Last Year at Betty and Bob's: A Novelty

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Published by Punctum Books

Doruff, Sher.
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I will get to my story of the tall woman’s return to the Path but I first want to tell of my slow jiwa jiwa through the Hole and my convalescence. I will use aspects of my personal articulation modus of feelings, states, actions, and things as sound words because often there is no other means of expression suitable. A young GenTel, cross-bred with ultrasonic hearing for a military career, once coded me in something very close to my own speak after a semi-public rehearsal when I was still juvenile. I was in mediocre voice that day. I heard, or thought I heard, a response wafting through a ventilation duct: Chuu Chuu, potsun nee. U wai wai alzop eeeeee do man ga. Do man ga. I understood the message to be:

"YOU AM [SIC] NOT ALONE. YOU SING AS THE MAN GOES TO DO. DO IT."
I didn’t know then and don’t know now what to make of this cryptogram. It could imply that we rats have developed phonetics similar to a graphic form in a human comic tradition called “Manga.” I have eaten these colorful words from the newsstand debris on occasion. But I digress ...

As the blue ones disappeared into the vanishing point of my perspectival view that day, I stumbled my way to the sideboard as quickly as I could manage. Still gasping for air through my damaged tracheal apparatus, I dreaded the arrival of a uniform to swat my pura pura from this life, incinerate my remains in the enormous fire container in the outside eating area where we often find a plentiful stockpile of rotting tidbits. Moku archai. I was aware of my exaggerated fura yora, not so different from my awkward posture during a tsura on the Path. I could feel the tremble of my hands and feet as I slowly progressed towards the Hole. I conjured a cloud of invisibility around my body to protect me. Koso. The terrifying tsun nuuu scent of PC pet Blue Billy in the Box, lingered in my perfectly functioning snout. He, Billy, ignored my own odor that day, remaining demurely, inexplicably, silent. Perhaps he smelled death without resistance and it bored him.

How long this jiwa jiwa took me I cannot say but I was beyond exhaustion when I reached the entrance to the Hole. Few of my clan use this route as its proximity to the Path holds little interest for most, my cousin and I aside. Once through the ass-tight cavity I could follow any one of a dozen burrows to the comfort of my own favorite nest, my Castle Keep, the chamber in the labyrinth that is my crib, my cell, my homey home. I’ve gouged out several smaller chambers for food storage and evasion, as one must anticipate all types of intruder. We rats favor a single chamber in which to stretch and huddle our weariness from the light and sparkle of the Upper World,
its marvels a mixed bag. As with many species I have en-
countered, a personal Inside is necessary to deflect the
never-ever-over assault of the spectacular Outside, the
always-on chaosmos. In any case, in the aftermath of the
Path encounter, the need for a quiet space had never felt
more necessary.

Safely composed in my nest I began to lick my wounds.
Vigorously, incessantly, dondon. As my tongue is a well-
honed athletic muscle, the enunciator of my vocal utter-
ances, I’ve developed several techniques for this. There
is bero bero, an aggressive licking action recommended
for serious wounds, bacterial illness and post-trauma-
tic stress. Pero pero, a softer more sensuous comforting
stroke, wet with memories of my mother’s sweet tongue
on my gritty fur, follows.

Once I’d completed the twice daily healing and cleans-
ing ritual, I would sleep. Deeply. Doyon. I would dream,
often finding myself exploring a foreign burrow and
its maze of endless dirty, dimpled cavities or venturing
from room to room in a huge, object strewn Upper World
house. I scamper, I skid. On occasion I float, hands and
feet splayed out like a winged bat, high above the scenic
display of my allusions. I tend to remember the dreams
I don’t understand, ones with abstract, nonlinear sto-
rylines that pretend to be full of meaning but have noth-
ing rational to offer. I will try to tell this recurring dream
so it makes some sense but of course it will not:

Folds. Everywhere there are lush doublings of every type to
scamper across and through. The windows on the ground floor
serve as an entrance hole to this two-story architecture that is
home to someone not present. Soft winds and animals such as
myself rush through these openings from the outer milieu, teas-
ing the interior things into new forms. Curtains both velvety
thick and diaphanously transparent rearrange their drape. All
is in motion, sasa. Bits of loose paper, wadded, marked, and creased are pushed by my ample snout around the parquet floor. Puffed, puu, and pliant pillows are reshaped by the weight of my diving body. Textures. Folds. Fun. Material reality. I entertain the thought that as an outsider in this place, I exert a force upon it, even of the most Pikachu insubstantial kind. I shift the position of a dustball, crumple a curtain crease, drop a shit pile in the corner. I’m a parasite in the host center of a cyclone.

Adventure gets the better of my instincts and I hazard forward via the steep accordion fold of a mahogany staircase, working my way towards the windowless upper floor. Once in this chamber, I experience the ineffable. I’m lucidly aware of my dreaming yet it’s still extraordinary. An experience of unpredictable variability assails my presence with the force of an oncoming wave. The intensity of a folding continuum pushes through me. Needing a visual to anchor the spin, I thrillingly recall the glossy image of a big blue wave I sat on in a garbage heap somewhere. I cruise the feeling, maintaining my balance with more prowess than I ever managed in a skid. Hallucinations can be very forgiving. Part water rat, part wet t-shirt in a washing machine spin cycle, I ride it well, screaming an exuberant Aiiiii! as I move through and with other force fields far greater than my own.

Exhausted by the exertion I stop to breathe deeply, claws sunk in the sway of a textured curtain. My relaxation doesn’t last long. Eyes wide shut I again witness the specter of a tsunami of great height and strength hovering in suspension above my body in freeze frame. This force, once unleashed, is impossible to fight or ride.

I wait for the water to break.

*
The urgent twitch of a bursting bladder abruptly aborts the dream. Relieving myself, I recognize the labyrinthine comfort of my burrow with its low ceiling and contoured walls, its claustrophobic coziness, in blatant contrast to my somni-fantasy of the Outside. Tumbling between these realities makes me woozy. I often wish I could control the sensations of my not-yet conscious state as much as I savor the surprise of the uncontrollable. As I recover my strength post-trauma, these images recur in one form or another in nearly every sleep cycle. Like the wave itself, I experience again and again a rolling cartoonish dreamscape fraught with dramatic ups and downs. Still vivid, I remember longing for an unopened package of fluffy marshmallow balls while in the thrall of suspense. I recall the flight line skewered through an incongruous hole in the exposed beam ceiling far above my head, illuminating the foamy crest of the hovering waveform. I cling to this light hole as an anchor in a turbulent topology. I guess this is a tendency of mine. Clinging for dear life to tethers when awash in too much motion; when in a precarious state of balance between an inside that is outside that is inside. This being between, hugging fast to a line that is the porous membrane between worlds, is hard work. It’s *shiwa shiwa* – Life in the Wrinkles.