

1/11 Late last night and this morning, electrical storms. Rain. Lightning flashes across the southern tier. Rumbles and grumbles from the disquieted atmospheres.

And a strange balm, before and after the storm.

Says the morning intelligence at Spaceweather.com:

“A new sunspot is emerging just south of the sun’s equator, and it is a curious one. The spot’s magnetic polarity is reversed compared to other nearby magnetic patches on the sun’s surface....

“Reversed-polarity sunspots are signs of a new solar cycle and, indeed, Solar Cycle 24 began just last week. So far, so good. But this spot is near the equator. New-cycle spots are supposed to be at high latitudes – hence the curiosity. Is this a genuine new-cycle spot? A weird old-cycle spot? Readers with solar telescopes are encouraged to monitor the situation.”

Freaky scenes of real delight.

If you were coming up in the city today, you’d definitely be going out with Mexican women.

In certain spoken languages, consonantal drift.

“Stocks Drop Sharply Amid Subprime Woes.” Whoas, Nelly. And Fannie. And Freddie. And that fourth horse, whassaname?

Then the next headline down the page: “Bank Agrees to Buy Troubled Loan

Giant for \$4 Billion.” When you first scanned the headline, your eyebrain skipped over the word “loan.” Hence triggered images of a more mythic or fairy tale-like order: Jack climbing back up the beanstalk, cash in hand, or Odysseus returning with a contract to take possession of Polyphemus’ corpse.

But when you re-read, corrected your error and went on to the sub-headline, the *Times*’s language itself led you back into the realm of the epic: “The deal will significantly bolster Bank of America’s position in the mortgage market while rescuing Countrywide from the jaws of possible bankruptcy.” What sort of beast is a Possible Bankruptcy? It must be a truly huge and fearsome thing to catch a giant – loan or otherwise – and then try to eat it whole and alive.

Hoot mon, what kind of fairy tale is it when it’s the giant, not the princess that gets rescued? Maybe we had the story wrong-way round all along. Does it still end with “and they lived happily ever after”?

Mommy, tell me the one about the banker locked in the Wall Street tower and how he grows his beard so the goddess can climb up and how she breaks the curse and they escape the bears and...

Yeah, and, and after that the one where every night for a thousand nights the hedge fund guy has to weave commercial paper into gold... or else...

1/12 Up to Woodstock where B.C., an old friend from Yomoma Arts days has arranged the premier screening of a documentary she’s edited, *Body of War*, produced and co-directed by Phil Donahue. Before the lights dim in the little theater, Phil holds the mic and the stage, and interminably afterward too. Whatever else may or may not

transpire, the vanities must bonfire on.

Finally you meet Comet Holmes. You'd pictured something that looked like a fuzzy star but no, he's grayer and much larger than you imagined, say the size of the full moon, though not nearly as bright. Holy cow is all you can say, peering through binoculars, walking backward along an upstate dirt road in the dark to get a view less impeded by trees and in the instant you trip over the snow plowed onto the shoulder and down you go. Find yourself looking up at Orion's belt. No damage done, nor traffic to be concerned about, so you stay supine a moment. Locate the Pleades, then raise the lenses again and track toward Perseus and more particularly home in on Algol the variable star in Perseus, aka al-Ghul, the ghoul or demon star, representing the eye of Medusa. And there, close to the evil gleam as can be, Holmes is.

Pick yourself up. Brush off snow. On the way back to the house, wherever there's a parting in the trees, raise the glasses and look again, just to make sure. No need really, because now that you know where to find him, the naked eye works just fine.

1/14 Laid low by some bug on your return you lay up and begin reading *Harpo Speaks*. Harpo describes the scene on East 93rd, near Rupert's Brewery, on election day, when a Tammany cab comes to pick up his father and grandfather to drive them to the polls. The Marx family is dirt poor, but once every two years, their votes become a valuable commodity.

When the carriage brought them back they sat in the hansom as long

as they could without the driver getting sore, savoring every moment of their glory while they puffed on their free Tammany cigars.

At last, reluctantly, they would descend to the curb, and Frenchie [Harpo's father] would make the grand gesture of handing the cabbie a tip. Kids watching in the streets and neighbors watching from upstairs windows were properly impressed.

About a half-hour later, the hansom would reappear, and Frenchie and Grandpa would go off to vote again. If it was a tough year, with a Reform movement threatening the city, they'd be taken to vote a third time.

Nobody was concerned over the fact that Grandpa happened not to be a United States citizen, or that he couldn't read or write English. He knew which side of the ballot to put his "X" on....

...Then came the night. The streets were cleared of horses, buggies and wagons. All crosstown traffic stopped. At seven o'clock firecrackers began to go off, the signal that the polls were closed. Whooping and hollering, a whole generation of kids came tumbling down out of the tenements and got their bonfires going. By a quarter after seven, the East Side was ablaze.

Whenever our 93rd Street fire showed signs of dying down, we'd throw on a fresh load of wood, out of another basement, and the flames would shoot up again. After my stash was piled on the blaze, I ran upstairs to watch from our front window with Grandpa.

It was beautiful. Flames seemed to leap as high as the tenement roof. The row of brownstones across the street, reflecting the fire was a

shimmering red wall. The sky was a great red curtain. And from all over the city, we could hear the clanging of fire engines. Our bonfire never got out of hand, but a lot of others did on election night.

Grandpa enjoyed the sight as much as I did, and he was flattered when I left the rest of the boys to come up and share it with him. He pulled his chair closer to the window and lit the butt of his Tammany stogie. "Ah, we are lucky to be in America," he said in German, taking a deep drag on the cigar he got for voting illegally and lifting his head to watch the shooting flames. "Ah, yes! This is true democracy."

I had no idea what Grandpa was talking about, but he was a man of great faith and whatever he said was the truth.

This afternoon, the Trump SoHo hotel and condominium, a jerry-rigged 46-story piece of shit that a squad of genuine gangsters is throwing up down at Varick and Spring, turned murderous. One worker killed and two others injured, all employees of DiFama Concrete, sub-contractor to the builder, the infamous Bovis Lend Lease.

"The Buildings Department," says the *Messenger*, "announced in the late afternoon that it had ordered all work stopped at the building.... Preliminary reports indicate the concrete formwork on the 42nd floor failed, leading to part of the formwork collapsing onto the 40th floor.... Buildings forensic engineers are conducting interviews and assessing the construction site to determine the exact cause of the partial collapse.

"The Buildings Department is vacating the top two floors of two neighboring buildings, 145 and 155 Sixth Avenue, as a safety precaution. The vacate orders will

remain in effect until the general contractor at 246 Spring Street, Bovis Lend Lease, makes the construction site safe.”

The *Messenger* also notes that Bovis “is the same company that oversaw demolition of the former Deutsche Bank building in Lower Manhattan, where two firefighters were killed in August in a blaze that swept through the contaminated structure.”

The building, if one can call it such, has been fabricated at warp speed to slick past a host of lawsuits. The carrot for Trump and his associated mafiosi partners, the Bayrock Group and the Sapir Organization, is that the tower’s four hundred apartments will be priced at \$3000 per square foot. In this market, as much or more than ever, speed is all.

Whatever materials it consumes, the bonfire, the bonfire.

It’s late afternoon when you pull up the windowshade. Puffy gray pseudo-cumulus dash by against a backdrop of who-knows-what unholy condensation, weirdly backlit. Now wait a minute – at this hour the sun’s over there, so it should be shining on the clouds, not from behind ‘em. So what’s bouncing off what?

Open an email from E.B. to find: *We now live in a city of two suns or just one reflecting off the mirror of metallic clouds, strange how neither prospect is particularly disturbing to us. The great white way is in the sky and the rainbows stretch along Broadway. Onward.*

Darktown dodges a blitzkrieg of a storm that buries much of New England. Bangor, where J., K. and daughter I. live, receives its fourth foot of snow this season.

Email from M.K., in response to the ninth installment, sent out last Friday: "I'd say, 'Hang in there,' but don't need to. I especially like the description of clouds."

Hang in there: never wasted words.

Beneath the headline "Americans Cut Back Sharply on Spending," the *Times* reports blandly, as though noting the fall of a tree in someone else's forest: "...At the same time [as jewelry sales are off] the number of overdue payments on American Express cards is surging, the company said – and this among well-heeled cardholders who charge up to \$12,000 a year, on average, on each card. American Express has called some cardholders in the last few weeks to ask if they will have trouble paying their bills.

"We are seeing a correlation with housing prices," said Michael O'Neill, a spokesman for American Express. "The falloff in spending is everywhere in the country, but it is greatest in those areas like south Florida and California, where home prices have fallen the most."

"The big exception is gasoline. American Express and the Consumer Federation of America say that consumers are buying just as many gallons as ever, but paying more for them, and that has forced cutbacks in other purchases. Gasoline prices usually drop after the summer driving season, but this year they shot up, from \$2.85 a gallon on average in September to \$3.07 in December and \$3.15 in the first week of January.

“A similar trend is evident in the cost of natural gas, electricity and home heating oil. ‘We built these big houses in the suburbs, which need a lot of energy to stay warm and a car to go shopping,’ said Stephen Brobeck, executive director of the Consumer Federation. ‘And we can’t change that quickly.’”

You think of M. and B. in their vast, remote house in Connecticut, and the seven inches of snow that fell there this morning.

1/15 Scattered through the popular press like so many disjecta membra, numerous sad tales of erectile dysfunction. They’re bloody Ubique.

“The ubiquitous terror drove people crazy...” said Kapuscinski of Persia under the Shah’s Savak.

Florella will ruin.

Suns and sun dogs. Wherever optical illusions are sold.

Citigroup, hereinafter referred to as Citicorpse, and Merrill out-to-Lynch sell largish parts of themselves to several sovereign wealth funds, the investment arms of foreign governments. What is one to do in the face of, in Citi’s case, a new \$10 milliard loss?

Indirectly, the Al-Qaeda organization – investment banking carried on by other means – now owns a significant share in the “American” FIRE industry. Not to

mention the State Council of the PRC which needs to do something more with its \$1.4 trillion in currency reserves than let it lie around gathering dust. No, better that they go Ubiq.

*There is a word you often see, pronounce it as you may –
“You bike,” “you bykwee,” “ubbikwe” – alludin’ to R.A.
It serves ‘Orse, Field, an’ Garrison as motto for a crest;
An’ when you’ve found out all it means I’ll tell you ‘alf the rest.*

*Ubiq means the long-range Krupp be’ind the low-range ‘ill –
Ubiq means you’ll pick it up an’, while you do, stand still.
Ubiq means you’ve caught the flash an’ timed it by the sound.
Ubiq means five gunners’ ‘ash before you’ve loosed a round.*

*Ubiq means Blue Fuse, an’ make the ‘ole to sink the trail.
Ubiq means stand up an’ take the Mauser’s ‘alf-mile ‘ail.
Ubiq means the crazy team not God nor man can ‘old.
Ubiq means that ‘orse’s scream which turns your innards cold!*

*Ubiq means “Bank, ‘Olborn, Bank – a penny all the way” –
The soothin’, jingle-bump-an’-clank from day to peaceful day.
Ubiq means “They’ve caught De Wet, an’ now we shan’t be long.”
Ubiq means “I much regret, the beggar’s goin’ strong!”*

Ubique means the tearin' drift where, breech-blocks jammed with mud,

The khaki muzzles duck an' lift across the khaki flood.

Ubique means the dancing plain that changes rocks to Boers.

Ubique means mirage again an' shellin' all outdoors....

To Kipling, Ubique meant the Latin motto of the Royal Artillery: *Everywhere*.

He and the soldiers to whom he gave written voice pronounced the word "oo-BIK-we," rather than the classical Latin "OO-bik-way." And the former suits the meter of the poem better anyhow.

Q: For sixty-four thousand rubles, what's the name of the city in Russia inhabited by people ruled by the planet Mercury?

A: Retrograd.

Q: Da! Da!

The great game goes on.

Singapore, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Japan, China, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, oh yes and the investment arm of the Sovereign State of New Jersey: they're all lining up to make sure that the fat man keeps driving his SUV to the mall through rain, snow, sleet and hail, huracán, tornado and typhoon.

For it's \$6.6 billion cash infusion, Merrill will pony up a 9% dividend. Citicorpse sucks up \$12.5 bil. Does one assume it'll pay 11% as it agreed to last

November when it glommed onto \$7.5 billion from the Emirate?

Bin Laden didn't get into it for the money, but hey, when you're hot, you're hot.

Discretely placed across the page from the Citi and Merrill news, in a spatial equivalent of a "decent interval," the headline "Bush Prods Saudi Arabia on High Oil Prices."

However, "Saudi Arabia's oil minister appeared to rebuff the president's appeal for OPEC to consider the cost to the American economy."

"'It's affected our families,' Mr. Bush told reporters, adding that he would raise the issue with the Saudi leader, King Abdullah, during a meeting on Tuesday evening at the king's lush horse farm in the desert outside Riyadh. 'Paying more for gasoline hurts some of the American families.'"

Whatever else goes down, Bush's trip is timed so that he can scoop any potential congressional opposition to his offering the Saudis \$20 billionsworth of the most sophisticated U.S. weaponry, including precision-guided bombs, since the Washington punters haven't officially returned to the Hill yet.

At the top left and right corners of the *Times* online masthead, where in the print edition a little boxes contain All the News That's Fit to Print on one side, and on the other, the edition – whether early or late – and beneath this the weather, one finds instead twin advertisements for the film adaptation of Upton Sinclair's novel *Oil!* – each featuring a pic of Daniel Day Lewis bedecked in a slouchy hat for his role as the

protagonist “Bunny” Arnold Ross, Jr. And against a dark background, the words:

GOLDEN GLOBE NOMINEE

BEST PICTURE

THERE WILL BE BLOOD

NOW PLAYING

Hah, and the movie title’s set in the same Old English typeface as the *Times* logo!

People disagreeing everywhere you look,

Makes you wanna stop and read a book.

Why only yesterday I saw somebody on the street

That was really shook.

But this ol’ river keeps on rollin’, though,

No matter what gets in the way and which way the wind does blow,

And as long as it does I’ll just sit here

And watch the river flow.