Last Year at Betty and Bob's: A Novelty
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Since the POMOC episode Bette B’s been adjusting to an onslaught of sudden, thankfully brief, hallucinatory episodes. In an eye blink, worlds appear replete with detailed scenarios much like the rapid onset of a dreamscape. She’s convinced she is wide awake and participating in the everyday physical world catalyzing her central nervous system. But these occasional “fits” knot a curious mix of sensory and hallucinatory perceptions. She records these happenings in her notepad according to their perceived normalcy or exaggerated abnormalcy:

— The air feels damp against my skin and smells of rotting organic matter as I pass a trash container.

✔️ normal

— The pulse of a jackhammer pounds the pavement somewhere near enough that its reverberation tickles my feet on the sidewalk.

✔️ normal

— The vegetable shop I’m browsing, unleashes a blinding cascade of color in its tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, endive, bananas, oranges, kiwis, pecans, potted basil...
☑️ normal

— The avocados in the same shop are a patented International Klein Blue (IKB).

☑️ abnormal

— The rain drains in the street amplify Merzbow’s Animal Magnetism album.

☑️ abnormal

— A figure in a white bunny suit with ridiculously long ears hands out flyers for the opening of new fitness center.

☑️ normal ✖️ uncertain????

Hyperaware of every prickle of sensation, she feels an excess of experience. Of course these kinds of scenes also play out every evening as she sleeps, if she sleeps, as she dreams, if she dreams, but her experience of the world the past few days is different somehow. She can only describe it as hallucinatory, having no other immediate vocabulary for the startling disjunction between how she thinks she feels and how she feels she thinks. There is a pervasive lucid quality to her phase shifting, a heightened state of attention.

The rat scratch on her left cheek has changed color. Initially a pinkish scrape, the four distinct claw marks swelled a bit then turned a rusty brownish hue. It appears to be healing, the tetanus shot, an RBF (rat bite fever) deterrent, doing its work behind the scenes, stultifying any bad bacterial behavior. But she’s suspicious and can’t shake an incipient morpho feeling, a queasy sense of alteration. But then she has always nursed an active
imagination, generously nourished by a literary appetite. That reminds her...

Pulling a gnarled copy of Kafka stories from the shelf, she finds what she’s looking for:

“They woke up from anxious dreams, he discovered that he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug.”

Never one of her favorite yarns, her girlish squeamishness towards insects trumped any real sympathy she could drum up for the hapless Gregor. Her lack of cockroach compassion provoked confrontational ethical problems for her as for the unfortunate Samsa family. Unmitigated animality. This is a something she had not yet experienced.

Anxiously, she went about her routines, fearful as one might be of a lump in the breast or a darkening mole. Waiting for the advent of a new state of affairs, just outside the reach of one’s control, she assessed the condition of her disquiet. She had the feeling that apprehensive expectation of emergence is an activity dosed with a significant degree of pathos. She then reassessed, thinking of the CERN physicists patiently and successfully anticipating the trace of the Higgs boson; astrophysicists keenly
awaiting the spectacle of the Milky Way black hole feasting on its gaseous perimeter. She then reconsiders her consideration. To lie in wait to observe or capture “eventfulness” must surely border on the empathetic.

Or is it better conceived as affective attunement? Her professorial concerns tend to infect her habitual activities.

She’s sensitive to trends despite a senior status that often prejudices any hipness factor she secretly feels she deserves.

She’s lately observed the becoming-fashionable of the term “empathy” in tandem with the now culturally inculcated understanding of “affect.” There is something doing here though she can’t put a finger on the impetus yet.

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Approaching the mirror in her bathroom as she has a hundred times in the past few days, she checks her cheek. The scabby strokes are each perceptibly turning a distinctive hue from left to right: violet-bluish, green, yellow-orangish, red. To her eyes it looks like the prismatic specter of a haunted event-to-come; a rainbow effect that elicits contagious potential.

Gazing with wide eyes at the reflected varicolor rat scratch, she again attempts to profile the perpetrator:

1. a rodent of the Rattus rattus variety
2. the common urban Rattus norvegicus
3. a disoriented pet guinea pig Cavia porcellus
4. a gerbil Merionus unguiculatus
One of these inflicted the scratch. Does the equation change if the perp was feral or domesticated? She was surely a perp herself – Caucasian, female, 176 cm, 50+, 63 kg – who with an astute defensive gesture, killed and/or rendered comatose a member of the Rodentia order. Her culpability has become a tedious distraction, fuelling her hallucinations with disturbing after effects. Uneasy, uncertain, she reckons she must return to the scene of the crime. So awhirl is her worlding that she can't yet tell if this desire to return is a closure or a beginning.

♥

Staring down the tubular structure of the POMOC she wonders what it is she hoped to find here? A teenage boy in orange tiger-striped tights skids past with such force she's sure he's enhanced his footwear with the alloy soles they sell online from the Corridor blog. Other skidders avoid her with precision or threaten certain collision with their inept technique. Her timing is off. The POMOC is so congested it reminds her of negotiating traffic in Cairo at midday, all nerve and insistence. Focusing on her own precarious balance, she misses the tactile grounding of the old-style travelators that once accommodated airport passengers down endless gateways. She has yet to finesse the physics of the POMOC. She'll have to return at a quieter moment.

♥

Her second attempt at epiphany yields different results. On a relatively quiet Saturday morning with few tasks waiting, she laced up a pair of red hi-top sneakers for better traction. Riding the force of compulsive instinct, she was out the door quickly. This time, she hoped to find a
sparsely peopled corridor in which her thoughts could flirt with the milieu unimpeded. What then occurred in the center of this speed tunnel disturbed her already unstable equilibrium beyond rescue.

Once again inside, she attuned to the space, examining its every detail with acumen. She scratched at everything that shined, smelled the cleaning fluids that pervaded every corner. She hadn't noticed these things before. In sync with something uncanny, she listened to the plumbing, the ventilation unit, the air-con fans, heard the titanium whisper as it held its own against the gravity that tried to push its curves to earth. She listened to a distinctive peeping, pathetic yet robust, resonating in the dark whoosh of that half-kilometer long expanse. Near the fire extinguisher marker she could hear a high frequency modulation, fluctuating between a whimper and a zing. As she adjusted to its resonance, it filled the space of her skull with a pleasure she could not identify. A song of sorts, reverberantly emanated inside and outside her head and through the tensed limbs of her body. Entranced, suffused by the force of these sonic waveforms bouncing off her molecular being as so many interference patterns diffracted by particulate matter, she stood still to better feel what she heard – a riot of bifurcating forms, a cacophony of ambient noise threaded by a riveting virtuosic microtonal solo. Was the ghost of her victim haunting this place? Or does the rodent live to sing its aria, its own version of *Nessun Dorma* as an ironic joke that will agitate her already incessant sleeplessness? Can she alone hear what she thinks she hears?
“I WILL WIN. I WILL WIN. VINCIRO! YOU WILL NOT SLEEP.”

Surely in her destabilized state she’s reading an improbably vindictive narrative into the beautiful trilling.

Momentarily paralyzed in this incongruous space, she feels like Schrödinger caught in a sick illusion of profound dimensions. She came, as it were, to open the box, to bear witness to the dead or alive status of the rodent she affectionately thinks of as B ☪ B. Can it be true that he is in superposition, living and not-living? The body, or trace of the body, is nowhere to be found of course. The incident occurred several days ago yet a voice persists. Fond of detective literature, she wonders if she’s stepped into a world of virtual evidence, entered a mystery? A morality play, a slapstick comedy, a romantic telenovela? B ☪ B must surely be or have been or will have been. Abruptly, she stops herself from constructing an unseemly anthropomorphic narrative. She’s already overstepped her bounds by naming him. Taming him some would say.

Soon the ultrasonic frequencies fade into the hum of the background noise that swaddles every earthly environment – urban, pastoral. It’s said there is no sound in space
but Bette B doubts this. Sure, soundwaves as we know them require a molecular atmosphere to roll out their sonority. All the movement of gluey dark matter and the accelerating force of dark energy must relay some kind of a vibrational buzz our transductive hearing mechanisms cannot process. She imagines the operatic dissonance of an event horizon as it spirals the mouth of the black hole it will eventually nourish. Neither a Pythagorean nor a Nada Brahma disciple, she nonetheless imagines sound as ubiquitous. This instinct was supported in part by legions of manga artists who depict aural vibrations in the absence of sound. Star, smile, mistake, wrinkles, depression are all drawn as graphic cochlear perturbations.

Bette B takes comfort in the ineffable. Always has. It’s perhaps why her aging ears, reduced to a limited 30–10,000 kHz bandwidth, can hear this plaintive rodent, vocalizing in the 30,000+ kHz range. Improbably, B\(\oplus\)B’s melody-free noise assertion stays with her even as her attention shifts to negotiating her skid to the exit.

Once outside the building, she decides to take a walk through a nearby park before returning home. She finds the hidden paths preferable to the asphalt thoroughfares of joggers, skateboarders, bikers, rollerbladers, powerwalkers, daydreamers, dating couples, cheating couples, teenage gangs, senior clubbers, show-dog contenders, cold drink and hot coffee vendors – the spill of humanity and others out for a few deep inhales of freshly oxygenated air. Here is the reciprocity of photosynthesis at work amidst an army of respiring carbon machines. Allowing herself the fleeting image of taking B\(\oplus\)B out for a walk, she wonders how other animals and humans would treat them both? Aborting her long stride, she stops to recall the rodent’s features. Dark, grimy, short-haired with sharp incisors and a triangular snout. Or was it a mottled brown and dirty white with blunt front teeth and a pink-
ish snubby snout? She would fail miserably as a witness to an accident or celebrity sighting

Opening her eyes, she rummages through an interior pouch of her backpack searching for a round compact mirror she keeps for makeup emergencies. The spectral scratches have taken on a neon quality. Placing her bag on the remains of yellow snow nestled by the trunk of a barren elm tree, she reenacts her reflex gesture that afternoon. Passers-by must think she’s practicing tai chi. She imagines the cold snout against her cheek, the scruffy whiskers, and now, filled with doubt as she is, feels tiny claws scrape her jaw in an effort to cling to her, to hold on to a pliable organic something in a blur of forbidding metals and plastics.
Franz Kafka, writer of short stories, letters, and novels died of starvation on 3 June 1924 from laryngeal tuberculosis. Eating had become too painful an exercise. One of his last works was the short story “Josephine the Singer and the Mouse Folk.”

Giacomo Puccini, a chronic smoker, died on 29 November 1924 from throat cancer. He left the writing of his opera *Turandot*, featuring the famous tenor aria *Nessun Dorma* (“None may sleep”), unfinished.

On a winter morning in 1925, a singing mouse was discovered in Detroit, MI by JL Clark. This discovery would lead to significant biological research on the vocal physiognomy of rats. Recent scientific evidence supports the claim that some species of rodent do indeed produce song-like ultrasonic voicings similar to that of birdsong.