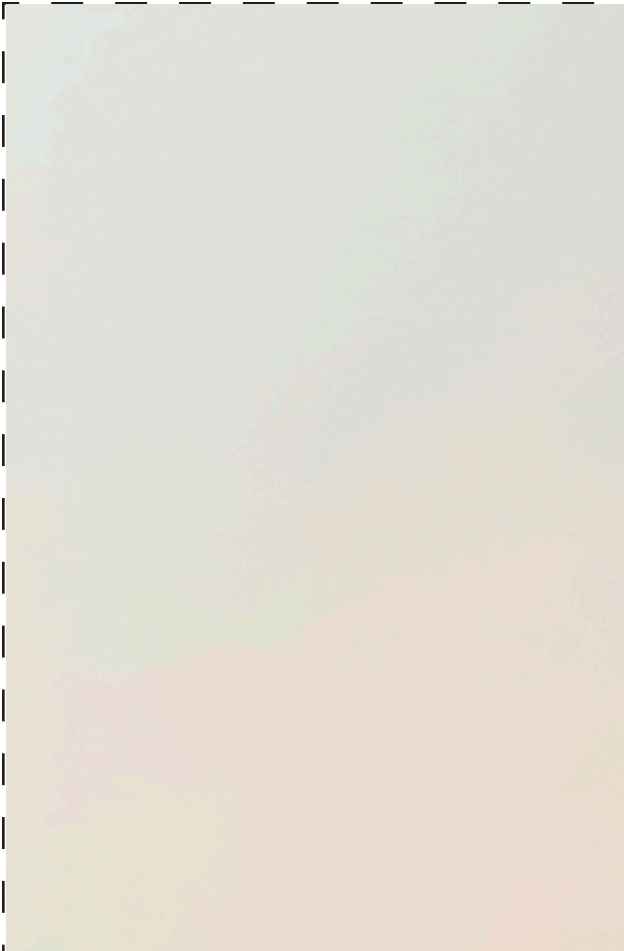




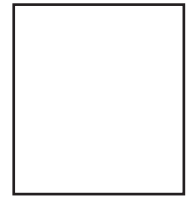
New York City, March 6, 2023

★★★ Pink light came up on the buildings under a sky with no clouds in sight. A ray of sun somehow cleared the roof of the apartment building from the rear, bounced off a brownstone window opposite, and came back low and straight enough to cross the whole living room and dining table, thread the kitchen pass-through, and cast a bright patch on the tiles below the microwave warming leftovers for the lunch thermoses. At midday the sky was gray and the wind bit harder with each passing moment of the short walk to get tea. The orange hoodie, rescued from the closet floor, was not really enough for the conditions, but the reading glasses that had been missing for months turned up in the pocket. By school dismissal, blue had rallied back in the northern sky, and it kept spreading till open and warming sun came up from the south and west, silvering the rocks and the wet patches on the path. A chilly wind seemed to be following right behind the sun, though the weather app and the quickly changing conditions overhead said it should have been blowing the opposite way. Within 10 blocks of walking, the sky had gone from half-clear to fully emptied out. It was worth the effort to cross the avenue early and walk on the sunny side. Between dinner and the start of class, the moon came up full and flawlessly round. By break time, it had slid sideways behind the adjoining building, with only a thin silver blur sticking out to show where it went.

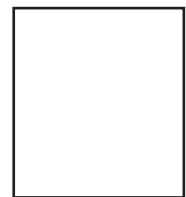


New York City, June 6, 2023

[NO STARS] The morning began overcast and humid, with rain falling around 9. Then a whole different morning arrived, a sunny and welcoming one. That mood lasted past lunchtime, until there was approaching thunder like heavy steel plates being dragged into place over an excavation site, followed by direct cracking thunder and a quick rush of rain. The streets were dry within the hour, but the shaded path through Morningside Park was puddly and muggy. Water droplets sat on sassafras leaves. Overhead—overhead was trouble, the forecast smoke from Canada mixing with whatever else was in the sky to make a haze with the ugly translucence of old Tupperware. The last uphill stretch on the walk home from school pickup felt like the tilted treadmill at the cardiologist's office. A neighbor was heading out with a mask on. It got worse. The light dimmed into something green and eerie, thunderstorm light, but what was coming was no thunderstorm. Things kept getting dimmer, till by 6:30 everything lay in deep, malevolent gloom, some two hours before the scheduled sunset. The smoke from Canada was not a tint or a filter on the sky but a reeking presence, pushing in through the windows. The sky was brown. Visible smoke loomed in the space between buildings. Through it all the air was cool and would have been pleasant—a beautiful day at the height of the year, so defiled it was necessary to shut the windows against it.



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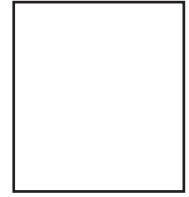
New York City, March 7, 2023

★★★The depths of the night had been filled with the howls of a neighbor baby and the sloshing and dripping of a storm outside, but all that showed in the morning were a few bits of crusted slush clinging whitely to a few spots in the branches, or to some of the car roofs and mirrors. Fat droplets all up and down the branches in the courtyard caught pinpoints of sun, like dew in a spiderweb. Wisps of cirrus lay above scraps of altocumulus in the morning sky, and by midday it was blue overhead with abundant sun coming down; the interlude of slush seemed as unconnected to things before or after as a passing nightmare. There was a different-sounding birdsong in the chorus out back, short and metallic, and something small and dark darted among the branches, but the tree was too brightly lit to make out whether it was really something new. Dry leaves, finally released by the trees, flew around with crispness and buoyancy that belied their shabbiness. One of them, an oak missing more than half its lobes but with petiole and midrib still gracefully arched, had made it down into the subway, where the rising gust from an express train sent it lifting and moving across the uptown platform. Up around the corner on the way to the school, a furiously turning circle of dirt and litter threw grit at the eyes. All the clarity and brilliance balanced out the cold wind just enough that the walk back, with the sixth-grader reading a book the whole way, was not unpleasant. A tallboy of Budweiser blew over on a stoop, spilling a line of foam before its owner could set it upright again. Amid the growing shadows, the sun found the red blooms in the top of the block's silver maple.



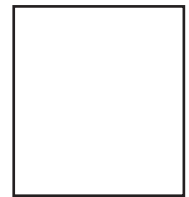
New York City, April 4, 2023

★★★★The first light was lemon yellow on the eastern sky. After a moment out on the balcony under the hazy blue sky of full daylight, indoors was unbearably dim. This was the day, the real one, after all the intimations and false starts: the air was soft and humid, the jacket unnecessary or close to it. Bad smells were ripening; pear trees were starting to leaf out. The haze blended into indistinct clouds. The throb of a helicopter came from somewhere else. It was mildly sweaty business to carry home a bag of rice. The midafternoon clouds solidified, clumping closely enough to show some gray. A cry of “Marvin! Get your ass up here!” carried down from the top of the slope in Morningside Park. The sixth-grader was ruddy and freckled from spending class outside. A game of dominos was happening on a white plastic table by the street corner. The clouds thinned again and a cluster of sparrows flew twittering and weaving through the trees in the courtyards, gathering briefly at the fork of one branch, then racing away again. A huge, globular black fly bumbled against the bay window, then into the living room, then back again, to die cleanly on the third swing of flyswatting season.



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Four horizontal lines stacked vertically, identical to the ones in the first section.

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