

Twenty Percent

by Tobias Carroll

That September, he had enjoyed drinks in the company of now-dead utopians. They sought access to his vast estate in the hopes that they might be permitted to establish a community in the form of a Fourier phalanx. For his part, the fast-food magnate sought only to drown out the horrified cries of his company's board of directors. The meeting had gone well for the first hour; then, the samples of a chicken sandwich were produced, the fruition of his apprenticeship to a cabal of surrealists in 1958. The screams on the revelation of its shape; the nosebleed that all his counsel's hankerchiefs could not contain.

"Jesus wept, Thomas!" the lawyer had said afterwards in the hallway. "This is a fiasco!" Ties were loosened, and mouths gasped for breath.

And so he took the meeting, summoning the four utopians to a private room in the Harvard Club. By the time it had ended, he had issued sixty acres to them. Later would come the expansion, the clashes with municipal ordinance 14, and the Supreme Court decision that, as one commenter later put it, "effectively defenestrated federalism."

Five of them gathered there, gathered 'round the table as though in a seance, speaking long into the night of quiet communities, of an unraveled thread of societal structure. This was, assuredly, not the backroom deal described by some. The simplicity of it appealed to the magnate, and while no handshakes had taken place at the night's conclusion, the four utopians had no doubts concerning his sincerity. And by the time, two decades later, that the red-haired corporate icon began to display agrarian sigils, at first surreptitiously and then in the form of tattoos, each of the four had passed from the earth. The fast-food magnate, now grayer of hair, overlooked the buildings from his study's window and smiled.

