

The Notebooks and Reports  
of William Weston

# ECOTOPIA

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(May 15) Marissa Brightcloud. A self-adopted, Indian-inspired name—many Ecotopians use them. Met me at train yesterday, to bring me to the forest camp where I am to observe lumbering and forestry practices for a few days. Assumed at first she must be some kind of PR or government person. Later learned she is one of seven members of elected committee that runs camp and tens of thousands of acres of forest. Strong, warmly physical woman—slender but with solid hips; dark curly hair, large intense eyes: I'd guess at an Italian family background. It was still damp morning—she wore a rough knitted sweater, denim pants, some kind of hiking or work shoes. Only decoration a light silk scarf at her neck—flowery, subtle pattern.

She had arranged bicycles for us. Panic: I haven't been on a bike in years! Wobbly at first. She watched me get onto it again with calm amusement, then we headed out through the station town and into the woods. She said little, but watched me curiously. Once we stopped on a hill, at a good view over a tract of forest. She gestured, then put a hand on my arm, as if awaiting my reaction. Nice forest, but all I could think of to say was, "Beautiful view." She looked at me a trifle impatiently, as if wondering what kind of person I could be, anyway.

"This forest is my home," she said quietly. "I feel best when I'm among trees. Open country always seems alien to me. Our chimp ancestors had the right idea. Among trees you're safe, you can be free." This with a mysterious smile.

I could think of no reply. She pedaled off. Seemed faster—or was I just getting tired? Had a little trouble keeping up, thought I concealed it. Finally we reached the camp.

It's a group of ramshackle buildings in a grove of very large trees. Old and unpainted, but with a certain sturdy grace, like old summer camps; arranged erratically around large central mess-hall meeting-room building. Off at one side a barn filled with machinery; beyond that an open nursery area of many acres, with thousands of tiny trees sprouting. The whole place foresty-smelling, as of needles slowly decomposing into a springy layer of humus underfoot. Light filtering down through the great trees—strange, soft atmosphere—made me feel a little odd, like a dark church.

As we arrived, several dozen people poured out of the buildings to greet us. A visitor is an event for them, evidently. Marissa stood rather protectively beside me as they came up and surrounded us. Barrage of questions—what I've seen so far, where I live in the U.S., what I

want to see here, what is my favorite tree (all I could think of was "Christmas tree"—botany was not a good subject for me—but it got appreciative laughs). Wisecracks about how I don't look like much of a lumberjack. Suddenly realized that about half the group are women. Assumed at the time they must deal chiefly with the nursery and the planting of young trees; later learned they also cut trees, operate tractors, and drive big diesels.

"Before we show him our work, our guest must have his bath," Marissa declared with a smile. Led me away for the ceremonial bath with which Ecotopians greet people who come to stay with them—even if, like me, they've only been an hour on the way. More talkative now. She has lived in this camp for several years, but has an occasional month in the city—part vacation and part a change-of-pace assignment, evidently. Obviously very hard-working person. At the same time lively and female, rather mischievous about the members of the camp crew who are city people doing their "forest service." Before people can buy a large quantity of lumber (for instance to build a house) they are obliged to put in a period of some months of labor in a forest camp—planting trees, caring for the forest lands, and supposedly setting in motion the new growth that will one day replace the wood they are buying. (Poetic but foolish notion—though it may make people have a better attitude toward lumber resources.)

She wanted to know whether I had a family, who made up my household (seemed surprised that I didn't even live with wife and children, much less grandparents, cousins, friends, colleagues, but in my own place, 30 miles away, all by myself, though I spend a good deal of time with another woman). Asked what my pleasures were—a question I found hard to answer frankly, but I tried, and her curiosity made it seem easier. "First a sense of power—of reaching out to people, to masses of them and to key people who can act—through my work. Then feelings of craftsmanship in my writing, of intelligence, of knowing I have the background and the originality to grasp strange events and put them into perspective. And love of luxury, or at least fine things: eating in the best restaurants, wearing the best clothes, being seen with the best people." Marissa interrupted teasingly, "Is your woman friend one of the best people?"

"Well, in a way. Or rather, the best people like her a great deal, even though she is not really one of them."

The bath house is a couple of hundred yards off in the woods. By

the time we got there the conversation had taken an oddly personal turn. "You haven't mentioned pleasures between yourself and other people, men or women. Don't you have friends, don't you like to love people?" "Well, of course!" I replied, feeling taken off guard. She opened the door to the bath house, and led me into the dark interior, holding my hand. Turned on the bath water tap, threw some more wood on the heating fire, gave me a warm, wry smile, came nearer, put a hand on my shoulder. "Do you want to make love with me?"

I have been feeling frustrated the last few days, but her assertiveness unnerved me a moment. She's not at all submissive or attentive. She just wanted to get close to me, to play, and to make love. I figured this will happen after the bath, but found myself pushed down onto the wood floor of the bath house. Jesus, I said to myself, this woman is stronger than I am!

But I mustered my forces, rolled her over. We were both instantly very excited. She giggled at the rapid fumbling we did with our clothes. We got enough of them off to manage—she looking at me intensely now, no more smiles. Her legs are muscular; as I went into her she wrapped them tightly around me. It was hard and brief and sweaty; her sexual odors are powerful. I lost consciousness of the hard floor beneath, and of the hot water steadily running into the huge round tub. Afterward she laughed and disengaged herself. "That was nice," she said; "I guessed you wouldn't mind some contact, when I met you at the train." She looked at me curiously. "Did you think of making a move when I stopped to show you the forest? I know a nice spot there, and I thought—"

"I guess I still felt like too much of a guest to focus on anything like that."

"Well, I thought of it. I liked you, you're a serious person, even if you're not a great bicyclist! You just seemed so—distracted or something. Anyway, we don't make that much of a distinction about guests. You're expected to join into everything. We'll have you at work tomorrow. Now I'll show you how we wash."

We scrubbed each other with an odd-shaped sponge, using a dishpan to scoop water from the tub. (There seems to be no shower.) Then we climbed in to soak, Marissa smiling contentedly. Seemed to me a ravishing presence in a way I have never before encountered. Not exactly beautiful, at least by my usual standards. But sometimes, when she looks

at me, my hair stands up as if I'm confronting a creature who's wild and incomprehensible, animal and human at once. Eyes dark brown, hard to fathom. She was a little rough as we splashed around in the water—bit me, jumped away. Finally realized she wanted me to stop being gentle with her. Kept relapsing into a kind of silly tenderness. She'd bring me out of it with a push or a bite.

This got very exciting. Eyes shining, she leapt out of tub and ran out the door, dripping. I looked after her, surprised. She jumped back in door, did a comic but enticing little dance, out the door, laughing, in again, and never saying a word. I sprang out and after her, down a forest path. She's damn fast, and also good at dodging around trees. We got into deeper forest. Suddenly, ducking around a particularly huge redwood tree, she disappeared into a hollow at its base. Springing in after her, I found myself in some kind of shrine. She was lying there on a bed of needles, taking deep, gasping breaths. Dimly visible, suspended on the charred inside of the tree, were charms and pendants made of bone and teeth and feathers, gleaming polished stones. It was as if I was being sucked into the tree, into some powerful spirit, and I fell on her as if I were falling freely through the soft air from a great height, through darkness, my reportorial self floating away.

We must have made love for hours. Cannot describe. Will not.

Finally we got up and returned to bath house, Marissa pausing as we left the tree, mumbling something I couldn't catch. Dawned on me that it was a prayer of some kind, and that this incredible woman is a goddamn druid or something—a tree-worshipper!

My feet hardly touched the ground as we went back to camp. When we got there everyone was in mess hall having lunch. Noisy, cheerful scene, big long tables. People smiled at us, made room. (Couple of women didn't smile—but looked me over appraisingly, or so it seemed. Are they all like Marissa, I wonder?)

Later in day, talking with one of the men, learned that Marissa has a reputation for being one of the most responsible and hard-working people on the executive committee. Difficult for me to focus on that side of her personality, even though I saw her operating in that role later in the afternoon. It turns out she has a regular lover in the camp. But has somehow arranged it so she can be with me during my stay. Lover is blond, shy, blushes a lot about other things but doesn't seem

at all jealous about his woman having made love with me. Evidently there are other women he can console himself with! Wasn't sure till nightfall who would sleep with whom. But she came to the little cabin I'm assigned to, quite unanxious about the whole situation.

What we do sexually is different from anything that has ever happened to me. Now that the beginning is over, we are utterly relaxed. We hug, we wrestle, we lie absolutely quietly looking at each other, we touch each other with feathery touches that are sometimes erotic and sometimes not. There seems to be no agenda: I feel no compulsion to fuck her, though she is enormously desirable to me. She never says in words whether anything pleases her or not. It's as if the whole American psychodrama of mutual suspicion between the sexes, demands and counterdemands and our desperate working at sex like a problem to be solved, has left my head. Everything comes from our feelings. Sometimes there is excitement in a mere look. Sometimes we get to almost terrifying orgiastic climaxes. But one doesn't really seem more important than the other. In any case, what happens between us is so extraordinary that I find myself utterly unconcerned with her regular lover, or what she might do with him.

Only one thing I don't like: she won't let me use my mouth on her breasts. "You're not a baby," she said, and pushed me away, moving my hand onto one of them instead: they are firm, fit my hand perfectly, very sensitive to arousal. "Have you had any children?" I asked. "Not yet," she said, "but I will soon." "With Everett?" "Oh, no! We're just good friends—fucking partners, not mates." "How will you find your mate?" She shrugged: "What a question! Don't you know?"

I thought about Pat. "I believed I knew, once, but we turned out to be just—well, living partners. We had two children, but then we broke up." "That must be terribly hard for the children, in your country? It's bad enough here, where children have many others besides their parents to love them." "Yes, it is. If I was doing it again I wouldn't leave." She looked at me—I thought approvingly—in the dim light that filtered through the forest canopy and into the cabin. Then she gave me a hug, and turned over to go to sleep.

## IN ECOTOPIA'S BIG WOODS

Healdsburg, May 17. Wood is a major factor in the topsy-turvy Ecotopian economy, as the source not only of lumber and paper but also of some of the remarkable plastics that Ecotopian scientists have developed. Ecotopians in the city and country alike take a deep and lasting interest in wood. They love to smell it, feel it, carve it, polish it. Inquiries about why they persist in using such an outdated material (which of course has been entirely obsoleted by aluminum and plastics in the United States) receive heated replies. To ensure a stable long-term supply of wood, the Ecotopians early reforested enormous areas that had been cut over by logging companies before Independence. They also planted trees on many hundreds of thousands of acres that had once been cleared for orchards or fields, but had gone wild or lay unused because of the exodus of people from the country into the cities.

I have now been able to visit one of the forest camps that carry out lumbering and tree-planting, and have observed how far the Ecotopians carry their love of trees. They do no clear-cutting at all, and their forests contain not only mixed ages but also mixed species of trees. They argue that the costs of mature-tree cutting are actually less per board foot than clear-cutting—but that even if they weren't, it would still be desirable because of less insect damage, less erosion, and more rapid growth of timber. But such arguments are probably only a sophisticated rationale for attitudes that can almost be called tree worship—and I would not be surprised, as I probe further into Ecotopian life, to discover practices that would strengthen this hypothesis. (I have seen fierce-looking totem poles outside dwellings, for instance.)

Certainly the Ecotopian lumber industry has one practice that must seem barbarian to its customers: the unlucky person or group wishing to build a timber structure must first arrange to go out to a forest camp and do "forest service"—a period of labor during which, according to the theory, they are supposed to contribute enough to the growth of new trees to replace the wood they are about to consume. This system must be enormously wasteful in terms of economic inefficiency and disruption, but that seems to disturb the Ecotopians—at least those who live in and run the lumber camps—not a bit.

The actual harvesting of timber is conducted with surprising efficiency, considering the general laxness of Ecotopian work habits. There is much goofing off in the forest camps, but when a crew is at work they work faster and more cooperatively than any workmen I have ever seen. They cut trees and trim them with a strange, almost religious respect: showing the emotional intensity and care we might use in preparing a ballet.

I was told that in rougher country ox-teams and even horses are used in lumbering, just as they were in Gold Rush times. And in many areas a tethered balloon and cables hoist the cut trees and carry them to nearby logging roads. But in the camp I visited (which may be a showplace) the basic machine is a large electric tractor with four huge rubber tires. These are said to tear up the forest floor even less than oxen, which have to drag timber out on some kind of sled. Though heavy, these tractors are surprisingly maneuverable since both front and rear wheels steer. They have a protected operator's cabin amidship; on one end there is a prehensile extension bearing a chain saw large enough to cut through all but the hugest trees, and mounted so it can cut them off only a few inches above ground level. (This is of course pleasant aesthetically, but it is also claimed that it saves some millions of board feet of lumber each year, and helps in management of the forest floor.) This saw can also cut trees into loadable lengths.

On the other end of the tractor is a huge claw device that can pick up a log, twirl it around lengthwise over the tractor, and carry it to the logging road where big diesel trucks wait to be loaded.

Ecotopian foresters claim that this machinery enables them to log safely even in dry weather, since there are no exhausts likely to set fire to undergrowth. It does seem to be true that their methods disturb the forest very little—it continues to look natural and attractive. Several types of trees usually grow in stands together, which is supposed to encourage wildlife and cut the chances of disastrous insect and fungi invasions. Curiously, a few dead trees are left standing—as homes for insect-gobbling woodpeckers!—and there are occasional forest meadows to provide habitats for deer and other animals. The older trees seed young ones naturally, so the foresters generally now only do artificial planting in areas they are trying to reforest. The dense forest canopy keeps the forest floor cool and moist, and pleasant

to walk in. Although it rained for a few hours during my stay, I noticed that the stream passing near the camp did not become muddy—evidently it is true, as they claim, that Ecotopian lumbering leaves the topsoil intact, cuts down erosion, and preserves fish. (I didn't actually see any fish—but then I am the kind of person who seldom sees fish anywhere.)

The lumber camps themselves do not have sawmills, though they possess portable devices with which they can saw rough boards in small quantities for their own needs. The main squaring and sawing of timber, and the production of slabs for pulp, takes place at mills located in more open country, which buy logs from the forest camps. The resulting boards are then sold, almost entirely in the county-sized area just around the mill. Lumber sales are solely domestic; Ecotopia ceased lumber export immediately after Independence. It is claimed that, since the U.S. formerly exported half as much lumber as was used in housing, much of it from the West, some surplus actually existed from the beginning of the new nation. Ecotopian foresters argue that their policies have, since then, more than doubled their per capita resources of timber. There are, however, no present plans for a resumption of export.

Interestingly enough, the Ecotopians themselves have a debate in progress about the huge diesel trucks they use to haul logs. Several forest workers apologized to me that they are still dependent on these noisy, smelly, hulking diesels. Yet there are people all over them at the end of the work day, shining them up—one of the few outlets still allowed in this carless society for man's love of powerful machinery. One truck I saw has lost its bumper, and the replacement is a large, sturdy piece of wood. As they wear out, the trucks will be eliminated in favor of electric vehicles. Meanwhile, people argue hotly over the bumpers—extremist ideologues saying that the bumpers (which are actually stainless steel, not chrome plate) should all be replaced with wood, and the traditionalists maintaining that the trucks should be treated as museum relics and kept in original condition. The factions seem about equally matched, which means that the traditionalists have won so far—since a change on such a "drastic" matter is only carried out if there is a virtual consensus.

Our economists would surely find the Ecotopian lumber industry a labyrinth of contradictions. An observer like myself can come only

to general conclusions. Certainly Ecotopians regard trees as being alive in almost a human sense—once I saw a quite ordinary-looking young man, not visibly drugged, lean against a large oak and mutter “Brother Tree!” And equally certainly, lumber in Ecotopia is cheap and plentiful, whatever the unorthodox means used to produce it. Wood therefore takes the place that aluminum, bituminous facings, and many other modern materials occupy with us.

An important by-product of the Ecotopian forestry policies is that extensive areas, too steep or rugged to be lumbered without causing erosion, have been assigned wilderness status. There all logging and fire roads have been eradicated. Such areas are now used only for camping and as wildlife preserves, and a higher risk of forest fire is apparently accepted. It is interesting, by the way, that such Ecotopian forests are uncannily quiet compared to ours, since they have no trail-bikes, all-terrain vehicles, airplanes overhead, nor snowmobiles in the winter. Nor can you get around in them rapidly, since foot trails are the only way to get anywhere.

Has Ecotopian livestock or agricultural production suffered because of the conversion of so much land to forest? Apparently not; vegetables, grains and meat are reasonably cheap, and beef cattle are common features of the landscape, though they are never concentrated in forced-feeding fattening lots. Thus an almost dead occupation, that of cowboy, has come back. And cattle ranches in the Sierra foothills have reverted to the old summer practice of driving their stock up to the high valleys where they pasture on wet mountain meadow grass. Grasslands research is said to be leading to the sowing of more native strains, which are better adapted to the climate and resist the incursion of thistles. Pasture irrigation is practiced only in a few areas, and only for milking herds.

But the true love of the Ecotopians is their forests, which they tend with so much care and manage in the prescribed stable-state manner. There they can claim much success in their campaign to return nature to a natural condition.

*(May 18) Marissa says I am squeamish about violence. Makes fun of American war technology, claims we had to develop it because we*

*can no longer bear just to bayonet a man—have to spend \$50,000 to avoid guilt, by zapping him from the stratosphere. This because last night I expressed dismay at the ritual war games. “Listen, you’ll love it,” she said gaily, “you’re just ripe for it!” With this, a flash of teeth: she can still scare me a little, sometimes is very aware of her strength—plain animal strength. And then great peals of laughter. Phoned to arrange to take me to a war games session not far north of here, which some friends of hers will be participating in. Her eyes shone with mischief as she set it all up. Before she even hung up the picturephone we were all over each other again. Giggling uncontrollably.*

*She finds my dubious confrontations with Ecotopian manners and morals endearingly comic. I am childishly wasteful in her eyes. This morning I had written a few sentences on a page, got disgusted, and tossed it away. She picked it up, frowned. “You’ve only used a little part of this one.” “Well, it didn’t go right, so I wanted a fresh start.” “Why can’t you make your fresh start further down? It’s you that’s making the start, not the poor paper! Think of the tree it came from.” I tore the sheet up and threw it at her. . . . On the other hand, if I lapse into inattention or mere American businesslikeness, she gets furious and accuses me of being detached and inhuman. But sometimes, if I am just lying quietly or thinking or writing, she looks at me as if I am not ludicrously un-Ecotopian but merely a fellow human being. It is at such times, I notice, that we have had our tenderest love-making.*

*I got up early next morning, to take train back to city and work on my next story. We bicycled together to the station. When the train warning bell rang I felt surprisingly bereft and blurted out, “Marissa, come with me.” She hugged me hard and said, “I want to, but I can’t. I’ll come tomorrow though. About sundown.” The train swept in, its air blast pushing us back. I got in and we stared at each other through the big windows until the train pulled away. Her grave, intense expression is still in my mind as I sit trying to finish my report on Ecotopian population policy. Tomorrow night she’ll be here, in my room. . . .*

*It feels good to be back at the Cove. I’m beginning to know the people here, and feel accepted as a colleague and a person, despite being an American. Bert is formidably generous, like most Ecotopians, really brotherly—but without the competitiveness that can be mixed with. Spends much time cluing me in on things here, introduces me to key people, lends me shirts, gave me a pen that I admired. Maybe it is*

*their economy of biological abundance that gives them this generosity?*

He has been reading my dispatches, jokes about putting an expose in the Times titled "Weston's Progress," but thinks I am trying seriously to overcome my "prejudices." He finds the lumber story the best yet, says teasingly that Marissa must have inspired me a little. (I have told him about our encounter, though not in any detail.) Also likes the story on Alviso. "But the sports story was terrible. You'd better keep away from that kind of thing. —Are you really going to try to handle the ritual war games?" I told him that Marissa had already arranged for me to see one, in a couple of days. He looked at me uncertainly. "I hope it goes all right," he said. "It's about the trickiest story you'll face here, I imagine. I might be able to help a little on it, if you want. I'd be glad to look over the draft, give you a little background maybe."

"Sure you can see it," I replied, "but I'll write it the way I write it."

*We shook hands on that, Ecotopian fashion.*

*(Later) Unpleasant night visit from the Ecotopian counter-intelligence, who have somehow heard about my encounter with the underground. (Or have I been tailed?) "Of course," they said, "you are perfectly free to talk with anyone at all while you are in Ecotopia. But you shouldn't think we are naive about your government's clandestine operations. It would be wise of you to forget to deliver that message in Washington."*

*"And if I don't forget?" "It will just make more trouble for your friends here." "They're not my friends." "Then why transmit their message?" "I don't like being intimidated."*

*They smiled. "A little country like ours 'intimidating' a big one like yours? Don't be absurd." There was a pause. I wondered how much they knew of what I had said. "Weston, you are not a fool. We also know you are not a spy. But would you expect somebody who acts like a spy to be received in the President's office?"*

*"Okay," I replied. "You've made your point. No message."*

*A sweaty experience—I'll have to watch my step. These Ecotopians are not so easy-going as they look. And to tell the truth it relieves my mind—didn't much like those people. I've burned the list of names and contact points.*

## DECLINE WITHOUT FALL? THE ECOTOPIAN POPULATION CHALLENGE

San Francisco, May 20. Ecotopia's population is slowly declining, and has done so for almost 15 years. This startling fact—which by itself would set Ecotopia apart from the U.S. and all other nations except Japan—has led to speculation that rampant abortion and even perhaps infanticide may be practiced here. However, I have now investigated sufficiently to report that Ecotopia's decline in population has been achieved through humane measures.

We tend to forget that even before Independence the rate of population growth in the area that became Ecotopia had slowed, as it had in most of the rest of the U.S. This was due, according to American demographers, partly to the persistent inflation-recession, partly to the relaxation of abortion laws, and perhaps most of all to increased recognition that additional children, in a highly advanced industrial society, could be more of a burden than an advantage to a family—the reverse of the situation in agricultural or less advanced societies. In addition, the horrible "Green Revolution" famines, in which tens of millions perished in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Egypt, had provided new and grim lessons in the dangers of overpopulation.

After secession, the Ecotopians adopted a formal national goal of a declining population—though only after long and bitter debate. It was widely agreed that *some* decline was needed, to lessen pressure on resources and other species and to improve the comfort and amenity of life. But opinions differed widely on exactly how a decline could be achieved, and how far it should go. Deep fears of national extinction gave heavy ammunition against advocates of population decline, and economists warned of fiscal dislocations.

Finally, a three-stage program was adopted. The first stage, begun immediately, was a massive educational and medical campaign aimed at providing absolutely all women with knowledge of the various birth-control devices. Abortion upon demand was legalized; its cost soon became very low, and it was practiced in local clinics as well as hospitals. As far as statistics could reveal in such a short period, this program reduced the number of births to a few tenths of a percent

below the number of deaths—almost enough to counterbalance the still growing longevity. (Ironically, an unusual number of pregnancies were initiated during the exciting months when Independence was achieved!)

The second stage, more gradual in effect, was linked to the radical decentralization of the country's economic life, and was thus more political in nature. During this period the Ecotopians largely dismantled their national tax and spending system, and local communities regained control over all basic life systems. This enabled people to deliberately think about how they now wished to arrange their collective lives, and what this meant for population levels and distribution. With better conditions in the countryside, the great concentrations of people in San Francisco, Oakland, Portland, Seattle, and even the smaller metropolitan areas began to disperse somewhat. New minicities grew up in favorable locations, with their own linkage necklaces of transit lines: Napa, on its winding, Seine-like river, at last pollution-free; Carquinez-Martinez, stretching out along rolling hills dropping down to the Strait; and others throughout the country. Some old city residential areas were abandoned and razed, and the land turned into parks or reforested. Some rural towns, like Placerville, which had been in the 10-20,000 people range, gained satellite minicities that would in a decade bring them to a total of 40-50,000—which was felt to be about ideal for an urban constellation.

Decentralization affected every aspect of life. Medical services were dispersed; the claim is that instead of massive hospitals in the city centers, besieged by huge lines of waiting patients, there were small hospitals and clinics everywhere, and a neighborhood-oriented system of medical aides. Schools were broken up and organized on a novel teacher-controlled basis. Agricultural, fishery, and forestry enterprises were also reorganized and decentralized. Large factory-farms were broken up through a strict enforcement of irrigation acreage regulations which had been ignored before Independence, and commune and extended-family farms were encouraged.

All these changes, according to my informants, meant notable readjustments in problems of crowding, and the predictions of some anti-decline arguments were indeed borne out: there didn't seem to be as many too many people as before!

Thus, the pressures for further population control measures waned. Nonetheless, some ten years ago the statistics showed that population had indeed taken its first actual drop—by about 17,000 people for Ecotopia as a whole. This fact was not greeted by the hysteria that had been widely predicted, and people probably took grim satisfaction from the news that American society, with its widely publicized overpopulation, had grown by another three million during the same period.

The third stage, if we can call it that, was one of watchful waiting, which has continued to the present. Abortion costs have fallen further, and the number per year has stabilized. The use of contraceptive devices now seems universal. (They are all, incidentally, female-controlled; there is no "male pill" here.) Population has tended to drop gently at a rate of around 65,000 per year, so that the original Ecotopian population of some 15 million has now declined to about 14 million. It is argued by some extremists that the declining population provides a substantial annual surplus per capita and helps account for the vitality of Ecotopian economic life. Though the decline undoubtedly influences the confident political and economic atmosphere, I remain skeptical of direct effects—the decline, after all, is only .3% per year.

What will happen to Ecotopian population levels in the future? Most people here foresee a continued slow decline. They consider that a more rapid drop might endanger the nation, making it more vulnerable to attack by the United States—which is still widely feared to be desirous of recapturing its "lost territories." On the other hand, some people hope that American population will itself soon begin to decline—and if that happens, many Ecotopians are prepared to accept an indefinite drop in their own numbers. In fact, some radical Survivalist Party thinkers believe that a proper population size would be the number of Indians who inhabited the territory before the Spaniards and Americans came—something less than a million for the whole country, living entirely in thinly scattered bands! Most Ecotopians, however, contend that the problem is no longer numbers as such. They place their faith for improvement of living conditions in the further reorganization of their cities into constellations of minicities, and in a continued dispersion into the countryside. In connection with this, the radicals are currently mounting a campaign to make train travel entirely free: this, they argue, could make country



living more agreeable to people who find city pleasures and facilities important, since they could then visit the cities virtually whenever they wished.

Americans are, of course, accustomed to believe that only economic and population growth can lead to improvement in life. The Ecotopian experiments, whatever their apparent achievements, have a long way to go in order to change this basic conviction. Ecotopian circumstances have been, after all, unusually favorable compared to those in the rest of the U.S.; the Ecotopians' special advantages in fertile agricultural land, a backlog of buildings suitable for housing, and a more self-reliant Western tradition, have all led them to focus on surpluses, not shortages—which they have encountered (or perhaps brought about) only in energy and metals.

Americans would find Ecotopian population policies alarming in that, along with Ecotopia's decline in population, the nuclear family as we know it is rapidly disappearing. Ecotopians still speak of "families," but they mean by that term a group of between five and 20 people, some of them actually related and some not, who live together. In many such families not only eating and household duties are shared, but also the raising of children—in which men and women seem to participate equally as far as time spent is concerned, but within a strange power context. Ecotopian life is strikingly equalitarian in general—women hold responsible jobs, receive equal pay, and of course they also control the Survivalist Party. The fact that they also exercise absolute control over their own bodies means that they openly exert a power which in other societies is covert or nonexistent: the right to select the fathers of their children. "No Ecotopian woman ever bears a child by a man she has not freely chosen," I was told sternly. And in the nurturing of children while they are under two, women continue this dominance; men participate extensively in the care and upbringing of the very young, but in cases of conflict the mothers have the final say, and mince no words about it. The fathers, odd though it appears to me, acquiesce in this situation as if it was perfectly natural; they evidently feel that their time of greater influence on the young will come later, and that that is the way it should be.

It's difficult for an outsider to determine the bonds that hold the communal groups together, but children may be a key factor, though

economic necessity clearly plays an important part also. In one such family I visited, I was reminded of the earlier American practice of having godparents—related or unrelated persons who assume a certain responsibility for children, take a special interest in them, and help to enrich their lives—or give them a refuge from their parents! Ecotopian children normally live surrounded by informal "godparents," and a cheerier bunch of kids I have never seen. A willingness to help nurture children may well be the crucial qualification for membership in one of these "families." But there are also "families" with no children at all. These have an entirely different atmosphere, tend to be larger, and are evidently more transient. Some are professionally oriented—journalist groups, musicians, scientists, craftspeople, or people concerned with an enterprise like a school or factory. Their members are mostly younger, whereas the families with children have members who span a wide range of ages. (It is rare for Ecotopian old people to live alone, as so many of ours do; they mostly live in the families, where they play an important role in child care and early education.)

Americans are familiar with rumors of sexual depravity in Ecotopia, but I must report that the sexual practices of these families seem about as stable as ours. Generally there are more or less permanent heterosexual couples involved—though both male and female homosexual couples also exist, and I gather that same-sex relationships pose less of a problem psychologically than they do with us. Monogamy is not an officially proclaimed value, but the couples are generally monogamous (except for four holidays each year, at the solstices and equinoxes, when sexual promiscuity is widespread.) Single members of the families often take up with lovers from outside, and sometimes this results in the addition or subtraction of a family member. There seems to be a continual slow shifting of membership, probably something like what must have happened with our "extended families" a few generations back.

I have made extensive inquiries about Ecotopian attitudes on the kind of eugenic population planning which has been discussed so passionately in the U.S.—either the aiding of natural selection by deliberate breeding, or farther-out possibilities such as cloning, whereby actual genetic duplicates of superior individuals might be produced, or even modification of gene structures to produce a race

of supermen. However, no Ecotopian scientist or citizen has been willing to discuss such matters, which they view with great distaste. Nor, when I have ventured the hypothesis that man may be only a "missing link" between the apes and a later, superior humanity, have I obtained any response except condescending incredulity. Their reluctance to enter into such speculations may show the extent to which Ecotopians have blinded themselves to the exciting possibilities offered by modern scientific advances. But it also shows that they are more willing than we to live with the biological constitutions we now possess.

(May 21) Everybody suddenly glued to TV sets. Ecotopian monitor systems, which seem to be extremely sophisticated for both nuclear and general pollution, have detected a sudden increase in the radiation level of air blowing in from the Pacific. Cause still unknown. Much speculation, on the streets and in media: Chinese nuclear blast gone out of control? Accident in a Japanese fission plant? Conflict on the Chinese-Russian border? Nuclear submarine accident offshore? People anxious, depressed, angry. They turn in a crisis to the TV, which they watch in tense groups, but not in the passive, dependent fashion of Americans—they actually shout at it, and the switchboards are flooded with picture-phone callers. Vera Allwen and her foreign minister were obliged to appear within an hour and on the defensive, answering angry citizens who put pointed, difficult questions about why their government can't do anything. (Also hotheads who think commando teams should be sent to disable plants in Japan, China, Siberia which emit wastes into air or sea!) Allwen says she is preparing a stiff protest to whoever turns out to be responsible. Meanwhile Ecotopian ships and agents are on a crash program to locate the pollution source. So far dead silence from the U.S. wire services, which are received in Vancouver and relayed here, though our satellite reconnaissance must have spotted what happened.

There is a widespread tendency to blame technological disasters on Americans, so I haven't been made to feel terribly welcome in the last few hours. Groups I have been with, watching Allwen and other national politicians, seem to think the Ecotopian government is too tolerant of

pollution coming in from outside. Talk about "reparations" on TV—apparently some international pollution-fine system is really being proposed. The Japanese will love that.

Have been watching all this mostly from Franklin's Cove, where I moved today, at their invitation (and urged by Marissa, who doesn't like hotels at all). "You're a journalist, aren't you?" they said; "Well then, you ought to live with us!" A welcome thought, and I guess I can find the time for their cooking and cleaning work crews. My little room's on the top floor; dormer window looks out toward Alcatraz—a green hump looming out of the Bay, with its cheerful orange lighthouse tower. Hard to believe such a peaceful grassy island once housed our worst desperadoes, and was covered with concrete and steel.

(Later) Have found the work crew experience a little unnerving. First time I joined one it was for after-dinner clean-up. I pitched in, American-style, scurrying around carrying dishes to the sink area. After a few moments I realized people had stopped their general chatter and were staring at me. "My God, Will," said Lorna, "whatever are you doing, running a race?" Everybody else laughed.

I blushed, or felt like it. "What do you mean?" "Well, you're hauling dishes like you were being paid by the dish. Very un-Ecotopian!" I looked around, suddenly conscious that everyone else had been working very leisurely by comparison: Lorna and Brit had developed a sort of game in which they took turns washing and giving each other little back rubs. Bert was meanwhile telling about a funny encounter he had had that day with a reader who threatened to beat him up. And Red was drinking beer and not doing much of anything; occasionally, when his attention fell on a dirty pot or something, he would bring it over to the sink.

"Don't you want to get it done with?" I replied defensively. "When I have a job to do I like to get it over with. What's wrong with a little efficiency?" "A little goes a long way, Will," Lorna said. "Our point of view is that if something's worth doing, it ought to be done in a way that's enjoyable—otherwise it can't really be worth doing."

"Then how does anything get done?" I asked, exasperatedly. "You don't mean to tell me washing dishes is exactly fun?" "It is the way we do it," said Bert. "Almost anything can be, if you keep your eye on the process and not on the goal."

"Okay," I said. "I'll try it." So I goofed off in the Ecotopian manner—drank a little beer, tossed some knives and forks into the sink, told a joke I'd heard that day, then wiped a few tables. But it was hard to keep my pace down, and harder still to keep in good touch with the other people—I'd focus on the task, and blot them out. But they noticed this, and invented a game around it. "Hey Will!" they'd yell, "we're here!" And somebody would tickle me, or give me a pat. They'll retrain me yet.

(May 23) Marissa's got positively hypnotic powers: when she's here I lose track of time, obligations, my American preconceptions. She exists in a contagious state of immediate consciousness. Somewhere far back in her head must be the forest camp, her responsibilities there, her plans to return tomorrow. But she seems to be able to turn them absolutely off and just be. She seems capable of anything—she's the freest and least anxious person I've ever known. To the extent I can get in on this, I begin to feel high and a little strange, as if I was on some kind of drug. I keep thinking she is like a wild animal: of course she responds to the influences and constraints of the other animals around (me included) but these are not inside her head, somehow. She's highly unpredictable, moody, changeable, yet wherever she is, she's always right there, with me or whoever it is. (I don't know how to deal with the jealousy I feel when she turns her attention, like a beautiful searchlight beam, on somebody else. But I bear it.)

Not that we lie around in bed all the time—have actually been fairly busy, wandering around to visit people she knows, taking expeditions so she can show me her favorite San Francisco places, eating at peculiar little restaurants, laughing, sometimes just sitting and watching people or birds or even trees. She has special trees all over the place, and they're really important to her. (Thinks I should write a column on the trees of Ecotopia!) She studies their characters, revisits them to see how they've grown and changed, likes to climb in some of them (she's agile and sure-footed), is immensely happy if they're thriving and cast down if they're not. Even talks to them—or rather mutters, since she knows I think it's kind of crazy.

I realize I am growing terribly attached to her. What seemed at the beginning like a lark, the usual brief liaison of a travelling man, has

quickly gotten terribly serious. Marissa is clearly a powerful and remarkable person: sees through my bullshit, but sees something valuable under it. By comparison I look back at Pat as almost an artificial person, vapid and rigid and horribly, horribly controlled. Even Francine, my beloved nutty Francine, with whom I've had such giggles and pleasures, begins to seem lightweight. With Marissa I get into feelings I never knew were there: a deep, overwhelming, scary sharing of our whole beings, as well as our bodies. There's no denying it—we're beginning to love each other. And despite her free ways, and her still living with Everett at the camp, she has some fierce possessive streak for me—gets angry whenever my return comes up.

Went sailing on the Bay yesterday, with a couple of people from the Cove. Marissa invited her brother Ben. Older brother; turns out to be surly and viciously anti-American. As soon as we had pushed off he came right at me with arguments and charges. I tried to parry politely but it didn't help. It's early in the season and the wind doesn't come up strongly yet, so we veered around trying to set the sails for a while. Then everybody lay down on the foredeck, getting some sun and watching the water go by. I went aft to sit with Ben, and offered to take the tiller. He scowled and said abruptly, in a low voice, "What the hell are you messing around with my sister for? Goddamn Americans can't keep their hands off anything!" I answered mildly, "We like each other—what's wrong with that?" "You know what's wrong with it, you stupid bastard—you're really getting to her, and then you're going to take off." "I've never concealed my intentions from anybody, Ben." He looked at me. "I ought to just push you overboard, and not turn back!" He made a sudden movement with his hands. I grabbed the rail, thinking he might really try something. He grinned wickedly. "You creep!" I said. "What do you mean, trying to run your sister's life? Making threats? Think you're the Mafia or something?" At this the others, hearing us, sat up and came back aft. Ben and I exchanged mean looks. "We were just having a little argument," he said. I got up and sat beside Marissa on the other side of the cockpit. She looked at me, then at Ben. "I'll tell you about it later," I said. "So will I," Ben shot back.

We sailed on, over to an abandoned whaling station on the east side of the Bay, and put in there for a while. It's a museum now, with chilling exhibits about whaling and the extinction of mammals generally.

Ben lost no chance to point out how Americans and their technology had been in the forefront of this tragic and irreversible process. And indeed I hadn't realized how far it has gone: it is a horrible story. Our role in it was heavy, and thousands of marvelous creatures that once inhabited this earth have now vanished from the universe forever. We have gobbled them up in our relentless increase. There are now 40 times more weight of humans on the earth than of all the wild mammals together!

Marissa mostly stared at the displays of whale life (Ecotopians have incredible wildlife photographers—they must literally live with the species they are filming—though as far as I can tell Ecotopians don't take ordinary snapshots of our quick-freeze-the-moment type.) It turns out she has swum with dolphins, but won't say much about the experience except that it was enormously exciting and quite scary.

On the way back we passed shrimp boats and other small fishing craft—apparently the Bay, once an open cess-pool, has again become the fertile habitat which estuaries naturally are (thus my ardent informant). Was proudly told how many metric tons of tiny, succulent Bay shrimp are consumed and shipped out daily; even clams, whose shells the local Indians once piled into huge refuse mounds, have returned to the mudflats.

Windblown, a little sunstruck, a little drunk, we returned at dusk to the Cove and to bed. "Ben is really a good brother to have, but I've never been able to get him to know where to stop," Marissa said apologetically. (I had noticed her lecturing him on the dock as we were stowing the boat's gear away.) "He cares about me a lot, even if I've never gotten him to understand me. He never likes to see me taking risks. It's a relic of the family past, I guess—when women supposedly had no independence at all. But without taking risks, I wouldn't feel I was alive." She smiled at me, with a sweet but inscrutable companionableness, and laid down in my arms.

What can I possibly mean to this incredible woman? She evades my questions about what she thinks of me. When she is back at the lumber camp, she evidently sleeps and lives with Everett as before; yet little by little, she spends more of her free time with me. Yet she makes goodhumored fun of me, correcting my ecological mistakes (like wasting wash water or electricity) as if she was the highly advanced person and I a kind of bumpkin, not yet fully acclimated to civilized life.

Sometimes, when I say something about how Ecotopians, or she herself, appear to me, she becomes very quiet and attentive. The other night I mentioned their way of holding eye contact for what seems to me excessively long times, and how this stirred up feelings it is hard for me to handle. "What feelings?" she asked. "Nervousness, a desire for relief, to look away for a while." "And if you withstand the nervousness and go on looking?" (All this, of course, with her great dark eyes intent upon mine.) "Then I guess tenderness, and a desire to touch. —It makes me afraid I'll cry." "You strange person—of course you can cry!" She gave me a long, strong hug.

I had to explain. "Not in our country! Maybe here you can teach me, though. I don't have to be so guarded here, with you." "All right," she said, a faint puzzlement in her eyes. Can I be, for her, some kind of Mysterious Stranger—exotic in spite of myself?