

CHAPTER 48: HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

Minnie Rose Rosen was sat in the middle of the room. There was an ache in her elbow joint due to either a complex conspiracy that aimed to deny her a pleasurable existence or maybe from spending way too much time awkwardly lying on her living room floor. She took a sip of Hawai'i-grown coffee and remembered certain facts. Her world was in motion and she was midst a plot to will it in a certain direction.

Now, you, the reader, are probably maybe an acquaintance of Minnie's, or on the off-chance that you randomly came upon this book at some hole-in-the-wall library or friend's messy apartment, let us stipulate that you are still, no doubt, a part of Minnie's world, and hence, a part of the plot. Closing this book won't change that. Your thoughts and actions are material to this grand narrative, whether or not it gets written or read or adapted into a critically acclaimed television miniseries. Or whatever. Anyway, suffice it to say, we were living in a specific world, together.

Minnie looked up and noticed she was now surrounded by strange faces that came and went with varying states of engagement. She burped up a mushroom flavored burp and licked her burgundy lips. She swallowed the remains of her mug and meditated on certain facts of existence.

ROAD WORK AHEAD

This is a heavy load, she surmised, as she walked down the street, glancing up to spy plenty avocado hanging from a tree. Minnie wiped a bead of sweat from her brow. Minnie Rose Rosen was a foreign girl in a familiar world in a galaxy far, far away. She was at home. She was walking towards a specific destination.

Minnie crossed the road.

Minnie Rose Rosen rounded the corner at the grand intersection, smiling at the signs and faces of the red and gold clad demonstrators, who stood waving, chanting, chatting, making it clear to passerby that this was not just going to be yet another typical fall season. She made her way towards the old library. Three now-borrowed videodiscs later, she made her way across campus, whistling a tune, heading towards the other library to drop off some knowledge in the book return, and maybe say hello to some old friends.

“So how does that work with the weight?” asked the friendly, relatively-older woman. Minnie looked up from her knees, asquat in front of the bins.

“So, you weigh the jar up front before you fill it. See, this one is point nine.” Minnie displayed the be-numbered lid to her interlocutor. “Then when they ring it up they need to subtract the weight from the total.” The woman smiled down at Minnie and said that was a good idea and thank you or some such thing.

Minnie Rose was sat against the wall, sipping her second cup of coffee of the day, now two jars richer in her bags, one jarful of flour, and one of yellow popping corn. Someone walked in the door to the coffee shop. Minnie was sitting in another coffee shop. It had been almost forty planetary revolutions since Minnie had been birthed into this world. Her bare thighs were now sticking to the chair. It was hot. It

was hotter than it used to be. This did not surprise Minnie exactly, but did make her feel like a bit of a failure, since she probably should have done a better job of dealing with these very foreseeable climate change issues some ten to fifteen years ago, which was, she recalled, the original plan. Could Minnie actually have done a better job maybe of communicating and collaborating with the others in her world or was it simply that this particular evolution was the only turn that did not lead into one dead end? And now what? Minnie felt her way through various pathways in her mind. *Maybe I can do this*, she thought, running into wall after wall, retracing some steps, abandoning others. *No, no. Okay, what matters? From where I'm sat, what power do I have?* A tiny winged bug flew into her view and landed on the rim of her mug. Minnie was feeling jittery. She felt something start to drip down the inside of her nose. Clearly nothing of substance had changed. A rose by any other name was still waiting, staring, wrestling. Yearning. Thirstily, Minnie took a sip from her cup.

UNCOMPROMISED IN HER POSITION

Okay. Let's not pretend that things are going well. Let's not pretend that there is some way out of this infernal machine. No, no. Let's pretend that we are eating a muffin and that we just popped the last bite into our mouth and shook with the gentle breeze that was flowing through the valley. Let's pretend we've spent the prime of our life hiding in our rooms and that we've missed all of the opportunities to right our sinking ship and that we are dying, slowly dying and that we are afraid of the future and that we can hear music and that despite all odds, we have many friends. Can you imagine a world that is not based on injustice? Of course you can. You've been there before. You've already paid your bill.

IT'S ALL GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN

Minnie sat on the grey couch, feeling tenuous in her maybe emergence into a prolonged state of human competence. She was a bit early for her shot and oh hello there she said to the person she used to see more often but hadn't seen in a while. She smiled shyly. Minnie Rose Rosen sat, waiting for her hormone injection, in the air-conditioned waiting room of the clinic which was one of the few places she went where she could pretend she was part of some nebulous trans girl community. Now she was feeling sad because she wished she could be more open and honest with EDIT EDIT EDIT [Dig deep your truth]

“Wow, that's so realistic. So much detail.”

Cinnamon was a little surprised by all of the thoughts that were flying through her head and bumping into and merging with her external reality. And the visuals. Such art!

“Once you try the fish out here in Hawai'i garble garble garble.”

“What's that? Oh no I can't do that here.” Cinnamon's mind was racing and she closed her eyes and felt a rush of bodily pleasures. Oh my god it's good to be alive inside of a body! Wait a second. What was going on here? Was Cinnamon possessed by some newly arrived spirit? That liked to dance? But these feelings, these perspectives, were so familiar. Like an old friend. Like a comfortable old shoe. Uh oh, I think someone is losing control of the wheel! Cinnamon felt a struggle occurring towards the back of her head. And a drip forming down her left nostril. People shouted orders through the café. The band played on.

Cinnamon Rose Rosen decided not to forgo her second cup of coffee that day. There was a depth to her vision, but her grasp was shaky, her steps a bit wobbly. *Come on now*, she thought at whoever was driving

her ship, it's like riding a bicycle.

Cinnamon Rose Rosen shivered and opened her eyes. Apparently she had jumped into another time juncture. She glanced over at the flavor wheel and gauged her coordinates in the space continuum. She picked up her utensils and played with her food. She thought about the shape of shadows and the call of birds. And whistling. *Life is to whistle*, she thought, as her backside tweeted out a smelly little tune. Yes, she just farted, okay? Geez. Someone inside her head screamed. It's okay, honey, she thought to herself. You can do it. Go at your own pace. A pigeon scampered past her table, dragging a white thread on one of its clawed feet. *The future scares me again*, Cinnamon thought. BEEP. ENERGY TANKS FULL. Cinnamon wiped her nose and took off into the day.

Elma Rose Rosen stared down at her day's fourth cup of coffee. She had a habit of drinking coffee with her meals which she picked up from her namesake who also had a habit of using the number of refills offered as a form of assessment for the quality of food service she was receiving, having grown up in a time when such a practice was somehow relevant to one's dining experience. Elma was named after a misspelling of a mispronunciation of her great grandmother's old schoolmate, who, of course, grew up in the old country, or the slightly newer old country, or maybe it was the same country but just felt old because of its placement in time. Elma waved off another refill and gathered her wits about her.

Elma Rosen was very bad at fishing. And it wasn't as if it was due to a lack of fish in the sea. And it wasn't as if she had trouble *finding* fish (or vice versa). It was, you know, the hooking. You know, the hook or whatever. You know? She was bad at fishing. Which, did this make her

sad? Maybe. Maybe when she was walking through those hot streets, seeing all those folks walking with their own fishes, maybe, maybe she thought, is there something wrong with me? Hold on a second. Wait a minute. Is this some kind of heavy-handed metaphor or are we actually talking about BURP. Excuse me. Ugh, thought Elma. *Why is this table so sticky? I'm such a dirty girl.* Elma looked around to see if anyone was listening to the thoughts being broadcast through her head, which, it seems like, maybe people were? Oh boy, it was hot in here, baby. Yeah, baby. Someone brought Elma some food and she was happy. Such a simple girl, she was.

...TIME PASSES

Elma was thinking about a recent missed opportunity and how she totally forgot her agreed upon operating procedures and how none of this was making any sense because her belly was so hungry and why did she completely forget how to cook food? It was like someone had taken control of her driving apparatus and maybe had forgotten/never knew how to operate the machinery. Elma looked over to the table with the young girl and felt a pang of loss for how her own young girlhood might have expressed itself due to her never having had one due to the fact that Elma was a ~~somewhat late transitioning trans woman~~ robot or something. Elma devoured her ketchupy potato fries and saucy eggplant sandwich and walked outside.

(No, no, this is definitely *science* fiction. Otherwise, why else would you be accessing it through such a futuristic technology?)

CHAPTER 49: BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

“Reading anything lately,” she asked, as our mind completely exploded once again.

“Well, there is this one book,” we thought as we surreptitiously looked around the dark and rainy courtyard full of a bunch of humans waiting for some kind of show to begin. BRRP INCOMING MESSAGE BRRP. Apple snapped out of her imaginary dreamworld, and pressed a button on her tiny machine. Zorba was waiting outside by the path, sitting on a wall. “Sigh,” sighed Apple. “We’re too old for this shit,” she didn’t add, since, apparently, the age they were now was now the new age they were ten years ago. On her way out of the yard, she looked over and noticed her maybe favorite DJ, who started playing an instrumental version of Sexual Healing. What this all had to do with our novel’s central mystery plot was not entirely clear, but that’s the beauty of living inside of a science experiment masquerading as quasi-poetic fiction, isn’t it. Isn’t it? Beautiful? This life? I mean, look at those mountains. Sigh.

Gods, [Zorba’s Cousin] was *really* good at fishing. This was more or less the gist of the thought patterns bolting through her caffeinated head as she sat on the inter-dimensional shuttle clutching her freshly caught red-headed snapper. The chill from the coldpacks seeped

through the bags into her lap and gave her...feelings. What a strange day it had been so far, this day that placed her, if her calculations hadn't gotten too skewed, somewhere between early to mid afternoon. [Zorba's Cousin] thought of all the mountains she was still going to have to climb before she could even begin to start to imagine reaching her destination. Which, somehow, in her age-addled brain, had come to equal Home. Of course, at this point, she could not know that when she got to where she was going, she would not get to stay there long. Indeed, at this time during today's tomorrow, she'd have already begun a brand new quest, and would find herself lunching in the old haunted forest with an old favorite relative and his hard-boiled yet charming friend.

CHAPTER 50: THIS IS A LOVE LETTER

Q: *If love is all we need, could there be enough to undo what we've done?*

Apple popped her newly scavenged Black Dresses album out of the tape deck, spun it around, and plopped it back in. She was thinking about the zombie encounter from earlier in the week and what it meant to walk through this world an undead girl. She looked down at her makeshift table, covered with scattered notepads and random bits of paper. She used to be so economical and efficient in her reports, but now her case notes were covered with strikethroughs and inserts and move here arrows. Was her brain malfunctioning? Did she need to poop? *Yes, indeed*, it occurred to her, *this is indeed something that I need*.

So many needs had Apple Hippopotamus, the no-nonsense mystery detective that took up the lion's share of protagonizing in this best-selling novel that you are reading. Apple existed somewhere in time, no doubt, and had been receiving many strange looks lately, which, you know, was strange. *Hmm*, she thought to herself. *Did I miss something?* Just then, an event occurred that would change the course of destiny forever more.

CHAPTER 51: NO SERIOUSLY, THIS IS A LOVE LETTER

Dear reader, perhaps I haven't been clear, due perhaps to my intense fear of things such as 1. being completely honest about my feelings, 2. rejection, and 3. social awkwardness, but it is no doubt true that I, the author, am quite possibly madly in love with you, the reader. Can I explain this infatuation that I quite undeniable have? I mean, sure, you've got that sweet smile, that good heart, and that exquisitely beautiful soul, but you wouldn't be wrong to suggest that we barely even know each other. I don't know. Maybe it could be the plain and simple fact that you are paying attention to me, but whatever it is, I am no doubt once again (for the first time?) experiencing those feelings that cause rainbows to spontaneously appear and babies to smile in my direction. Could this, would this, might this be love?

Apple sighed at her grocery list which was now almost completely checked off save for that one frustratingly elusive item. Something shifted and her stomach lurched as her plot mechanism turned the corner on its landscape and coasted down the tree-lined avenue towards the sea. Was this poetry? A story? Or simply another love letter boxed in yet another improbably convoluted delivery system?

CHAPTER 52: IMNOTSMARTITSJUSTTHESAMEFUCKINGPATTERN

Mississippi Hammer tiptoed through the beach, feeling the sand flow through her crevices, basking in the impossible coincidences that propelled her through the universe. Salt water dripped down her back and she giggled with delight as she felt a dribble between her cheeks. How many years now had it been since she stepped outside the confines of her cozy mountain village? Twenty years? Five years? Missy wasn't that good at math. She looked down and noticed something scrawled into the sand. *Aha*, she thought. *A clue*.

CHAPTER 53: AND SO IT WAS

PLEASE RESPOND