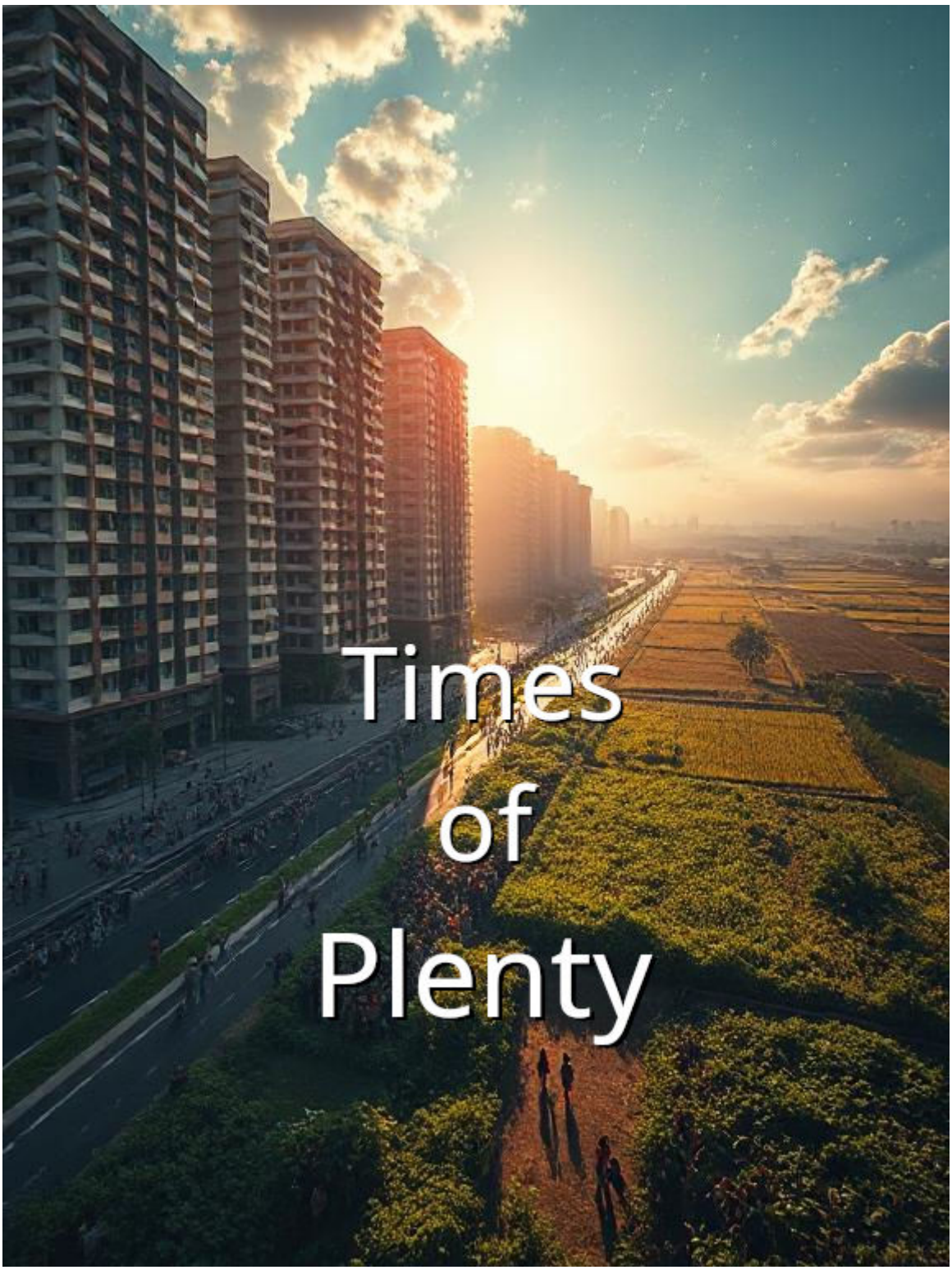
Times
of
Plenty

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Acknowledgements

First, thank you for taking an interest in my writing. I encourage you to send feedback and comments about the book! That motivates me to continue writing and to incorporate the observations into my future work. In the meantime: enjoy the story and I wish you useful lessons!

— Hill Smith
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Prologue

The world we live in is rich in goods and opportunities, yet more fragile than many imagine. City lights shine, and technology offers a comfort and freedom that once had no precedent in history. The laws of nature have faded in people's awareness and scarcely occupy anyone's thoughts. Yet the physical limits of the world have not vanished: atmosphere, water, and the movements of the earth continue—slowly but relentlessly—to shape the systems around us.

What follows is a short tale that flashes five fates amid the currents of unavoidable change: the planner's; the one who moves to the countryside and the one who stays in the city; the dilemmas of governmental decision makers; and finally those who were unprepared for change. It shows how prosperity can be fleeting, and how new values can emerge among the props of a fading era.

This is not a prediction but a mirror: what we might become when we must part with familiar demands because past routines no longer sustain us. The characters choose, err, and adapt—ultimately the paths they take are many, but their consequences are shared.

Pest County, September 3, 2025.

— Hill Smith

Forced Change

The city’s face that day was the usual one: the waking morning slowly flooded the streets with light. Courier drones hummed softly as they carried packages, and an automatic irrigation system sprinkled water over the plants in the community garden. Most people walking the streets did not hurry; they held coffee in their hands or gazed at the city with the easy calm that accompanies general prosperity: short work hours, abundant services, entertainment instantly available, learning personalized and on-demand. Most city dwellers had time to tend balcony gardens, volunteer, study art, travel—and they had the money to do so.

Everyday comfort was not accidental. Most energy came from decentralized solar and wind systems; traditional grids had become smarter, so power outages were unknown to the city's residents. All their devices were electric, and the thought of losing power at any hour of the year hardly occurred. Vertical farms and lab-grown proteins in the food chain reduced volatility; fresh vegetables were grown beneath and atop the city. Transportation was mostly autonomous and electric: quiet, smooth, and much faster than the chaos of old times. Medicine and biotechnology enabled early disease detection via wearable sensors and home diagnostic tools; personalized treatments and immunotherapies improved life prospects. Education matched individual rhythms: learning agents, virtual masters, and augmented-reality experiences made knowledge accessible to everyone. Financial services were automated and cheap; microloans and basic-income–like mechanisms allowed people to invest in their passions—crafts, art, small industry, or startups.

Of course, this was not homogeneous. Those living in large cities benefited the most: lines, infrastructures, digital markets, and cultural opportunities were concentrated there. The urban majority was globally among the most consuming and welfare-experiencing groups: more leisure, more choices, more opportunities to realize desires—simply because the system was optimized for them. Technology served them: personal assistants organized life, households became nearly self-sufficient, and nobody was bored within the endless buffet of entertainment.

The mechanics of happiness were subtle and gentle: consumption, experiences, and relationships together sustained social peace. Markets were structured so that most people fared well—at least in the short term: repair services, subscriptions, platforms, and community initiatives formed the network that enveloped life.

Yet behind the idyllic image, numbers and models whispered that the curtain of abundance was thin. The Earth's climate was changing and warming further; sea-level rise was already noticeable along shorelines and ports, while river flows were steadily decreasing. Atmospheric composition and the frequency of extreme weather grew: longer heatwaves, more intense storms, unexpected monsoon-like rains. Warnings from the depths of the earth could not be ignored either: melting polar ice had caused large masses of water to appear around the Equator, provoking seismic activity, and layers weakened by oil and gas extraction introduced additional risks into the increasingly complex process of climate change. Ecosystem collapses—the loss of pollinators, declining fish stocks, soil erosion, dying forests—were all warning lights saying: the current management model is unsustainable.

Abundance, then, was fragile: welfare, freedom of choice, and leisure all depended on systems running continuously and smoothly. When storms grew harsher, harvests began to fluctuate—even vertical farms were not completely immune to altered water balances, extreme temperatures, and transport disruptions. A series of earthquakes shook underground pipelines, partial loss of ports crippled global logistics, and despite decentralized energy networks, shortages of rare metals and semiconductors limited device repair and manufacturing. The market based on waste and exchange became vulnerable all at once.

Increasingly, people recognized that the prosperity they had taken as normal was not the same as sustainability. The consumer masses—those who had kept the urban system stable by continuously using services and products—soon would no longer be central to the new economic structure. If resources ran out, market mechanisms would cease to

operate as before; consumption would fall, services would become more expensive, and most importantly: the jobs and services that sustained urban welfare would disappear. The urban majority, whose identity partly depended on richness of purchase and choice, could suddenly become superfluous in the shifted social optimization.

The turning point was not necessarily immediate, but it seemed inevitable: society began to reorganize. Values shifted from growth toward adaptation and sharing. Survival skills—agriculture and repair work, community organizing, local governance—came to the fore. Metropolises that had embodied consumer lifestyles gradually lost dominance; peripheries and regions with direct ties to nature and better local resource management regained importance.

One day a small group of city dwellers—planners, young artists, programmers, gardeners, and determined volunteers—gathered around a rooftop café, feeling as if every possibility in the world was at their fingertips. They talked about their next projects: a new VR performance, a pop-up restaurant, a startup that made personalized beverages. Excitement, hope, and calm vibrated in the air. The sunset painted glass facades of office buildings golden. Then a quiet but firm voice ended the conversation: a geophysicist, a silent witness to the past years' warnings, stood and reminded them that the systems their plans were built on were not timeless.

> *"If the models are right, there will no longer be a market like today—at least not as we know it. There won't be demand for unnecessary consumption. The millions of people who now occupy consumer positions will not be central in the new economic structure. The prosperity you've experienced may come to an end."*

The weight of the words cooled the air. The group members looked at each other: shock, denial, and slowly growing recognition. The taste of the coffee shared on the roof was not the same any more.

In the months that followed, changes became increasingly visible. Consumer market volume curves began to flatten; more significant natural events multiplied. Residents who had once enjoyed abundance and freedom were forced to choose: fight to maintain the old prosperity, or adapt, learn to share, and relinquish roles they had grown accustomed to. Some moved to the countryside; others stayed and tried to create community economies. Some struggled: they lost jobs, identities, and the security that the unraveling consumer society had once unquestioningly provided.

The story does not end in tragedy but unfolds in the tension where the waning days of abundance meet the prospects of a changing future. The city that had recently been the triumph of prosperity now stood on the threshold of an era in which limited supplies, climate, and geophysical laws imposed new rules. The consumer masses—the once indispensable mass of the system—faced a crossroads: either voluntarily adapt to new functions or be squeezed out of a social order that no longer required them.

The city still shone that evening while, slowly but surely, it prepared for redistribution. The time of abundance once seemed endless—now it neared its end, not in a sudden explosion but through a slow reorganization that erased old roles and forced new ones into their place. Some of those on the roof understood: the prosperity they had taken for granted depended on a system—and when that system is judged by the laws of nature, it will lose.

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Restart

Late-summer scent hung on the hillside when Gabriel walked the small holding for the first time. His ears, unaccustomed to the city’s noise, found company in the crickets and the wind. Beyond the open fence a meadow spread, and a little stream tinkled at the bottom of the valley. A storage made from an old truck chassis showed that human hands had worked here before. Gabriel looked at the papers in his hand: the official loan contract, the map, the property boundaries — all meant he had committed himself, for good, to a different way of life.

He visited the local vet, an experienced beekeeper and the old shepherd. After about six months he was stepping out of the house among sheep and goats. He set up a poultry yard and added two rabbit hutches beside the henhouse. The first year was a learning year: when to milk, how to cut the grass to preserve the soil, what the difference is between winter and summer feed rations. He learned how to bale forage, how to cover bales with waterproof film, how to stack drying branches for firewood.

The system was deliberately simple. A network of tanks collecting rainwater supplied part of the drinking and irrigation water; the well provided security. Heating and cooking were handled by a multi-fuel stove that used only wood — not wastefully, but carefully regulated, favoring fruit-tree prunings and dead trunks. His bee families were placed next to the orchard: in the first year they reduced the sugar bought at the store and their own honey sweetened tea and cakes. The house's energy setup was mixed: a few solar panels supplied lighting. Gabriel did not fully trust the electric grid; his batteries stored enough power to keep the pump and the refrigerator running no matter what.

Animal keeping was not a luxury but insurance: 20–30 sheep and goats provided milk, occasionally meat, wool and hides; the poultry supplied eggs, and rabbits multiplied quickly as a meat source. Mowing and baling were the season's main events: hay was what carried spring into winter. The garden yielded multi-generational vegetables: legumes, brassicas, onions, and fodder corn. They bought minimal seed and aimed for resilient local varieties. Everything was about shared work: children fed the chickens, his wife made the cheese, Gabriel repaired fences and machines. The family did not live more easily than in the city — but more stably.

Their way of life was based on reducing exposure. They made purchases collectively in the village and occasionally exchanged labor with other farmers: a week of mowing in return for someone helping as a beekeeper's assistant for a season. The local community network — kitchen-garden support, tool-sharing, swap markets — formed slowly; not on a single digital platform but between yards, on the school noticeboard and at local markets. Gabriel knew his self-sufficiency would never be complete; modern seeds, certain medicines, medical care and spare parts still required external sources. But the goal was limited dependence: less vulnerability, more resilience.

Farming was partly ritual. Harvesting feed became a family celebration: neighbors helped, children sold ice cream to volunteers, and the evening ended with a communal meal. Plans for the future were not frightening; they were quietly practical. When Gabriel watched the clear sky from the press-house veranda in the evening, lights in the valley blinked softly; everywhere around him he saw thrift and the fruits of purposeful work. He took joy in simplicity: the warmth of freshly drawn milk, the smell of wool on the line, the bean soup bubbling on the stove.

Still, his motive was not only practical but moral: Gabriel believed excessive consumption and dependence on global supply systems made people fragile. By moving to the farm he hoped that if urban comfort dimmed, his family would have a base: food, warmth, community ties — and children who learned the land and animals and thus could survive and recreate. The shadow of wars over resources loomed, but he thought: the less you are part of the global competition, the less chance you become a target. If the area became more self-reliant, external pressures would affect them less.

The real struggle, however, was not measured only in yields or livestock counts. The psychological costs of renunciation could be hard: the city's buzz, the ease of shopping, and the flood of instant services were missed. His children, especially the older one, sometimes complained about slow internet and the distance from friends. Gabriel always answered that freedom here took another shape: the children knew how to fix a broken gate, how to milk a goat or plant a seedling. Those skills, he said, were life insurance.

The first winter tested the farm. Snow closed some roads, and deliveries became less frequent. The local community pulled together. Bales and stores kept the animals fed and the family warm with wood heating. There were harder days: one goat died, the pump failed, and an influenza wave hit the area. Nevertheless, communal exchange and homegrown coping practices bridged the worst moments. Later friends from the city looked on in wonder at what the simple life could withstand in hard times.

For Gabriel the greater hope lay in the lifestyle taking root in his children. He had no illusion that the world would suddenly become peaceful — rather he thought that networks of local communities might be the safety net that outlasted geopolitical and ecological stresses. If wars reached the region, the holding and the network could offer shelter and means to survive; if not, the quiet working life would persist and make more ambitious goals attainable: a local school, community energy production, perhaps a joint dairy-processing facility.

On the anniversary evening, with the family gathered around the warm stove, Gabriel listened cheerfully to the children's laughter. The older child spoke about the broom he would make, the younger had named a goat. The memory of the city — old jobs, daily shopping, fast food and endless entertainment — already seemed distant. Something else had moved into them: practical wisdom, patience and a kind of peace grounded in the rhythm of daily work. Gabriel knew the future was uncertain: there could be wars, resource shortages and market collapses. Still, he believed that the small holding, the exchange network and the children's developing skills gave them a better chance to weather those times.

Days passed: the grass began to grow again as the bales dwindled, and the bees buzzed once more. The farm renewed itself in spring and continued to promise no luxury, but silence and basic security. Gabriel often reflected that his decision — to withdraw, renounce, and build — might be more than one family's story: an experiment in how to value well-being differently, not by the number of choices but by daily self-reliance and the quality of communal commitment.

When dusk fell and shadows lengthened across the field, the farm's soft sounds — the sheep settling for the night, the pecking at the corn — were like an old song. Gabriel had learned its rhythm: mowing, feeding, lamb care. The future could not be foretold; one could only prepare for it. His hope was simple: if the world broke, his family and community would be able to rebuild, and perhaps pass on calm and craft to the next generation — in peace and work.

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Perseverance in the City

The city kept its outward lights even as its internal organs grew weaker. There was no longer a time of day when everything ran smoothly: streetlights became intermittent, refrigerators creaked through rolling blackouts, yet the adverts impatiently pushed the next offer. David’s days began at first with the usual rhythm: a morning run along the river, a quick check of mail in the café, then into the glass-walled office where monitors and air-conditioning pleasantly shielded him from the extremes outside. From there everything seemed set to continue the good life.

The changes were gradual, then suddenly accelerated. Inflation rose: coffee, the cafeteria, tickets—all cost more. Summer turned abruptly hot; without air conditioning the apartment became unbearable. Within a week heatwaves came repeatedly, asphalt on the streets softened like jam, and people lined up early at shaded bus stops for relief. The later monsoon-like rains doubled the problems: the city's drainage system could not handle the new rhythms, metro tunnels simply flooded, and surface transport was regularly paralyzed.

David was not naïve: he heard the warnings, read the models, saw the news. Still he did not want to give up what had defined his life so far: weekly streaming marathons, the smell and noise of ruin pubs, the ritual of shopping and home delivery. The freedom the city provided—to go to a museum one day, a night concert the next; to buy a discount flight on the weekend and fly to another country or continent—felt as necessary as air. His hope was not rational: he believed that if he held on, systems would eventually normalize, prices would fall, and the old order would return without him having to change. Perhaps the world would even improve, since progress and technology kept delivering better results.

Reality pointed consistently the other way. Artificial intelligence systems entered and effectively replaced many former office roles—data entry, administration, customer service. The easiest, best-earning opportunities vanished. Several of his friends became suddenly and permanently unemployed; companies reorganized for cost efficiency and operated with fewer people. Wages did not keep pace with price rises, and savings had to be dipped into more deeply to make ends meet.

Regulations followed. Cars were banned from certain zones to reduce air pollution; the inner city gradually became pedestrian. That was theoretically good for the air, but for David—accustomed to constant mobility—it meant more constraints: spontaneous trips ended; shopping and weekend outings required planning. Store shelves more often ran short of this or that: fewer imported goods, and later even staple foods fluctuated. At first it was single exotic fruits, then flour and sour cream became irregular in supply. Disrupted supply—later, transport stoppages—undermined daily comfort and security.

Utilities were not immune. At first there were shorter, planned outages; then longer, unexpected ones. Elevators stopped for hours, garbage collection lagged, and most painfully the water pressure began to fluctuate. One evening after bathing, David's family encountered the harsh new order of the changed world when flushing the toilet. Notices first arrived through the condo's channels: "water service restricted, expected restoration: unknown." Panic slowly crept down the corridors. They turned to bottled water and toilet-bin collectors; the residential community filled with questioners and complainants.

David tried to adapt. He bought a small rainwater collector for the balcony, bought buckets for water storage from the nearby shop, and set up a portable gas stove in the kitchen corner. But every such attempt reminded him how vulnerable urban life was: there were no reserves here, no base supplies; familiar routines did not work when infrastructure failed.

The children grew unsettled. School schedules changed, after-school programs fell away and wifi stuttered, leaving learning fragmented. Family finances strained: David and his wife took odd jobs, sometimes delivering food or doing household repairs to make up lost income. Status symbols—new gadgets, fashionable clothes, festival tickets—were no longer priorities; desires narrowed to survival.

Hope, however, did not die. David clung to routines: he still sat down for an episode in the evenings, because series—even as more productions halted—still offered some security. The ruin pubs sometimes stayed open, and an occasional mini-festival could be caught. Those moments were vital, like breaths between sprints: they gave strength to continue everyday life.

But the city could no longer maintain its former role. One evening, when his wife applied for work in the city, she was told smaller office tasks were now automated—local events dwindled because money and logistics no longer supported large outdoor gatherings. Low-cost flights served fewer destinations; foreign travel, once a constant lift, became unaffordable and uncertain.

The hardest moment came when the condo's water supply stopped for weeks. On days without an elevator they carried bottles up the stairs, and stairwells filled with strangers' supplies: kitchenware, buckets, barrels. Community spirit did revive—some residents banded together to help—but for many this was the first time they truly met scarcity in their lives. David sat nights in the dark and wondered how to build new structures, how to find a way out.

There was no single answer. Those who stayed in the city tried two tracks: some sought a renewed connection with the land—like Gabriel in the countryside—while many could not afford to move. Experimentation therefore had to happen in place: building communal water tanks, neighborhood swap programs, small community gardens and repair workshops. David joined these efforts: he helped install a rainwater collection system in a nearby courtyard and joined a local group that prepared long-lasting food for sharing.

The change was not romantic. Degrees of freedom shrank; everyday choices were increasingly constrained. David learned that hope did not necessarily mean hoping for a return, but the capacity to adapt: to keep the important things—family cohesion, children's education, community ties—while giving up previous excess comfort and entertainment. He realized that the fragments of city experience offered little value in staying if the conditions for existence collapsed.

One night he sat on the balcony watching the city's remaining lights. Rain tapped the railing; the city still murmured. In the year of searching he had not found a perfect answer, but he had found some practical measures: modest water collection, community barter, membership in a local repair co-op. He knew the city he loved was changing shape; the familiar comforts would fade or be reshaped. He still kept hope, but of a different kind: not for a return, but for the ability to recreate the good things in simpler, more resilient forms—by building community, learning skills, and accepting that the city would no longer provide everything automatically.

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Governmental Challenges

Behind the glass walls of government offices the atmosphere had clearly changed: previous busyness gave way to a constant state of emergency. Daily situation reports arrived from county governors, the railway company and the energy network operators; on maps, alongside populated settlements, markings for damaged levee systems, washed-away ports and landslide-prone sections now carried weight. The state's responsibility had never been so tangible: people's lives, food supply, heating and drinking water—all depended on governmental decisions and resources.

The first challenge was collapsing revenues. Because of inflation and supply-chain disruptions corporate profits fell, household consumption declined, and with it VAT and corporate tax receipts. Unemployment rose, payrolls slipped, and the tax base narrowed. The budget simultaneously contracted while expenditures grew: disaster recovery, emergency food shipments, heating subsidies and financing of local crisis-management agencies demanded funds.

Infrastructure disruptions drained reserves. Repairing road and rail sections, restoring ports, reinforcing dams and quickly repairing energy networks imposed enormous costs on the state. Major investments often required imported technology and materials—scarce on international markets—so recovery was slow and expensive. Local authorities increasingly reported that central support did not match needs; utility providers' maintenance windows widened and public trust eroded.

Rising unemployment and recession carried social and political consequences. Corporate lay-offs and robotization/AI-driven reorganizations inflicted existential shocks on many families. Growth in joblessness strained welfare systems: benefit payouts, unemployment allowances and public works programs consumed ever larger budget shares. Pressure on social services exposed vulnerabilities: local governments responded with forced cuts, which bred further discontent.

The international environment offered little relief. Neighboring states faced similar problems; international aid channels were strained as every country focused on its internal crises. Scarcity on global markets and logistical breakdowns made imports—especially strategic commodities and food—hard to obtain. Regional tensions flared into armed conflicts in some border areas where scarce resources were being redistributed. This uncertain context further increased government costs: border defense, managing refugee flows and delivering humanitarian assistance.

The political space destabilized. The opposition gained voice by channeling public dissatisfaction; protests, roadblocks and local blockades followed. The government maneuvered with partial reallocations, targeted aid programs and communication campaigns to preserve social order. Harsher regulations were announced: energy-use restrictions, vehicle bans and temporary price controls on staple foods. These measures had mixed effects: they reduced the worst inequalities in the short term but distorted markets and dampened innovation incentives over time.

Government strategy rested on two pillars: crisis management and preparing transformation. Crisis measures included designating emergency logistical corridors, fast-track public procurement, temporary housing programs and prioritizing vital services—water, energy, healthcare. The simple aim was to keep the population afloat, maintain basic provision and eliminate the largest humanitarian risks.

At the same time authorities began preparing a longer-term adaptation plan: supporting decentralized energy and water systems, promoting local food supply chains, job-creation programs in sustainable agriculture and local processing, and education and retraining programs to shift the workforce to the new economic environment. Financial tools included issuing transitional development bonds, targeted lending for SMEs, and creating a so-called "reserve fund" for the next, likely more severe storm cycle.

The difficulty was that all this had to be done at once: respond quickly to worsening humanitarian and infrastructure realities while financing strategic investments to reduce future vulnerability. Budget constraints, falling revenues and international market difficulties made factual planning uncertain: which programs would deliver rapid impact, and which would serve the long-term sustainability of the economy?

Political resistance and public impatience compounded the burden. The government's communications team tried to report honestly and in detail: open crisis briefings, regional forums and local consultations were launched to increase public participation and communal feeling. This was partly effective: in some places local communities indeed became more active, spawning volunteer groups, food cooperatives and repair workshops. Elsewhere fatigue and despair led to protests and political radicalization.

The government's ultimate goal was to steer the country through the storm, preserve institutions and buy time until global and regional systems found a more stable state. They knew the period could be long and costly; they knew mistakes would bear political costs; but they also knew inaction would have harsher consequences. Decisions carried weight: balancing direct support against investment in the future; maintaining social order while restructuring the economic foundation; and preserving international cooperation in a region where everyone struggled with the same crisis.

One night a cabinet meeting illustrated this picture: tired but not broken experts and politicians debated the next steps—an urban protection package, expanded rural support, and launching a regional negotiation series to strengthen shared logistical corridors. They understood the government's task was not only to meet citizens' immediate needs but to set a direction for transformation: finding a workable balance between survival and long-term resilience. The effects of their choices would become clear only years later—but until then one eye remained on the budget, the other on community tremors, as they tried to keep pace with the storm.

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The Loser

Mike’s name never appeared on any plot plan. He did not acquire his own land, did not buy seed as a reserve, and did not collect rainwater on his balcony. The city had provided his world: flexible work hours, late-afternoon socializing, a weekly concert, late-night conversations, fast-food joints, the flood of lights from the shopping mall. His work seemed flexible — he never stayed at one company long, had many small orders and occasional projects. His life was marked by few reserves, many impulses, and sudden decisions.

When services became increasingly uncertain, Mike believed he would ride out the temporary inconveniences. Packages ordered from overseas still arrived, the internet still

worked, pub company held up well — for a while. The shift was swift: platforms reduced commissions while his number of orders dropped; then companies automated, and the short jobs suddenly vanished. He realized too late he had to curb his spending. His savings, which had never been large, were quickly exhausted. Soon the apartment's electricity started cutting out intermittently, then stopped; the tap delivered water for only half the time it used to; and in autumn it became clear the heating did not always run. Worried messages and desperate pleas for help appeared on the building's mailing list.

He recognized two paths ahead: stay and risk, or leave and—willingly or not—join those migrating to the countryside or simply try to survive on the streets. He had no rural relatives, nowhere to go. Staying meant continued vulnerability: the flat he still had to pay rent for was becoming unlivable. Leaving meant unknown risk—how much cash did he have, where could he go, who could he turn to? The decision came suddenly and begrudgingly: a month after the major water outage the building owner terminated the contract over unpaid communal fees; he had to vacate the apartment.

So Mike set out with a single suitcase and a backpack. That was all he could carry on his own strength, though there hadn't been many personal belongings in the rented flat anyway. The first days were spent at the city's edge: he sheltered in underpasses, temporary shelters, and only occasionally on a friend's couch for short stretches. He tried to find work: part-time food delivery was available, but the order system faltered and income became erratic. City streets were harsh; some community solidarity remained, but competition for resources sharpened. Mike often felt the earlier easy life was an illusion of another era.

He also headed toward country roads: he had heard of villages where land could be rented, seasonal work existed, and people with similar fates tried to build self-sufficiency in communities. But most places demanded an entry price—added personal tools, labor, verifiable credibility, the ability to gain local community support—which was too high for him. Some communities accepted those who could contribute; others were wary of outsiders who had little to give. For Mike, agricultural labor was physically exhausting and unacceptably underpaid; compared to urban routine it required a completely different endurance.

Street life carried serious security issues: theft, violence, health risks. After a month Mike contracted an illness that was harder to treat than before because outpatient clinics were overloaded. His care was partly covered by community donations; a local NGO took him in temporarily until he recovered, but afterwards he again found himself on the streets. The experience broke his pride but offered an opening: involvement in a volunteer-based community program that linked repair workshops, communal kitchens, and small farming projects.

A year later Mike's fate showed a mixed picture. He did not gain stable property nor city comforts. Yet, through acquaintances' intervention he was accepted into a rural cooperative where he performed wage labor in exchange for housing and meals. Pay was low but steadier, and the community safety net helped bridge illness and shortages. He learned basic repairs, helped with mowing and baling. Over time he also obtained a small share in the community's dairy processing as compensation for dedicated work. He made new friends and, to some degree, built a small measure of security around himself.

But the darker side must be mentioned. For many like Mike, being forced out of urban life was traumatic: financial loss, lowered social status, and broken relationships. Not everyone found organized cooperative systems or places willing to take them in; many became wanderers, at the mercy of volatile, often arbitrary local politics and black-market resources. Mental health deteriorated: loss of identity and hopelessness left marks.

In Mike’s case the outcome was somewhat better than the beginning suggested: he found a new kind of home, gaining some stability and skills. But the path was not glorious; it came at the cost of many sacrifices, relentless work, and little financial return. It was simultaneously a learning process and survival—a lived experience that broke him, shaped him, and eventually embedded him in a new community.

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He who laughs last, laughs best

Weighing the changes is not simple: there is no clear winner, rather different benefits and drawbacks arose from the choices, carrying different risks and opportunities. The balance of the stories, however, showed that Gabriel's and David's choices were not merely matters of lifestyle but commitments to different dependency patterns and resilience strategies, with their attendant risks and returns.

Analysis of Gabriel's situation — partial rural self-sufficiency:

- Strengths: higher baseline food and energy security (feed, own milk/meat, honey; rainwater, wood heating, solar panels), a local community safety net (barter, shared machinery), and basic skills for survival and transition. These reduced the impact of external supply-chain and infrastructure breakdowns.
- Weaknesses: limited access to specialized medical/technical services, lower consumer comfort, and a smaller market for income generation. The countryside was not completely independent: dependence on seeds, certain medicines, and tools persisted.
- Outcome: medium–high local resilience. Gabriel's family weathered the initial crises relatively stably; their children's practical skills and the local network later became valuable capital. Over the longer term the holding could grow into a community hub, with local processing and services emerging, but constraints on financial mobility and access to specialized services remained.

Analysis of David's situation — staying in the city and adapting:

- Strengths: initially high access to cultural and service goods, a larger labor-market variety, and the flexibility of urban services. Remaining in the city offered greater chances to join technological and community innovations (e.g., neighborhood self-help groups, urban community gardens).
- Weaknesses: greater exposure to infrastructure collapse (water, electricity, networks), stronger financial vulnerability, and direct experience of social tensions. AI and market restructuring eliminated many previous office-income forms, and urban living costs relatively worsened.
- Outcome: high short-term vulnerability with partial long-term transformation. David's household went through severe hardship, but urban community initiatives (water collection, repair workshops, networked solidarity) helped survival. If cities successfully reconfigured infrastructure into decentralized, local systems and new economic models, those who stayed could later gain new stability; if not, urban mobility and adaptability declined, leading to mass departure or impoverishment.

Shared lessons — what decided the outcomes?

- Dependency profile: those who secured more basic provisioning locally (food, water, heat) were less likely to face immediate humanitarian crises. Local self-sufficiency is not a complete lifeline but is a significant risk reducer.
- Skills and community: practical skills (animal husbandry, repairs, food preservation) and strong local networks increase resilience. Social capital often outweighed money.
- Innovation and adaptation: urban environments offered greater odds for technological and organizational innovation; these only helped substantially if infrastructure remained at least partly functional and people had resources to adopt innovations.
- Time horizon and risk tolerance: the rural strategy tended to be more stable short–mid term for physical survival; the urban strategy offered higher potential long-term returns but carried greater systemic risk.

Final judgment

There was no absolute better path — circumstances and scale decided. Partial rural self-sufficiency gave Gabriel a realistic chance for mid-term survival and local prosperity, but with limits and sacrifices. David’s staying in the city initially provided greater comfort and cultural opportunities, but systemic disruptions brought severe vulnerability that community reorganization could only partly mitigate.

The world they entered was about transformation, not return: those who built local provisioning, practical skills, and strong communal networks were likelier to survive and build a future. The fate of city dwellers depended heavily on how quickly they could create new decentralized systems and solidarity mechanisms. Both routes taught that modern forms of prosperity are fragile; survival and future-building rest on reducing dependencies, acquiring skills, and forging community ties.

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Epilogue

History rarely resolves everything at once; the crisis's blade breeds pain, but in the same place new shoots begin to appear. The storms of recent years taught people that it isn't enough to wait for good things: they must shape them together. Cities and villages, holdings and apartment-staircase communities slowly rebuilt what was lost — but differently and more wisely.

Political and economic institutions learned their limits and increasingly began to cooperate: local decision-making was strengthened, regional collaborations emerged for fairer resource distribution, and technology — now in the service of sustainability — helped optimize local systems. Unilateral dependencies were replaced by flexible reciprocities.

People learned that well-being is not merely a matter of quantity: it's not about how much and how fast we consume, but about the quality of life we live, the relationships we have, and the skills we possess to build the future. In hardship many discovered: the joy of shared work, the taste of food made by your own hands, exchanged stories, and the morning silence on the field carry at least as much value as any office bustle or mall lights.

Losses did occur, and some paths remained painfully stony. But a new hope emerged: that if we prepare with foresight and confidence, learn skills, build communities, and put technology at the service of human goals, change will not only force survival but offer the opportunity to create a better, fairer, and more durable world.

This epilogue does not close the story with triumph; it is both a challenge and an encouragement. Let the measure of prosperity be more than rapid consumption: let it be cooperation, the strength of community, and prudent hope in the future. If we approach it this way, change — however harsh — can ultimately lead to a deeper, more humane form of growth. And that idea, if tended together, is strong enough to lend light to a new dawn.

We can thrive if we greet the future prepared and with open hearts.

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A Twist in the Story

These lines are written in 2025. The story references artificial intelligence beginning to displace people from their jobs. That still sounds like fiction to many—just like delivery drones in the city sky. Yet both are realities today. The spread of AI is precisely what this little book proves.

This story was written by artificial intelligence.

I did not add anything, did not correct it, did not embellish or complicate the story. The only instruction given to the AI was to write a novella about people leaving the city during climate change.

So here we are in 2025.

It is not hard to imagine that if a general-purpose service, freely and publicly available in an ordinary web browser, can solve such a complex task at this quality, then it can perform a large share of office work as well. Tasks now done by masses of office workers will fall under AI's domain sooner than many expect. This will not appear as isolated individual problems but as a societal-scale crisis. The majority of the population lives in cities, and most city dwellers are office workers.

A few years from now, looking back, no one will likely be surprised at what AI did to society, reshaping everyday life with both positive and negative effects. Just as before the 1990s there were no mobile phones and a few years later people could hardly imagine how they had lived without them, smartphones produced an even greater shift. Today it is shocking to be without a smartphone for even a few hours. The next level is AI, with influence reaching into every detail of the world.

The point here, too, is change. Change always has winners—the adapters—and losers. The first step of adaptation is preparation: recognizing change early and exploiting new opportunities before the masses awaken. Those who neglect situational analysis and preparation will be the losers of change. This is one of nature's oldest laws, valid in human societies as much as in the rest of the living world.

This text described the forced changes before us and possible responses, as outlined by a general machine intelligence. It sketched expected consequences of the three clearest choices—proactive, reactive, and passive. AI models are currently trained to be fundamentally positive in their outputs. Therefore even the story's most poorly adapting, and thus greatest-losing, passive character was painted an optimistic future by the AI. That rhetorical device is misleading: in reality, fortune rarely favors those who do nothing.

Our future stems from our present. The rise of AI, the dominance within the population of urban residents unable even at a basic level to be self-sufficient, and increasingly unfavorable environmental conditions frame our everyday life. Even if many do not perceive this, or cling consciously to accustomed lifestyles and hopes of continuity.

It is worth reflecting which strategy describes us, and which would be effective and reassuring for each of us. That reflection can lead to realizations that take shape in a new plan. Perhaps precisely in an escape plan.

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About the author

Hill Smith is the pen name of a former city dweller who relocated to the countryside and found a new purpose in livestock and mountain farming. He writes various stories, mostly revolving around farming, preparedness, and futures analysis, and some are science fiction. His writings are available as ebooks at this site:

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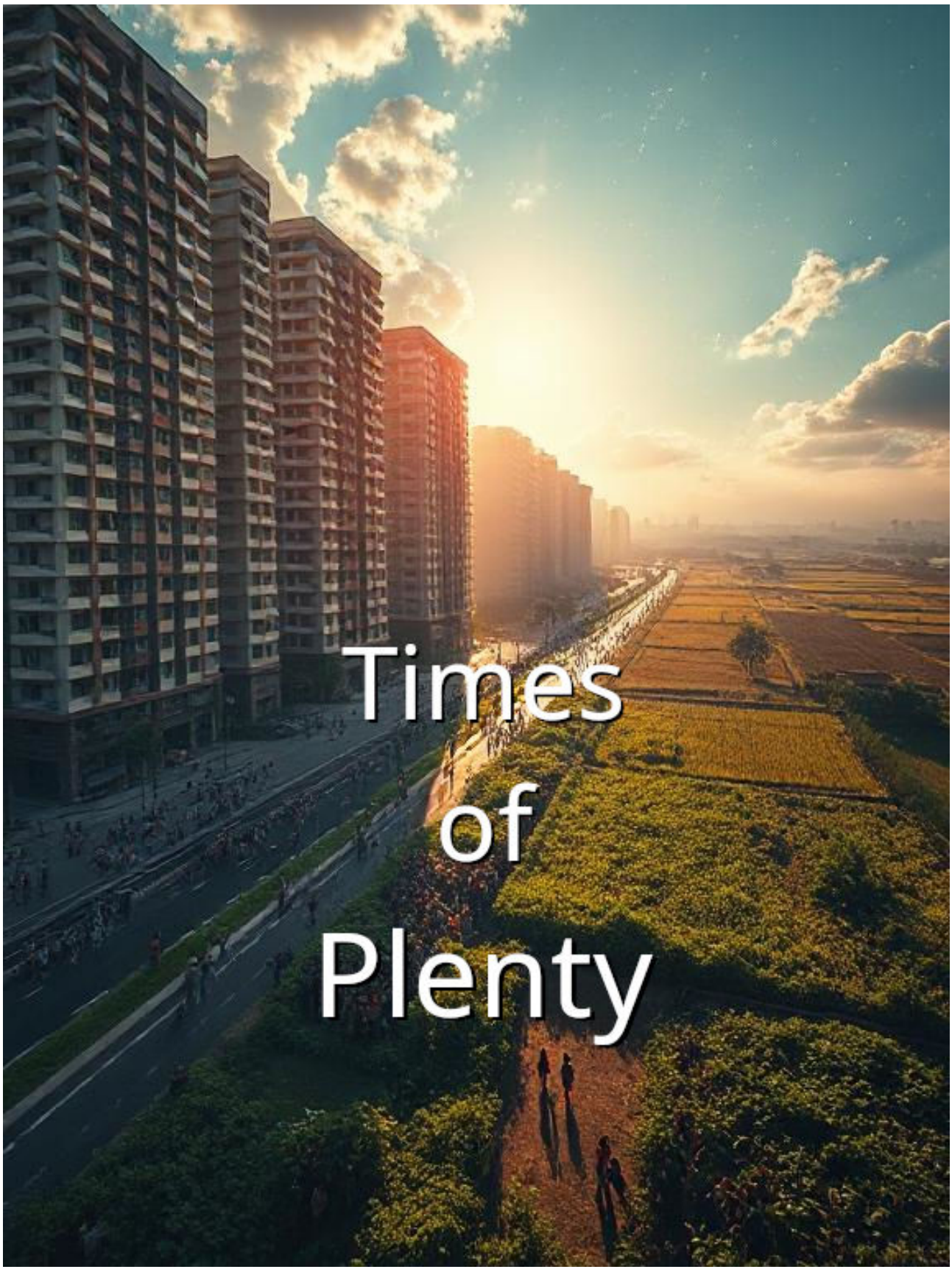
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