Last Year at Betty and Bob's: A Novelty

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Holed up, nursing his wounds, BΩB’s been revisiting what he thinks of as his epiphanic moment, his near death experience on the Path. In countless ways, its impact upon him continues to reverberate. He’s exhaustively retraced his steps and stumbles that day in an attempt to piece details together; in a frustrated effort to come to some kind of understanding of his character, motivations, desires, and on some metaphysical plane, his beliefs. His cousin has accused him of pursuing answers through transcendental means. Gettin’ religious and all. But this is her whacked out, semi-anaesthetized sensibility talking. Her radar is way rusted. Ethanol can do that. Nonetheless, his endless rehashing has begun to simulate a style of storytelling a victim engages in with the authority of a parent, a journalist or perhaps a god. One version goes something like this:

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It was late, or early, depending on one’s perspective. I was taking a risk by being out in the open after dawn, in all the brightness of the morning. I’d been licking aggressively that evening, consuming more of the happy vapor than usual. Why? That’s a question I can’t answer honestly because it’s complicated. Or complex. I’m not sure which term best contextualizes my state on that day. Ac-
tually I have no idea why I was where I was. I had been out playing late, or early, and continued to play. Sometimes one does things inexplicably, without purpose, without intention. I don’t tend to psychologize my every motivation. I leave that activity to other species.

I’ve been trying to master the skid recently. Well, master is too ambitious a word for my futile attempts at maintaining an upright posture while gliding several centimeters above the ground surface. It also has unfortunate overtones so maybe “wizard a skid” works better? Hazard a skid? Anyway, humans and larger animals can better direct their balance at these unnatural speeds. The first time I tried I could feel my hands and back feet leave the surface of the Path altogether. I thought I would be flung against the far wall of the long hall but somehow the momentum decreased proportionate to the space, I magically decelerated as the boundary approached, coming to a soft stop. I was quite a distance from the Hole in the storage room that shuttles my entry to and from this world.

Still amateur at this, I practice when the space is unpeopled. On this occasion it was empty but for a solitary human draped in black like a shadow with the most fantastic shiny, reflective footwear I have ever seen. I couldn’t take my gaze off them. The light bouncing erratically from the curvilinear polished surfaces of the interior walls blindingly diffracted around the touch of those shimmering feet upon the glistening ground. It was terrifyingly attractive this light, so bright as to blind one like me, pull my kind by the sheer force of their brilliance. Without further consideration, I was off in skid mode, my momentum increasing. Distracted by the bright-bright, I felt panic swell as I lost my balance all together, flopping from side to belly at a ridiculous speed. The lure of those shoes threw my equilibrium out of sync.
The glittery foot figure had stopped still near the rail that runs along the middle of the Path but there was no friction or object to slow my own way forward. I could zip by this human, but having no hope of gaining traction in my present state of uncontrolled corporeal thrust, the thick, vertical fabric of her outer clothing (for I could now smell her sex) promised a gripping respite from a splattered death against the far wall. I did what I must do, directed all my effort towards ascending that dark cylindrical rise of textured folds in a milieu of spectral light and glare. Whatever might occur, it could not but be magnificent, wrapped as it was in such an aura.

Up I went in a nanosecond, vaulted from the shoe welt to the glimmering contour of the cow-leather upper and up again to the reassuring feel of thick materiality, and finally to the peak of vulnerable flesh. I clung to a supple smoothness that I know now was the soft, finely wrinkled skin of her cheek. My heart stopped beating. There was no next move. It was her turn.

And she took it. As one might expect, she reacted with animal instinct. With a wild blitz of motion she would rid herself of the present danger, of the parasite clinging absurdly to her upper body. As she held my jaws between her sheepwooly hands and began to squeeze all breath from me, I could feel the direct pressure on my voice box, the crushing of the vibrating lips that let the song out. Even in a conflating moment of life and death, a dark irony cast a balm over the pain. My eyes closed, I saw nothing of what I felt through every cell of my wriggling body as all sense of being there vanished.

I have no recollection of hitting the floor. No clue as to the length and breadth of my unconscious state. I recall attending to the slowly receding flicker I now suspect was the luminous footwear that first attracted me. I took a
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strange comfort in that recognition; in the fading echo of the click, click, click of heel to floor. More unsettling was the blurry sighting of the boxy blue forms that silently crept towards the vanishing point of my perspective. Blue devils. Their presence, though waning, excited a blitz of fear sufficient to force my aching body upright. I began a slow, painful crawl from the center of the Path to the relative safety of the plinth along the wall. From here, with luck, I could make my way unnoticed to the refuge of the Hole.

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This story could and will be told several times in many ways, unfolding with a curious Rashomon effect. The thoughtful reconstituting of BΩB’s own experience exhibits a surprising dexterity of worldview. He continues as though speaking to another audience:

I have no means of comparing my Rodentia sense of timespace to that of other species. In my way, I am careful not to project the perception and affection of my realities onto the felt sensations of other’s realities. Such projections are tinged with arrogance and always get me in trouble. I am aware that I don’t know what I don’t know as keenly as I do know what I don’t know. I tend to accept difference in itself and leave it at that as I move on to the next morsel, the next high, the next voicing, the next skid. It seems like a chronological sequence or maybe a choreographic score – a birth-to-death series of tiny events, some charged, some flat, most necessary, some blissfully unnecessary yet ever so satisfying. Especially since that encounter, I have wondered about the differing range and qualities of affective attunement between species, between things, between cousins, between, say, a
grape seed and a bottle cap, a steel screw and a puddle of hot piss, a tendency and a constraint?

How can I grasp what she felt that day without falling prey to a species-specific worldview? Now I realize humans do this all the time, anthropomorphize, they can’t help themselves even though they’re supposedly smart enough to know better. The jury is out on this problem – hung. I can gauge the intensity of trans-species survival instincts; of a choke and a swat and the urgency of flight much better than I can the irrational lure of the bright-bright diffraction of those damn shoes that threw me off my game that morning. Living, it would seem, entails the orderly distillation of sensation, indeterminately cast into the chaosmos that provides its very oxygen.

All that said, I am left with the uneasy yet exhilarating feeling that we two have somehow mingled; now share common agents that do their immanently microcosmic work in our very different architectures of being. What passed between us that day may well be more than matter. It may be something that comes to matter. And yes, I know that’s a lightweight pun but I utter it because I feel it occurring. Why? How? I just somehow knew she’d return to the scene. And she did.

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Some time, not much, passed. I was weak but I summoned enough energy to hobble back through the Hole to a shadowy corner near the Path exit. Before indulging in a necessary period of hermetic restoration, I needed to sniff out the traces of what had occurred. Give myself something to think about during my lonely recovery. As I hid in the shadows of the Path I knew she too was near. I sensed she too was wary, sniffing. Instinctively, without
agitation, I opened my mouth, my conviction amplified perhaps by my drugged state of Spiritus pain sublimation. As I puffed up my chest cavity with deep inhales, my tortured vocal folds emitted what I can only describe as dissonant sonorities that frankly, shocked me. Gyo. The tonal qualities, in concert with the sheer exertion of expression, were like nothing I have ever heard or produced. I can’t quite believe they vibrated solely from my body, from the sorely injured tissue substrates of my folds. The point I’m getting at is – she heard me. This is a biological impossibility of course, human hearing cannot ordinarily exceed 20 kHz and that’s a pleasure only young humans imbibe in. Reactively agile though she is, she is most definitely no longer young. Besides, the extraordinary bandwidth of my voice that day, cracking and fluctuating though it was, spun out to heights that challenged the limits my own ability to feel sound. Something is doing. Something peculiar is afoot.

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_now curled into a ball of filthy fur, squeezed into a secure pocket of his burrow, B⊗B recuperates. This will take some time. Free to brain wander, his rat thoughts turn from the solitary figure of the statuesque woman to the forbidding menace of the blue ones._