

ZAZEN

Chapter 3—The New Haiku

Up in my attic room the president came on the radio. Another special broadcast. Computers and digital cable hum in unison throughout the nation:

War A is going well and no longer a threat, small and mature. Like a Bonsai. War B is in full flower. Its thin green shoots reaching across the ocean floor like fiber optic cable. Our only defense is attack. We will hunt them in a ship with a crucifix mast, plastic bag sails and a hull made of disposable razors and straw. Streaming the news is a signal of relapse.

I muted the computer.

Mr. Tofu Scramble says anyone who's leaving the country should go now. He's leaving in three weeks. It's Bali for sure, he says, the sale of his house is pending and as soon as it all goes through, he's gone.

I imagine people that leave turn to pools of light when they're over water. Circles of phosphorescent green appear and light up the Black Ocean then dissolve into silt and the silt turns to stone. We can now tell time by comparing the rates of people leaving—one thing always follows another—a timeline of events leading up and to and away from the central event, which in this case, is the event of leaving.

I signed up for yoga classes the week I found the rat. I got a six-month membership. Credence said the consistency would be good. The woman behind the counter was wearing a tank top that had "Namaste!" written across the front of it like the Coca Cola logo. Her hair was red and wrapped in an orange scarf. Her nails were pink glitter and she had a pendant of Guadalupe hanging from her neck.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

Yes. I want to look like you. I want to be so thoroughly anchored into some sort of pop culture aesthetic that nothing can knock me over or wash me away or make me hate everyone. I want to sleep again.

"I'd like to take some yoga classes," I said.

"Great! Let me show you around. My name is Devadatta."

She came around the counter and led me into a hallway that smelled of vanilla candles and dry leaves. She was like a beautiful collage jagged and bright and I thought I could be that, I could, but I can't and didn't know that then for sure but I

thought it was probably the case. Still, I had some hope so I followed her down the hall.

“We have a really wonderful studio,” she said and opened a door.

The room was large and empty with floors made of salvaged hard wood. People walked by the window outside, disembodied. Their heads sank and rose like glass floats upon the ocean or seafoam or apples.

“Do you prefer Vinyasa or Hatha?” Devadatta asked.

I prefer sleep and loud blackberries.

“I don’t remember what I used to do,” I said.

“I’d recommend Raina’s class,” she said, “She has a lot of yin energy, very gentle, you’ll love her,” and I remember thinking, like I do now, that I would love to love something, especially if I could do it without feeling like I was watching it die right in front of me, “Okay,” I said.

Raina’s class that day was full of women with quiet voices. I took a mat from the closet and set-up next to two of them about my age. They were talking about the naturopathic school they were going to and how it was expensive but still worth it and how their parents didn’t think so but who cared cause they ate frozen dinners and jogged even though it was bad for their joints. Raina came in and we started.

I slept through the night and didn’t go to the Asian market for fortunes the next day either. Instead, I stayed home and helped Annette work on a mosaic she’s laying down on the floor of the upstairs bathroom. She wants to finish it before the Bellyfish come.

I brought in the boxes of broken tile I’d been collecting and a map of the design I drew on graph paper and blew up to scale. Annette was on the floor with her legs stretched out in either direction, jars of colored chips between them. She’s gotten so big she can’t sit comfortably any other way.

We were all shocked when Annette got pregnant. She’s famous for saying there are too many of us already, comes from being a public health nurse. I think the whole thing was an accident and they decided not to terminate. Then found it was twins. I was working with Credence on the Wal-Mart at the time. The joy almost killed our parents. Not only were we going to be the Bobsey Twins of Labor Unrest (300 million Americans watch as Credence and Della try to shore up failing infrastructure while simultaneously reinvigorating common discourse on the subject of THE PUBLIC as a reflection collective will, as in REPUBLIC and not as in BIG GOVERNMENT) but to be gifted with actual black grandchildren? It was a miracle in dark times.

Annette dumped the jar of red chips on the floor. We talked about the yoga class. She asked what the studio looked like because it had only been open a few months and used to be a shop that sold custom cut foam. It was famous for having this huge Bas Relief foam flag in the window.

“The building’s totally remodeled,” I said, “You’d never recognize it.”

I took a piece of paper and started to sketch it but then in my mind, the foam flag disintegrated. Golden sun and full spectrum track lighting flooded the old shop. The man at the counter grew girlish and began practicing forward folds, clothed in hemp and other organic fibers.

Map of Foam Store/Yoga Studio

1) Foam flag area: territory of patriotic working class, which emerged vanguardless from the masses i.e., without our permission.

2) Yoga studio: territory of micro-populists, who promise to make sure that everyone has forty acres and a mule upon which to build tiny rice paper houses which we shall call Jeffersons, like the democracy and not like a/the black family.

2a) Subdivision of #2—Nowhere: territory of the indigenous black.

Note: Patrons form the middle third, the scene of the battle, civilians and traitors. Torn between two visions of the future 1) one of joint cracking crickets following lucky numbers in red and 2) a glittering Popsicle stick palace, the architecture of a new revolution, tipping this way and that in the gentle breeze—they look a their shoes. Nice cement. Yeah, thanks. I poured it myself. Have you ever insulated with straw? No, I’m a cob man.

But that’s not the map I drew for Annette. Her map had a box with Xs where they tore down a wall and hatch marks for windows. The real map was just forming on the edges of my thoughts. Flashing before me were new index fossils, like Taco Bell and Payless Shoes. And beyond that a shifting cartography, not like a series of snapshots but like a hidden camera that never stops, never plays back and goes all the time, a living map.

Up in my room another presidential address came on the radio. It was just before dawn and contained no information. We were to be prepared, but not nervous, yet alert. They tested the emergency broadcast signal and I threw up. Is that prepared or alert?

I finished the map, stuck it in my bike messenger bag and brought it to work. I spread it out on the counter in front of Mr. Tofu Scramble and Ed, Logic's Only Son.

Mr. Tofu Scramble: Did you draw that, Della? That's pretty cool, I particularly like the, uh...uh.

Ed, Logic's Only Son: What the hell is that? A spaceman?

Me: It's a map of colonialism as a cottage industry.

Ed, Logic's Only Son: What's that thing on its head?

The cumulative weight of a dense cultural mesh that prevents us from understanding whether the foundational problem is really race, class or gender? A hat?

Me: A hat.

Mr. Tofu Scramble: Well, it does kind of look like a hat. Now that I follow the, uh...uh.

Ed, Logic's Only Son: It would float off his head.

Mirror came in the door and walked over to us. She pulled off her knit cap and her pink hair, full of static electricity, crackled around her face.

"Hey Della," she said, "Franklin here?"

Tiny strands, like pink thread pink and as thin as a spider's silk, stuck to her cheeks.

"He was here earlier," I said.

"Did he say anything about the work meeting?"

"Not to me."

Mitch, the morning cook stuck her head through the food window, "He wants to talk about the future," she yelled.

Mirror handed me a flier for her sex party.

"I don't care what he wants to talk about. He scheduled the meeting for the day after my party and I'm totally not coming. No way."

Mitch came out of the kitchen and took some fliers. I looked at the one in my hand. It was a picture of an orgy drawn to look like a subway map with an arrow pointing to a tangle in the center that said **You Are Here**.

"We'll have lube, condoms and dental dams there. If you're allergic to latex you should bring your own gloves."

Mirror reached in her bag and pulled out a few more fliers. Mitch took some.

“You can take these and invite a couple of people but let them know that we’re asking all fluid-bonded couples to use condoms and dams too,” she said, “It’s just more respectful that way.”

I saw a broken horizon. Huge, jagged slabs in the distance under which people met and danced as though it was an actual dancehall and not a crack in the pavement.

Mirror and grabbed a cookie from a basket by the register and unwrapped it.

“When is Franklin going to fucking figure out that a chocolate chip cookie with milk chocolate is not vegan?”

Mirror picked out the chocolate chips and put them on a napkin.

“Oh, by the way,” she said, biting into the pockmarked cookie, “I found another rat. Thankfully, it was already dead.”

“You sure?” asked Mitch.

“Yeah. It had its head chewed off.”

I went out to see where they had buried it.

The rain made the upturned earth look black. I found a hole near the back fence but there wasn’t a rat in it. The other mounds had weeds growing out of them. Some of the crosses had fallen over in the rain but several still standing. It had a miniature Buzz Lightyear lashed to it. I stepped around a rotten crate and went to the grave of the pregnant rat. I wondered if she was really in there and if I should have made more little white flags. I don’t know how many baby rats she would have had, or how many are in a litter or even if they’re called litters.

I left for the Asian Market.