

## Domicile 4.5

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“And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.”

– *Mark 4:30–2*

The morning was flowing in through the eastern facing windows, hot white light that was being filtered through the tri-weave diamond panes inset in the fine faux-wood frames. Inside each pane, invisible micro filaments picked up a small percentage of those errant photons, those troublesome subatomic particles that weren't quite particles or waves, and channeled them down to the basement where they were stored in the house's main generator. In the kitchen, Martha was busy heating up a pan of water that would soon be dedicated to the boiling of some eggs for their Sunday brunch. Gerald, her husband, and their little Timmy, who would be arriving home at any moment, were known to get hungry at about this time.

In the den, the aforementioned Gerald sat and read from a copy of *The Times*. The single page was unfolded in front of him, text and streaming video moving about and giving him the day's events. International news was proving depressing on this fine day, so a simple verbal command changed it immediately.

“Sports,” he said softly. The pictures and text immediately changed, only the title and the days date, and the cost of the circular, still apparent at the top. Within moments, his senses were distracted by the smell of browning toast and hot eggs coming from the kitchen. He smiled when he realized that fresh cheese was being brought out as well, and his mouth began to water in anticipation.

The stove moved deliberately slow, drawing photons from the house' generator to power what appeared to be an old-fashioned electrical appliance, but what was in reality a superior nanotech model. Every element was constructed of super resilient metals that had very little atomic weight and required very little energy to heat. Thus energy was applied slowly and evenly to give it the feel of an old-style cooker, the kind that took minutes or even hours to heat something to the point where it was edible or could be cooked with.

There was a sudden pounding at the door. Gerald and Martha both looked up to see their son standing there, his arms laden with all kinds of materials. Gerald was quick to his feet, chivalrously volunteering to let him in so Martha could continue cooking. When the door opened (a slight breeze coming in due to a temporary change in pressure from the perfectly climate-controlled interior) he noticed that his son was indeed heavily laden. His arms were stuffed with what appeared to be scholastic reading materials, sports equipment of various kinds and personal items. And at his feet, the petmodel they had named Rufus was impatiently walking around his legs.

“Come in, son! Come in Rufus!” he said to them both. The model Rufus obliged and his son did as he was told as well, the result of internal compulsion and not embedded voice command software. “How was your morning?”

“Oh fine,” he said, putting all his things down at once in the corner. “Why you insist on sending me to such a primitive academy is beyond me, though.”

“Son!” Gerald objected. “St. Anne’s is a prestigious institution, and their insistence on traditional methods is hardly a mark of underdevelopment. It is, far from it, a conscious choice to promote self-reliance and encourage us to remember how blessed we are.”

“Yes, father,” Timmy said obligingly. “I just don’t understand why we can’t use the lighter equipment. It’s not like their expensive or anything.”

Gerald shook his head ruefully. But eyeing the pile his son had made, he acknowledged that he had a point. Sports equipment made of wood and plastic might be solid to the touch, but was cumbersome and awkward, especially when accompanied by paper tomes that were encased in cellulose bindings. And they certainly weren’t anywhere near as good at keeping dirt and dust away.

It was all food for thought as Martha plugged a vacuum line into the room’s main feed and began running it over their son and his dirty possessions. Within seconds, tiny nanomites poured out of the hose and began filtering through his clothes, hair and pores to comb away outside intruders. Dust, dirt, molds, spores, and infections that they had programmed the house’s main directional computer to recognize and target. Unrecognized nanomites (hostiles, perhaps) were also targeted and neutralized using tiny shocks of EM radiation to their central cores, knocking out their power supplies and then carried back like dead drones to the house’s Seed.

When the vacuum job was complete, the unit dinged and Margaret withdrew it to its hole. Had she read the indicator on the line, she would have noticed that Timmy was now clean based on household specifications. While all families knew the importance of allowing their children to be exposed to some degree of filth in exchange for the benefits it held for their immune systems, every family was at their own discretion to decide how much of it they wanted in their house. The Wilkinson’s were a rustic family by most standards, choosing to program their nanomites to filter out harmful E Coli, Tetanus and other such things, but keeping just enough cold and flu bacteria in the air to keep themselves strong. What was the occasional runny nose so long as their white cells continued to function?

“Learn anything new and exciting?” Gerald asked once they were all seated at the dining room table and eating their food. Timmy shrugged, looking up from Rufus, who needed to be shooed away from begging at his feet.

“Miss Tomlin spent the whole morning telling us about the breakup of the old nation state system. I didn’t get it much, seemed stupid to me.”

“Son, studying the past is important,” Gerald said. “It is how we got to the period we know as the now, after all.”

“Yeah, but why did people ever live like that? She said they used paper to simulate currency, paid a central government to take care of them, even though everyone complained about it, and went to war over flags.”

“People still go to war, son. Remember the nanocausts?”

“Yes, father,” Timmy nodded. “But why fight over a strip of cloth? Why pay a bunch of people you never even met to take care of you?”

“It was a different time,” his father reminded him. “They had not yet realized these things were obsolete, or they would have abandoned them. For that to happen, they needed the means. The nanoindustrial revolution changed not only the way people think, but the way they lived and did things.”

“I’ll say,” Timmy said, poking at his lunch. “She also said they cut down trees a lot, used paper for everything.”

“Also true,” Gerald said proudly. “Paper was used for currency back then, and it was considered a replacement for precious metals, which used to be used to stamp coins.”

“But why use money like that? Couldn’t people just steal it?”

Gerald had just finished putting a piece of toast with egg on top into his mouth. He smiled as he chewed quickly, making sure to masticate and swallow every piece before opening his mouth again.

“They could,” he said, coughing to clear a crumb from his throat. “And they often did. Which was one of the reasons why they began to rely on the credit system. But it was some time before they switched completely, and people still relied on physical currency for quite some time.”

Timmy poked at his food with his fork. “But that’s stupid.”

“Son, keep in mind people enjoy having physical things they can touch. They are much more tangible. Besides, we still use wood and paper when it suits us. Some people even prefer to use the kind that’s made by hand in an old fashioned press.”

“Huh! Yes, those who don’t mind throwing their money away,” Martha said with a laugh. Gerald gave her a look and then went right back to eating his brunch.

“The point, my son, is that we’ve come a long way and it’s important to remember that people in the past didn’t always have it so easy. But chances are, they did things the way they did for a reason, and it’s not really fair to judge them for it.”

“Yeah...” Timmy said, staring off into space and poking his food some more. Were his father watching him, he would see that the boy had more burning questions, he just wasn’t sure how to go about asking them. It wasn’t long before the one he wanted answered most slipped out though.

“Is it true they once used paper to... you know...”

Both his parents looked at him. Timmy shrugged and began motioning towards his backside.

“Oh, Timmy!” cried Martha.

“Son, that’s not appropriate!” said his father. A few seconds passed before he felt Martha’s composure had returned and he could answer further. “But it is true that toiletries were different back then too.”

“Yeah...” Timmy said, finally put food onto his fork. “She said we’d talk about that during the next class too.”

Gerald smiled and patted his son on the shoulder. They continued to eat quietly for a few minutes, until Martha thought the time was ripe to bring up the piece of gossip she had heard yesterday. As with all things, it was important to get the timing right.

“Gerald, I was wondering if maybe it was time to upgrade?”

Her husband looked up at her with sudden disquiet. “Upgrade? But why? Didn’t we just do that?”

“Yes...” Martha replied coolly. “Three months ago. But I heard that the Masons are doing it. Tina told me yesterday that Bert got a tip from the manufacturers’ warrens that a new model is available.”

“Really?” Gerald said incredulously. “They just came out with the four point oh.”

“Rumor has it the four point five is even better.”

“When can we access it?”

Martha linked her fingers together triumphantly. "I was told they will make an announcement this week, but if we tell them we already know, they might give us the specs ahead of schedule."

Gerald sighed. "Nothing ever stays secret in this community." He thought it over for a second, though Martha could tell he had already made up his mind. "Alright, what's a few more days in a hotel?"

"Do I get to miss school?" Timmy asked excitedly.

"No!" Gerald said flatly. Martha giggled. "I'll put in a call to Sydney down at the warrens. You call the hotel and book a few nights." Looking over at their son again, he added: "I suggest you pack some clothes young man."

A loud pop sounded, followed by a prolonged hissing noise. Perhaps it was just her imagination, but Martha thought she saw the edges of the house folding and coming down. As they watched, the house's nanomites were busy at work, decompiling entire areas of the house atom for atom, sending it to the Seed where it would be reprocessed and sent back along the feed lines to wherever it was needed. Every section that was to be upgraded would slowly be replaced this way, regrown over a matter of days until it looked new. When they returned, they would find themselves presented with a new house. Not radically different, but better and more efficient. Those areas of the house that were no longer up-to-date would be combed out and replaced with new, healthy tissues, nanoware that was current and top of the line.

Martha hadn't read the specifications, she preferred to be surprised. But Gerald, with his engineering background, just had to devour the manual. He knew exactly what the layout would look like once they returned, and a general understanding of how much less energy it would need to consume to do many of the same tasks as their old house. Plus they could look forward to new planters out the back, a gondola, and a new swing set for Timmy. Perhaps they would take the opportunity to add another child to their flock, a little girl perhaps.

Picking up their bags, the family came about to face the driveway, the only part of the house that was under control of the Seed and its feed lines. He sighed.

"Well, let's head out then. The house won't finish as long as we're watching it."

Martha and Timmy tittered. That was such an old joke! And with little Rufus barking and running circles around them, they began to walk to the edge of the property, the Pedi cab waiting for them, its engine cold and quiet.

"Where are you fine folks heading today?" asked the Hindustani man in a flawless English accent.

"To the hotel by Baywater Inne, my dear man," said Gerald, handing him his credit slip.

"Very good sir," he said, putting the last of their cases in the rear and heading to the front. He quickly waved the slip over the cab's remote sensor and smiled happily when it chimed and turned green. He turned to hand the slip back and looked on them with smiling green eyes.

"Taking a little vacation, are we?"

"Just a little time away while the house upgrades," said Gerald.

"Ah, you too," he observed. "Seems to be a common thing in this community."

Martha looked to Gerald worryingly. He knew that look well enough. It was the kind that wondered if they were getting in on this development just a little later than she would have wanted. He could imagine her embarrassment if they walked into the Inne and found every

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