Her nerves were frayed. An animal a fraction her size and doubtless twice as fearful had prompted a survival response she can’t yet explain. She saw, or thought she saw, felt or thought she felt, her life in the balance of an action. The swift advance of chance was coupled to reactive anxiety in an interspecies encounter. She, Bette B, had proved victorious in a spontaneous duel in which an enemy had not declared itself as such. She may well have disposed an innocent, entangled in its own reptilian fight, flight, or freeze survival catharsis.

Leaving the scene of the crime before any authority had yet responded, she was dazed, needing the reassurance of normalcy her home would afford. Having thanked the blue-coated couple for their attention, all three had carefully stepped along their ways. The rat or guinea pig, breathing shallowly in the middle of the POMOC, would, yes or no, regain its composure and slip away, finding a hole through the gleaming façade to its netherworld as rodents do. Or it would perish there.

At home in her apartment, situated on a relatively quiet residential street just off a shopping artery, she was able to mix herself a gin and tonic, put the scratchy Miles
Kind of Blue LP on the player and collapse into her favorite reading chair to remember what had occurred.

Nerves settling, she walked to her bathroom in which hung the only mirror in her apartment. She examined her face and neck, finding a small four-stroke scratch on the jawbone of her left cheek. In a rush as palpable as the initial “attack,” she felt fear move from her gut to her throat, choking her gasp.

Talking to herself she mapped the possibilities.

“This is gonna be a fucking nightmare saga, a bloody cautionary tale, a medical odyssey.”

“Uhh, uhh, a biopower morality play maybe ... or Christ, another mythic animal story.” Her imagination often took her on wild rides even in the most unremarkable of situations. Faced with the immediacy of real-life drama, she felt a latent pang for cosmic adventures, drifting weightlessly, blissfully, on a blanket of stardust amidst a sparkling multiverse of quasars, supermassive black holes, and bursting supernovae. Carl Sagan’s spaceship. She long ago purchased her ticket to ride to the cosmic “out there.” How had she been so suddenly transported to its inverse “in there”? She held her panic at bay, clos-
ing her eyes as she scaled, travelled down to the invisible realm of the quantum register. She let its equivocal mystery soothe her for a moment.

Opening her eyes to the lurid fluorescent light in this her two-meter-square water closet, she understood her new reality was oscillating somewhere between infinities of vast and vast. The messy, earthy microscopic dimension of squiggly life-form activity had never before tickled her conceptual terrain. Sure, she’d followed the rhetoric of the anthropocene with interest but her pop-sci preferences erred towards physics rather than biology. Uncomfortable with allegories outside the extremes of the infinite macro or infinitesimal micro, she took another long look in the mirror.

Squeamish. She was fucking squeamish.