

10/30 Eric B., Katie and yourself agree: it is possible, and desirable, to cultivate the Graces, without putting on Airs.

The Dark Month will be upon us in two bounds of a wolfhound – the sort of canines that accompany warrior shades along the Secret Road that runs through Ireland and, in all probability, some other places too. Should you find yourself traveling that road, neither warriors nor hounds will do you any harm, but it's best to keep a crust of bread in your pocket, and hold it fast to keep yourself rooted in your own world.

E. Stanley "Stan" O'Neal, former GM assembly line worker, son of rural Alabama and grandchild of slaves, gets the golden boot – \$161.5 mil – that propels him from the gates of Merrill Lynch. There's a story in that tangle, but who's to tell it? This guy was not your average CEO. Nor average anything.

Merrill – seems harmless enough. But watch out for Lynch.

10/31 A Midsummer Night's Dream out of season.

And among the other old roads, the Silk Road. Along the way, just when one has become parched from the journey, a chaikhana, resting place, where one can sit, drink tea, and live for a moment enfolded in the language of the divine.

But here, in Gotham, or Xanadu on Hudson, or Mecca of fools, such craziness, such abundant, nay opulent, dysfunction. *The war, says Katie, is the elephant in the living*

room.

Comes Kipling:

They shut the road through the woods

Seventy years ago.

Weather and rain have undone it again,

And now you would never know

There was once a road through the woods...

Before Merrill Lynch's hallucination of vast trading floors came to Xanadu on Hudson, Kublai Kahn's exemplary summer capital set the dreamstage. But in order for the road to lead to Xanadu, Kublai's grandfather Genghis knew that first, *steppes must be taken.*

Ethical stranger, when do we meet?

Lots of contrails laid down in the clear blue of early morning, and now around 11 a.m., a weird, whitish sky.

By 12:30, it's predominantly bizarre cirrocumulus up there, some wispy as cirrus and blending into cirrostratus. As though a celestial painter abandoned a canvas that wasn't working out midway through. Is it your projection or are these very tormented-looking clouds?

By dint of certain Board of Health regulations, Mario has to wear some kind of hair covering when he's working behind the counter at Le G., as does the rest of the kitchen staff. Usually he's got a cap on, but today, perhaps in deference to Halloween, he's wrapped his head in a red bandana which makes him look borderline piratical, though more Penzance than Edward Teach. "Where's your costume?" he asks.

"Don't need one," you reply. "I'm really scary on the inside."

Off the cuff, but true.

The dusk sky is gorgeous. Cloud formations have regrouped into something approximating natural condensation, and they're redolent with an orange pink that also suffuses the horizon and fades upward into the bluing dome. Goblins emerge from their lairs below.

On Eighth Avenue near 26th Street, a trio of street people, well in their cups by the look and sound of 'em, hang out on a stoop in the deepening shadows beneath a scaffold. The men sit on a low step, legs stuck out like toddlers. The woman stands. She's singing too, but also conducting her brethren as, with considerable brio they belt out verse and chorus of "We all need somebody to lean on."

11/1 Fuckin' A, New Yawk.

As if to prove you are not a bodhisattva, a flaccid young couple stands squarely in the bike lane on Eighth as you put on a burst for home. Plenty of traffic zooming by on your right, no swerve room, so you tinkle the bell on the handlebar and when that

fails, wave them toward the curb. They step back, but not very far and with no sense of urgency and up wells, as you pass them: "Hey, hey, don't fuck around!"

The male offers a "fuck you" to your back and that's it. You hit the brakes and tight circle around. Jump off the bike, prop it up on the kickstand. Motion him toward you. "Come on motherfucker!" But they've snagged a cab, which was their intent all along. The door slams and the cab wooshes by. "Go back to the suburbs, you piece of shit!" Do they hear you?

For the first time in a week, shaking in the limbs, your vocal chords stripped, a sense of being absolutely alive.

Where did all that red energy come from? Out of the blue?

At the café not five minutes before, M. kvelled over the color of your shirt. A purple to dye for.

At times you are a meal too rich for your own consumption. Cramps. Sweat it out.

Lost and found by degrees.

In this moment, any sense of relaxation or peace is purchased with the coin of vast and insanely rapid expenditures of energy. Thus is the material world evermore transformed to feed the non-substance of vanity.

New Jersey Transit train to meet Cousin Jane in Princeton. Through the

window, vast demolitions in Newark's equivalent of Long Island City.

Why do not the facades of all buildings shimmer with kinetic displays? What's wrong with them? What delays the celebration?

You have one brother. A half-brother in gene terms – David's your father's child. Different mothers. But he's come to feel brotherly indeed. You've also got cousins, some by blood, the majority by affinity. Even before you started studying Ba Gua, you'd become habituated to walking in circles – all different sizes and configurations.

You can have a gut feeling. Or a gutted feeling. It is also possible to be filled with calm passion.

The misnaming of things: a Dialogue Box isn't. But hay, no problema.

Young Arthur, Robert and Jane – in age-descending order, your uncle Arthur and aunt Alice's kids. When Jane talks about Robert, it still seems unimaginable that he's been dead for over a year. On the videotape of the memorial, you hear two generations of his students offer highly personal encomiums which distill down to a common theme: "If it wasn't for Mr. Darton, I'd never have...". Fill in the blank. *Gone to college. Stopped taking drugs. Learned to think for myself.*

An avowed and open Marxist, Robert worked as a history teacher in a South Jersey public high school for the whole of his professional life. How he managed to

walk that faultline you'll never figure.

Jane tells you that when they admitted Robert to the hospital on his last day, he'd grown too weak to fill out the forms, so she wrote in the answers for him: Name, address, d/o/b, etc. But when it came to what to put down for "Religion," she had to ask him. "None!" he almost barked. Then lay back. "And all."

She tells you too that several of Robert's former students have organized themselves into an ongoing study group. That they've named The Dartonians.

On the twilight train home, nearly everywhere you look between Newark and Secaucus, an incredible industrial ruandscape.

Marsh and more marsh. Birds. And that cloud of tiny flying things? The Jersey bats.

Somehow, still, even in this world, an amazing number of people somehow manage to avoid being narcissists.

How differently would we react if instead of all the "luxury" chicken coops and posh office blocks being flung up, these were buildings burning down?

Eureka – I have drowned it!

11/2 Dia de Los Muertos.

The *Times* headline actually says "Obama Envisions New Iran Approach," but

you read the second word as “Invasions.” Conditioned reflex.

Everywhere in the modern world we create vast, bleak islands of frozen energy. Thus are we forced, nomads all, to journey endlessly from noasis to noasis.

There was once a man who believed to the end of his days that he could stay alive forever by simply not using the subjunctive.

Nut soup.

4-something p.m. Friday. By degrees, traffic on Eighth Avenue begins to form itself into a parking lot jampacked with honking cars. Over the cacophony, from twenty stories down comes an electronic squawk, then the unmistakable voice of a cop over a squad car’s loudspeaker. “Put down the phone and pull over to the right.”

Most gorgeous sunset in memory. First the sun constructs an array of saffron-colored battlements from the vertical elements of the downtown massif. Then the skydome erupts in color, redpurpleblue, except for a swath of slate gray cloud that cuts across the whole visible south as though some high mesa has formed out there beyond the harbor. Or has the plate of another continent reared up to show us its flank?

By contrast with the bath Merrill Lynch is taking, Citigroup’s \$6 billion sub-prime mortgage writedown seems modest indeed. Still, they’re sending Charlie “Bonnie” O. Prince III packing in what the *Times* describes as “a crushing blow to the

legacy" of Citigroup's paterfamilias and ex-chair Sanford "Quicksand" I. Weill.

So Citi's un-grouping. Having sprung forward they are now, like autumnal clocks across the country, falling back. No daylight savings in the Dark Month and upon the shifting tides, the rats who've guessed the fate of the ship have overflowed the hawsers and are scuttling for the gangplank. But the solid's turned liquid, and the liquid's now a gas – what the Greeks called Chaos: those swirling vapors from which the universe would one day form and to which it now returns.

Meanwhile, above the caption "First Kiss Back Home," the *Times*'s front page picture shows four soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division pressing their lips against the airport tarmac. The enormous backpacks they wear lend them, in their gesture, the air of prostrate, camo'd Pillsbury Dough Boys.[®] Lucky ones. They've just landed, intact, at Fort Drum, NY, after a fifteen-month "tour" in Iraq.

11/3 Biscuits. Lost in the sauce.

In respiration, we experience the constant interchange between internal and external states. Since breathing isn't something we choose, where then, are our agencies within its process? What are its qualities?

Conspiracy.

What if a jail wouldn't let you finish your sentence.

Nous some tous emirates.

Moving wight along.

Bleakwater.

Hey, you don't have to reincarnate the wheel. No, I meant the weal. No, the veal.

"Musharraf Declares State of Emergency." Didn't they used to call it "Siege"? Hence this morning's *Times* photo: a truckload of Pakistani soldiers zooming past the camera. The men survey their surroundings keenly, like raptors, semiautomatics at the ready. No kissing the terra firma here. Nor are they home from somewhere else. Moving like the wind, these creatures are exactly where they are.

Bleachwater.

Stanley O'Neal. Charles O. Prince III. Whassup with these chief executives and their Oh's?

Mind the gap.

Into which you fell last March when Cousin Jane referred you to a photograph of your paternal great grandparents house in Hinching, England, near Nottingham.

You'd elaborated a Robin Hood fantasy around this place, replete with ancestral claim to Locksley Hall.

Lo, what a difference a consonant makes. Still walking in the light of your latest communion with Cousin Jane, you trip to ancestry dot com to discover that your grand dad, Arthur William Darton, was most likely born in Hitchin, within the parish of St. Ippollitts, Hertfordshire, not far north of London. The 1891 English records show him in Islington. By 1906, he's married Annie D. and crossed the pond. The 1910 Fed. census has them domiciled in Union City, NJ, Ward 3.

Ninety-seven years and two waves of Dartons later, Robert's gone. But you think of how, recently you've gotten to know his son Achilles, really for the first time. He's a musician, which runs deep in the bloodline, and, very much in his own way, a remarkably talented man. Like his father, a person of considerable heart. Young by your standards, but an elder in his generation of Darton cousins: Roy, Liza, then Achilles, followed by Zach, Chris, Michael, Gwen. And coming up in the next wave, a passel of your generation's grandkids.

Flashback to when you sat next to Robert at Michael's Bar Mitzvah, late in 2001. A low hum in the room, waiting for the ceremony to begin. You asked about his teaching. Good. good. His students were great. The latest crop was the best. He said some kind words about *Divided...* and asked if you were you working on a new book. You started to tell him about *Notes...*, and had got about half a sentence out when the rabbi and Michael emerged on stage.

Somewhere in the course of the service, as the rabbi intoned at length in Hebrew, Robert nudged you and leaned over. "One favor," he whispered.

"What's that?"

"Don't write about my house."

Day after Day of the Dead. The Mexican State of Tabasco lies under water. Villahermosa drowns. Severe floods in neighboring Chiapas too. Hurricane Noel didn't curve that way, rather headed up to rake Hispaniola. Still, from where did those torrential rains come?

No Age like unto this Age – whatever mid 17th century Digger or True Leveller chose that pamphlet title got it right – and not just for the their own age either.

11/4 When bullshit works.

And now... a tribute to our men in unicorn.

No more Mr. Nice Goy.

A boy named Aperçu.

Φ upon you.

No more Mr. Nice Φ.

The Musharraf of Nottingham. Watch ya back, Bakistan.

!Hasta lumbago! A greeting to those paying the spinal price of hind leg walking.

The coffin, is it half-open, or half-shut?

Unthink the box.

Angles in America. Saxons too. Celts, Normans, Huns, Ostro and Visi-goths.

Crazy Danes and Mongols always get me down.

Hey Mr. Timurlame Man...

Fall back. Sundrop at four forty-five, wham, like a weighted curtain.

Black is the new black.

Is it dark or is it dark?

Apple above. Iambus + Trochee 4 Ever

Look out below.

Run for the iambus, stretching out those trochanters. Whew, made it. Sit down and write with your iambic pen: *iamb therefore i...*

And now for \$64,000... *Descartes*: iambic or trochaic?

Correct! And for the triple bonus question: *René*...

...Before they planted the trees.

It is underneath the coppice and heath,

And the thin anemones.

Only the keeper sees

That, where the ring-dove broods,

And the badgers roll at ease,

There was once a road through the woods....

Oh. Oh. Get on your Oh's. Seems Citigroup must write down another \$11 billion. Which added to the \$6 billion just reported, puts them ahead of Merrill Lynch by a goodly \$6.3 billion, if your math's right.

But now, with Prince gone, ex-Treasury Sec. Robert Rubin's got the top job at Citi. At least his middle initial is E, not O, denks gott! Unless – gadzooks! – the E stands for Enron. Which come to think of it, it might. For did Rob not, in his salad days at Citi – fresh from the Clinton administration – call his pals at Treasury to ask if they couldn't lean a just a little on the bond-rating agencies not to downgrade Enron's debt? See, the "troubled energy giant" owed Citi bigtime and Rob hoped its creditors wouldn't call in the chips but rather lend it still more...

Thus in the momentous year of two oh oh one did Citi cross the Rubin con.