Last Year at Betty and Bob's: A Novelty
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Hello Purello

It’s the Purello that takes the most getting used to. There’s a skewed reciprocity in the compulsive gesture of freshening one’s hands in this way. The attempt to remove any bacterial trace from giving and receiving is futile. She supposes that in her circumstances this precaution is more than warranted, yet it feels slimy somehow, even as the stuff itself evaporates when it hits the air. The bottle wrapper says that it contains 63% ethyl alcohol, isopropyl alcohol, aminomethyl propanol, propylene glycol, and a myriad of other chemicals. She has no idea what these substances are but they “sound” toxic. Apparently regular old impure tap water is almost as effective in killing germs from human hands, but since her condition is precarious she’s become obsessively antiseptic compulsive. Surprisingly, the latex gloves add a fashion wallop to her wardrobe and she loses little dexterity due to their flexibility. The main annoyance is the smartphone handicap. She’s considered punching a tiny hole in each thumb. It would alleviate that inconvenience but then she will have rendered the gloves partially ineffective. She hasn’t decided yet how to handle this situation. Already stretched to the limits of her coping ability, Bette B is now preoccupied with identifying islands of stability rather than attending to the many instabilities in her heightening perception of a whirling, indeterminate world.
She recalls a factoid. As a species we’re most human at the moment of birth when our cellular material is purely *Homo sapiens*. By the time we’re mature adults we have accrued so many diverse bacterial cells that, if one were to make a corporeal analogy, only the area from the foot to the knee of one leg would be composed of distinctly human cellular matter. The rest is other.

This analogy has long impressed her. It puts an effusive spin on categorical animality. She’d chuck the gloves and the Purello if she were alone in this. Get on with the getting on. The threat of her contaminating agency keeps sociability in check. As for the intimate exchange of bodily fluids, her aging, drowsy libido offers little resistance to restrictions. She has more time on her red hands.

So naturally, Bette B’s become inordinately interested in all things pathogenic. She’s fastidiously searched through digital and analog archives on the history of infectious disease control. Confused by distinctions between inoculation and vaccination, she looked into the etymologies of the terms.

**Inoculate (v):**

mid-15c., “implant a bud into a plant,” from Latin *inoculates* [...] “graft in, implant,” from *in* “in” + *oculus* “bud,” originally “eye.” Meaning “implant germs of a disease to produce immunity” first recorded (in inoculation) 1714, originally in reference to smallpox. After 1799, often used in sense of “to vaccine inoculate” [*OED*].

To graft a bud, an eye. It reminded her of teratoma tumors, a subject she was afraid to research.

She was surprised to find that a “vaccine,” initially, was cowpox. *Vacca* = cow. The Latin root was a giveaway but she hadn’t been paying attention.
Vaccination (n):

1803, used by British physician Edward Jenner (1749–1823) for the technique he devised of preventing smallpox by injecting people with the cowpox virus (*variolae vaccinae*), from vaccine “pertaining to cows, from cows” (1798), from Latin *vaccinus* “from cows,” from *vacca* “cow” [OED].

Whereas differentiating between the bacterial and the viral is a vital clarification, inoculation, vaccination, and immunization are used interchangeably among the folk who actually do these things. She wonders what the team of researchers handling her case might call her antidote should they need to contrive a preemptive fix? Rattusination? Gerbillination? How would they extract the cellular material without the culprit? A little ashamed of her ignorance in these matters, she’s determined to be a quick study in all things microbial.

One takeaway insight resonated with her usual interests. The zoomorphic. Why had she never noticed the exaggerated use of animal references in human language before? Descriptive adages, similes, categorizations so endemic to the quotidian that they pass as unremarkable, appearing regularly as people, as institutions, as markets, as corporations, as products, as insults; weaving their way through conversations in all tongues as a subliminal nature/culture membrane. Now an ultra-sensitive witness to the zoological, she fancies herself shaman material, feels a lightning rod of recognition as she squirts another round of ridiculous purifier on her hairy hands.