledges its continuing interest in supplying arms for all the world's dictators and all the world's wars—then Los Alamos is a place you ought to have a look at.

I don't find it creepy anymore. I've been up there hundreds of times. I can drive by the lights and storage tanks and towers of the old Plutonium Facility across from the airport and wonder calmly how many hundreds of years will be needed to complete its decontamination. I can glance to the right at the runway that parallels the highway into town, see if the Ross Airlines turboprop is in yet, and I can recall reading that they stopped flying plutonium in and out of Los Alamos twenty years ago—or so they say, because how would we know otherwise? I can turn right at the Lodge, once part of a school, now home of the Chamber of Commerce, a place where meetings and wedding receptions are held, and think of the stroke of malign genius fifty years ago that led our universities into the business of inventing weapons of mass destruction. I can wonder if they will ever be able to redeem themselves from this philosophical betrayal.

My intention when I first decided to sell my garlic up there was to stop being afraid of Los Alamos. My intention was to become part of the place, to experience it, to earn a point of view about it, as one who to a certain extent had made Los Alamos his community too.

My point of view is the tailgate of my pickup, parked each Thursday morning in summer on the rim of that five-acre circle within which was invented a half-century ago the first atomic bombs. My customers are the women and men of Los Alamos, some of whom were there at the beginning, and their sons and daughters, and their successors, the wives of their successors, who carry on the work begun in 1943, and their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren who sweep

through the market area in little bands on excursions from day-care centers.

They are good customers. I cannot think of them as evil people. We've got to know each other in a polite, distant way over the past seven or eight years I've been selling there. We chat a lot about gardens, and the weather, and how to cook this and that. We don't talk about all the rest. Los Alamos people seem slow to accept outsiders, perhaps fearing what they think of Los Alamos. But I know how to speak their language. The first time I come up to Los Alamos each season, it feels like going home to the Southern California of the fifties and sixties. Most of the farmers who sell in Los Alamos are Hispanic. Most of the customers are Anglo women. As an Anglo male with a university education, I'm on the wrong side of the wooden planks and apple boxes that make up my stand. But my customers have decided I'm all right.

In fact I'm not. But since I'm part of the place, perhaps certain things are being overlooked. I worried about my business when a little group I belong to, the Los Alamos Study Group, decided to meet at Fuller Lodge once a month on Sunday evenings to discuss so many of those things people in northern New Mexico are afraid of or reluctant to talk about. We decided to announce our topics in the local paper, and give our names in an ad we paid for ourselves. Over the course of several months a handful of Los Alamos people came to our meetings and joined in our thoughtful discussions—a handful of potentially thousands. Perhaps those others were worried about their jobs, just as I was worried about my business. But the greatest danger of all in a country that prides itself on being a democracy is failing to speak your mind, to speak your fears and worries, to risk your job, your business.

Los Alamos has never figured out how to mon-

umentalize itself, a ticklish problem for the city known as the destroyer of cities. Oppenheimer was perhaps drawn to northern New Mexico by the same spell of the landscape that lured later generations of artists and anarchists to the region, to paint, to write, to build houses of mud, grow garlic. Perhaps he was conscious of the fact that he was founding high in the mountains a modern Delphi. He fished for imagery in mystical literature and came up with a line from a sonnet by John Donne for the name of the first atomic test in Alamogordo, which eventually became the name of the main drag of the town, Trinity Drive. Betrayed by his friends and vilified by the times, his ghost had to be long content with a truncated one-way street off Trinity in his name, whose principal address was the police department, and with an annual lecture series in his honor. Not until 1983 did the Lab pay official homage when it renamed the library after its founder.

The bombs are there, of course, in the Bradbury Science Museum, less a museum than a public relations shrine, and named after Oppenheimer's successor—whose wife buys my onions and garlic. The bombs or rather their replicas are painted white, but without the graffiti the bomber crews scribbled all over them as they were loaded into their planes, which we would now regard as tasteless, and are without the red spray paint lines along the steel joints. But in their whiteness they are more realistic than the sinister black shapes on display at the National Atomic Museum in Albuquerque, a true cathedral, or Lourdes, or Disneyland, of the nuclear arms race.

Nor do the names of the several hundred streets of the town reflect its history except in perhaps three or four cases, Oppenheimer Drive of course, Manhattan Drive, and Trinity Drive. In this largely Anglo town most of the rest are in Real

Estate Spanish, a commercial dialect that extends across much of the Southwest.

And in fact what monument could you erect to commemorate the grand achievement of this town and its famous national laboratory, arguably one of the most powerful places on earth?

As I sit on my tailgate in the pines, my back to the grassy clearing, I sometimes think about the rough circle of trees and grass and pavement ringed by the Historical Museum and Lodge and Community Center, the round crater-like Pond, County Building, and farmers' market: here perhaps is that monument, a grassy space a few acres in extent, without prominent stone or marker.

It is a space to which I come once a week in the summer with my flowers and garlic. It would not do to call them offerings or charms. I am not a believer in the simplistic evils, in vampires.

Yet all this vaguely—disjointedly—adds up to why I choose to sell in Los Alamos, and why I persist in this exchange. I am pleased when a bureaucrat or engineer or scientist from the Lab comes by the market early in the morning and buys up an armload of bouquets for his secretarial staff back at the office, over to the west, across the canyon, over the bridge, behind the guarded doors. It pleases me to think of those flowers making their way into the inner recesses of a place most Americans will be forever forbidden to visit.

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FINANCIAL STATEMENT

THE QUESTION HAS been asked: "Do you actually make a living on an acre and a half of garlic?"

No: it takes another acre of statice flowers and two or three acres of vegetables, mainly winter squash and pumpkins, to make a living.

A strictly financial view of the farm is what I have to take during the annual accounting with the Farmers Home Administration at the end of each year, in the declining days of early December. The frames of my farm life contract to the partitions and fixtures of a standard government-issue office in a nearby town, and to the dollar value of what Rose Mary and I produce and to our costs and expenses. The fields are a memory now, the shadows are cold, and in the dry, overheated air of an office my farm life could seem to take place on another planet.

There is an element of luck in all economic arrangements, which has to do with whether the tides of economic change happen to be going with or against your own personal inclinations. Our balance sheet often looks good because the four acres we bought in the 1970s have appreciated markedly; and because we built our house with

our own hands as money became available, we have never been burdened with a mortgage. We're fortunate to live in a region where we can retail the vast bulk of what we grow. The occasional good farming year has made up for a few bad years, and literary advances and grants, extended family loans, low-interest FmHA loans, short-term operating loans from a local bank have enabled us to keep going; consequently our short- and medium-term debts are reasonable in relation to our assets.

But the frames of the conventional financial statement are narrow. They tend to leave out which way the economic tide is moving, thus excluding important shifts in the attribution of costs and in the creation of value. Over the past ten years, for people at the lower end of the economic scale the tide withdrew in the form of rising health care and education costs and reduced levels of social services in general, while an ever-increasing share of public wealth flowed to the military-industrial complex, and into a vast nonproductive sector of financial manipulation—with its grotesque transfers of wealth and debt. This state of affairs is reflected in the disparity between those at the bottom earning a minimum wage with few or no fringe benefits, and the fortunes paid those at the pinnacle of professional and corporate structures. This is a weight that bears down on the negative side of our balance sheet as much as it does on that of anyone at the lower and least-structured end of the economic scale.

By opening up the frame, we can include other factors which do not fit into the boxes and lines of the usual financial statement. There is the fact that my labor and Rose Mary's provide food for ourselves and our friends and workers, and that it is of greater nutritional value than most supermarket produce. Further, I regard our labor as a product, not an expense: it is healthy in itself, at least much of the time, which

means that we place a lesser burden on the health care system than we might were we working in a polluted city at more lucrative occupations.

The farm also enables us to contribute time and money to two local acequias and the farmers' markets, thereby adding value to the infrastructure of our village and to neighboring towns. There is no place on the financial statement for this value.

And in such community work, and through the farm, we're able to live out our passion for this land, its skies, its waters. We're able to shape and nourish and maintain a landscape, as tenders of irrigation channels and watchers of rivers, as stewards of the small parcels of land that have fallen under our care.

The wealth that comes to us from the earth is considerable, however undervalued it may be in the marketplace. Even when we think ourselves strapped or poor, most years we're able to contribute hundreds of pounds of produce, even tons, to those far more in need than ourselves. Whatever produce spoils goes into the compost heap or into the goose pen, to return eventually to feed the earth again. Thus we burden no landfill or sewage treatment plant with farm wastes or kitchen scraps.

Security can be seen as a complex of investments in real estate, stocks and bonds, retirement plans, life insurance, health plans, and so on. Or it can be defined as that web of arrangements with family and friends and neighbors and coworkers, and with the land itself, which one has woven into a sense of community. We have virtually no institutional security of the conventional sort: we have chosen instead to place our security in the hands of the community in which we live and work. Such is the old way, the traditional way; and who knows, this old way may be more certain than its

institutional counterpart, particularly in a time of failing banks and insurance companies and evasive governmental agencies.

Toward the end of each year, when the financial accounting is over and done with in the Farmers Home Administration office, and I am back home fretting over the always-unsatisfactory numbers, I will often pose the question in an extreme form: Would I rather have a substantial savings account, a health plan, life insurance, a pension plan—yet hate the life I lead in order to have these things? We have chosen to make a living, not endure one. In the deeper sense, ends mostly meet—perhaps as much as they ever do in human life.

The shadows are long, and the numbers are always unsatisfactory, and when the forms are filled out and the account books closed the winter looms ahead as a cold tunnel down into which one must descend. But there are the little flames. The catalogs arrive with their bright pictures of fruits and flowers and of astoundingly perfect heads of lettuce. And with them, the hope, the determination that next year the same mistakes won't be made, that the weather will be better, without drought or flood or hail or frosts too late or too early, that next year I'll be stronger, wiser, more foresighted, more philosophical, more pragmatic; perhaps less idealistic, perhaps less the dreamer.

But who knows. Perhaps I perversely enjoy making the same mistakes over and over again—perhaps I even take a wry pleasure in seeing what new ones I can come up with after all this time, because there will always be new ones. Of course the cycle is flawed. There can be no perfection, only dreams of it, dreams of improvement, ease, completion.

Yet the dream must have its day, it must have its hour, its season to rebuild the little hearth where hopes may glow

and flame, its private space where it can weave to its own pattern the commercial imaginings of the greater world, which wishes to do all your dreaming for you, your imagining, and which will try to form and reform your hopes to its own ends. The dream is a labor both of self-creation but also of self-defense against the commercial imagination of our time, whose boundless resources are so artfully beamed into those spaces we think of as our own, and which would harness our needs and desires and fears and fantasies to their profitable ends: free enterprise, so called, knows no bounds and shrinks from no means in the pursuit of its power over the imagination.

Thus to dream a garden and then to plant it is an act of independence and even defiance to that greater world. And though that garden or field you have first dreamed and then planted may later come in the high summer noon to seem a tyranny of its own, it is nonetheless one to which you have bound yourself voluntarily, with eyes open, head clear, without intermediary, without the sleight of hand and the duplicity, or with much less of them, of human aggregations—political, corporate, whatever—that will always aspire to feed you, fuel your equipment, illuminate your nights, and imagine away your life.

The dreams will fail. There is no perfection. There will be drought, flood, plague—inevitably, everywhere, sooner, then later again. But everywhere also the imagination will overcome them, and like the spider that within hours emerges from the rubble to spin a first silver filament across the desert created by a man on an orange tractor as he tills under the last harvested field, it will begin its work of creation and re-creation. It has not—you may argue—yet been wholly defeated anywhere. It may, for all its sloppiness and foolishness, be our most powerful faculty.

The numbers are quickly forgotten. The financial statement must finally give way to the narrative, with all its exceptions, special cases, imponderables. It must finally give way to the story, which is perhaps the way we arm ourselves against the next and always unpredictable turn of the cycle in the quixotic dare that is life: across the rock and cold of lifelessness, it is our seed, our clove, our filament cast toward the future.