

Everything's O.K.

When I heard about the Phoenix bombings, I was getting an eyebrow piercing from the place down the street, and the off-color tv they had up in the corner switched from a sitcom nobody was watching to a newslady standing in the street, with all this smoke and shit in the background. I ended up watching it with everyone else, and right when I realized what she was saying the dude shot the post in.

It was pretty much right as it happened, so they weren't saying a whole lot, just showing all this footage of the skyscrapers burning and stuff, and people running around in the streets trying to get away from all the fires and smoke and all that. The lady kept saying that they would continue updating their report as more information came in, but I wasn't there for that long, so I didn't really get a lot of the details. I shot the shit with the guy doing my eyebrow for a little while about the whole thing, but honestly after I had left I didn't really think much about it.

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That night there was gonna be this big house party that a bunch of people I knew were gonna go to, and I was gonna go, just to have something to do, but it ended up that I didn't really feel like it. I hung around the house for a little while before I realized I didn't really wanna do that either, so I threw on my jacket and decided to go over to Cottonmouth and have some beers and just kinda see what was going on.

Cottonmouth was ok. It was kind of a weird crowd; pretty loud and it took a while to get a drink, but nobody was really doing anything, just standing around talking—not dancing or fighting or anything like that. There was a band playing in the basement, and they sounded alright, but the place was charging like five bucks to go down there, and even though I had just gotten paid, I figured a band that was trying to get me to pay five bucks to see them wasn't a band I really wanted to have much to do with anyway.

Thomas Hvizdos

I ended up just sitting at the bar. After a while I realized that the place was playing music through the speakers they had upstairs, but the band coming up from the basement was pretty loud too, so there were kinda always two songs playing at once, which actually sounded kinda cool sometimes, but also got to be a real headache after I had been sitting there for a while, especially with the mood I was in.

I didn't really want to see anybody. Everybody I really got along with was probably gonna be at that party, and I didn't really wanna spend time with somebody I didn't really get along with. So I figured I'd just hang around at the bar until I felt like going back home.

After a few beers I was thinking that my whole plan for the evening was a pretty good one, but then I started kinda noticing this girl who had sat down next to me a few minutes ago. Like I said, I wasn't really too much in the mood to really talk to anyone, and I don't usually just start talking to people out of nowhere, cause I figure people are entitled to their privacy and whatnot, but sometimes you gotta do stuff that you didn't really think you would and I figured this was one of those times.

She had this short blond hair, and these real strong bags under her eyes, but I honestly kinda liked that, cause it made me think maybe she thought a lot or something. Plus she was wearing a Circle of Shit t-shirt, so I could tell she at least had pretty good taste in music.

I asked her if she knew the next time those guys were gonna have a show, and she kinda squinted at me and told me they were the ones playing in the basement, which kinda threw me off, cause who would've expected that Circle of Shit would charge five bucks for a show? She shrugged and said maybe it was Cottonmouth's fault, which kinda made sense, but then again that'd be a pretty dick move on Cottonmouth's part and that was just about as hard for me to imagine anyway. I told her that but she just kinda shrugged again and didn't really seem to have much more to say about it.

I asked her if she had seen that show they had played a few months ago down in the Heights and I guess she had, so we kinda talked about that whole thing and then ended up talking about a bunch of

Thomas Hvizdos

other stuff, and it was actually pretty cool. A lot of people are pretty much assholes nowadays, even a lot of the guys I usually hang around with, but it just sorta seemed like there was something really different about her, like she kinda gave a shit, but like not in a lame way or anything. Plus I could tell she was really smart, but she wasn't in your face about it or anything—it just kinda came out from the way she talked about stuff.

At one point she started saying all this stuff about the bombing—like how it was weird there still wasn't any information or anything about what really happened, or who did it, or anything like that, and I didn't really know much about the whole thing, so I couldn't say much, but the more she talked, the more I thought about it, and the more it seemed pretty weird to me too, even though I couldn't really put my finger on why.

After a while she asked if I wanted to go back to her apartment, and I said that sounded pretty good to me. I was honestly pretty surprised that she asked, but I wasn't about to turn her down. As we were going in, she said she lived with a few other girls, and the number of shoes and stuff by her door seemed to confirm it, but I didn't see any of them while I was there.

We got to the living room and she told me to hold on a second and disappeared down a hallway, so I kinda just looked around the place for a little while.

Her apartment was really cluttered; there was just a lot of stuff. I really liked that, cause it made it seem like the place was really lived in. She had a bunch of African looking stuff all over the place: there were all these long shiny wooden masks, and these crazy rugs hung up all over with these really intense geometric patterns. I kept looking at those rugs trying to figure out how they were put together, and I was gonna ask where all that stuff came from when she got back, but when she did she had a big jar of pot, and by the time we had got around to smoking it I had kinda forgot.

We sat down and smoked on the couch, which was kind of fucked up and saggy and seemed like it

Thomas Hvizdos

had a few parts missing, and then just kind of sat around and talked some more. After a while we ended up fooling around a little, but not all that much. Maybe it was the pot, but I just couldn't stop thinking about all that stuff she had at the bar. So I wasn't really all there, and I think she could tell, cause she asked me to leave pretty quick. That was ok by me though, I just got on my shoes and everything and thanked her for the pot and went on my way.

It was pretty late, and I was glad I wasn't too drunk or high or anything anymore. On the way back, this truck drove by, and there was something about the light from the headlights that kind of caught the scene and froze it for a second. Everything looked real nice, with the trees blooming and streets and buildings giving off heat from the day before, and even the cones coming down from the streetlights just kind of added to the whole effect. I was feeling pretty good, and everything looked real nice, and for an instant I didn't really feel too sad or upset about anything.

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That didn't last too long. The next morning I was kinda lying in bed, enjoying the sun coming in through the blinds, and I kept hearing this rumbling pass by my window every few minutes. Eventually it really started interfering with the lounging I was trying to do, so I pulled myself up out of bed and kinda peeked out the blinds like how they do sometimes in movies. Well, I don't know what I was expecting but after a little while I saw this crazy armored truck drive past, all full of soldiers and everything, which was a real odd way to start the day. So I kinda made my way down to the basement and hauled up Pauly's old TV that he had left when he moved out, just so I could figure out what was going on.

Pauly said it didn't work when he left it, but he was just lazy. It took some messing with the antenna to get a picture, but after like a half an hour, things started coming through just fine. Every channel was just turned over to the news, which usually makes me pretty mad, but today I actually

wanted to know what was going on, so it was actually a pretty good situation.

Stuff was pretty messed up. Phoenix was bad enough, but they had apparently got St. Louis, too, and like half of it was just gone, turned into rubble. Probably hundreds, maybe thousands of people were dead. The president had declared a national state of emergency, and that's why those soldiers were hanging around outside—nobody could leave their houses unless they had a good reason to. I had work, but I figured that job wasn't worth getting hassled by a cop with a tiny dick and a bigger gun to compensate, so I stayed in and let them fire me.

Luckily I had just bought cigarettes, so I was all set on that front, and I was pretty well stocked up on beer, too. The only thing to do was decide on what I was gonna do with all my free time. I figured it had been a while since I really had sat down and had a good think, so I turned off the TV and just kind of sat on the couch for a while smoking and pondering stuff, and thinking about that girl last night, and I guess both of those things kind of came together and I decided I should probably get more informed about the whole state of the world and everything.

A couple of weeks ago this friend of mine had given me this zine that she and some of the people she knew had put together. At the time I didn't really think that much of it, but it seemed like maybe there'd be some good stuff in there, so I went and dug it out of my room and sat down on the couch and read it, cover to cover. It was really heavy stuff, a lot of talk about war criminal generals and all the lies the government was telling us and stuff like that. I guess I had always kind of figured the people running things were pretty much assholes, but I hadn't really ever given it much thought, and it was pretty crazy to read about all the stuff that all the politicians and stuff were getting to.

The weird thing was, I had kind of figured that reading that would make me feel better, just cause I'd know a little bit more about what was going on, but honestly it just made me feel a lot worse. I started thinking about all the people that had probably died in Phoenix and St. Louis, and all the fucked

Thomas Hvizdos

up stuff that was probably going on at that very moment. I didn't really have any big ideas or anything, it was just a bummer.

I turned the TV back on, and kept watching the news. They had all this footage of National Guard guys marching through the city, and I can tell you it was pretty surreal to see all those guys in camouflage and tanks and shit just running all over all these places that were only a couple miles away.

The news people kept having all these experts on, but the weird thing was none of 'em really seemed to know why anything was happening. They'd get into debates about who had the best theory, and even I could see what they were saying was bullshit, but everyone just shouted over each other and ignored what the other guys were saying. Everybody seemed to think we were under some kind of attack, but nobody could come up with an explanation of who would be attacking us, or how they'd manage to blow up two cities.

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I spent the next few days just kinda doing that, watching tv and smoking cigarettes. Occasionally I'd get up and walk over to the kitchen and grab some saltines if I got hungry, but that didn't happen too often.

It got to the point where I was almost in a trance, just kind of lulled into the routine of smoking and watching all this shit unfold on the screen. Honestly, after about the second day I didn't even really have much of a reason to keep watching, I just couldn't come up with anything much better to do.

After a few days though, things started kind of changing. People started getting pissed that they had to stay in their houses, and there was all this footage of soldiers like forcing people back into their homes, or shoving 'em down and arresting them and shit like that. I mean, at first it was kinda funny seeing all these suburban assholes getting roughed up, but then it just kinda seemed pretty sad,

Thomas Hvizdos

especially after they started messing with people that didn't really seem to me like they were doing that much, probably just trying to run out and get some groceries or some shit like that.

But I guess the soldiers couldn't be everywhere at once, cause eventually the news people cut over to this big helicopter shot of all these people gathering outside of independence hall with signs and all that, just walking around and being mad. By the time the news got there things were already getting pretty tense, with people like throwing bricks and bottles and shit at all the soldiers that were hanging around trying to get them to fuck off and go home. Well, by that point I was pretty sick of being stuck in the house too, so I figured I'd go down there and join 'em, so I kinda waited around until the coast seemed like it was clear, and headed out.

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Things were going well enough, and I actually made it pretty far without seeing any soldiers or anything. But eventually I turned the corner into this alley, and, bam, there were these soldiers chasing down this kid. Well, I had been hassled by cops enough to figure that he was probably gonna need a hand, so I kinda followed along after em.

They caught up to him pretty quick, and when they did one of them slammed him into the wall hard enough so that when his head hit the brick, it sheared off some skin on the side, and I could see he was bleeding before he dropped.

Then they really started beating on him, kicking and hitting him with their rifles, yelling all about how he should learn some respect—all the same old bullshit.

I saw all this as I was catching up to em, and I sort of snapped or something, and just started really going after em, charging full steam ahead, mad, ready to throw down.

One of them noticed me, and quick as that he stopped beating on the kid and swung his gun up

Thomas Hvizdos

into his shoulder, and held it on me and started yelling: you fucking stop right there!

I don't even know how I stopped, cause I can move pretty fast when I'm trying, but before I even knew it I standing still staring at that rifle. I started feeling real cold, and my head just went completely blank, not even really thinking about the whole situation, just thinking about what would happen if he pulled that trigger.

It felt like all of my energy was falling through me, and it wanted to pull me with it, like just collapse on the ground or something. The other soldier was kind of glancing between me and the kid lying on the ground moaning, and the first guy was just standing there pointing that gun at me, and as I was looking into that rifle, he knew I was gonna do whatever he wanted. He jerked his rifle and he told me to get out of there.

If he didn't have that gun I know I could've taken the both of them, no problem, but he did, so I just looked at him feeling all of this crazy energy spinning around through me and telling me that I needed to charge him and beat his face in, but I couldn't, and I just sort of stood there breathing real hard and shaking and thinking about what I would've done if he didn't have that gun.

Usually when I tell people this story they always have some big ideas about what I should've done, y'know, how I should've stood up for myself or something, but at the same time, they weren't there, and I was.

I stood there shaking and glaring at him for a long time, until I turned around and left.

And I ran home, trying to burn out some of the feeling.

And when I got home I turned up a record real loud, got wasted, and punched a hole in the wall.