Last Year at Betty and Bob's: A Novelty

Sher Doruff

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B⊗B wasn’t sleeping well lately. If he managed to doze off his dreams would wake him. He’d been anxious and couldn’t quite grasp why. His voice, different, was fit in a fresh way. Dazzling even, if one had ears for the experimentally unpretty. He couldn’t help but notice that he now had a younger following of walkabout rats with an adventurous taste in soundings. He enjoyed the revival of his status though the praise he garnered was often for his epic recuperative efforts. Publicly he was flourishing. Privately he was unhinged.

Adjusting to the effects of rabid insomnia was a matter of real concern. This, he reckoned, was the one annoying fly in the ointment of his total recovery. Prior to his encounter with the woman on the Path he had gone about his daily activities in an habitual mode: sleep, dream, wake, fuck, gather foodstuffs, fuck, eat copiously, lick, fuck, eat again, lick again, skid (depending on conditions), lick, sleep, hallucinate ... Begin again. Just as day and night conflate in the recesses of his burrow, his dream actions neatly fold into his waking wanderings. His dream state experiences used to be every bit as bold as his hyper-sensory awareness while out and about. The incident on the Path and its subsequent effects had momentarily brought the pervasiveness of multiple realities to his attention.
Now, with perpetual lack of sleep, he was thoroughly dull around the edges, often dangerously pushing his exertions beyond the limits of his fatigue. The irregular fits and starts of his somni-being were tangibly diminishing his experience of the Outside. As he hoped for an average-to-long life span this weakened intensity was worrying. It did not bode well.

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_Rattus norvegicus_ are notorious neophobes. Novelty is threatening, though this effect is easily overcome as suspicion of the new gets old fast.

Habitual practice has proved throughout millennia to be a decent survival mechanism for some species. One habit, given BØB’s present state of anxious tiredness, is becoming problematic. His Spiritus intake. Though a long-term daily doser, his consumption pre-encounter was tempered, even modest. Since that critical moment, a stinging feeling of desperation often overpowers his restlessness as he lies awake in his anechoic crib. On many afternoons, his unease prompts him to slip unto to the Path to lick himself to a dumb stupor. This is a dubious strategy as the POMOC is more peopled during these hours and his way back to the Hole is hampered by a stumbling, inebriated gait. Intoxication as sleep inducer is an unreliable treatment method. Sometimes however, the volatile mix of untamable imagining and unnamable panic obliterates all good sensing. Impulsively, he will erupt in a fit of perilous behavior.

Outside, evening colored the light black. BØB stirred in Castle Keep. Having dined on a family of termites unwisely camped in the main passageway of his palace, he managed to steal a few sleep cycles, dreaming yet again
of the house with the curtains and the cushy pillows and the hole in the ceiling through which the tremendous draft of outer forces swept him from his hands and feet in the whirling bliss of a palpable unknown. As he dozed he heard a sounding from his gut, from a resonant body-space gouged deep beneath the taut vibrations of his vocal folds.

On cue, the familiar rhythms of the turbulent air crescendo in the emergence of the inevitable tidal wave hovering above his head. With ambiguous purpose it is at once the foreboding jaw of devouring hunger and the consuming comfort of a safeplace. Zappaan! He’s never fearful when inside this recurring image yet it often wakes him with a feeling of irresolution.

Because it’s so infrequent now, he takes his dreaming seriously. He apprehends more than usual these days as the folding convolutions of his waking and stuttering sleeping life produce uncanny nuance. The sensational top floor of his baroque dreamhouse reverberates in his lair. Multiple realities feed on each other in a masterly knead-
ing movement. How many holes inhabit this topology he wonders? Two is already too much.

His thoughts divert momentarily to his favorite eating spot outside, The Scentuous Bakery. He feels hungry as he frivolously counts nine openings: mouth, anus, eyes, ears, nostrils, urethra, but only three present a credible thoroughfare of in and out. He’s hypersensitive to this as all rats – field, lab, and city – have an innate orientation for entrance, exit, and escape holes. Speculation tends to intensify his hunger. Scraps of the holey bagel on his mind, he decides on the bakery kitchen for his first meal.

A walk-in establishment without the usual array of tables and upholstered chairs, the comings and goings here are quick and efficient. Crusty and baked doughmeat are amply littered beneath the main counter. In the kitchen area, raw flour, always a treat, is plentiful. He long ago plotted the optimal hours of invasion of this place. The baker’s trade suits the normal rhythm of his existence. With the help of siblings, a hole has been carved in a room behind the kitchen where the food supplies are kept. It’s easy prey if a rat knows to avoid the ridiculous traps placed in obvious nooks.

His health restored, BØB whets a now voracious appetite on the prospect of midnight breakfast. It feels so good to crave Upper World food again. The strangling encounter on the Path had caused his salivary gland to malfunction among other complications. Besides an incessantly dry mouth and difficulties swallowing, his desire for tasty bits evaporated. It provoked him to wonder in his endless awake moments whether salivating made him hungry or hunger made him salivate? It was a chicken and egg ques-
tion he supposed. An ontological puzzle that kept him from feeling sorry for himself.
All organs and appendages working properly again, he breaks through the loose mortar hole in the kitchen’s west wing.