Last Year at Betty and Bob's: An Adventure

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I hardly knew her. We were young then. She was quiet, mostly, not as annoying as the rest of us. I guess we thought it suited her, given she was an aspiring poet while we were all into rowdiness, performance art, punk. I went with her to slams a few times when she was feeling adventurous. She rarely revved up with the rest of the crowd keeping her eyes on the filthy floor, fastidiously avoiding the dog shit piles saying to me, “yum, my little adventure.” People roared for Patti but Blue liked the lesser knowns. She preferred the monthly open readings of work in progress at the church. The Wednesday Night series was pretty good most of the time.

There was a sadness in Blue that I couldn’t access. Not sure any one could, maybe Red, maybe mama bear White. Blue wore her disorientation, maybe it was grief, or fear, literally on her sleeve. She had a 2×2 patch of cerulean blue that she safety-pinned to every garment. Usually on her left sleeve but sometimes over a nipple, on her crotch, on a navy blue beret. Red had this extroverty cape but Blue was discreet. That’s what I remember.

Oh yeah, another thing. She got a job. A real job, not the waitron thing we all did to pay the rent. She joined the enemy though she fiercely defended this move as sub-
versive activism. “Fucking Mad Ave bullshit” I told her. I didn’t buy her proposition at all. I said it to her face, said she was a sellout. She cried and I felt terrible for a millisecond cuz we all have needs and desires complicated by nature and nurture issues. But I mean, come on. This was extreme. I remember that when she regained a bit of composure I continued in a milder but nonetheless agitated tone. I accused her of selling out because she could. Because her white privilege gave her the option to rent a one bedroom in a highrise with a doorman (has there ever been a woman in one of those uniforms? I’ve never seen one). She stood up for herself though. Snarled at my generic politics. Said she knew what she had to do and anyway, she was a sucky poet so she needed to find an authentic way to voice her voice. “You ever listen to those Stan Freberg radio commercials? They’re the most brilliant thing ever. Ever!” she screamed at me. “If I could do that I’d die happy. Omaha! Listen to that and tell me all advertising is a sellout. Pity the poor gypsy since Salada came along … OK, dicey racial profiling now but brilliant in ’61… Today the pits, tomorrow the wrinkles. Prunes, Bob, prunes! I mean it’s great, it’s, it’s … powerful!” I recall this passionate exertion exhausted her. She sat down to catch her breath. After a minute I asked her if she thought she was as funny as Freberg? Silently she went over to the record collection, a motley assortment of dusty LPs and 45s. She rifled through the discs and easily found what she was looking for. Put the needle down in a groove that spat out a dry Sgt. Joe Friday interrogation:

“11:45am. I saw a little girl in a blue hood. I stopped to question her. Pardon me ma’am. Could I talk to you for just a minute ma’am?”
“What about?” “Nothing much, just wanna ask you a few questions ma’am. What’s your name ma’am?” “Little Blue Ridin’ Hood.” “Where you going ma’am?” “Grandma’s house.” “Yes ma’am. Whadyaya got in the basket?” “What ya tryin to say? I got something in the basket I shouldn’t have?” “No ma’am I didn’t say that.” “Then why ya askin me
all these questions for?” “Just routine ma’am, we just wanna get the facts. May I have a look in that basket ma’am?” “Be my guest.” “Let’s see ... sawed off shotgun, knife, bludgeon, box of dumdum bullets ... nothing suspicious here. All right ma’am, we might want to talk to you later so don’t leave the woods.”

Was she being funny with me? Pointing out a comic irony? A prophecy? I couldn’t figure it out then and still can’t. Now, that basket coulda been shoulda been Red’s handbag. Our for real Red Riding Robin Hood but anyway ... basta. The Freberg nugget ended that conversation. That was the last time I saw Blue. She went deep into the woods.