

# A conversation overheard by a fly on the wall

By Kelly Lee

"Sir Alveolee, I must tell you very strange story,  
About my trip to the mountains in the south:  
I was with m'lady ascending high to glory,  
When suddenly my meal came out my mouth!"

*"Mr. Ozzi Jen, did you have an ache in your head,  
And were you 8,000 feet high?  
Sounds like something in a paper I read,  
Acute Mountain Sickness; either that, or too much pie!"*

"Sir, when I go up, what happens to me?  
In terms of euphoria I certainly don't feel slighted,  
So happy up there, so full of glee,  
Like there's a party in my head and everyone's invited..."

*"Well, there's a loss of mental function at 9,000 feet,  
And if you think that's bad, wait until you go,  
To high altitude to run in a track meet!  
The oxygen levels in the air become far too low —"*

"Yes Sir!! Your blood oxygen falls way below normal,  
Activating those funny thingies on your inside,  
Peripheral chemoreceptors, to be formal,  
Minute ventilation goes up, with a decrease in carbon dioxide."

*"Good work there, you've got it old chap!  
But too little CO<sub>2</sub> means respiratory alkalosis,  
Your kidneys must excrete HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> to avoid a mishap,  
You want pH back to normal, or at least the closest."*

"That's all well and good Sir Alveolee,  
I also noticed the effect of altitude diuresis,  
When I was up high, I always had to pee!  
But what about that track meet business?"

*"Well, with the case of that high altitude jogging,  
You raise RBC production to assist oxygen delivery,  
But hematocrit goes up too, so beware of clogging,  
If there's too much of that you get cardiac hypertrophy!"*

"Well thank you Sir, I sure learned quite a bit,  
I had no idea why things happened before,  
But now that all the pieces of the puzzle fit.  
Why don't we go for crumpets and talk some more?"