

7/3 An all and nothing proposition.

And Big Sur.



Peter DaSilva/European Pressphoto Agency

Local 282 of the Teamsters goes on strike and the construction game falls temporarily silent – the ready-mix don't roll. Forest stands of expectant rebar quiver in the furtive wind. Nearby, some sign says ...*Luxury*....

No one expects the walkout to last long. Quoth Denise Richardson, a contractors' association spokeswoman, "To a certain extent, concrete is to a construction project like food is to a human. You can go for a period of time without food, but at some point you need to eat."

7/4 Wondrous morning. Pedaling across 25th, the birds out in force, incredibly active – calling switching trees, branches. And the café, apart from the staff and yourself, deserted.

Something, who knows what, calls you back to the wash of linden scent in the park last Sunday, even as you nibbled at a stalk of poor man's pepper. Sweet and spicy. Too early for wineberries, but you tasted the last of the juneberries and picked mulberries in plenitude, all within easy reach of the joggers who pounded by, swerving round the puddles on the reservoir path. Wild black cherries too, of which V.'s young daughter M. partook to juicy distraction.



Katie Kehrig

Obama's shape-shifted again. And not just at the level of his policy "refinements." Gone, or sublimated, the vulnerable, fledgling quality, replaced by a sense of metal armature powering the chopping gestures. He even looks a bit grayer. Is

it possible that the players in this political theater company aren't merely reading prescribed lines but have become, quite literally, master-puppets, in their own half-right? Charlie McCarthy co-controlling Edgar Bergen? Are we dealing with dreadful cyborgnetic actors? Self-created robots, vibrating on some brave new frequency, and bent on...

Refining policies. Like so much raw cane and grain that may be processed any number of ways, depending on what you want to produce, from deep dark rum to hi-fructose corn syrup. Sticky stuff. Lucky charms. Capitulum.

Extraordinary theater in the aftermath of Ingrid Betancourt's "rescue" from the FARC in the jungles of Colombia.



Pascal Le Segretain/Getty Images

Ingrid Betancourt, right, with President Nicolas Sarkozy at the military base of Villacoublay in Velizy Villacoublay, France. Carla Bruni-Sarkozy is fifth from right and Ms. Betancourt's son, Lorenzo, is fourth from right, her daughter, Melanie, is third from right, and her mother, Yolanda Pulecio, is at left.

Sarko and Ingrid's extended arms and clasped hands form an almost perfect catenary chain. A vaulted arch in reverse. Her liberation was, she says, "a miracle of the Virgin Mary."

Had she been tortured? "Yes, yes." Her captors had fallen into "diabolical behavior... so monstrous I think they themselves were disgusted."

And as for the jungle, "an absolutely hostile world... no sun, no sky, a green ceiling – it was too much, it was too much, a wall of trees, a lot of beasts, each more dreadful than the next."

During six years of captivity she walked, by her estimate, some two hundred miles a year "with a hat pulled down over my ears because all sorts of things fall on your head, ants that bite you, beasts, lice, ticks, with gloves because everything in the jungle bites, each time you try to grab on to something so that you don't fall, you've put your hand on a tarantula, you've put your hand on a thorn, a leaf that bites, it's an absolutely hostile world, dangerous with dangerous animals. But the most dangerous of all was the men, those who were behind me with their big guns."

She fashioned a wooden rosary to help sustain her.

"You need tremendous spirituality to stop yourself falling into the abyss."

Next week, the Pope, Benedict XVI, will welcome her in Rome.

But today being Friday, it all smells fishy.

7/5 a.m. Café with G. She talks about the cycles of history as she notates the decades of the recent past in her sketchbook next to the fashion drawing – the Roaring '20s through to now and forward into the coming phases of war and revolution. And

what about the oh-oh's, you ask, how will they be seen in the future? This, she says, will be remembered as the age of lies.

*I listen to the wind come howl
telling me I have to hurry
I listen to the robin's song
saying not to worry...*

*So off and on you go,
the seconds tick the time out
There's so much left to know
and I'm on the road to find out...
Growled Cat *kan ya makan.**

7/6 *Go, go – into the dust cloud of history!*

A strange, humid, chill, peach-haze mother of pearl dusk.

7/7 “Welcome to the Battalion Committee of the Sixth Reserve Engineers’ Battalion!” cried my friend, and introduced me as an American Socialist. Whereat everyone rose to shake my hand, and one old soldier put his arms around me and gave me a hearty kiss. A wooden spoon was produced and I took my place at the table. Another tub, full of *kasha*, was brought in, a huge loaf of black bread, and of course the inevitable teapots. At once everyone began asking me questions about America: Was it

true that people in a free country sold their votes for *money*? If so, how did they get what they wanted? How about this 'Tammany'? Was it true that in a free country a little group of people could control a whole city, and exploited it for their personal benefit? Why did the people stand it? Even under the Czar such things could not happen in Russia; true here there was always graft, but to buy and sell a whole city full of people! And in a free country! Had the people no revolutionary feeling? I tried to explain that in my country people tried to change things by law.

“Of course,” nodded a young sergeant, named Baklanov, who spoke French. ‘But you have a highly developed capitalist class? Then the capitalist class must control the legislatures and the courts. How then can the people change things? I am open to conviction, for I do not know your country, but to me it is incredible...’”

Wrote John Reed in *Ten Days That Shook the World*.

La vida wow.

Sure we got our Prozac[®] and cons, but, hey, America’s still number one...

For days now, unbelievable, body-sapping, oppressive humidity.

Via the *Messenger*: “Fannie and Freddie Shares Plunge,” beneath which headline:

“As home prices decline and Washington struggles to end the current economic malaise, Wall Street is starting to send a message: The Worst is Yet To Come.

“One of the strongest warning signals came Monday, when shares of two of the

nation's most important housing barometers, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, plummeted. After falling remorselessly over the past month, in just one day Freddie Mac tumbled nearly 18 percent, and Fannie Mae lost 16 percent.

Stock prices of both companies – the nation's largest buyers of home mortgages, and traditionally the government's backstop for the housing economy – have each declined by more than 60 percent this year....

“Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are ground zero for mortgages,’ said Steve Persky, chief executive at Dalton Investments in Los Angeles. ‘They’re the largest leveraged owners of mortgages out there, and that’s not a good position to be in right now....”

And plunging out of the sky soon after takeoff from Bogotá, Colombia, a “flower-laden U.S. cargo plane headed for Miami.” The Boeing 747, with at least one engine afire, landed on a “small house on a ranch” killing two inhabitants, but apparently none of its crew of eight. Another 747, also flown by Kalitta Air, of Ypsilante, MI, crashed during an aborted takeoff in Brussels six weeks ago. According to a Kalitta official, the company was operating the plane for another air line, Miami-based Centurion Air Cargo, which name, when you read it, rings a bell. And, yes, that’s an affirmative: both Centurion and Kalitta are CIA covers, known less as messengers of flower power than for delivering extraordinarily rendered unfortunates to our blossoming archipelago of black holes.

Fannie Mae, but can't. And Freddie's Maxed. And now IndyMac, a huge, private mortgage lender which sold loans it made to Fannie and Freddie, slurps down

the drain, having lost 98 percent of its share value in the past year. Is this the breaking of the spell? Will we finally be freed from the enchantment of Mortgage le Fay?

Perhaps. But, the downside of a thrall or nothing game don't come cheap. Says Karen Shaw Petrou, managing partner of Federal Financial Analytics, "If Fannie or Freddie ever became critically undercapitalized, their regulator would have no choice but to put in place a taxpayer rescue." And where, exactly are Joe and Jane supposed to get the jackola?

7/8 This photo appeared on front page of the online *Messenger* around quarter to seven this evening accompanied by the caption "Ben S. Bernanke spoke at a forum in Arlington, Va., on lending for low- and moderate-income households." No mention of either special, or spectral, effects. Most peculiar, mama.



Mark Wilson/Getty Images

7/9 Also, the sun rises.

Noctilucent clouds.

So, what other wheels can we spin?

And thick and fast they came at last,

And more, and more, and more –

In the predawn darkness, a man used the *New York Times* building as a jungle gym – the third ascendeer these past five weeks.

“‘I thought he was a worker,’ said Michael Pabon, 32, who was outside the bus terminal when he saw the man begin to scale the building. ‘He turned up to the letter ‘H’ and climbed above it,’ Mr. Pabon said, referring to the letter H in the ‘The’ of the New York Times logo, which is painted in giant black letters on the ceramic rods on the Eighth Avenue side of the building [around eleven floors up].

“‘It was above the ‘T’ in ‘The’ that the climber hung a white banner....”

The Paper of Record keeps the banner’s content under wraps, but according to CNN it read “Bin Laden’s Plan,” this message illustrated with a giant cartoon of ObL pulling the strings of a GWB marionette.

The *Times* photo shows a buff, brushcut, militarily-postured young man, spookily resembling in affectlessness the late Timothy McVeigh, being led away in handcuffs to, for some unstated reason, St. Vincent’s Hospital, by a joint detachment of Finest and Bravest.

“We learned on 9/11 how deadly a falling body can be,” *Times*-blogged an entity soi-monickered Spikethedog. “I wouldn’t worry about the climbers if there weren’t innocent pedestrian targets below.”

This sentiment echoing that of city council member Peter Vallone who only last week sponsored a bill making it a Class A misdemeanor – punishable by up to a year in the can and a thousand dollar fine – to either scale or jump from a building twenty-five feet or taller. “We don’t want our city to become Disneyland for BASE jumpers or climbers,” quoth he.

But another *Messenger* respondent sees it different: “People who scale buildings are engaging directly with life – and the attendant possibility of death – in a way most of us modern drones in our technological cocoons will never know.”

Drones. Send ‘em in. Don’t bother...

O Dumbo, wherefore art thou when we needest thou?

And then comes the headline: “Third Man Climbs the Times Building.” O, Harry Lime, we hardly knew ya!

Nor is the elephant in the living room going nowhere.

Oaf, or a moose afire?

MARTINS: Have you ever seen any of your victims?

Harry takes a look at the toy landscape below and comes away from the door.

HARRY: I never feel quite safe in these things. He feels the door with his hands.

Victims? Don't be melodramatic. Look down there.

He points through the window at the people moving like black flies at the base of the Wheel.

HARRY: Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving for ever? If I said you can have twenty thousand pounds for every dot that stops, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money – or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spare? Free of income tax, old man. Free of income tax. *He gives his boyish, conspiratorial smile.* It's the only way to save nowadays.

Writ Graham Greene several turns back.

The latest addition to Abu Dhabi's skyline is a gorgeous, iconic, seventy-seven story, art deco-trimmed tower. It's called the Chrysler Building. The emirate ponied up \$800 million for a ninety percent stake. Tishman Speyer owns the remaining share and "controls" the land beneath.