

ZAZEN

Ch 29—Della's Mosaic

By the time I turned myself in I was pretty run down. No electrolytes at all. My hands and face were chapped and I had a lot of scratches but I was as lucid as I have ever been, clear and attentive. I watched each person who came and talked to me and could almost see the flames licking up around them.

I was held as a possible terrorism suspect. Grace and Miro were so proud they could barely stand it. Like it was lefty Christmas just for them. Viva North Pole Libre.

There was a lot of debate about the timeline of events and my whereabouts. Some of which could have been solved earlier if anybody in my family talked to cops. But they don't. Years of training. They said Grace wouldn't even tell them my middle name.

"It's Rachael," the FBI guy kept saying, "We know it's Rachael. It's a matter of public record. You're not keeping anything from us. Della Rachael Mylinek. I'm holding her ID right here. Public record."

Credence said she made him cry but he probably just said that to cheer me up. He said every time they'd ask Miro a question, he'd get that look like he was watching snowflakes fall. Credence gets that look too sometimes.

I saw Grace for a few minutes. My mother is beautiful. Her hair was the color of late fall when all the red and brown leaves are turning black but haven't yet, should have and haven't. I bet she did make those crickets cry.

The papers said I was a scientist, which was media code for Nuclear Secrets so everyone had to watch computerized models of mushroom clouds on TV for days. There was even a site where you could type in your zip code and see a model of your local fallout patterns under the current weather conditions. Which were changing.

"I'm wanted in connection with a series of terrorist attacks," I told the guy who brought me my Gatorade, "You should be scared of me. I'm a geologist."

Grace always said I was good at entertaining myself.

They put me in alone so that I didn't convert the masses.

I didn't ask why they thought I was a terrorist. And I didn't answer when they asked why I didn't ask. In one particularly intense interrogation I decided to give them a brief history of the planet. Starting at about 4.6 billion years ago and sweeping gracefully up to the present. My favorite part is the 2 billion years between the prokaryotic and Eukaryotic cell. It's riveting, really. I get excited. I did it once when I was drunk at Davis and nobody talked to me for a week. But the FBI loved it. I could tell.

What became clear after several meetings with the agents was that they didn't really have anything. It was mostly the panic I caused in the airport when I failed to board at the gate. Apparently, they pulled my bag off the plane to Laos and blew it up on the Tarmac to just make sure there wasn't a bomb in it. Then the terminal went into a security shutdown and the cameras went live and my face was everywhere.

Over the next two weeks a lot of people came to my defense. Coworker Franklin said I always showed up to work on time. Mirror denied that I was antisocial and went into elaborate detail. My professor from Davis flew up with copies of the *Journal of Paleobiology* for everyone and talked about the rigors of academia and the immense pressure on doctoral students. Mirror even dragged poor Sasha down to sign an affidavit saying I was with him at the party. They asked if anyone else had seen us together, which I thought was pretty funny.

It was cool of Sasha to step up like that. He didn't have to. Mirror said he was great about it. I didn't get to see him though. They kept me fairly well separated for most of the time.

In the end they didn't release me because of any of that. Some apartment manager caught Jules and Tamara rifling through the people's mail and they got busted for identity theft. They were awaiting arraignment at the county when the bag I threw in the river washed ashore south of the city. Finding the last of the Hive phones sent the crickets into a chirping frenzy. The wireless company's records showed that the phone had been used near Breaker's Rise, which matched with my stolen credit card report. Tamara's face was on security camera footage from the dog track and that, along with the lack of alibis for the time of the bombings, pretty much sealed it.

I suppose I could have jumped up and down and claimed to be the art director of the consumer apocalypse. Gone down with ship and all. But I wasn't the one who bombed those places. I just thought they looked pretty on fire. Sort of. Now that everything is it means less.

When I got out I spent a few days with Grace and Miro up on the mountain. They never asked me what my role was in the bombings or about Jules or Tamara. That way they could pass a lie detector test. They're still secretly hoping I am a terrorist with a more far-reaching plan. Something vast, tied to a huge underground of new Internationalists. Mostly though, we talked about Credence and Annette and the soon-to-be-here Bellyfish. And about Southeast Asia. There was a substantive discussion about the transition of former colonial provinces to fledgling communist governments without a stable economy or adequate cultural reference points to sustain them.

"You can't expect a thousand years of oppression not to result in rage when the power dynamic shifts," said Grace.

"I don't," I said, "If it shifted now I'd probably want to blow up a small star."

She kissed me on the forehead like I was ten.

Coworker Franklin said I could have my job back. He'd cut some deal with the new owners to keep on any employee who could get it together enough to get a food handlers card and I already had one. So, despite being recently held as a terrorist, I was a model employee.

My first day back in town and out of jail, I went down to Rise Up Singing to see what it was like. The sign over the door said RISE in fatigued metal and there was a new mural, a big social realism piece with a remodeled house in the center and a thick red line over the top that turns into dashes then disappears into an endless sunlight. But it was all one big ember so I started working there again. I didn't care which little piece of orange carbon popped out and cracked at my feet. Hello! Imbue me with meaning! I'm a little piece of gender identification. Crack! I'm a down in the gutter art intellectual. Thwizzz...(the tiniest of voices) I'm a 19th century neo-classical vagabond. phit. I'm a spaceship. It just didn't matter.

Mirror quit outright.

“Fuck Franklin. That fucking fish killer. And fuck the new owners. If I wanted to have a food handlers card, pull micro beer and listen to Enya I’d go to fucking college.”

Mirror didn’t seem too broken up about Tamara going to jail either.

“Whatever,” she said, “She’s always been a little faggot. I’m just glad she’s not as much of a hippy as I thought, you know, with that farm and the goats and all.”

I don’t know for sure why Tamara and Jules didn’t take me down too except that “whoever did it” was getting a lot of credit in the subculture, mostly for the urban targets and names of the terrorist groups, my tattered little flag. I don’t think they wanted to share the attention. When Tamara and Jules actually got charged, it was Bastille Day in the squats. Better than a police riot. I personally know of at least three vegetarian restaurants and a record store where they were gods. I even heard of a coffee shop in the Midwest. The Breaker’s Rise Two. Free vegan cornmeal blueberry muffins for life. Credence says there are T-shirts with them looking all punk rock on the front with the bombing sites listed like tour dates on the back. I haven’t seen them. It’s the kind of thing I would normally wear. Not in this case, but in general.

I told Credence that and got a lecture on the difference between strategies for political change and merchandising.

“I’d still wear it, if I didn’t know them. I’d wear it.”

“It’s moronic.”

“It’s the purest form of communication.”

The T-shirt, the bumper-sticker, the bomb. The undifferentiated ocean of brutality I had been drowning in had undergone a change. It was as violent as it had ever been but it wasn’t personal. The waves were not random. They were simply the rocking back and forth of actions and reactions. The slogan, the talking point and the bullet were all elements, atoms, leaving behind banded marks. It ebbs and crashes pulling grass, sand and small animals into the sea. I know shouldn’t care, that its just erosion. It happens to everything. But I do, I still care, I still cling to the shore.

Credence and Annette painted my room pale gold for the Bellyfish and hung mobiles, stars and birds that circle across the skylight. I lie in bed and I watch them for hours. Something is changing. I know because I stay awake and listen to the world at night and I can feel it.

Mirror suggested I try cranial sacral therapy.

“You should totally do it. I also know this dude who did it after a really bad head injury. He said it made him dream in magenta.”

Instead of retribitional geology?

Sasha said when he met me he thought I was drunk. But then decided I was just a little out of my mind. I told him it was true. I hadn't watched a school full of children get blown up a thousand times. I was less settled than I am now.

He asked me to come into his high school classroom and talk about the history of the earth. How we think the moon was made. About comets and asteroids and extinctions and how the sea was filled with ammonites and how there wasn't any grassland and that planets die like everything else; babies, continents, solar systems. I don't have the part after that. Just like with the skateboard-Goth boy down by the river, I don't have a god or a country hiding in my hands. I don't even have a saying or some kind of joke. Consider the lilies...(voiceover to be drowned in howling winds of the holocaust). So I decided to bring in a bunch of concretions and some rock hammers and let the kids bash the hell out of them. It seemed like as good a finale as anything else. Sasha liked it too. He met me beforehand in the parking lot and we had a few shots of vodka and went in.

The principal stopped us in the hall. There were construction paper flowers on the wall and soccer trophies in a glass case under a banner that said “Welcome Home Birds of Prey.”

I was temporarily sorry the school had not been on my original target list.

Sasha introduced me as Professor Mylinek, eminent geologist and former terrorism suspect, which she didn't think was funny. They wanted to see my notes and have me sign a waiver so they could videotape the class in case they needed to turn it over the FBI. They also confiscated the rock

hammers so we had to have the kids take the concretions outside and smash them on the sidewalk. They looked like a bunch of angry seagulls. Which was pretty great too. Any fossils inside those rocks were destroyed but it felt good and the assistant principle got it all on camera through the window of the science lab. Sasha said that's what the kids liked best. Feeling dangerous. But I still saw the gulf between us, a short lifetime of thoughts. Future soldiers and tiny liver hearts.

In the street corner across from the school when I had been accompanied off grounds, Sasha asked me if I wanted to have dinner the next night.

"But late," he said, "As a Russian, I never dine before 11pm and usually don't finish until well after midnight."

I said yes.

On the way home I thought about how he looked in the muted light through the green sheet of the Motel window. In the chair with the silhouette of the abandoned public utility in the background and all the poisoned land underneath and the sky full of toxic smoke overhead. His light gray skin and the clouds of breath rising to nowhere.

Atoms.