

ZAZEN

10—Venus Rodere

The next morning I took a bus out to the Four Points of Heaven Mall. We passed the auto shop along the way. The garage was strewn with flowers. Scorched framing stuck out of the ground like whalebone and notes, weighted with charred brick fragments, fluttered in the morning breeze. Beyond New Honduras the avenues widened. Bamboo blinds hung in the windows. Cats ran over welcoming porches. A woman in a light raincoat trimmed a fuchsia.

At a kiosk in an ancillary shopping park near the Four Points of Heaven Mall, I bought 9 prepaid cell phones. One for each child the Rat Queen might have had. I named them after the planets. In keeping with the inclusiveness of my new movement, I counted Pluto. I even got shared minutes. The lady at the kiosk called it the Hive Plan. The receipt had little bees all over it.

“The high school girls just love it,” she said.

Because they need to coordinate their torture of each other or because it has bees, I wondered.

“They just think the bees are adorable. And...”

They need to coordinate their torture of each other.

“And it comes in all these colors,” she spread cell phones like cards on the counter, “Like lollipops.”

And condoms.

“Or sweet tarts.”

And handguns.

I paid for it all with cash pulled off my Grand Canyon Visa and spent the rest of the morning looking up FCC cell phone towers on line and adding them to my maps. Little colored dots, like lollipops or condoms.

I got to the box-mall-church by late afternoon and the raffle hadn't started. The shiny red truck sat on the dais behind the velvet ropes just like I'd seen it several days before, the coveted *Aries Geo Killrover Conquistador*. People gathered by its wheels and girls with clipboards circled the perimeter.

“Have you applied for a mall-wide Superland™ credit card yet? You’re automatically entered.”

I signed up the baby rats. Everyone deserves a chance.

The Piazza filled. I made a list of possible terrorist groups. I decided it’s only fair that with a personal savior you should get a personal destroyer—niche terrorism being the obvious next step in identity politics. Narcissism meets the rest of the world. Hi! Howdy do? The market rallies. Satin covered bullet cases? First-responder kits with your astrological sign etched on the front plate? My mind was clicking.

I spent an hour in the food court by Mandarin Village watching a teenager serve fake rice and fantasizing about the Blackberry Apocalypse.

Just after 5pm the Pastor of the box-mall-church stepped up onto a riser next to the truck and took the microphone from the Human Resource Director. He jangled the key to the truck.

“Now, how come I haven’t seen this many of you in church?”

The mob chuckled.

Grace and Miro say fatherly admonishment is the sand in the cement of Patriarchy.

The Pastor moved toward the huge glass barrel where the raffle entries tumbled. The crowd quieted. He put his hands down together in prayer and looked up. They burst into laughter.

I imagined his hand falling on a rat ticket, Venus Rodere. No single mother sobbing on stage about how she could now get to her second job. No honor student with gleaming eyes. No football star. No thankful soldiers whispering the prayers in Spanish.

She would move toward the tumbling barrel, a collective construction of fear and desire. A sexy black rat with vague family loyalties and an enhanced ability to survive on less? The sleek carrier of change and possible disease? The eldest daughter of the Rat Queen, a tall black woman with violet and copper extensions in a tight bronze mini skirt with a GPS in one hand and a machete in the other **Venus Rodere** *You redeem others with your strength:*

191292709.24. The backs of my hands quivered. I could feel the tiny hairs on my cheeks move like cilia.

It was about to start.

The Human Resources Director tumbled the barrel one final time and the Pastor reached in and pulled out the ticket. He cleared his throat and held it up.

A thousand people stopped moving but for the rustling of plastic bags.

I walked over to the emergency pay phone, dug out a handful of change and called in a bomb threat. It was the easiest call I ever made. I told them I was with a group called Citizens for a Rabid Economy and that we were going to blow-up the box-mall-church to stimulate local job growth. I also told them that we believed the creation of a media event would cause consumer spending to increase and lead to economic expansion. And that they had twenty minutes to get everyone out of the building.

I hung up and sat down on a bench under some plastic palm trees. The Human Resources Director was making a speech on the importance of community.

Two security officers ran past me. Then a voice came over the PA system, “This is an emergency. Please leave any shopping bags you have and move quickly to your nearest exit. This is not a test. Head to the nearest exit immediately. This is an emergency.”

At first people were more annoyed than scared but after the second and third announcements, they began to rush the doors. I jumped in with the crowd. We were jammed through a side door and ended up out in the South parking lot. A couple of fat crickets with bullhorns ushered us toward a transit island in the center of the lot. People were asking them what was going on but they wouldn’t say anything.

“I heard it’s a bomb threat,” I said.

“A bomb threat?” said the man next to me.

“Yeah, that’s what I heard a cop say. Bomb threat.”

And it bubbled through conversations, bomb threat, bomb threat, bomb threat, until it pattered out of earshot. Camera crews arrived in trucks and turned on the bright lights. All eyes on the box-mall-church. Police, reporters, shoppers—waiting, hanging on each tick of a second and nothing

happened. Not a thing. People got restless. It was perfect. For the second time in an hour I snatched it from them.

Bomb squads were sent in to sweep the mall. Reporters went live with pictures of Rusty, the bomb-sniffing dog and asked viewers to pray for his safety. I didn't really think the day could get any better. But it did. Once it became clear that the police weren't going to let anybody back inside the mall, and that it wasn't going to blow up, people began to leave. They got into their cars, thousands of them, but they couldn't get out of the parking lot. That took too much cooperation. They gridlocked themselves instantly.

I was laughing so hard my jaw hurt. Tears streamed down my face and every time I tried to get a handle on myself and calm down, I lost it again. It was better than being fourteen on mushrooms in a Denny's. At one point I actually had to sit down. Two hours into the fiasco a city emergency was declared and my ribs were so sore from convulsive laughter I felt like I'd been beaten. I climbed up onto a ridge of new row housing that overlooked the city. Down below fire trucks and emergency vehicles flashed.

I lay down on my back in the lifeless dirt and stared at the sky. An hour later the first wave of street lamps went out in the valley. Under the new system they have to off by 9pm. I watched the neighborhoods go dark. From above with only the emergency lamps and chain stores visible, the grid system is gone and we are nothing but an aggregate of lights. Each gas station, fast food restaurant or all-night office supply store burns like an orange coal in the darkness.

I started to walk. On either side of me were vacant, half-built houses. Their peaked roofs dipped with the angle of the road cut. Everything was wet from the light rain but it was more like dew. I wandered through the new streets. I didn't know what I was doing. I did and I didn't. I just wanted there to be some kind a record showing exactly which side I was on, even if it was only for me. The box-mall-church disappeared as I slipped over the backside of the rise. It had been a remarkable day and I was happy walking in that chilled, acid night.

