

# ZAZEN

## Chapter 7—Cherry Blossom Arms

Everyone at Rise Up Singing knew who bombed the New Land Trust building. Mr. Tofu Scramble said it was an intergovernmental squabble. Ed, Logic's Only Son said it was immigrants.

"They got their own radio station with fucking tubas and everything," he said.

Mirror said she had a friend who applied for an admin job with New Land Trust and was denied an interview for refusing to claim a gender on the application.

"She could have totally done it."

Mitch the cook, thought it was eco-terrorists for sure. Kelly, the fill-in dishwasher agreed but then they split over whether it was an anarcho-primitivist cell or the Redwood Action Collective. That's how the betting pool got started. Mirror put each theory up on the "Specials" board as it came in and collected the money. By dinner she had erased the board twice, each time, writing smaller so it would all fit. As the list grew, I began to notice something. Everyone had a pretty good reason to blow up a building. I agreed with most of them. The names on the board might seem disconnected but there was a structural logic if you knew how to look.

We listened on the kitchen radio. A whole cast heroes emerged. The janitor who could have been killed in the blast and wasn't. The junior executive who said he would continue to use the bathroom when it was rebuilt. The woman crossing Redbird Square who was the first to see the smoke. Each of them, a bright star.

Meanwhile, customers congregated by the cash register, laughing as more possible terrorist groups went up on the board. Martyrs, bullies and causes in demographic filigree entwined in unpredictable ways. And where others saw fragmentation, I saw a terrible unity. The truth was that anybody could have done it. I could have done it, if I didn't shake every time someone slammed a car trunk shut or think the birds were children screaming and garbage trucks were tanks. If I wasn't that way, I could have blown it up.

I closed my eyes. Blast coronas paint the sky orange. Raging walls of flame devour everything. I was glad other people had to see what I'd been seeing. Even if it was so much smaller than what was in my head. I was glad. They should have to.

Later that night I got a text message from Jimmy asking me to meet her at a party in the industrial district down by the water. I don't know if it was her idea or if Credence asked her to keep an eye on me. He probably thought a warehouse full of dystopic urban hippies was safer than any padded room. Nothing but the dull thud of zero contact.

"Come on," said Jimmy, "You'll meet people. It'll be good."

Because meeting people is always good.

The Glass House was a single-story factory between grain elevators where they used to make art glass in the 40s. Two summers ago I'd gone to a bunch of parties there. Mostly noise bands. It was down by the water where all the roads looked like industrial gullies and loading zones. Most of the windows were blown out and the electrical was badly patched because the copper wire got scavenged from the boxes every few months and sold. Someone told me a fleet of meth-heads in homemade boats were crossing the river at night, sailing right up under the docks and stripping copper from the conduits. A fucking Dunkirk of tweakers. I imagined them building a penny-colored palace in the hills with exploding processing plants and Guitar Hero going all the time.

I chained my bike to the side rail. There was music coming through the windows, some brown Goth thing with cellos and keyboards. I didn't see Jimmy's truck anywhere. By the door was a girl in a pink dress with a vintage apron tied around her waist. Her arm was tattooed with cherry blossoms and her hand was on a glass vase full of dollar bills. I asked her if she knew Jimmy but she didn't.

Inside sheets of colored glass hung from ceiling like guillotines and I could hear the words, "New Land Trust," pattering through the room.

The event was a benefit. Some media collective that taught underprivileged kids how to make chapbooks. On a table next to me were

some of the books the kids made. I looked through them. They were full of basketball stars with guns and Spiderman cars, kids with blood drawn like tears. Slanted houses and sagging rainbows buckling in the blue sky. I couldn't take it. Everyone was eating almond paté.

Jimmy said on the phone that she was bringing vegan cupcakes so I went over to the food table but it was all nut paste and Tabouli. Behind me in someone was talking about leaving the country. I turned around. It was some neo-tribal Goth chick. She had a ticket to Mexico. The woman standing laughed.

"It won't matter where you go," she said, "It's all going to happen here."

The woman who spoke was older than me but not by much, maybe in her thirties. Most of her hair was dirty blonde but the hair closest her face was lavender.

"It's already started," she said and leaned across me to put some tabouli on her plate, "Look at the New Land Trust building. You knew someone was going to try to take that thing down. It was just a matter of time."

She put a forkful of Tabouli in her mouth and chewed.

"So what," the other girl said, "It's not like I can do anything here. They can blow up all the buildings, it's still going to be the same stupid people."

The woman with the lavender hair put her fork down, staring blankly across the crowd. Her eyes were bright blue and she had on gray glitter eye shadow that was creased and rubbing off. Faint streaks of it sparkled under her eyes and across her cheekbones. She swallowed, turned slightly and looked up at me.

"Well," she said, "What do you think? I'm taking a poll."

"About what," I said.

"Should we all just become eco-tourists until the sun shines down?"

"Depends," I said, "If you're doing something useful, you should probably stay. I went to a party at an anarchist house with some Food Not Bombs guy. They had an old time band in the basement and like six hundred crusty punks square dancing. I figure they can do that about anywhere. There are a lot of islands in Micronesia."

“Fair enough,” the woman laughed and for a second I saw her real intelligence blaze out over the world like something that had escaped. She took another bite of Tabouli.

“What about the New Land Trust Building?” she said, “Would you have blown it up?”

A couple of people smearing pate´ on their seed crackers stopped. Everyone likes a bomb, I guess.

“No.”

“No one got killed.”

“Could have.”

“What if no one got hurt?”

I was out on the schoolyard. Or in some stupid dorm room conversation with the cafeteria socialists, that’s what it felt like. Pie-card philosophers and bullies but I walked right into it.

“Maybe,” I said, “If no one got hurt. In theory.”

“What if one person got hurt?”

“Then I wouldn’t.”

“What if they just hurt? Time off with pay.”

“And I was a psychic and knew for sure? Maybe.”

“And he was an asshole. Like he beat his wife or molested kids?”

“I wouldn’t be sad but I wouldn’t do it.”

“Oh,” she said smiling, “So it’s a matter of degree. Injuries are fine. And if an asshole gets killed you don’t really mind as long as you don’t have to do it yourself.”

Some guy getting cashew butter laughed and the woman with the blonde and lavender hair grinned.

“The blew up a bathroom,” I said, a little too loudly, “Not the fucking space station. They’ll probably build the new one out of 800-year old cedar and elephant tusks. Blowing it up was fucking pointless.”

Apparently you can be a terrorist as long as you don’t raise your voice because everyone started looking at the ground, which is code for ‘You’re dead to us now.’

“So what’s your great plan?” I said.

“Well, to begin with I’m not leaving.”

“I might,” I snapped.

“Yeah that will really change things for people.”

“It’ll change things for me.”

And I should have stopped there but I didn’t.

“Yeah you know, you’re right,” I said, “I should stay and make a stand, something symbolic. Maybe make a Paper Mache head of John the Baptist and string it up like a piñata for the art walk. Write: Unionize the Bomb Builders on one side and Feed the Cows Spirulina on the other.”

—Oh yeah? Oh yeah? Well, I’m gonna... and nothing behind it but a belly full of Kimba reruns. It wasn’t any different than recess that but I couldn’t stop myself, even though everyone around us was staring—

“Maybe publish a manifesto calling on all of us to dress our scarecrows from the community free-box so it’ll fool the giant crows making nests of the splintered world. You know I hear they’re making one out of hemp and third party candidates.”

The guy with the cashew butter laughed but this time for me. Fucking Deserter. Poetaster. Second up against the wall so you get to watch.

The woman just picked up her plate and began to eat.

“So you will be leaving, then??”

—Run, Kimba run! A mother constellated of stars. There is supernatural help! This is all a test. But leaping to my own defense the words came out exactly as they were in my head.

“It’s fucking sand painting!” I said, “Popsicle sticks! It’s nothing but the hem of a ghost.”

—KIMBA! Your father is still alive in the forest!

My face was hot and I made no sense to anybody and I knew if didn’t get away I was going to start crying tears of hateful rage all over myself. I saw Jimmy and waved. The woman with the lavender hair glanced over her shoulder and put some more Tabouli on her plate.

“I hear Goa has nice beaches,” she said.

Jimmy walked over, mild and oblivious. She’d dyed her hair tangerine and was holding a tray of pink frosted cupcakes.

“I put Red Hots on them. Want to help me frost the rest?”

“Well,” said the woman, “I guess you can do what you’re doing here just about anywhere.”

Jimmy handed me a cupcake. I wanted to throw it at the wall.

The Goth chick wanted to know if Red Hots were vegan.

Outside they started setting off fireworks. I could feel them in my spleen. I was sick of being terrified all the time. People pressed against the windows. Jimmy went over too. Explosion after explosion in a cascade of storylines, spiders and chrysanthemums, cakes and candles, beautiful showers of green and fuchsia rained down and all I saw was war. I wanted to find that boundless place where you never have to sleep again. I wanted to drown myself in that underground river.

Across the room I saw a guy who was the homeless boyfriend of a girl I used to know. Someone said he wrote a banjo retelling of the Inferno. It was supposed to be good but I never heard it. What I did know was, if he was there, everyone else I knew for the past ten years was going to show up too. I went outside, told Jimmy I needed air. Smoke from the fireworks drifted between the wheels of Biodiesel trucks.

On the other side of the water tiny campfires glowed. Abandoned cars parked along the frontage road with people crouched inside. Every now and then a lighter flared and car windows flashed like fireflies on the banks. On our side of the river were dancehalls and lit windows flickering like a net of stars. But it wasn’t going to stay like that. The whole area was about to get a huge development grant. We were only there because we were cheaper than security. And, look! An art district! A cobbled bohemia between the packed earth and leathered sole of the descending boot, a chapel of freedom.

I helped Jimmy frost cupcakes and stayed in the kitchen for most of the party. Jimmy offered to give me a ride home.

“I have to drop these trays off at the restaurant first but it won’t take long. We can throw your bike in the back of my truck.”

In the truck we talked about Honduras.

“I’m going miss this,” she said gesturing vaguely at the warehouse behind us as we crossed the train tracks and lurched up onto another frontage road, “But I’m not going to miss the rest.”

She says all of this is just a war for resources and she doesn’t want any part of it. She wants to go where she never has to drive again.

“Can’t you just stop driving here?” I asked.

“I’m not going to wait this shit out.”

We rolled up onto a newly paved street, which ran along the edge of a small park with rusted swings and a slide. Then we turned and drove up a hill until we came to Catholic Church and a coffee shop, the gateway to our neighborhood, and passed between them.

The world outside is only as big as a small island, I thought, a thin spit of sand. On one end they speak Spanish and on the other end Lao. I saw everything anew. We were already in Honduras. My problem was the language barrier. The streets weren’t a record of community decimation. They were filled with merry peasants. Look! There’s a bike shop. My neighborhood was filled with happy people. So much better since all that land reform went through. During the day young paisanos lingered by the food co-ops unloading trucks, glad to be helping farmers bring their groceries to urban markets.

“Hola!” I call.

“Hola!” they call back.

New Honduras.

Jimmy pulled up by Rise Up Singing and we dropped off the trays. When we were locking up I thought—Why not leave?

“I might come,” I said, “To where you are, I mean. For a little while.”

There wasn’t any moon just an emergency light at the other end of the block. I couldn’t see Jimmy’s expression. I felt her body relax because that’s the way it is when a possibility opens up; the body doesn’t know any better. It reaches for the glittering incongruity.