

## ZAZEN

### 19—The Sea Goat

As I got into the truck to go home my hands were shaking. I felt like something was finally becoming clear but I wasn't sure what. Something had failed, something big and now there was a vast plain before us on which I could build anything.

Jimmy spun us around on the trail rock and out onto the road.

We drove under the night sky with the windows rolled down and the cold air rushing around us. The broken speedometer bounced frantically between numbers as we barreled down the mountain. Capricorn blinked through a lattice of radio towers in the distance.

It was like the world had broken open and nothing was hidden anymore, like we were crawling all over it like salamanders. I felt my own life, a minnow in a brook silvered and fleet. I was alive for no reason at all, finally unindentured. Miro told me that he swam the Morava when it was flooding. All the landmarks he had counted on were sunken beneath the water, which just kept rising. He dove into the current and when he came up he was surrounded by sticks and card tables, shoes and bottles. He said it was as if the river had swollen with debris of his country, like it had done it on purpose to keep him from leaving. I felt that way saying goodnight to Grace.

We were on the porch and the light was broken. She hooked my fingers with hers and I felt the dark woods, filled with birthday trees, shudder. The whites of her eyes flickered like stars on the sea when she moved.

“Della...” she said and took my head in her hands, “Della.”

Her breath wet my cheek. She leaned in and said something to me in a sharp whisper. It must have been important because it seemed like she said it twice but her palms were over my ears and I couldn't understand what it was. All I could hear was the ocean. And I thought, it's only going to get worse. Leave. Down below this mountain the borders are tightening, the nations are shifting and through all the dangling black branches I see Grace and Cady dancing in circles. If I look down for a second, I will never go. Grace, my Broken Shield will hold me forever. And Cady? My Clay Dog Master, my

Torturer? My Brave Indian Chief? She will certainly kick me if I move and shoot me if I talk.

Tapping Jimmy's windshield, I pointed to the rim of the valley.

"See that? Capricorn? That's the tail of the Sea Goat."

She didn't raise her eyes.

"Over there," I pointed, "Capricorn. By the towers."

"I don't want to talk about constellations. I don't want to talk about anything."

"But It's Babylonian."

"Della, that was the most fucked up, masochistic fucking thing I have ever fucking witnessed. I felt like I was being asked to watch your mom slice herself to ribbons."

She had a point. If you look at Grace too long everything turns into scary little splinters but I didn't want to get into it and lose my own momentum.

"I thought it was really sweet of you to eat the Frito Pie."

"Fuck the Frito Pie!" she screamed, "Fuck the fucking Frito Pie!"

The spinning cell phone whizzed by on my left and parking lots on my right.

"I'm going to get a ticket tomorrow," I said, but I could tell it was too late.

"Fine. Look, I need a few days. Let's just create some space. Okay?"

"Sure, okay. I'll call you when I get my ticket sorted out."

Jimmy rolled her window up. I started to say something and she turned on the radio. There wasn't a clear station and several different ones came in and out of the static. A blast of Christianity, the stammering Mexican brass then nothing but free bandwidth. We turned off the freeway and eventually came to a barricade. There were packs of crickets everywhere and a large chirper sidled over.

"Where are you girls going?" he asked.

"Home," Jimmy said

"Where have you been?"

"At a family gathering."

“Oh yeah, what kind?”

The kind where you celebrate the day a bus crash killed your 13-year-old sister because your mom believes that it is important to re-experience pain as a political construct. An anniversary?

Jimmy glared at a crack in the dashboard.

“An anniversary,” I said.

“I’m not talking to you,” snapped the officer.

“At an anniversary,” Jimmy said.

The side streets were dark tunnels with all the windows still covered in black. I asked Jimmy to drop me off at an all-night Safeway. She pulled up to the curb by the sliding doors. I got out and started to say goodnight but she was already driving away. I didn’t really blame her. It just wasn’t what she thought it was going to be, being out there with them. I could have said charisma is violence. But she wouldn’t have understood. I could have told her, there is no haven. But it’s hard to look those things in the eye. It’s hard to see Grace as she really is. She’s just too close to what you need her to be. Up until that moment I think Jimmy really believed that there was sanctuary somewhere. And not just driftwood shacks filled with sorrow, lit with oil lamps.

I stood in front of the Safeway for a few moments then went in. I have my own traditions. They have nothing to do with anyone else.

The store was empty. The meat glowed and a steel drum version of Eleanor Rigby echoed on the Congoleum. I went over to the customer service desk. A checker with fine brown hair, hoop earrings and tracheotomy scar walked up to me. She had a button pinned to her chest, big as a can lid, with a photo of a German shepherd puppy on it.

“Can I help you?”

“I want have my sister paged. We came in together and I can’t find her.”

“Have you looked around?”

“Yes, I’ve looked everywhere.”

I went back to the table and waited.

“Cady Elizabeth...”

The checker's voice cracked shrill through the overhead PA.

A teenage boy unpacking a palette of potato chips looked up. That's right, I thought, you should be looking for her, my scary Indian sister, it's only smart. She'd slit your throat in your sleep you big sell-out. You're lucky it's just me here.

I waited a few minutes and walked back over and asked her to page Cady again.

"I don't think your sister is here," she said.

"Maybe she was in the bathroom," I said.

"Maybe she went outside to use the phone" she said, "There's a pay phone on the corner."

Maybe she's turned into minerals that got ground into soil and line the tanks of goldfish.

"Maybe your sister will come back later..."

As a Gila Monster or a grass spider.

I could have kept going but she didn't need it. None of us did.

I left the commercial lighting behind and wandered through darker and darker streets. I would get a ticket tomorrow. I was a coward for sure but I didn't care. I came again the edge of New Honduras. Ten blocks up an emergency lamp reddened the blackness.

Fires burned all the next day. I called Jimmy twice but she didn't answer. Mid afternoon I got a text: "Not into talking. Not into anything." That night I went to her place. She was standing in the living room surrounded by boxes. There were white squares on her wall where pictures had hung.

"I changed my flight back. I'm leaving next week."

Her hair was dyed brown all over. She had cut off her cord necklaces and taken out her piercings. If had seen her in kindergarten, and then seen her now, I probably would have said she never changed.

Jimmy leaned down and ran a strip of packing tape along a box of kitchen supplies.

"I'm actually heading out tonight," she said.

"Tonight?"

She stood, "Yeah, as soon as I'm done with these boxes."

The rooms were empty. The plants were gone. On the floor was a Chinese calendar. She picked it up.

"Here," she handed it to me "There's still three good months on it."

"I'm getting a ticket tomorrow. The travel agency was closed today because of the bomb squads."

"I'll send you my address. You'll always be welcome."

"Mirror will kill you for leaving before her party."

She laughed, "Yeah, I'm sure I'll get the lecture on a postcard."

She picked up the box of kitchen supplies and asked me to hold the door. There wasn't anything else for me to do but load the truck.

Jimmy decided to spend the last few days with her family. They had a house out near Pretty Little Hopes in an adjacent suburb called Fair Prospect. That's where she went. Mirror asked me why she left before the party. I told her going to that thing would be like crashing your own wake and you just can't be in two places at once. I didn't blame Jimmy either. All this glory is too much glory. She needed to get away. From the smoke, the fires, the bomb threats, the bus crashes, and me. I saw her beyond the orange lights twirling in a ball gown. Queen of the Jaguars.