

## Of Marmots

A little marmot, forlorn, with drooping ears and a drooping spirit, advances clumsily along an abandoned bicycle path in a fading model of Central Park. He has no name. It does not even know it is a he. I am attributing the male sex to it for the purpose of convenience. It has no notion of a purpose. After all its head is too small to house the notion of a notion, let alone that of a purpose. It has no tail either (no doubt, the result of an unfortunate misadventure). But it has esprit. It has lots of it. It (l'esprit, not la marmotte) is presently shooting out of its little round eyes, fixed, with ever so much determination, on the fading path in front of it, and if you happened to be standing on the path at this very moment, you would have been smitten with the intensity of its glance, the ferocity of its gait, the seriousness of its little face, which made it appear even smaller. It trudged along, carrying the sadness of the entire world on its furry back, occasionally stopping to take a break, leaning against a plastic tree, drawing a quick inventory of its burden, making sure that the universal sadness was still one and universal, that not a single drop of it had fallen away or gotten mixed up with ennui. There was another marmot in charge of universal ennui. Its name was Neville. It was named after Edward Gorey's Neville who died of ennui. Neville. At this moment, Neville was trudging along down some other long-forgotten path, amidst quasi-trees, whose acrylic green had faded back to its natural prototype, whatever that was. La marmotte did not remember what it was. It felt its nostrils twitching. Something was burning. It smelled like plastic. The little marmot let go of universal sadness and lay back over it, smoothing down a few wrinkles here and there. It made a point of being comfortable even when it was wallowing in universal sadness. It lay there thinking, musing, pondering, reflecting, meditating, considering how many synonyms of what it was doing it was capable of summoning. Its hair moved ever so slightly in the rubbery wind flowing steadily over its prostrate little body. For the first time, the little marmot felt how little it was and how universal its unlikely mattress. It fell asleep. Quietly it dreamed of Neville.

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Neville was sick of being in other people's dreams. Not to mention marmots'. Marmots' dreams are the worst. Neville stopped. It looked down, thereby activating the super-small digital map implanted in the toenail of its sixth toe. It had never been proud of that sixth toe (no doubt the result of an unfortunate misadventure or a misfortunate fortuna, one or the other) but it had to admit that it came in handy in times like this when superfluous gadgets were all that an honest marmot could rely on as it trudged along, earning its daily pumpkin. Neville sighed. It hated pumpkins. Finally the little screen of its reliable toe lit up. Absent-mindedly Neville performed a movement that would later be described as 'scratching' as it bent down to look closer at the screen. It was an interactive toe-screen. Neville touched it but its paws had become so overgrown with hair that the image on the screen was all fuzzy. Let's take a step back and silently enjoy this image for a second: a little marmot, looking down, its hair casually falling over its beady little eyes, with an inquisitive look on its face, the lower lip protruding slightly forward. Neville liked to pout. It did so unconsciously when it was faced with an exceptionally complicated problem. The image on the screen cleared up and lo and behold, amidst the stationary representations of quasi-trees (or was it the trees that were stationary, not the representations), something moved. Neville looked closer. And closer. And closer. Finally, using a special feature of its eyes, of whose existence no one else was aware, Neville zoomed into the image. A tiny hairy dot moved in the lower left corner of the screen. Zoom. Zoom. The dot was still too tiny to identify as this or that. Hairy was the only characteristic one could attribute to it. Neville was too intrigued by the image on the screen to consider attributing anything to the dot. Neville took a step forward. The dot moved. Neville took another step forward. The dot moved again. Not only that but now it was bigger. Neville looked at its feet, startled but pleasantly so by the discovery of unsuspected

zooming capacity in its right foot. Excited and nervous, Neville wrapped the ennui around its head and continued pressing forward. The dot continued getting bigger and bigger without however acquiring any definite physical characteristics. At this point the dot was filling the entire toe-screen. Neville felt the fur on its back drenched in sweat. Under different circumstances Neville would have stopped and rubbed off the sweat but suddenly a feeling of something came over Neville. A strangely familiar feeling, indefinable and because of that familiar. Neville thrust its lower lip even further forward, as if trying to convince itself that it was determined enough not to give up now. How could it give up now? Just when it seemed to have found evidence of another creature, perhaps a fellow marmot, so near...what...a few paths over perhaps? It had never occurred to Neville that there were other paths, other marmots, who knew, perhaps marmots with seven toes. The idea of another marmot stoically trudging along a bicycle path parallel to Neville's threw Neville into some kind of nervous excitement very similar to that usually associated with female characters in a Dostoevsky novel. Yet this other indefinable feeling returned again, replacing the aforementioned short-lived nervous excitement (which, if I may say so, did not really become Neville). Neville was now moving very slowly. At one point it sank to the ground. On one of the branches of a nearby plastic weeping willow, a most colorful plastic parrot stared silently at the little pile of Neville. At this very moment, the dot on Neville's toe-screen disappeared and the creature it represented—our old acquaintance, as you might have guessed, *la marmotte*—stepped on Neville's sixth toe. Naturally, Neville had already died of ennui.

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