All was in ordered disorder. *Tattarrattat*, or “RatTat,” wasn’t showing any signs of disappearing, maintaining a healthy glow. The latex continued to suffocate her hands. She was teaching herself to attack a keyboard with limited sensation in her fingertips, causing more typos than usual. But she was getting the hang of it.

On this fine afternoon of bursting spring green and yellow crocus, she searched for online diagnoses of spectral scarring symptoms, and basically anything she can find on rats. She’s been at this for more than two months but today she happens on a provocative hyperlink. Transfixed, she copy–pastes some excerpts to her digital notebook:

> CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — At the University of Illinois, a new study claims that in order to reduce a loss of vocal intensity in the muscles of the aging larynx, older rats train their vocal folds. This condition called presbyphonia is faced by many humans as they age. In a young, healthy larynx the vocal folds completely open and close during vibration. This creates little bursts of air we hear as sound. Aging causes degeneration in the muscle, resulting in a weakened voice that becomes easily fatigued by the efforts to communicate.

[...]
Vocalizations of the rat species are ultrasonic and therefore above the range of human hearing. Through the use of special recording techniques that lower their frequency, humans are able to perceive rat calls. These sounds are similar to birdsong. In studying human vocal characteristics, rats are ideal subjects as they vocalize with similar neuromuscular mechanisms.

Images of rat studies of all types are plentiful online. She’s taken to printing them and pinning them up on the wall opposite her desk, an old habit from her studio years. They provide graphic evidence of the laboratory testing that buoy the superficially uplifting context of the “singing rat” project. All the ethical conundrums ping-ponging in her head come out to play. She stares at the flayed images of rat organs. Her sense of smell, lately hyper-accentuated to the point of extreme discomfort within a four meter range of any dumpster, piss-soir, or perfumed woman, kicks into her imaginary as the scent of formaldehyde mingles with the Tibetan incense she burns to mask a profusion of scents she has not yet learned to tolerate.

Circumspect, she removes the gloves and squirts another drop of Purello on her hands for comfort. This action is by now obsessive compulsive but she can’t worry about the pathological consequences as she closes her eyes and feels the billion cells of her body dying and dividing, feels the scavenger macrophage cells devouring the dead ones. She’s exfoliating at an accelerated pace or so it seems when her tongue advances to her forearms, biceps, and shoulders in her extended ritual. She is, for now, a tribe of one, inculcated by masses of other ones, on the move. She is quasi. Almost. Quasimodo. She says it out loud. “Quasi-modo!” It rings true.