

10/16 *The Walrus and the Carpenter*

Go walking close at hand;

They laugh like anything to see

Great quantities of sand:

'We're going to build some condos here,'

Oh my, won't it be grand!'

Once upon a time, back in 1968, when the World Trade Center was a pair of rising skeletons and the Battery Park City landfill was still a beach, Charles J. Urstadt, a longtime aide to then-Governor Nelson Rockefeller, was made first Commissioner of the Authority that ruled the riverside sands. Eventually the luxury high-rises Rocky dreamed of blossomed on this desert, and Urstadt gave up his shoreline sheikdom and went on to a partnership in a firm that plants shopping malls throughout the Northeast.

But now, encore, Urstadt's in a landfill state of mind, lobbying hard to build fifty more acres of New Manhattan in the Hudson River, up the coast from BPC, a stretch about two thousand feet long and jutting a thousand feet out from the island's present edge. "It's economically desirable," Urstadt says, invoking the timeless folk wisdom of his tribe. "We can create that land for \$75 a square foot. Depending on what you put on the land, it's worth \$2,000 to \$3,000 a square foot." His notion is that Battery Park City North would fall, like its predecessor, under the aegis of the Battery Park City Authority, hence property owners would be exempted from city taxes. Instead, they'd pay "in lieu of taxes," to the Authority with some portion of the take ultimately trickling down to the municipality.

Presumably, one could keep on landfilling north, though there's only so far you

can go before the ranks of new towers start to threaten the last generation of posh condos' sunset river views. And laterally, it makes real estate sense to preserve enough river to be able to claim one's property as "waterfront." But that's on the west side. As far as the Harlem River is concerned, Urstadt's not adverse to filling it in altogether. "It doesn't do any good," he says. "The only thing it's used for is the Circle Line."

10/17 An articulated vehicle that looks like an immense catywumpus tractor trailer attempts to negotiate the turn from Ninth Avenue onto 21st Street, but can't make it all the way. The street's narrow and unless it wants to take off the rear end of a BMW parked at the corner, that's as far as it'll get. And what a bizarre thing it is. The cab's normal enough, but the back end appears to be an outsized shipping container angled down toward the rear by inset wheels considerably smaller than those at the front. And then, there are pipes and valves sprouting from the thing, the whole of it painted baby blue. Ah, there's the logo. Silhouette of an umbrella and falling droplets painted black on a white circle with type curving round the graphic: RAIN FOR RENT. Must be some sort of a water tank, but not of the iconic cylindrical variety one's accustomed to seeing used for transporting liquids. Something disconcerting about an oblong vessel, but there it is.

The driver dismounts the cab and enters the café to ask if the BMW's owner is on the scene. No dice. At this hour, it's not a BMW crowd. You joke with Mario: "Why don't you move your car and let the guy through?" The driver leaves the café and stands on the corner, scanning in this direction and that, hoping perhaps that the person who can solve his problem will materialize out of the air. Not likely, since the spot is legal until tomorrow at 9 a.m. For a full half hour then, RAIN FOR RENT serves

as an impromptu roadblock, as effective or more than any student barricade in le quartier latin. Finally, the driver gets back into the cab and slowly, reluctantly even, backs the truck up, attended by much beeping and guided by an officious-looking fellow who's materialized out of the ether of the city and seems accustomed to directing traffic. Having cleared the intersection, the driver pulls up in front of the Seminary entrance on Ninth Avenue. Is this where the presumptive water delivery was headed all along? Perhaps the driver made a wrong turn? The Seminary's been digging geothermal wells along 21st. Did they rupture a water line? Quien sabe? Someone, but it would be exhausting to investigate. Only the Creator of all things, however, knows the true answer to the question of why She or He or It or They has seen fit to visit upon us a water tank – if indeed that is what this is – in the outward form of a shipping container. The easy conclusion is: stackable water. But somehow that doesn't satisfy the heart.

For most of the latter writing of *Notes of a New York Son* you had the sense of surfing the chaos, the silliness, the awfulness of the moment. Now, having wiped out you're in the soup itself, sometimes flotsam, sometimes jetsam, a new and different relationship with waves. It is said that the schizophrenic drowns in the same water in which the mystic swims.

Despite their ravings, posturings, their flotillas sitting out in the Arabian Sea, the Bushies seem strangely reluctant to do the Iran job. Perhaps, and this is only conjecture, some small reserve of sanity in them has balked – wishes somehow to keep things suspended, just as they are – knows that from this next move, the only one they

have left, there will be no way back. Or else, they may simply have overextended their limitations.

Look here, look there. Along a blocksworth of posh shops in a big pomo skyscraper on Lex in the upper fifties, they've installed a no-sitting-on-our-window-ledges-thank-you-very-much device. A close-spaced row of tapering polished metal cylinders about four inches tall sticks up from the otherwise temptingly wide bench-high sills of polished granite. At both corners, the subway entrance-exits feature the same nasty bit of detailing. Designer spikes. It actually hurts to look at them, these human-intended versions of the classic nail bed pigeon-perch dissuaders.

Then you walk through a public park where the concession stand is surrounded by several huge plasma screen TVs displaying a Weimaraner's head poking out of a business suit. What gives? A Wegman film festival, some clever ad, or both?

Either way, O Best Beloveds, there's no end to the amount of street level civic good that a few folks with hammers couldn't accomplish in no time at all.

And if I had a bell,

I'd ring it in the morning,

I'd ring it in the evening...

Pushing five and you drop by the Le Grainne Café to find herself ensconced at Table 2, flipping through fashion mags, killing time before her lease renewal meeting with the landlords who live upstairs. Incredible – it was only the other day she told you, beaming, that she'd signed a new three year lease. But that other day happened in

2004. Her younger daughter Isis was three, Gwen twelve. Grainne doesn't seem worried precisely, just a bit preoccupied. On verra.

Happily, Noelle and Samantha, respectively of Marseille and Aix-en-Provence, are waitressing the evening shift. In the time it takes to drink a lemonade, your spirits revive on a double dose of the feminine Midi and you decide to pedal round to Jack Macrae's bookshop on the offchance of finding him in residence. But the instant you turn the corner onto 21st Street, you spot it. Wonder of wonders. Via some rare magic or by dint of main force, they've managed to position that huge, blue oblong water tank on the sidewalk half hidden behind the hoarding that screens off the well-digging operation. Of course! RAIN FOR RENT – the water's there to cool the drills, they'll need lots of it as they spiral their way down into the hot, forgiving earth.

Whiplash. Bush presents an award to the Dalai Lama, then threatens to start WWII should Iran acquire the same bomb we've had for sixty years and used twice.

10/19 Ask not for whom the cops troll...

Like glaciers, your gums retreat as your body warms toward old age.

Hours after leaving class at El Instituto Cervantes your mind still rushes with a whitewater cascade of Spanglish. Into your head pops a Sly Stone song, subtly modified: *Everybody is estar*.

This too shall pass.

10/20 Mario informs you that Grainne will be signing a new five year lease for the café. Which means it runs out in late 2012, right around the time the Maya long count does.

Will we witness the end of ourselves as we knew us? Of history? Of crêpes? Or are these the twilight years of bunk?

10/21 In the relative stillness of an early Sunday morning you hear them: two crows cawing, must be from the big lawn below. They sound like ancient enemies continuing a futile argument in which neither will triumph, nor back down. Like an acoustic Black Goya.

Up to Rhinebeck for the Sheep and Wool festival, wherein everything fluffy and fleecy from angora rabbits, musk oxen and alpacas – there's a llama leaping contest – to merinos, and impossibly greasy, randy rambouillets have been gathered into the Dutchess County Fairgrounds, along with a multitude of products made therefrom – raw wools, rovings, spun yarns of myriad hues and textures, plus machines for their processing and the demonstration of numerous ancillary arts and crafts. Two fellows make brooms with technics from a century ago alongside a belt-driven chitty-chitty-bang-bang shingle-slicing operation. Sheep shearing, of course. Out on the vast track and playing field, a battery of catapults – like medieval trebuchets and huge sling shots, constructed and crewed by teams from local high schools and community colleges – compete to lob pumpkins at targets several hundred feet away. Too feed the spectacle, a panoply of regional wines, cheeses, fudges, fruits, spun maple sugar, not to mention the gastric mosaic of fast food crapola. Ba-a-a-sta.

It's an impossibly beautiful day. Seventy-five degrees, which the trees defy by exhibiting their most flamboyant natures against a sky of unmediated blue.

Mid-afternoon and you've wandered pretty much everywhere. Check the schedule and head for Building 34. You arrive a little early and witness an extraordinary border collie and his fairly unremarkable man engaged in the finale of their partner act. The collie catches in his teeth, with verve and accuracy, every frisbee that the man rapidfire throws. To give the latter his credit, he's a terrific tosser. But the show lies in the collie's acrobatics – she leaps onto the man's shoulders, caroms off his chest, makes mad dashes to catch distant throws two inches above the ground. Six in fast succession, catch and drop, catch and drop, bam bam bam.

Amidst the applause, you and Gwen find seats in the bleachers. Outside the barn, a white Sheriff's vehicle pulls out, lights flashing and in short order, the Dutchess County K-9 Corps has set up and is ready to give its demonstration. Such dogs! One proves himself an ace at finding accelerant-soaked rags. A bloodhound bays as only a bloodhound can. Timber, an \$11,000 shepherd from Slovenia, so Lt. Hicks explains, is an expert in locating explosives. He's also a whiz at catching bad guys. Deputy Lenz puts on a pair of huge padded sleeves and starts to run. *Go!* or word to that effect from Timber's handler and the dog is bounding forth to clamp his jaws on the deputy's arm. Lenz whirls. The dog's feet come off the ground, first fore than hind, and centrifugal force carries his body out damn near horizontal, but still Timber won't let go. It's only on his handler's order that, saliva dripping in sheets, he releases Lenz's arm and plops to all fours.

As if anticipating the audience's collective "but what if?..." the scenario's repeated with a variation. This time, when caught, Lenz jettisons the padded sleeve,

leaves Timber holding it in his jaws and makes to runs away again. In half a beat, the dog has dropped the false flag and leaps to seize the Bad Guy's other arm. Astounding. Yet at a command, Timber releases, turns round, trots back to his handler's side. Hicks calls for volunteers. The chosen one, a little girl named Aden, crosses from the bleachers to the sawdust floor, pats Timber's head, scratches his lupine ruff. "See?" says the lieutenant. "Each of these dogs has an on-off switch."

Though you see no demonstration of this, Lt. Hicks informs you that another of the Department's Slovenian shepherds, whose name sounds like Dough, has been schooled in the location of human remains. But finding explosives, the lieutenant says, is specialty that has come most to the fore since 9/11. When a dog scents a possible bomb, it wouldn't do to bark or claw. Instead, the animal sits calmly by the object, turns to his handler and wags his tail. The professional term for this is "passive alert."

Bushness as usual.

Trace your ancestry and find it extends all the way back to Charlatan.

10/22 Right around the time *Divided We Stand* came out, late 1999, you bought a Perry Ellis shirt at Century 21. Slate blue, with signature Ellis detailing plus one eye-catching feature: a zipper across the breast pocket. Came readings for the book and you wore the shirt. Its semi-retirement coincided with your public disappearance. Came the tumbling towers and the shirt roared back into action, this time mediated by the mechanics of television and paired with a silk Francesco Smalto red striped tie, inherited from your ex-friend J. Katie's pick for the TV interviews. Authoritative.

Formal. But not without an edge.

Fifteen minutes passed in an eyeblink – no, a video scan – and the shirt returned to living among its rarely-worn fellows in the bedroom closet. Until last year when, as you searched for something else, it came to light again and you found that the collar and cuffs, whether by some mineral action in the wash water or a degradation in the dye itself had turned a strange brownish.

Into the sink it went, with a dose of bleach. Fifteen minutes later, something wrong. No longer slate blue but a kind of piebald beige. Rinsed and dried, and back in the closet at the far end of the shirts, unwearable but too charged an object to be simply thrown out. Yet its presence nagged. Once glorious, or at least valorous. And now?

Upstairs neighbor M. knows something about dying and everything about fibers. She lends you her special bleachtub. It's standard yellow Rubbermaid, but it's hers. She recommends a long soaking in very little bleach. Amazing. After several hours, a uniform bone-white. Not Rit she says, use another kind of dye. There's a Procion lilac at the Fashion Institute store. Expensive. Invest. Then up to M.'s where you follow her instructions to the letter, stirring the shirt in a well-used dyepot pot on her unlit stove for the better part of an hour. Add washing soda. Patience, but no faith.

Take shirt downstairs and rinse forever until no trace of purple shows when the fabric's squeezed. The chroma's deep. And even. Shirt hangs dripping from the shower head. Purple rain. More rinsing. Katie irons it. Reddish streaks. Rinse again.

You wore the shirt to the Sheep and Wool Festival yesterday, and early this a.m. grabbed it blindly the from hanger on the shirts-in-transit bookshelf where you left it overnight to air. Something in its tribulations has softened the material, given it an almost iridescent sheen. Apparently it always wanted to be this color. The zipper and

its little metal pull remain slate blue. The pearlescent buttons, well, they'd go with nearly anything. On closer look, they really have no color of their own. Apart from fastening, and unfastening, their function is to reflect.



A photo of the shirt during its blue period on the afternoon of 11/24/07. In the background, flowers, xeroxed portraits, written messages: an improvised memorial on a chain-link fence in Washington Square Park. And yes, now it comes back. You bought the shirt at Century 21, on one of those downtown runs to research the thing itself, right across the street. A Spanish photographer named Miguel Rajmil took the pic, then vanished into the city.

To tired to cognate last night you cracked Herodotus before turning in and underlined a paragraph about the famous Table of the Sun, whose existence the Persians sent spies to Ethiopia in order to confirm or deny. The spies reported that the Table is a meadow on the outskirts of the city, and on it lies an abundance of the boiled meat of every four-footed creature. "To this meadow, those of the citizens who on each

occasion are in authority bring the meat by night; by day anyone who pleases may come and eat there. But the people of the place declare that the earth of itself continuously renews the food."

In describing this Cockaigne, the Father of History conflates, it seems, two places: first the African Ethiopia that was subject to the Persian empire, and also, the "fabulous Ethiopia" whose inhabitants live at the uttermost end of the earth, and where, according to the *Odyssey*, Poseidon visits time and again to feast.

A puzzling question: where do you locate your self outside your body?
And inside?

Blue of a sort overhead, but with a strange, pale orange glow in the southeast. Ten in the morning. A wild mix of altostratus, cirrocumulus, cirrostratus and cirrus crosshatched with contrails. Looking at such a thing, you feel illiterate. Still you know, the sky's the litmus.

Mentally, physically, spiritually hung over. Only one small glass of wine with dinner last night, but what did you drink in with it?

"We've got everything on our side except for Mother Nature," State Assemblywoman Julia Brownley laments as a dozen fires roar along the California coast from north of LA to the Mexico border. Driest brush in a month of Sundays and extreme Santa Anas that gust to amazing, hurricane-force velocities. Among the buildings gone to embers, Castle Kashan, high nestled in the Malibu hills. Built in 1978

to seem the redoubt of a Scottish laird, the Castle went lately on the block, its owner hoping to kash out before the fire sale – though in truth, it would've been a steal at only \$17 mil. Lilly Lawrence is the chatelaine's name, though she's also called the Rose of Shiraz, philanthropist and socialite. Her dad, the late Reza Fallah, served loyally as oil minister to the Shah – until forced to evacuate a brush fire of another sort.



Nearly a thousand firefighters fought to bring the blaze under control. Here, firefighters work near Castle Kashan. (NYT) Photo: J. Emilio Flores/Getty Images

*Straight to Shiraz I will flee,
a hundred friends I'll find at every stop...*

These words belong to Baba Taher.

Then Hafez sang:

Pleasant is Shiraz and its incomparable state.

Oh lord, preserve it from decline!

And again:

Shiraz, and the waters of Roknabad, and this pleasant breeze,

Fault it not! For it is the beauty of seven nations.

And again:

Belle of Shiraz, grant me but love's demand,

And for your mole – that clinging grain of sand

Upon a cheek of pearl – Hafez would give

All of Bokhara, all of Samarkand...



A satellite image shows smoke from wildfires in Southern California. Tens of thousands of people were ordered to evacuate today as the wind-driven fires spread. (NYT) Source: NASA via Reuters.

The Great Lakes, Michigan, Huron, Ontario, Erie, even mighty Superior, in whose great waves once you swam grow shallower inch by inch. Mild winters, hence lots of evaporation.

“Mother Nature is largely the driving force on what the water levels are,” says Keith Kompoltowicz, a Detroit-based meteorologist with the Army Corps of Engineers.

So Mom, where does all the water go?

RAIN FOR RENT.

Note: petition to change name of agency to Army Corps of Ingénues.

Mams Naturaleza, what she know? Is something out there engaging with our Sun?

Q: What do you call an institution of higher learning established on the closest of Jupiter’s four moons.

A: Io U.

Io, once a Priestess of Hera. Seduced by Zeus, then transfigured into a cow by the jealous goddess and condemned to wander, constantly molested by a gadfly. Her celestial counterpart’s been acting up of late, volcanoes spewing out matter that

augments Jupiter's tail, a vast magnetic appendage, hundreds of millions of miles long. Prehensile?

A slight shift in pronunciation and stock market becomes stalk market. Easier by far to climb up than down. Boom boom boom, here comes the giant. Run, Jack, run!

Nail soup. For the soul. A simple recipe. Tried and true. If you can pump enough agua to fill the pot.