

The Pond

Not far from our editing operations in Building 4 of the *Wall Street Journal's* temporary corporate headquarters in South Brunswick is a pond. Each morning I like to leave for my break by a side entrance. As the managers and department heads grapple with the future of the company, I make my way across a wide expanse of grass toward a bench near the water where I sit under some trees. The air is fresh and bracing, the sky cobalt blue. But I don't look up as I go. I have to watch my step to avoid the goose scat.

Before September 11, I would rise at 7:30 A.M. and be at my desk at One World Financial Center at 8:30. I took my first break with my Page One friend, or strolled to the Winter Garden and sat on a bench and looked at the palm trees. Now I wake up at 5:30 to be at work at 8, and leave for my first break two hours later. The ride in the company van from Brooklyn is slow, but not traffic-snarled as it can be for people going to New York City.

If we take Fourth Avenue to the Verrazano bridge, we pass Nice and Necessary, the pharmacy and beauty aids shop. John, the oldest driver, prefers the shadows of Third Avenue. Around Thirtieth and Third, a man comes outside of a car wash with a long pole, a large American flag at its end and plants it into a hollow base. Next door is Pleasure and Paradise, private viewing booths. Cafe Gowanus. On the Verrazano itself, I watch a jetstream in the morning sky and wait for the explosion, the end of the perfect white line.

Usually, the geese and I have the green space to ourselves. But as I settle into the bench, I am startled to see three Australian shepherds running toward the flock. Their noses thrust forward like racers, the shepherds run alongside a man driving a golf cart at its top speed. For days I'd watched as Canada geese gathered near the pond in ever-increasing numbers. Perhaps because I am originally from Canada, they evoke home. Now at least one hundred of them are in flight to get away from the dogs and a man in a golf cart, hurtling around the pond.

The geese circle high in the air, but then slowly coast their way back to the surface of the water. I can't get a good look at the man inside the golf cart, but he is big and dressed in green from head to toe. The man and the dogs circle the area one more time, forcing the last goose into the air and onto the surface.

Next, man and dogs stop at the water's edge. The man takes a thin plastic bag and opens its mouth to the autumn breeze. It fills in an instant and he ties it securely, then tosses the ash-colored balloon onto the pond. The bag rolls like tumbleweed across the surface toward the geese. The man fills another bag and tosses it as well, and then another, until a phalanx of inflated bags march on the floating geese. Suddenly, as one, the birds beat the air with their wings and honk in fright, flying away, the pressure of a wild thing on a sleeping chest. The man and the dogs dash off, too, to gather up the bags which were rolling in the wind beyond the softball diamond where at the post-September 11 company picnic the technical workers edged the news staff, 10 to 9.

I sit on the park bench a little longer. My break is over and I need to get back to work. There are stories that need editing, supervisors, with deadlines approaching, who are beginning to wonder where I am. Perhaps the managers have returned from their meetings, to announce who would be staying in South Brunswick, who would be returning home. It is time that we all should learn what the future holds.

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Now empty, devoid of the birds, the man and the dogs, the grass expanse and rippled water look as eerie as an unsold postcard at the turnpike. A cloud covers the sun for a moment and I shiver and stand up to go. That is when I notice the pond, without the birds, the dogs, and the man in the golf cart. I get up on the seat of the park bench for a better vantage point and can see what had escaped me before. There is no doubt. The pond is built in the shape of the state of New Jersey.