

*(That night, for no reason, the city classified its recollections and every citizen had a right to pen and paper to write the history of the town.*

*How the other people seemed at ease while I strayed without memories. With shards of words, I rebuilt a destroyed city, where my books lay buried, with broken bees' wings.)*

Writ Jabès.

"...She was young as heart." Verbal slip made by a woman, aged 84 in her eulogy of her long-time friend.

If, as the rabbi said at Ruth O.'s funeral, each of our parents bequeaths us a kind of Torah – whose teachings are meant for us alone, and from which we draw knowledge according to our ability to receive it – then from Jack you've inherited a very problematic Torah indeed, and one that challenges all your powers of interpretation. Yet the rabbi's formulation reminds you oddly of Marx's dictum: *From each according to his abilities...*

9/10 Eric B. sends you a verse he wrote.

*how it is*

*wretched words spill from struggled soul  
vain hope to drench passions burning coal  
still wrench apart that which lies asunder  
all time and will from which we set to plunder*

*dreams drift beyond the boundaries of mirth  
as sanguine seeds rest a while on barren earth  
whilst waiting to be wakened by warm tears  
a feckless future furtively appears*

What ever does he mean?

9/11 Time to put the dignitaries to work. With shovels.

It'll soon be '68 all over again. 5,768. Rosh Hashanah approaches.

This date in 1922 the League of Nations approved the British memorandum that the territory of the Mandate for Palestine lying to the east of the Jordan River would be exempted from all provisions dealing with Jewish settlement. Curiouser.

A blast from an improvised bomb, or perhaps a mortar or rocket, sends pressure waves coursing through the brain of anyone close by. This experience is what grunts call "getting your bell rung." In some cases the explosion results neither in visible injuries, nor disabling symptoms. But the tissue has been laced with tiny, often microscopic holes. One appears to have gotten off unscathed. Until.

President Giuliani. Why not? People have talked their way into more amazing shit than that. The shock doctrine makes it all possible.

Capitalism is disaster capitalism, since capitalism itself is the disaster.

A particularly nasty move in Ba Gua, one which results in, at best, a serious headache for one's opponent, translates from Chinese as "old monk rings the bell."

Kant's "unjust enemy." Coined at the tail end of the 18th century, he's fair game for the State. It is possible to legislate him into a state of exception wherein he will be subject to anything you wish to inflict upon him. He is thus reduced, in Giorgio Agamben's term, to "bare life" – biological existence that has become politically not merely sub, but extra-human. The unjust enemy has lately made a resurgence. Who is he to, and inside, us?

On posters inside subway cars and plastered to the sides of busses, in English and Spanish versions:

EL AÑO PASADO

1,944 NEOYORQUINOS

VIERON ALGO Y

DIJERON ALGO.

Gracias por mantener tus ojos y oídas bien abiertos.

Y no guardar tus sospechas para ti mismo.

¡SI VES ALGO, DI ALGO!

Habla con un policía o con un empleado de la MTA, o llama a

1-888-NYC-SAFE

The gist of it being that last year, 1,944 New Yorkers “saw something and said something.” The MTA and NYC police thank us for using our eyes and ears and not keeping our suspicions to ourselves. And we are urged, should we notice any unspecified thing that appears untoward, to speak to a police officer or MTA employee. Or call the toll-free number.

At first you find yourself annoyed by the message, reflexively, compounded by its delivery in the fulsome, paternalistic, ex-cathedra tone of pseudo-authority. But then it strikes you that fewer than two thousand reports of suspicious objects, persons, or activities in a city of eight million souls, and amortized over a period of 365 days, is a pretty low figure – one bordering on the infinitesimal. Which means what? That there is really very little sinister stuff going on? Alternatively, are there are dangers in plain view that we routinely block? Or, having seen “something,” many folks, for whatever reason, choose to keep mum about it?

How real is the number 1,944 anyway? Who keeps count? And what resonates about that year?

MoveOn catches a world of flack for uttering “General Betray Us” full page in yesterday’s *Times*. Now it’s hard to imagine a single soul with any sort of capacity for phonic associations, who hasn’t heard Betray Us in Petraeus since first his name came to prominence in the audible surround. And it’s likely a great many people presently lambasting MoveOn for this traitorous act deep down believe there’s something more in the analogy besides wordplay. Ah, but what happens, O best beloveds, when the

gulf between what one can think and what one can say widens to the point where you've got to jump to one side or the other or else *vroom!* down the abyss you go?

9/13 It struck you powerfully today, and it emerged spontaneously in a conversation with Eric B., that you've felt physically sick to the stomach at least once a day since the first Gulf war in 1990. You've had bouts of political illness before. Around the invasions of Grenada in '84 and of Panama in '89. But the last seventeen years have been one long scream of sheer helplessness in the face of your country's awful acts of aggression. And now – who knows how soon? – Iran.

It's a ridiculous question, because intellectually you know the answer. But you can't help asking yourself: how is it possible for the Dow soar a hundred and forty-something points when seven thousand people are sick with cholera in Northern Iraq? In what sort of universe do such simultaneities coexist? Beyond your imagining.

F. calls. First time you've spoken in months. He's inviting you to his big five-oh party next week. Seven years younger than you, but in some ways he's your mentor. The subject of twelve steps arise and soon afterward, in your head, the *ur-maxim* wells up, all inverted: *Soul grant me the will to change the things I cannot accept...*

On October 5, 1950, when you were just over half a year old, scores of manholes flipped their lids and hundreds of windows defenestrated in the explosion that followed Esso's spillage of thirty million-odd gallons of oil in and around Newtown creek – more even than the Exxon-Valdez let loose off Alaska. It's said that seventeen million gallons poured into the Brooklyn soil affecting more than fifty-five

acres. Nor was this the first toxic spill in the area which, since the mid-1800s, had been a mecca for kerosene, and later, oil refiners. Sugar mills, textile factories, coopers and butchers abounded too, creating over time one of the densest industrial concentrations in the country and, by 1891, an attar of pollution that a citizen's watchdog group, The Brooklyn Smelling Committee, declared the most noisome in the city.

Today in Greenpoint, trees may grow, but the methane also rises, and chemical tests of homes in the area indicate a possible "vapor intrusion phenomenon," doubtless from the plume which billows out horizontally thirty or so feet below street level. A spokesperson for Exxon-Mobil – Esso's corporate successor – says the company will "remain in Greenpoint until the [cleanup] job is done and done right." But no one seems to know what, if anything, that means in real terms. Today, you can dip a cup into the creek around the Exxon-Mobil refinery and you'll get nearly pure oil that's been floating there for fifty-seven years.

OPEC said it would boost production, but the market didn't pay no nevermind and today oil slid upward, past a long-awaited benchmark. By closing time at the NY Merc, crude had sought and found its own level: \$80.09 a barrel.

Which makes you flash on the old joke: What did the 0 say to the 8?

Nice belt.

And oil, unbelted, could go either way, toward Zed, or Benjamin Franklin.

9/14 All quiet on the western omelette.

You watch a *NYT* video story on “Art and Unrest on the Lower East Side.” Scenes from many epochs including Clayton Powers’ footage of the Tompkins Square police riot in ’88, one of the last major civil unrests in the city. Waves of association come beating on the shore. Today you feel like a city that’s been built, ruined, built over its ruins and ruined again countless times. What does the top stratum have to do with the ones beneath it, memory’s material crushed ever finer by the weight of what’s above? And the city to be built upon the ruins what stands now? Unimaginable.

9/15 And there are time when you feel completely unsubstantial. As though people on the street would walk right through you if you didn’t step out of the way.

9/16 To Schenectady for a wedding. Overnight at Days Inn. You and Katie share a mattress that wraps you, enchilada-like. Dream in which you shoes are fitted with tiny bells make the most amazing and rhythmic harmonic chimes depending on how you move your feet: walking, running, leaping up stairs. You’re also the leader of a band that has two keyboard players. Why, you ask yourself, are there two of them? Isn’t one enough? But then dismiss the question since the band sounds fantastic.

9/17 The Gray Ghost gives up the ghost on the Thruway just after E-Z-passing the Woodbury toll barrier. A great fountain of greenish liquid through the seam between the hood and the fender, yea even onto the windshield. No power. Throw it into neutral and glide to the meridian where, from the blown-out water pump, a mini-flood of bilious liquid courses down the gutter.

Some while later, the tow truck driver drops the three of you off at the immense outlet mall. You enter a church-like building to buy tickets for the Short Line bus into the city while Katie and Gwen hold a place for you on line. All around a surging tide of commodity worshippers in various states of frenzy and abandon. A multiplicity of hues and babbles. Differing folk, straight-jacketed into the same implacable stroke.

Wait on line. Board. Whereupon you find, fortunately, three adjacent seats. As the driver inches through the densest traffic jam in the largest parking lot in Christendom, the sound of an argument from the back of the bus. You half-rise and turn, look down the aisle at four rows of bright, uncaring eyes. A good third of the riders clasp cell phones to the sides of their faces as if convinced the device is some sort of necessary bracket that keeps their heads from rolling off. The ruckus subsides – a grudging accommodation reached over whose bag fits where. And yes, the purchases are ubiquitous, stuffed into the overhead racks and under seats, clutched on laps. Glance diagonally over at the receipt stapled to an Asian woman’s shopping bag handles. Type’s too small for you to read what she bought, but even with the jolting of the bus you can make out the bold faced caveat: *ALL SALES FINAL..*

9/18 “For sixty-four thousand dollars, what are the three words most commonly printed words in the English language?”

*Bzzzz!*

“Go ahead contestant number 3”

“Uh, Made in China.”

“Correct!”

Once again, triggered by passages in Kapuscinski *Shah of Shahs* you become aware that whatever the objective conditions outside your skin, your internal life unfolds within the play of revolution and reaction. Revolution and reaction come in cycles as surely as your qi pulses yin and yang. Freedom, then fear, then freedom again, in succeeding waves of sensation and degree and duration.

Can you say freedom is present within fear and fear within freedom? You cannot be sure. And who among us knows?

Are fear and freedom inextricable from one another, and integral to your organism? Oh yes. Was this dynamic always present? Well, always is a long time. But certainly as far back as you can remember.

9/19 Noontime. Stuck in traffic on Mott Street, a gigantic green garbage truck. A toga'd male figure wielding a lightning bolt and painted bright yellow on the hopper's flank. Next to which in bold letters: Zeus Waste Management.

Lord, you hope so.

Arrive at Le G. around four, just in time for the staff to present Mario with a cake surmounted by a single candle. *¡Feliz cumpleaños! How old are you? Forty five.* Wow, young fella.

The birthday song sung, the hands clapped, the kitchen folks returns to work, the customers' attention shifts back to food and conversation as Mario stands, present elsewhere, frozen in a moment that extends toward a minute.

You lean toward him. "Got to blow out the candle. And make a wish."

He breaks out of his reverie, stares at the candle almost sideways, as if the flame were speaking, then looks past you, shifts focus again into some place internal. Finds his wish. Inclines his head forward. Out it goes.

9/20 Thursday a.m. and not only do you not have to move the car, you can't move the car. Ever since you consigned the Gray Ghost to the junkyard, you've seen Tauruses everywhere, including one dark gray one in front of the precinct on 20th, that looked so much like her, you were fooled for a moment.

Following nearly on your heels into the café, a chic Asian woman wearing beautiful lizardy green shoes. Then hard upon, two tall white fellows who look vaguely familiar, all business, yet not suited – maybe film guys. They smile in sculpted sneers, with an air of bronze to them, like Rodin subjects gone feral and opportunist. Still, you can't bring yourself to fully reprehend them. They'll take up more space than they'll need, bark at the waitstaff, and, sooner than you, be gone.

Once upon a time in the winter of 1780, during what has come to be called the Little Ice Age, New York harbor froze over. For five weeks, one could walk from Staten Island to Manhattan. Or vice versa, as a large body of British forces did, their horse teams pulling heavy cannon. The redcoats built blockhouses on the ice and manned them to guard their rear.

Surely during that time some free soul skated from Coenties Slip round to Sheepshead Bay. And a dozen farm boys from the upper reaches of Manhattan and the Bronx met up at Spuyten Duyvel to bat a stone around the ice with sticks.

Beneath the promontory not yet known as Coogan's Bluff – for that Coogan would not be born till mid-next century – a fourteen-year-old twirled in skirts, her blades centrifuging showers of crystal shards. Suddenly dizzy, she paused to look up at the great white house, a Palladian wedding cake built atop the cliff face by a certain Colonel Morris back in 1765. General George commandeered it eleven years later on his retreat from Brooklyn Heights after which it was occupied in turn by the British and Hessians. By the time Eliza and Stephen Jumel buy the mansion in the future, more locally peaceable year of 1810, this girl will be skating toward the thin ice of old age. But what did she notice that particular twilight? Are there lights on? Smoke from the chimneys? What's the color of the sky beyond?

9/21 Take the trope: "I'm afraid I can't...".

As in: "I'm afraid I can't dance the Tango." Or "I'm afraid I can't publish your manuscript."

Snap this trope in the center and you get: *I'm afraid. I can't.*

"Fear:" writes Kapuscinski, "a predatory, voracious animal living inside us. It does not let us forget it's there. It keeps eating at us and twisting our guts. It demands food all the time, and we see that it gets the choicest delicacies. Its preferred fare is dismal gossip, bad news, panicky thoughts, nightmare images. From a thousand pieces of gossip, portents, ideas, we always cull the worst ones – the ones that fear likes best. Anything to satisfy the monster and set it at ease. Here we see a man listening to someone talking, his face pale and his movements restless. What's going on? He is feeding his fear? And what if we have nothing to feed it with? We make something up,

feverishly. And what if (seldom though this may occur) we can't make anything up? We rush to other people, look for them, ask questions, listen and gather portents, for as long as it takes to satiate our fear.

“All books about all revolutions begin with a chapter that describes the decay of tottering authority or the misery and sufferings of the people. They should begin with a psychological chapter, one that shows how a harassed, terrified man suddenly breaks his terror, stops being afraid. This unusual process, sometimes accomplished in an instant like a shock or lustration, demands illuminating. Man gets rid of fear and feels free. Without that there would be no revolution.”

Just prior to that passage from *Shah of Shahs*, Kapuscinski describes the moment the revolution starts. A policeman confronts man at the edge of a crowd, shouting “Go home!” in his face. Instead of running away, as is the usual and expected response, the man stands his ground.

“There is a moment of silence. We don't know whether the policeman and the man on the edge of the crowd already realize what has happened. The man has stopped being afraid.... Until now, whenever these two men approached each other, a third figure instantly intervened between them. That third figure was fear. Fear was the policeman's ally and the man in the crowd's foe. Fear interposed its rules and decided everything. Now the two men find themselves alone, facing each other and fear has disappeared into thin air.”

*Say fear is a man's best friend*

*You add it up it brings you down.*

Sings John Cale.

Exchange of emails:

E.B. All dreams will be henceforth quoted in Euros, the streets will be full of europeans spending their redundancy money on whats left of last years christmas stock while the sheiks and chinese apparatchik buy the empty apartments and shares in twinkie manufacturing technology stocks.

As sir donald maintains, longevity is up...

E.D. But when it comes to slaughter

You will do your work on (black)water...

Yes, dreams and dream derivatives. Now there's a market anyone can night trade in. Even mercenaries.

It's a merc merc merc merc merc merc merc merc world.

9/22 Coincidence of Yom Kippur and pre-equinox.