

8/11 Holbrook Island sanctuary. A feather. Hawk? Owl? Young porcupine twelve feet up a maple. Seemingly at home twined in the roots of a keeled-over birch tree, a slender snake, gray-brown with yellow-beige scales.

Amidst the conifer undergrowth, a harvest of chanterelles, sending off an attar of apricots. Clusters of indian pipes. A trio of huge, beautifully-colored conifer-based polypores. Found out only later that these are very destructive to the trees.

At Bagaduce Falls, two bald eagles scavenge salmon carcasses. Precision swoops, their out-thrust talons scrape the rock. And away bearing their prizes, attended by a retinue of complaining gulls.

8/16 Here in Maine, what's clear is your internal fragmentation. It belongs to you exclusively and is easy to perceive. Whereas in NYC, you struggle to maintain any sort of cohesion in the face of so much generalized fragmentation. There, the majority of your energies are consumed by simply trying to pay attention and recognize internal processes amidst a constant barrage of external and unpatternable stimulations. But in this breathing, tidal place?

8/17 "Extremes in Weather Kill Dozens Across the U.S." headlines the *Times*. It's a positive Biblical litany: wind here, inundations there, a broad swath of searing heat. A nuclear reactor in Alabama shut down because the river water that cools it won't.

8/18 Heading back to the city you stop overnight in Portsmouth. Free wifi at the motel! Online to discover there's been a fire, a bad one, at the Deutsche Bank building – the monstrous, poison-filled hulk they're taking down by inches just south of the WTC

site. Two firefighters killed, several injured. The *Times* photo shows a billowing cloud of smoke rising over the lower Manhattan skyline.

Keyboard. Hands to work:

*The House on Liberty Street*

*Once upon a time there was a little piggy called Bankers Trust, and like most little piggies who roll around in the filth and slop, deep down, way deep inside, it hated living in a pigpen. In fact, this little piggy hated the pigpen so much that every night it dreamed of a beautiful, shiny new home, high, high up in a... SKYSCRAPER!*

Too much and too hard to tell right now – Katie’s calling you to dinner – and in any case you want to wait for events to unfold. Note to self: At some propitious time, tell the whole sorry tale.

8/19 Breakfast at IHOP on the outskirts of Portsmouth. You order Canadian bacon with your eggs and pancakes and the quantity of meat that shows up leaves you gaping. Enough to feed a regiment – no, a brigade. Half a pig, half a pig onward...

8/20 Home agin.

8 a.m. and you head out to move the car from its spot on 25th Street. But the Gray Ghost has vanished along with all the other cars on both sides of the street. Say what? *Towed*, says a cop, *film shoot* and yes, you see the trailers, and the crews already setting up, laconic bustle. Aha, you didn’t notice the signs posted on every other tree late last night when you came in from Maine, delighted to find a spot right on the block.

A city tow truck's idling on Eighth Avenue near the corner. Driver's on his cell. Catch his eye, he pauses, you ask if he knows where they towed your car. He holds up a wait-a-minute finger, rings off, speed dials, engages in a short palaver and informs you that the Ghost's just down 25th between Ninth and Tenth, south side. Sure enough, you find her where he says you will, apparently none the worse for wear, wearing a big yellow sticker proudly on her windshield, like a Ford Taurus Minnie Pearl:

TO: All Traffic Enforcement Agents, Police Officers and Other Summons Issuers

BY: Commanding Officer, Traffic Control Division

THIS VEHICLE WAS RELOCATED BY TRUCK # 6809 (the number written in magic marker in the blank space left for it). DUE TO: – and here there are several choices, of which Movie Detail has been circled. Other options being Special Event, Emergency, or Parade.

Well, whew, at least she didn't end up in the pound. And, small blessing upon large, at the bottom of the sticker, in caps: DO NOT SUMMONS OR TOW WITHIN 48HRS FROM DATE OF RELOCATION. Alright! Good where she is. No reason to move her, so you don't. Walk back home, past the film crew and their metal forest of equipment. Some of these guys you recognize. Eternally shooting up the neighborhood. "Law and Order."

How many billions pumped from bank to bank to keep the game going a round longer? Between wishful and magical the thinking teeters, roulette ball glued to the

cusps of black and red. For big adjustments, made quickly, it's best to have no thought at all.

Some fucked-up shit went down at the Deutsche Bank fire. No working sprinklers it turned out, and a malfunctioning standpipe. So much for the rigorous inspections mandated for this infamously toxic deconstruction site. Hundreds of tons of water ended up in the basement and no pressure above where it was needed. Plus the NYFD brass sent in something like a hundred guys to fight the blaze. For what? No babies were being thrown out the window, everyone was out.

From the dim reaches of your memory, something pops to the surface about the large number of American Airlines put options Deutsche Bank held on 9/11/01.

The mind reels. Again. You get very sick and have to sit down.

8/21 Dateline Kingstown:

*Dear Eric – power just back on – saw the thing out from the tower – which was truly beautiful – few windows missing so the blow was coming in horizontally, six foot waves whipping up on the harbour – the buddhist temple lost its roof but the shanties stayed intact – something of a metaphor as they were nearly all in the lee of much sturdier buildings... so thanks for the vibes and truly I think we were quite lucky as the eye of the big D scooted away before reaching landfall.*

xx

Melinda

8/22 A deep indifference, even to its own fate, lay upon the land. Occasionally a bubble of anxiety or outrage would make its way to the surface and pop, leaving behind nothing but an odor that the indifferent wind carried away before the smell could be recognized or its qualities fully apprehended. A low nagging heat lay beneath the great mass, raising its temperature so incrementally it seemed the glueyness of things would go on forever, never rolling to a boil. Perhaps some fundamental chemistry had changed?

The promised persisted in its non-arrival, or showed up piecemeal. If shock, then where was awe? That which appeared awesome lacked for a sense of initiating shock. This was how things stood, neither at ease, no to attention. In Chelsea, when a hardware store closed, it was replaced by a nail salon. Journalistic utterance alone kept up its LED flashes of ecstatic hyperbole. If there came a hurricane, then “in its wake, a trail of devastation.” But really? Or were people simply taking down the plywood, sweeping up the branches and bits of roof and hoping that some day soon the juice would go back on? And hanging above all social life, like a gray mist in the sky: “Authorities say some bodies may never be recovered.”

In such a time, even the keenest minds grew flummoxed attempting to recognize a distinction between a genuine impulse and a vestigial twitch. Theoretically, nothing goes on forever. But what, what if it does?

Practice makes practice.

A classic *Times* headline: “Many Eligible For Child Health Plan Have No Idea.”

8/23 80th anniversary of execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. Said Judge Webster Thayer during the trial in 1920: "This man, (Vanzetti) although he may not have actually committed the crime attributed to him, is nevertheless culpable, because he is the enemy of our existing institutions."

8/24 Grace Paley dies. She'd read at a Goddard residency, when was it, 2002? Gwenny, not quite ten, had connected with her words and after the reading they exchanged hugs. Seems not five, but a thousand years ago.

Who is king among the dust?

Obstacle illusions. Optical course.

Before it fades from memory, set it down. Yesterday, late afternoon, you heard a hissing sound and looked round toward its source. A cicada, a good three inches long, had perched on the outside of the screen on your bedroom window. Greenish body, translucent wings. After inspecting it as closely as possible while taking care not to disturb it, you returned to your work and in a few minutes heard its hissing noise again, this time rising swiftly in amplitude until the sound filled the room, became nearly deafening, drowned out even the clamor of the traffic and shouts of the just-liberated high school kids below. You walked out of the bedroom and down the long hallway to the front door, and still the sound persisted, less intense, but distinctly audible.

Twice again in the half hour or so it remained there, the cicada's call grew to a crescendo and you plugged your fingers in your ears and approached, trying to see whatever vibrating organs were creating this amazing cacophony, all out of proportion to the creature's size.

In the intervals between songs, the insect fell silent, and you went about your business. So you almost missed seeing it fly off, suddenly, at some cue unknown to you, angling steeply, spiraling like a swallow. Now though, you're more acutely aware of the occasional swell of sound from the flora downstairs, you can pick out its rise and fall in a different register from the roar of the cars and subways. How many of these creatures live in the lawn and trees nearby? Until this visitation, unremarked by you.

*Golden cicada sheds its skin.* One of the thirty-six tactics. The bird swoops down to snatch its prey. But where the morsel had been, there's only an empty shell.



8/25 Counting cranes. Not. Whiteout. Can't see across the street.

Saturday night and Chelsea is hopping. So the plan, driving back from Joisey near midnight, is to try to find a parking space on 25th Street – set yourself up for the next waltz in the alternate-side-of-the-street ball, commencing Monday a.m.. But even before you turn onto 24th from Ninth Avenue you see the panoply of swirling lights and then comes into view a host of fire trucks lining the south side. First thought: wow, big fire in the movie theatre, but then you notice: a) no hoses or equipment; b) the firemen are hanging out, most of 'em wearing shorts and c) the line of trucks extends all the way to Eighth Avenue where the intersection is jampacked with yet more fire trucks, ambulances, police cars. Is even one lane open? Barely. No one's directing traffic so you thread the Ghost through this maze as best you can, veering south for a moment to go around one huge bus-like fire truck parked half in the intersection whose flank is prominently marked MAJOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE VEHICLE. Roll down the window and ask one of the firemen what's going on. He confirms what you've already guessed: it's a drill.

Right. Scores of vehicles deployed both along both sides of the street from 23rd all the way to 26th. Hundreds, if not thousands of personnel. Thread the needle through a gap in trucks and turn right onto 25th where, mirabile dictu! there's an open spot. Homeward stroll, the sidewalks thronged with men in dark blue shirts bearing immense white initials on their backs: NYFD, NYPD. Plenty of onlookers, neighbors of every stripe talking and laughing with the official drillees, and, this being Chelsea, a grand convocation of overstimulated dogs – the spectacle illuminated by brilliant red



and white pulsations, the roar of idling engines punctuated by the occasional carnival squawk of a siren. An oddly festive atmosphere prevails, a weird obverse to the soberly regimented public lamentations that attended the funerals, only a couple of days ago of the two firefighters killed in the Deutsche Bank blaze.

Katie and Gwen head upstairs and you cross over to Kyung's to buy a quart of milk. A portly gray-haired guy in an OEM shirt standing on the corner just outside the deli gives you a friendly smile. Inside a lean, intent-looking white fella prowls the aisles as though he wants to buy something but hasn't located that obscure object of desire. While you're paying, he walks past you and into the fetid night empty-handed, a giant-sized FBI imprinted on his back. Vanishes into the midway crowd.

From twenty stories up the play of lights makes different kind of dazzling show – a theater of midgets who only moments before had appeared gigantic. You watch, semi-hypnotized. And then realize something's missing. The helicopters, always hovering above the flashing lights below – where are they? Not a one. Go figure.

An hour later. The civilians have thinned out, but the vehicles are going nowhere fast. You think about pulling down the shade, waiting a beat or two, then letting it up again. Would all of this be gone?



*Est-ce que ce monde est sérieux?*

*Si, si hombre.*

8/26 When you do open the shade, it's morning and the whole show's evaporated into thin air. But on the streets of Chelsea, and at the café, madness in the air, like a fog you can smell.

Take a leak in the café WC. Mind drifts. A sneeze. What? Who? You look toward the source of sound. It's the aerosol deodorant pump mounted up in the corner

near the ceiling. It sneezes again and now you smell the hyper-citrus lavender. As you wash your hands, *Achoo!* – a third paroxysm. *Gesundheit*, you respond. Can the little thing have hayfever? So early in the season?