

Mr. Smith's Strange Day

And so it began. Tuesday was a strange day for Mr. Smith. He woke in the morning thinking that life was a bit normal (for a change) and then, well before lunch, he realized it was not at all normal. Why, he couldn't say.

It became clear, however, towards the end of the day, that something strange had happened. When he looked back on the morning and the morning's experiences, he discovered that nothing had happened at all. This was strange because he was sure he had spent the morning busily working on several different activities. Upon further reflection, however, it became clear that he couldn't be sure of anything.

After some time, his wife came home from her daily operation. It seemed that at least once a week she went somewhere other than the place she usually went. This was confusing.

After a while it became clear that whatever had been clear moments before, or hours before, it wasn't clear which, was now not clear at all. In fact clarity was something he couldn't even quite remember experiencing. Life goes on, he thought. But then, why wouldn't it?

After some time his wife returned home, having completed another of her daily operations. It wasn't yet entirely clear whether these operations were medical operations conducted in an operating room in a hospital somewhere, probably nearby, or whether these were operations which she performed, which could indeed have been medical in nature or even something completely unrelated to medicine, perhaps an operation of a machine or an operation of some role in the world which she fulfilled each day by operating something or operating herself. It was all very unclear.

Just after lunchtime, the police officer came to the door. He asked Mr. Smith a series of questions about his whereabouts and what he had been doing, and when. Mr. Smith spoke at length, and after many pages of notes scribbled into a small hand-pad, the policeman left. Mr. Smith watched the officer stroll down the front walk and drive away in a patrol car. He wondered what the policeman had written in the note-pad, because it might have contained a clue. Any clue could be important.

Towards early evening Mr. Smith thought to himself, I should get this straightened out. He did the best he could. He called several of his neighbors, with whom he was not terribly familiar, and asked them what had been going on. None of them knew, except one of them said he should mind his flocking business. That confused Mr. Smith, because his business seemed to be nothing at all. Or at least nothing that he could remember doing or conducting. For a moment he wondered if conducting his business was in some sense parallel to his wife's daily operations. Maybe he was operating a business. That's a real possibility, he thought.

But another of his neighbors claimed to have seen him go to work that morning and come home in the afternoon in the usual way. Mr. Smith thought about this and it seemed strange because he was pretty sure he had not gone anywhere all day. This had been a long strange day, and he had been at the house the whole time, waiting, perhaps waiting for his wife to come home after her usual daily operation, or maybe she was conducting something and not operating something. If he was conducting a business, then she might be conducting an operation. Nevertheless, operating and conducting an operation seemed very much like the same thing.

Mr Smith asked his neighbor about the cop, but the neighbor had not seen any policemen lately. The cop might have come on a different day long ago, or not at all. Unless the neighbor was mistaken, or Mr. Smith was mistaken. The policeman may also have been mistaken.

The uncertainties piled upon one another until by nightfall, when it was time to go to bed, Mr. Smith realized there was no point in going to bed because he would never sleep until he had sorted everything out. He sat in the living room, in a large chair that had been there for many years.

After a while, late in the night, but well before dawn, Mr. Smith realized he had not sorted anything out, not anything at all, but there had been a long period of blankness during which nothing had happened, and he had

not had any thoughts. Perhaps this was sleep, he thought, because it seemed very familiar, but looking back, the whole strange day had been very blank. Very blank indeed. Mr. Smith thought, Maybe I've been conducting sleep, or operating sleep. Maybe I have not been awake.

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