



Source: Jim Rutenberg, Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Mark Mazzetti, "'Free Iraq' is within reach, Bush declares", *New York Times online*, 23/08/07.

Tags: [animals](#), [dreams](#), [travel](#), [workplace](#)

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The bat that had hung in a stiff, crucified state between the two power lines, was gone. He found that he felt disappointed at its sudden disappearance. He had gotten use to looking up at it, each morning on his way to work. Of course at first, like all new things, he looked at it out of curiosity. This new black cloth, crisp as a starched handkerchief, poised and quiet, and occasionally, gently catching the breeze. He was only moderately shocked to realize what it was; the bat being far enough above him to feel unreal, yet also near enough, for him to know it wasn't.

How it weathered storms! And still, the next day, there it was—four corners clutching the wires, tenacious for want of life. Those perfect aerodynamic folds, the now silent sonar vision. He began to admire it (although, he would never admit to this; he was barely conscious of his motives for looking). Nevertheless, it had become part of his morning and afternoon ritual. And when passing under it each day, he made sure to look up—he had the sensation of tipping his hat (if he had owned a hat) to an acquaintance.

It was when he heard the small child's cry (a passing girl, revelling in the bat's condition) that he realized he felt, what he could only describe as, ownership of the bat. He smiled at the girl's naiveté: himself being so far past feelings of astonishment; and also, condescending towards the idea that it wasn't simply a natural thing for the bat to be there.

But now it was gone. To where? Who had taken it? He was not an imaginative person, and his lack of experience in dealing with this type of disappearance forced the limits of his creative capabilities. The best he could picture was some large sort of mechanical crane, arriving in the middle of the night and taking the bat away. Or perhaps it had fallen down, and been disposed of by the morning's garbage men. But this last option didn't seem likely—not when it had managed to hang onto the lines for so long.

The street now seemed lonelier.

It is going to be a fine day, he thought. The sun at first tentative, now strengthened and sprawled across the sky, burning up the dawn's clouds. His stride grew more confident as he left the bat's absence behind.

As he reached the corner he saw the morning masses mobilizing. 'Another great day for the race' he said to himself. He crossed the road, and made his way up the station steps to the platform.

He checked his watch, looked pleased at making good time, then stood still, and waited. He was someone for whom time passed effortlessly: his mind not easily disturbed by any movements or images to mark its passage. Yet neither did he stare—you could not accuse him of looking vacant. He had a generally pleasant and assured air, which meant that he excelled at making first impressions.

The train began to pull into the station. There was a shout as two schoolboys scuffled, one swinging the other toward the train in the spirit of camaraderie. The surprised victim came to no harm, his arm grazing the carriage before being pulled back by his friend. He looked suitably, but not overly annoyed, and thumped the other boy on the back, swearing at him.

As the doors opened, the man let the other passengers board, and then followed, taking a seat between a short plump woman, and a youth, that he supposed with one glance, to be a university student. The train gathered speed, the carriages jostling against each other, and the tracks clicking, creating rhythmic intervals. A dream from the previous night popped into his head. It was rare for him to remember any of his dreams so he observed the phenomena with a quiet interest. There had been eggs. Eggs growing, buried in the dirt. No, not growing, cooking. And they had been digging, looking for the boiled ones to eat. Only, most of them came out raw, their shells breaking and spilling the contents of underdeveloped chicks. Repulsed, he put the dream away—noting that he had accidentally broken some eggs a few days ago, and this is probably where the dream had come from.

Leaving the train, walking through the city, he felt unsettled, as if some unhomely, dimness had attached itself to him while he wasn't looking. He picked up his morning coffee, the usual, and began to feel better.

Now, walking into the office, smiling at the receptionist, picking up his messages, he felt normal again. He had a glass-cornered office, overlooking the city, an impressive looking desk with leather swivel chair, and neat stacks of papers for him to sign. He sat down, leafed through his diary, and looked up as his colleague entered the room.

'Have you seen the projections for next quarter?' his colleague asked.

'Yes, it's all very gloomy, isn't it.' the man replied, offering a smile of commiseration.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Kathryn Ryan.*