Last Year at Betty and Bob's: An Adventure

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part 2

MASHING

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A colour is eternal. It haunts time, like a spirit. It comes and
goes. But where it comes, it is the same colour. It neither survives
nor does it live. It appears when it is wanted.

– A.N. Whitehead, Science in the Modern World

Although a monster Geryon could be charming in company.

– Anne Carson, Autobiography of Red
Blue on Red

Email to self, email to self!
I.e., best way to have a true blue conversation and store it indefinitely. I have no fuckin’ clue who I think I’m addressing, probably my demons. In any case, it feels good to ramble with words rather than hauling my big ass from point to point to connect life dots.

Logged on to a library computer as I tend to do on our monthly sweep for vermin. Bob and I always bring the fellows we catch here to the Uni-3 lab coz we feel they’ve consumed a formidable education. Our little joke that generally makes the whitecoats cheerily add a few units to our wages.

Anyway, I found out that Red fell, found out she passed. Saw it on BuzzFeed of all places. Checked the NYT obit and sure enough The Bettys had a nice bit in there that linked to ShazDada’s eulogy. The official family entry was a big nothin’ list of survivors. Missed the point of her. The Bs retired her color, just like they did for me.

Crap, this is unexpected. Or maybe not. Red was reckless for sure. As reckless as I am stupid. I was sure she’d only notched up five of her nine lives though. Can’t believe I actually fondled that red cape last week in a nostalgic fit
for the good ole days. She lent it to me for a wild party way back when. Said it would be queer for me to dress in her color, abandon my quiet blue self for a moment of fiery presence. I remember wondering if I’d actually come off as a fuckin’ flyin’ purple people eater when our colors merged? Decided that would be OK if it happened but it didn’t really.

I was red but fake. Synthetic red, phony red. I remember sitting in a corner observing the swingers. They reveled in my lurking participation. Brought me wine and olives in lieu of other succulents. Even as they tried to seduce me into their artiness I insisted on – how did Adrian Piper say it? – something about isolating consciousness from sensory input, to the aversion of the objective gaze. But I didn’t quite manage like Piper did that night at Max’s. I also never confessed to Red that I was an awkward coward even protected by super-shero duds. Red for a day. Blue, blue, sad blue always otherwise.

Just watched the YouTube video of Sheb Wooley singin’ that song I danced to as a little kid. The one that made me wanna be in a rock and roll band when I grew up. Cutesy monster that one. Probably responsible for a generation of baby boomers having rock and roll wet dreams…. Shit, I hate the digressions I inevitably take sitting at this f***ing portal. My mind was on Red, my heart was with Red and I end up tapping my boot to purple prose. Been accused of that by the way, when I was a student at Uni-5. Failed creative writing twice. Excessive drivel production they told me. Find another field. I did. Advertising, ha. Cut that drivel to the bone.
Back to Red B. I remember meeting her for the first time at FOOD. We were both into GM-C’s holey architecture and Carol’s cooking. Red was vegetarian of course, later vegan. I was into Matta-Bones dinners. I made a chicken leg necklace from one such occasion. We argued about that and I think we had a kind of love–hate relationship. I wish I still carried that bangle around in my safeguard box. But yeah, I admired her like hell. Marxist, feminist rabble-rouser that she was. We had a knockdown once while forking chunky soup over Betty Friedan’s refusal to let the lezzies in. Betty F was squarish but effective I thought. Red dissed and hissed her homophobic views. Red was into Angela. I was dancing in the middle of the road.

I loved the way Red laughed. She’d let out a howl when something touched her unexpectedly. An unadulterated whoop. Yeah, she was ballsy and in-your-face but had a bite like a kitty after two glasses of cheap wine and potato stew. She wore her dark hair long and pulled back with a rubber band so she had unobstructed sightlines at all times (and ugly split ends I might add). I remember her big feet, her size 11 shoe. That memory struck me when I read she slipped from the TAP netting. Seems so unlikely such a big foot would lose its grip. But there you go. If ShazDada would interview me again and ask what I recall most vividly about Red I’d have to say .... Well, I’d have to recount all my sexy dreams that involved reds rolling around on white sheets with blues and the purple haze that spewed from that damp melting like an aura, like a goddamn bird on the wing. And believe me, there is no allusion in any way to political compromise here. This is pure desire goin’ on. I admit it’s an unorthodox way of eulogizing a friend but those wet dreams have stayed with me .... They speak to Red’s energy, her sexual playfulness (and she was hot).
Now I also gotta state here that she was a bona fide activist with a sometimes debilitating reticence to join whatever bandwagon. I remember the anguished story she recounted at a Betty party. I could probably tell this to Shaz as RB told it. She was carrying a cherry bomb in a mob (né multitudes né resistance fighters) set to burn a campus ROTC building in an agitated era. After twenty minutes of escalating “Fuck the Pigs” chanting to get the revolutionary juices boiling, the air in her activist balloon burst and she split the scene. Walking off the campus she ex-cor-i-a-ted herself. Was she a coward? Why did she crave a more articulate political discourse than “Fuck the Pigs” for carrying out violent action? She respected the Panthers’ anti-cop refrain but doubted whether the jargon translated to anti-war protest. It did, it didn’t. I think I will, I think I won’t. I think I will I think I won’t. She had a tendency to overthink everything, see what I mean. She’d been a committed pacifist. Studied the Quakers, Gandhi, MLK. She was devastated by the escalation of the war and felt a need to explore other approaches. Even considered procuring a gun. She said the army building burned without her contribution that day. Her sparks weren’t required. Honestly, I think she had the chops to survive any dystopian scenario but then again, she didn’t did she?

Bluesy Bob is off in the stacks. I can hear him grunting. He brought his volcanic sex toy along this time. His darling Vesuvius, his Mount Saint Helen’s. Gross I say, but I can’t deny him his holey perversity as long as it don’t hurt anybody.

The library gigs are always the best evening of our monthly trappings meaning we don’t do much rat catching work and rather enjoy the peaceful surroundings of the books and the comfy chairs and of course the network link to other worlds. Burroughs used to talk about portals.
of entry in art works. Blue Bob’s got his own portal goin’ on. I got mine. This smudgy public keyboard with every kind of crumb in the key cracks, and the dark surface of its dated low-res monitor are all I need to transport from complicated bare life to a complex pixelated reality. The librarians, Mrs. Beverly and Mr. T. Zhang, are counting sheep at home under their down duvets in these early hours. They aren’t around to kindly suggest we evacuate these public premises.

Took a poop break. I like the toilets here, the marble floors. Feeling much better now.

Where was I? Oh yeah ...
Each month when I sit down at the computer screen I like to research a prominent Betty among other necessaries. Had a go already at quite a few.
Bette Davis,
Betty Shabazz,
Betty Friedan (check),
Betty White,
Betty Ford,
Betty Hill,
Betty Crocker,
Betty Danko,
Betye Saar (check),
Betty Catroux,
Betty Grable,
Betty Berzon,
Betty Hawley Kelso,
Bettie Page,
Betty Everett,
Betty Cooper,
Betty Boop (check>black esther jones or white helen kane?),
Betty Ting,
Betty Rubble,
Aunt Betty (the ubiquitous),
Betty Blue.

True, Blue Betty the rat catcher, that’s me, will never have a Wikipedia page. I’ll get my anonymous tick on the Worldometer when I pass. Maybe. If I have ID on me. But for now I’ve got no place to store a paper archive or for that matter a digital archive though I lifted a thumb drive for that purpose should I ever find a port. And then there’s my tumblr account. So I try to keep the info in my head for some purpose sometime. Memorize and recite the litany of namesakes. All of ’em are mostly very old or long dead. Gotta wonder if the name will have a comeback or if it’s hopelessly antiquarian?

Anyway, today I stumbled on Betty Parsons. Never heard of her before. A gallerist and painter. Found this snip from a 1977 interview:

**INTERVIEWER**: Do you feel the feminist movement should deal with the problems of getting along with men, and not be separate.

**PARSONS**: I think the whole point of life, as dear old Shakespeare said, “Their going hence, even as their coming hither: Ripeness is all.”

**INTERVIEWER**: Ripeness?

**PARSONS**: To be integrated, to be ripe, to go on. We’re all part of everything.

Ripeness, eh? Will ponder that as I pinch my luxuriant love handles. Seems like she liked Spaniels. Probably purebred as she had money. Now our Billy, he’s no hot-de-trot pedigree but he’s a champ most of the time. On library nights we keep him in the toilet area so he doesn’t pick up the scent of *Rattus norvegicus*. If we do catch any here we want ’em, as I said, alive, for their exchange value at the
The Infectious Disease unit pays ten a head. The rats are never pathogen free, SPF as the whitecoats call it, but these guys tend to harbor fewer parasites than the street and subway dudes. But anyway, lookin’ into Betty Parsons made me think of Betye Saar again. She was younger than Betty P but I doubt they knew each other. Doubt Betty would have been interested in showing Betye, know what I mean. AbEx’ers had their own thing going in those days. Relational color, shape, non-objecthood. A complicated subject—object sublimity. Says here that Betty P supported Agnes Martin besides all the name-brand male painters of the day. Betye, rather, loves the emotional histories of second hand objects. I get that, understand the urge and wish I could lug around all the stuff I’d like to. I touch, fondle, and move on. I’m what they call, well what some folks call, haptic. Here’s a nice bit from Betye:

I am a mixed media collage, assemblage, and installation artist. The concepts of passage, crossroads, death, and rebirth have been underlying elements in much of my work. My art continues to move in a creative spiral. Much of my current work is about issues of race and gender; a return to my concerns of 1972 and The Liberation of Aunt Jemima. Mystery and beauty remain constant forces behind my creative energy. This is the energy that spins the spiral. — Betye Saar

Mystery, beauty, spirals ... I can never bring myself to admit those are my touchstone as well. Seems ridiculously beyond the scope of a blue PC such as myself.

“Alas poor Yorick of infinite jest.
How now, a ratty rat!”
“But sir what’s in a name at best”
“A rose is a rose is a brat.”

... Betye ... just read this ... her granddaughter interviewed her about lightness, darkness, race, and death.
SA: Your new *Black White* show [...] is about the dichotomy of lightness and darkness and the racial undertones [*sic*] language that pertains to color. Does the concept of lightness and darkness in death relate to that?

BS: In Western culture, death is depicted as black. But in African culture, death is represented with the color white. Bones are white.

Now this touches on something I think about a lot these days. I wonder if Betty Bob knows her, Betye? Probably. If I recall it well, he was just beginning to develop his own color theory based on some kind of new calculus that exploded additive and subtractive color dynamics. I’ve always been dismal at physics so I could never follow his logics. He was a bit too smart for me and too well dressed though he said he loved blue. But I have no say in The Bettys any more. I abandoned them. I’m in perpetual hiding even though I’m totally exposed on the streets. The PC cloak grants me invisibility. No one looks at me. Ever. Kinda like Piper’s enforced invisibility. But different.

[ Went to check on Bob Blue. He’s in full slumber mode, fetal position, dick in hand. ]

So I’m still at the terminal. Using the pre-dawn hours to drift away. every now and then I catch my own jowly reflection and I gasp a little. Who’s that sad sack? I mean, that old rumpled broad there, caught in the gap between a Wikipedia page and the flat infinity of the monitor? The blue overcoat, PC standard issue, hangs heavy on my white white bones these days. (Maybe it’s the snack stash in the pockets, maybe the tiny pieces of polished glass I can’t seem to throw away that weigh me down, bend my shoulders in a sad arc of drudging onward til the end. Maybe it’s these damn heavy boots. (Aside to self – that acronym for Pest Control we gotta wear is a real kicker somebody didn’t see comin’).
I don't hear Bob snoring any more. Probably still crumpled in Dewey D aisles 610 thru 615. 'Bout time Billy’s fed and it’s his turn. My fingers are sore from all this typing. I’m gonna get callouses on the tips and then I can play the uke again without pain. Whoopee! If I had a uke.