

ZAZEN

Chapter 13—Manifestation

All the windows in the neighborhood were covered in black crepe. It started in the morning while I was asleep and by the end of the day there wasn't a house that didn't have something up even if it was an old blue coat or a green scarf. Annette had gone early to the fabric store. She said they were sold out of black cloth by noon. The details had been coming out in bits. The boys were fourteen and sixteen and the cop shot them because he thought they had a gun. It was all pretty typical.

Annette was in the kitchen when I came down. She had been on the phone with one of the families and her cheeks were red and puffy. She made a bowl of cereal and didn't eat it.

"You know what he had in his hand?" she asked.

She looked at me like I was a ghost, familiar but transparent.

"A toy. A fucking toy. Some space doll or robot or something."

The radio was on. They were deepening their coverage of the bomb threat at box-mall-church. Would it affect shopping?

Annette yanked the plug.

"Who cares about that damn mall?"

Over the next few hours funeral services were arranged. Community groups met to come up with a collective response. Credence was trying to get the unions involved. But whatever they came up with—an army of shiny jackets marching in phalanx and covered with buttons, a black rainbow invoking the mountaintop—wasn't going to work. It never does. It was just adding color to the sand painting. Oh look! I really like that streak of brown, so bold where you put it next to all that red.

They hung a man off the Roseway Bridge a couple of months ago. Someone saw the body on the way to work dangling like a blackened branch over the river. They had meetings then too.

I spread my field notes on the floor of my room. All the sketches and lists, the formations and fossils and indexing of trends, I laid them out.

It already was one big map.

I knelt by a series of Vietnamese nail salons and white suburban fitness centers. They were marked as a braided stream. At the mouth of the waterway was an enormous Asian market called Transcontinental. It never closes and inside huge HDL screens play Karaoke videos with Filipinos running around Scottish Castles. I marked it with a large red “U.”

I put another “U” by the box-mall-church and looked at the map again.

Transcontinental, The New Land Trust Building, the box-mall-church—they were all unconformities, non sequiturs. I put a “U” by a cluster mall that ran a free bus service back and forth to the high schools. I put a “U” by Redbird Square for appropriating a public space as a billboard for a bank. I put a “U” by the Central Library, which was half empty of books and had black birds in the rafters. Such hollow hopes should be punished, shown for what they were. Bio Diesel Fueling Station with an armored vehicle bay? Large red “U.”

I grabbed a copy of Vermeij’s *Nature: An Economic History* off the shelf unfolded the cover and tossed the book aside. Spreading the dust jacket on the coffee table I wrote “Della’s Flag” across the top in red marker. At the bottom of my flag I drew a little Rat Queen Betsy Ross. The Head of John the Baptist was on the coffee table and the nine rat cell phones lay on the bed unopened.

Tamara called. She wanted to meet at a place downtown called Naught. Mirror must have given her my number. I said yes. I wasn’t any use to anyone in my room.

Downstairs I heard Annette get up and go into the bathroom. I opened my door and leaned out over the banister. Credence was still asleep. I waited until I heard the water run and Annette got into the shower, then stuffed the maps and phones in my bag and left.

Outside the dry bushes rattled and everything was tense like something hanging heavy was about to drop. The pressure was dropping and the sky was the color of cement. It was going to rain. I took the bus downtown.

Naught was a raw food tapas bar near Redbird Square with an ice sculpture of Leda and the Swan in the lobby. Tamara had a friend in the kitchen. She said

he'd hook us up. Cashew hummus, seed crackers and pro-biotic gin. I walked into the restaurant right before the rain started. A group of people came in behind me.

"Just in time," said one of the men.

No, you're not, I thought. The door shut. Someone turned up the bossanova.

Tamara was in the corner with her face in a book, her hair curled in short ponytails by her ears and wearing a green t-shirt with owls on it and jeans. There were light freckles across the bridge of her nose and her skin was so fair it was pale blue under her eyes. I sat down.

"Do they really make pro-biotic gin?" I asked.

"Yes. I always get it. It's disgusting."

She handed me a glass. It tasted like the bottom of a planter.

"Hey, guess what?" I said, "Someone actually sprayed 'Superland™—The parking lot. We will never forget!' on the wall of the downtown post office. Isn't that great?"

I'd been waiting to tell someone that.

Tamara didn't say anything. She picked up her menu and started asking questions about seaweed.

"Do you like Nori?"

"Do I what?"

"Like Nori. I like Dulse."

"What do you think about that?"

"About what?"

"Superland. We will never forget?"

"Oh," she flipped the menu over, "That's the problem they already have. What makes something a 'sea lettuce'?"

"Oh come on, it was cool. What was the name of that group? Citizens for a Rabid Economy? I mean I got it. You got it. Other people must have gotten it too. That's something."

Tamara shrugged. She put the menu down and leaned back in her chair.

"All I'm saying is that it's a fucking lovely day to buy more IKEA. They're already out shopping."

“Last night you said it was brilliant.”

“Yes. And it was. But it was a wink, wasn’t it? It didn’t really change anything.”

“Oh, I’m sure it would have been much more effective if they lit a trashcan on fire and spray painted anarchy symbols on the wall.”

“Whatever, those aren’t anarchists. They’re kids who want to sleep late and avoid cleaning their rooms.”

The waiter set a small glass dish of sprouted almonds on the table. Tamara told him we weren’t ready to order.

“So what? Superland doesn’t count?”

“No one did anything. It was more like a joke, right?”

She picked up her water glass then put it back down without taking a drink.

“And,” she said, leaning across the table, “You’re right, a lot of people claiming to be anarchists are pathetic and if Emma Goldman were here she would personally kick their ass. I’ll give them one thing, though, they’ve got it right about property destruction. It isn’t violence. Poverty? That’s violence. War? That’s violence. Blowing up someone’s SUV when they’re not in it is just a good idea.”

It was true. And Tamara might be a bully, but we were more alike than different. While I was too chicken to set an SUV on fire, I wasn’t really against it. In fact I loved reading about things like that because I knew the people who did it were on the same side. Even if they didn’t know about me, I knew about them and that made all the difference. Tamara’s face was inches from mine. I could see gray lines in the blue of her iris, her cornflower fingertips on the gin glass. I began to think that maybe what I viewed as sensitivity and compassion had just been squeamishness all along.

Tamara called the waiter.

“I’m going to have the sea lettuce,” she turned to me “And you?”

“Nothing.”

“My friend will have nothing.”

Tamara handed over the menus. She sipped her green gin and read the local produce roster on the chalkboard by the bar.

“Squash, garlic, cilantro. Good, I like cilantro, kale, also very good.”

“If you’re such a revolutionary what’s your suggestion?”

“Chard, apple...Don’t know what I’d do. Have to think about it. Pretty sure it doesn’t have anything to do with committees and talking points. Fingerling potatoes. Aren’t they poisonous raw? You’re a scientist Della, you should know.”

“Oh you must be part of that underground no one’s ever heard about.”

“I don’t belong to any group outside my friends.”

“That’s a real bridge builder.”

But I couldn’t say much. I wasn’t part of any group either. And not just because my wiring was shot and I cried all the time, but because I had never met anyone in any political organization that I liked. “Eat with your hands like the African people,” that’s what this one girl I knew used to say. Someone told me she called a fork fascist. They were all like that—macrobiotic Belgian trust-fund junkies, park bench anarchists, mean white lesbians in canvas clothing and dreadlocks—each ready to denounce you as a cop at the slightest sign of dissent. But beyond that, I had dirty little secret. I only liked militants at a distance. Up close I couldn’t stand them. Their targets were always the same, a cow path from the cell to the Great Reactionary Dawn. I wanted something more creative than dead clerks.

“So Della,” said Tamara, “What do you think will come from the shootings? An editorial or an oversight committee? Constructive Public Outrage? Cause I’m betting on nothing.”

She ate from the plate of seaweed the waiter brought.

“This is the grossest thing I’ve ever had. Try some.”

She pushed it toward me. I pushed it back.

“I don’t want to eat something I already know I don’t want to eat.”

My family has no patience for anarchists. They sent me to a Marxist reading group when I was sixteen. I walked in and the people there acted like they’d found the messiah. A really kind, old communist thought I was part of a youth brigade that didn’t exist. He liked to talk to me about revolutionary strategy. His analysis was flawless. It was horrible, like being forced to watch a

starving polar bear clamber over breaking ice after a fat and agile sea lion. Nice left! Shame about all that saltwater. Ever thought about hunting in packs?

Oh god, I am the polar bear, I thought.

I got up and left.

Crossing Redbird Square, the rain had stopped for the moment and the sky was dark gray. Bands of pale light were on the horizon underneath the heavy clouds, driven down, bright with compression. They turned everything blue. A bald man's head went by vivid as a robin's egg.

Tamara was wrong about the box-mall-church. It wasn't useless. If she saw it and understood it, so had other people. Fucking Delphi of Gnostic Anarchism. Gatekeeper. Hey, I have to go now. I'm late for a hanging. Gonna celebrate the eight-hour day with some friends, you should totally come. Fucking elitist. Assuming I hadn't thought about these kinds of things before.

I activated the phones in the parking lot of the Village of Light Towne Square near Four Points of Heaven Mall. I was calling in bomb threats by mid-afternoon. I used the tangerine cell that belonged to Venus Rodere. She got the cluster mall and the biodiesel fueling station (with clever armored vehicle bay) the Asian behemoth, Transcontinental—all of which deserved to be blasted to atoms, the terrible little minerals. Then I ditched the phone in some lush industrial landscaping and went on to the next.

On the lime cell phone I called Better Gods and Gardens, The New Land Trust Building (again) and the yoga studio:

Yoga On the Hill, Devadatta speaking.

Get everyone out of the building—

Hold please—

Typing. Online trying to befriend the entire country of Nepal.

—Sorry about that, how can I help you?

This is a bomb threat.

I think you have the wrong number.

I don't.

Well, I can't think of anyone who would want to blow us up.

I can.

Okay, well I'll let people know but there's class going on right now and I think they're all in Shavasana.

Perfect.

Then Naught because the bathroom sink counters had the name of a different god/prophet painted on every fourth tile and "ALL IS ONE" inlaid around the basin. Then all the strip joints that charged a stage fee. Next, I sent a text message to a newsroom calling for an end to Bubble Tea as the hypermodern equivalent to absinthe. Told them the rising popularity of Bubble Tea was a barrier to real revolution. The equation **Bubble Tea = Something to Look Forward To** depressurized the misery of capitalism and allowed it to limp forward and that it was a Hello Kitty band-aid on the festering wound of Neo-Liberalism.

I threw that phone in the trash and boarded the Number 22 to Pretty Little Hopes. **Eartha Rodere** *When the heart opens, the hands follow:*

191292309.24.

Up ahead was Brass Ring Employment Solution, a temp agency shaped like a refrigerator and built out of concrete and torque. Their motto was "Every little bit helps." Flocks of men in white shirts, crisp sleeves rolled down over their tattoos, kissed ass daily just to work for nothing. Hostages taking each other hostage. Jazz hands. Out of respect for the relationship between war and commerce and the necessity of cheap labor for both to thrive, I let Aries Rodere make the call.

Good Afternoon! Brass Ring, where we know that every little bit helps...Maintain wage slavery.

How may I direct your call?

Bombs, I told them, blast coronas the size of Texas. Bone fragments like chalk dust staining the sidewalk and washing away in the rain.

I heard alarms. The bus driver closed the doors. I got off at the next stop, leaving the raspberry cell phone under my seat pinging towers all the way to Pretty Little Hopes.

I was only halfway through my list. There were so many facets. Redbird Square for being named after a bank and recasting cultural geography as a proprietary object. The Central Library for being a de-funded sham, a gutted

shell, a hope crime. The Cine-Tower for having 20 theaters, 10 levels of parking and playing Christmas music year round. The Golden Oldies station KGOD for being a mask of Christianity formed from revisionist musical portraits of the past. And for sending nostalgia into the valleys of the scurrying poor to get them through the work day then giving them a god to go to at night when they're tired. Me, third. 8-8-and 8. The FM repeaters chattering like cats, selling bobbleheads pushing mad cow meat and formula on babies so their mothers don't have to keep up enough body weight to nurse. The Happy Day Corporate Charity Center? O' let me count the ways... IKEA monkeys, urban yogis with real estate kriyas, manifest class destiny—each target was a jewel on the web, a dewy gem reflecting the Grand Ravage back to itself.

I stopped to organize my notes and get food. It was raining again and I was in line at a falafel stand with a newspaper folded over my head. A small radio was playing Egyptian disco. Suddenly it stopped and the emergency broadcast signal came on. The falafel man turned the up the volume. Crackling, competing with the slap of raindrops on the tiny tarp the words “explosion,” “dog track” and “panic” emerged.

The woman next to me turned gray. The falafel man started packing up and dumping trays of fry oil into the gutter. Another bomb had gone off at a parking garage downtown. I put my list away. I saw the satellites in the terrosphere. I needed to think.

No one had claimed the New Land Trust bombing. Superland™ was still generating bumper text even though nothing had happened—Is it safe to shop? If there was one thing I learned from Credence, it was how to redirect message. I hadn't bombed those places but I could take advantage of them. Their violence reframed in a new message. Talking points for the Blackberry Massacre.

I was close to the cemetery on the border of New Honduras and that's where I went, deep, deep into the acres and tall trees. Past the new gravestones in Chinese, Cyrillic and Tagalog I walked into the oldest part of the cemetery where it's nothing but flu babies and second sons in plots by a statue of a Mermaid that someone put there around 1900. Under her bronze arms, I called and claimed the bombs as mine.

“Cultural obsolescence impeding the flow of fresh commerce,” I told the police operator, “That’s why we blew up the dog track.”

I gave different reasons for the other bombs because Citizens for a Rabid Economy only described part of the ugliness. I needed a name for the unseen hand behind it all. And when I dropped the lemon cell phone among the leaves at the base of the Mermaid, the name of my new movement was spelled out on the LCD screen. **MANIFESTATION.** It glowed phosphorescent on the face of the phone, a little pool of light, then went black on the forest floor.