

3/25 As you pass the empty movie house on 23rd between Ninth and Eighth, a weathered-looking compact man with very bronzed skin sitting amidst his bags on the little curb by the bushes calls out: "D'ya have any spare change," the latter word pronounced "chaynge" the way a Cockney, or perhaps an Australian might sound it.

You're moving fast, intent on getting home, hence three paces past him by the time this anomalous twang registers. So you don't deflect your path and loop back to give him some money in ex-chaynge for asking his story about where he acquired his accent. Next time, you tell yourself, beelining it for Mohammed's cart and the bananas which have now inexplicably become three for a dollar, one banana less than they were last week, and a pound of grapes for Gwen which have been holding steady at two bucks these last several months.

Next time. Yeah.

My dust is your dust.

How to maintain the fiction of fiction?

*Ground Zero, zero ground*

*What goes around...*

Venga, venga a bailar...

Mi polvo es su polvo.

Cheney's back and the battle for Iran begins – on Iraqi soil with a huge American military assault on Basra.

Long ago in 1984, you wrote a song which your band played and eventually recorded as a flexidisk, a very thin vinyl record, that was bound into a magazine called *High Performance* and thus distributed to the waiting world.

Today, the lyrics pop back into your head after a long voyage through some other galaxies:

*Rider in the red field dressed in blue*

*Ought to know the heartaches I've been through*

*Hit the ground my dress all torn*

*Ought to wonder why I was ever born*

*See everything turn out OK*

*Even Nanny Cako got it on*

*Eh, eh*

*Shirt and tie and bright yellow hair*

*What the devil else she gonna wear?*

*Rain beating down on a Cadillac hood*

*Ain't gonna do them kids no good*

*See everything turn out that way*

*Even Nanny Cako got it on*

*Eh, eh*

*Fire sale everything must go*

*Fire sale everything must go*

*Fire sale everything must go*

*Johnny in the jungle dress all torn*

*Ought to wonder why he was ever born*

*They give him sixteen units in the medevac*

*But they're never gonna bring young Johnny back*

*They were singing*

*Fire sale everything must go*

*Sheep lamb ramhorn black cat bone*

*Swing low chariot take me home*

*Hit the ground my dress all torn*

*Watch them wall come tumbling down*

*Eh, eh*

*They were singing*

*Fire sale...*

The postage-stamp-sized photo on the front page of the online *Times* shows the shoulders of apparently shirtless man and his badly bloodied face, cropped like a portrait. Above which, a little click-on-me camera icon and the words: "Pictures of the Day: Fighting in Iraq's two largest cities and the first baseball game of the season."

Fucking grimm, sisters and brothers, nor ain't it no fairy tail neither.

3/26 *I realized quickly when I knew I should  
that the world was made up of this brotherhood of man  
for whatever that means...*  
Sang 4 Non Blondes.

Posted across the broad plate glass storefronts: Soon Going.

Lunch with E. and F. at French Roast. A grand reunion. Feels like new-old times.

Go to the bathroom, where you find yourself facing the three watercolor prints of Paris that reside on the wall above and behind the toilet. They're third rate, nearly kitsch – Hitler could've painted them in one of his looser moments – yet utterly evocative at the same time.

Back in the salon, you sit down again to discover that your hearing, particularly in the left ear is diminished, in absolute terms, and duller. You can still hear the conversation at your table and the cacophony around you, but it's all fainter and duller. Reflexively you put a pinky in your left ear to see if it's blocked somehow.

Must have something to do with your sinus condition. Or, maybe, given that you feel a little out of the body, this is It. What if it is It? Well, what if it is? Gwen and Katie know you love them so if it is, it is. Not too happy about it, but...

Look round the room. It's full, and, through the windows so many people passing by. Seven billion more or less out there. One more or less, adding or subtracting you?

In a part of your mind, the room fades quickly to black and you hear E.'s voice, high-pitched with alarm, seconded by F.'s baritone shouting to the waitstaff to call 911. It ought to be St. Vincent's, that being closest. Will you still be aware when you get there?

You ignore the hearing problem as best you can for the remainder of the lengthy and diverting post-lunch confab, during which, earwise, your acuity waxes and wanes. For an instant, things sharpen, then go sonorous again. But by the time the three of you clasp hands around the table and vow to meet again soon, you've forgotten your imminent demise and your muddy hearing. To the point that, when you exit into an outside atmosphere has suddenly turned full-on spring, you levitate a bit and realize that the street sounds are coming across sharp as normal. Whatever the problem was has been and gone.

A woman with terrific posture and wearing really cool shoes walks by holding, as though they weigh nothing at all, two armsful of cherry-blossomed branches. She tap-taps across 11th and Sixth on a diagonal and E. points out that her shoulder bag says *Mood*. "Damn," says F., or words to that effect. "Why aren't I Robert Frank? If I were Robert Frank, I'd have the camera with me, and..."

Another young woman passes heading east, nearly retracing the steps of the first, and carrying a bunch of twiggy blossoms you can't identify, nor can E. or F. No sooner than you collectively speculate on this, than a third woman, passes heading south and bearing a wrapped cluster of pussy-willows with strangely serpentine stems.

Several people walking several dogs each appear and their canines seem unusually stimulated by the smells of one another, yet distracted by the prospect of that potential next smell too.

Half an hour ago, you were contemplating death and now you're aware of your personal sap rising. Homeward you step, doing the Lambeth Walk.

Long ago in November, you wrote: *For a little while the ruins fool you by continuing to stand* – a one liner that went out two installments ago. Nor did it take long for E. to fire back: *For a long while, the fools ruin you by continuing to stand.*

That's it. That's what it wanted to say. And she got the comma right.

3/27 A gigantic white semi-truck pulls up along the west shore of Ninth Avenue as it does every Thursday. Weekly delivery to the overpriced hardware store down the block. In nearly discreet red semi-script on the front: *True Value.*

Wotta concept.

A motorized police tricycle with a little enclosed cabin positions itself diagonally in front of True Value's cab. An absolutely gargantuan traffic cop gets out. Fast work and there's a new dayglo-orange ticket stuck beneath the wiper on the truck's high windshield. No stretch for the cop who could be the green giant wearing serge

blue. Somehow he compresses back into his little cart and off he goes, varoom, into the great city.

Railyards railyards. And the weiner is: Tishman X-pire.

Paragons of deficiency.

Para. Gone.

*You treated me like a stranger  
And all the time I was loving you  
All of your slick moves  
They were once innocent moves  
I wanted to look up to you  
I really trusted you  
And every word you said...*

*I was loving you like a child  
All the time you were smiling  
The same smile  
I was loving you like a child  
I really trusted you  
  
Every word you said*

*Every word you said*

*(Love is what the word was)*

*I send it all back to you*

*(Love is what the word was)...*

Sang la trouvère Sade, kan ya makan.

Will to meaning, will to meaning, mayday mayday.

Follow the bouncing zeroes: \$1 trillion and change in home equity loans.

Home sweet cash. Para. gone.

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Decimals sans frontières. Where's the point?

What elephant? Which living room?

Standard Water just doesn't have the same ring.

The boats go out. Some don't come back.

Mona El-Nagggar writing for the Times:

"CAIRO — President Bush apologized to the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, on Thursday for the killing of an Egyptian vendor when a cargo ship

chartered by the United States opened fire on his small boat near the Suez Canal on Monday in an incident that has enraged Egyptians.

“‘President Bush expressed his deep regret and sympathies for the incident in the Suez Canal,’ the White House spokesman, Gordon Johndroe, said Thursday morning aboard Air Force One, adding that, in his telephone conversation with Mr. Mubarak, President Bush promised that the United States ‘would fully investigate.’

“President Bush also expressed hopes that the accident would not damage friendly relations between the two countries, a press release from the Egyptian president’s office said Thursday.

“The vendor, 28-year-old Muhammad Fouad Afifi, was a licensed trader selling cigarettes and antiques to ships passing through the Suez Canal. He was shot on Monday evening as he approached a cargo ship, the Global Patriot. The ship was under contract to the Navy, which has been wary of small motorboats since the attack on the U.S.S. Cole in 2000, in which terrorists drove a small vessel packed with explosives into the ship as it lay at anchor at a Yemeni port, killing 17 crew members.

“An Egyptian daily newspaper, Rozalyousef, reported on the case on Wednesday under the headline ‘Cole Phobia Resulted in the Suez Canal Tragedy.’

“Egyptians were further infuriated when the United States Embassy in Cairo and the Navy initially maintained that the security team aboard the Global Patriot said there had been no casualties in the shooting.

“On Wednesday, Vice Admiral Kevin J. Cosgriff, the commander of the Fifth Fleet, based in Bahrain, acknowledged the killing, calling it accidental. In a statement, he said a security team on board the ship had fired two sets of warning shots as three small boats approached. After the first set, two boats turned away, but the vendor’s

boat did not. 'This situation is tragic, and we will do our utmost to help take care of the family of the deceased,' the statement said.

"Mr. Afifi left behind his 23-year-old wife, a 5-year-old daughter and a 9-month-old son. On Thursday, a relative said they had not received any form of compensation.

"'There is no possible compensation for his life,' said Heba Moustafa, Mr. Afifi's 21-year-old niece, in a telephone interview. 'But we want to feel like someone is standing up for us.'"

Quoth Associated Press:

"The State Department has instructed all personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad not to leave reinforced structures due to incoming insurgent rocket fire that has killed two American government workers this week.

"In a memo sent Thursday to embassy staff and obtained by The Associated Press, the department says employees are required to wear helmets and other protective gear if they must venture outside even in the heavily fortified Green Zone and strongly advises them to sleep in blast-resistant locations instead of the less secure trailers that most occupy.

"'Due to the continuing threat of indirect fire in the International Zone, all personnel are advised to remain under hard cover at all times,' it says. 'Personnel should only move outside of hard cover for essential reasons.'

"'Essential outdoor movements should be sharply limited in duration,' the memo says, adding that personal protective equipment 'is mandatory for all outside movements.'

“‘We strongly recommend personnel do not sleep in their trailers,’ it goes on to say, offering space inside the Saddam Hussein-era palace that is the embassy’s temporary home as well as room at an as-yet uncompleted new embassy compound and a limited supply of cots.

“The memo was sent after a second American citizen was killed by a rocket attack in the Green Zone on Thursday. A U.S. citizen military contractor died of his wounds on Monday after being severely injured with four others in an attack.

“One explosion from a rocket launched by suspected Shiite militiamen on Thursday ignited a fire in the central area of the zone that sent a massive column of thick, black smoke drifting over the Tigris River....”

Yes, trailers. FEMA, Greenzone and others. The Traveler life minus horses, campfires and other accoutrements of the open road.

And now ex-Gov. Spitzer’s been linked – conjoin’d really – with another prostitution service, this one based in Manhattan and called Wicked Models. Trust the *Pest* to deliver up its description of the madam in with near-Joycean lyric verve:

“At the center of the new ring is Kristin ‘Billie’ Davis, a busty bottle blonde who hails from a rough-and-tumble California trailer park.”

*I’ve never had no money,  
And no hope to get none.  
I can always get a penny,  
When there is good reason.  
And I know you won’t believe me*

*Though it is the truth to tell*

*That the living it is hard, oh,*

*But it suits me well.*

Chanté Sandy D. of a day gone by.

3/28 The real estate bastards still produce tremendous carnage, but gone, with their falling cranes, and failing mega-deals is any sense of shock and awe.

The round one of the Persian offensive goes into extra innings as: “The American forces entered the battle at the request of the Iraqi Army, which asked the Americans to strike two militia strongholds in the city, according to a spokesman for the British military.” All the players advancing their pieces except the Israelis and Iranians. But the gambit’s begun. Look out, Elam, here they come.

I remember Amygdala.