Last Year at Betty and Bob's: A Novelty

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Smothered in malodorous layers of salvaged sheep woolies, Blue Betty, once a chronic insomniac when an up-and-comer yuppie, sleeps in the open urban air as the dead do. Millennial passers-by continue on, phone to ear. Sleep. It’s a stunning perk in an otherwise precarious life. Bob, usually nearby, also sleeps deeply but does not, or cannot, enjoy the resilience REM cycles afford. Perhaps his resistance evokes an irreversible hereditary responsibility to stand guard? She really doesn’t care, happy that she gets enough night rest to trapse through the next day, pushing the stuff of their conjoined lives on their rolling home like mutant turtles. She’s been a certified Pest Controller for two years and is beginning to take a certain pride in her achievements and skills, surprised to encounter satisfaction in the most menial of service professions. Still, she only displays her PC badge for strategic purposes.

Wiping crusty ochre sleepdust from the corners of her eyes, she reruns one of last night’s many internal flicks. She had always hoped to become a serious a writer, a novelist, an investigative journalist, maybe a librettist. Her Master’s degree in Comparative Literature had never helped her professionally advance beyond producing creative advertising copy. Her most memorable yet fleet-
ing success was her campaign for a vegan franchise that played on the ’80s “Where’s the beef?” slogan with a stu-
pid knock knock joke spin-off.

Knock knock.  
Where’s the Beef?  
On the cow, on the cow!  
(Repeat Chant ...)

An obnoxious mantra, it took on a short-lived earworm status until it naturally faded from advert slot-time, con-
signed to the compost heap of perishables. Having exhib-
ited limited skills in this field, she was one of the first in her advertising firm to be made redundant in the midst of yet another non-credible financial crisis. Initially, she took the blow with grace. Relishing a bit a freedom from work-
place demands, taking time off to travel. Four months of vigorous globetrotting wafted into four years of inertia. Savings exhausted, all prospects soon followed suit. Given her composure during employment interviews was alarm-
ingly unstable, she found herself spinning in a monoto-
rous loop, a mouse in a wheel. Awaiting extinction.

Now wide awake, Betty’s latest dalliance with the surreal had triggered the memory of a transparent Visible Woman doll she was given on her twelfth birthday from her fa-
ther. Immobilized for a summer, she was recovering from the bite of a fierce German Shepherd. Two skin graft op-
erations left a scar in the shape of a cumulus cloud on her left calf. Her hip flesh was now forever plastered over her upper soleus muscle. At the time, she thought the medical mannequin an odd gift. Doubtless her father was inspired to direct her trauma towards colorful, mucous-
free, plastic organs encased in an expressionless, mature female body. The ironic name of the gutsy educational toy did not escape her notice.
This morning, crumpled in an exterior corner enclave of a granite hi-rise, warmed by the steamy residue rising from a manhole cover, she wondered about the present state of her entrails. What colors, what shapes, would her eviscerated intestines, her liver, her spleen reveal if exposed to the chilly spring air? The perfectly bloodless Visible Woman meets the imperfectly homeless Invisible Woman. Fate, mektoub, kismet – that causeless meta-effect worshipped by many, is way too fickle for her taste. She prefers to put her betting money on dreams. One day she’ll win the Lotto big time. One day she’ll grow young and take a long thrilling skid in the Corridor, leaving her trolley and her pathetic husband in the dust. One day she’ll fly.

Months ago, in a rare spirit of fairness, Betty’d agreed that Bob could lug around his volcanic model if she could keep her stash of memorabilia. Stretching her cramped legs, she rose this fine morning on the prowl for her favorite useless item. Dexterously she rearranged the dent-ed cardboard boxes on the cart, careful to not rouse the sleeping Billy. Now, right now, she wanted to touch it. Folded away in a box marked “STUFF”, buried underneath a packet of old love letters, a feminista “Blonde Betty” button and a faded “Best All Around Girl” ribbon from third grade, lay a bright scarlet unitard and cape, the remnants of a wild, orgiastic costume party two decades ago. She’d once had a pair of matching latex gloves and slippers but had misplaced them. Eyes closed, lightly caressing the synthetic fabric, she grafted wonder woman superpowers onto cellulite flesh.

As her physical strength slowly dissipates, she’ll one day be forced to reconsider the value of her belongings solely
on the basis of their material weight and is as yet unde-
cided whether this is disturbing or liberating criteria.