

Did I drink a few too many bottles too often? Probably. Did I maybe spend my money a little too recklessly? Of course. I lived a worthless life. My existence benefited no one, and I had no privilege to continue to live, but I did, even if it was for myself. It was stupid and pointless, but this is where my choices had gotten me to, and there was no point in changing it now.

The day I am deciding to start this record on was nothing strange. It was basically just like every other day with the same old routine, the same old apartment, and the same old lingering sadness. It was slightly worse that day though, but I had shrugged it off and planned to drink it away later like I always did. The alcohol used to mask it so well I forgot it was even there, but would eventually pull it back stronger once it wore off. A temporary fix that made things worse in the end.

I went to work: that little pizza shop that paid pretty well and required minimum skills. It was what kept me alive at the time, and looking back, I guess I kinda liked it. None of the workers were very warm, but you got used to swinging in every morning, grabbing your apron from the same hook with the scratch above it, and digging your hands into the dough. I fell in love with the small habits that I developed there, even if it was kind of lonely.

The work day was normal; no anomalies, strange looking customers, or gusts of bad luck that somehow made all of us mess up our jobs. That day was nothing noteworthy, and something I expected to never remember again.

So I went to the bar. I was used to that routine I had started for myself so many years before: feel pain, go to the bar and wash it away. Work ended at five, so all it took was a quick meal at home and then I was back out the door on the usual path downtown. I was content like that. Content living worthlessly, for no one. I had no purpose in life, but was happy to live out my fate until death came and shipped me away like it did to everyone. I had no plan to change anything.

The bar was the same as usual. I took my usual seat on the counter by the wall and ordered my usual preference, then drank it at the same speed as always and spent ten minutes just sitting there and thinking. Then I ordered another, a little stronger, and would go until I was completely knocked out and had to be awakened by the bartender. Sometimes I felt bad for him, since I never changed.

That night I made it to my third drink before the explosion happened. It came out of nowhere, and shook the bar, causing loose bottles to fall out of their holders onto the floor. The room immediately became lively- or maybe panicked is a better word- and half a dozen people bolted outside to see what had happened.

A moment later came the second. And after few heartbeats, the third. Drunk with confusion and unease, I eventually slipped off my stool and followed the crowd outside onto the street where we stood in tension, gazing up at a sparkling building that was raining debris down onto the sidewalk. I remember smelling the smoke in the air, and inhaling it, taking in the massive destruction right before my eyes. No questions entered my mind. No fear. Just a sense of displacement. A looming sense of being out of order. This was different. This... wasn't usual.

I'm not sure how, but eventually I felt the need to run, and since a few others already were, I slipped in among them. Not a few seconds later the bar that I had just been reclining in burst into flames. That hurt me more than the deafening ringing in my ears did. This... this would make my schedule never be the same. This would change my entire lifestyle.

So I kept running. And the buildings kept exploding. All down the street, flames burst through windows and fell out onto the sidewalk, attached to small pieces of wood and stone. Only then did panic start to sift into my running body. I never really cared for living, but I guess adrenaline did things to you that you didn't mean. I ran. For my life.

It was around those moments that I passed *her*. At first I barely paid attention to her as she emerged into my vision, but as we got closer, she stood out more and more. I became enraptured. And then we passed.

I immediately stopped running and looked back at the girl who was walking straight into the coming flames. Her hair was as bright and red as the fire around her, and on her body was a bright yellow dress that dropped past her knees, just high enough to reveal a pair of bare feet. But what stood out the most was what hung onto her like a cloud of smoke. It was an atmosphere of calmness. Of peace, of collectedness. When I looked at her, it looked like she was completely oblivious of the deathly destruction around her.

No one else seemed to pay her any attention, or notice her at all. And before I knew it, I found myself slowly beginning to follow her into the flames, the new explosions unimportant to my expanding mind. I couldn't make sense of anything, but at the same time I wasn't trying to. My body was just taking me to be with her, whatever she was.

I think a late passerby tried to stop me, but in their self-need to live, they soon gave up and ran off on their own, leaving me to continue to trail behind the red-haired head through the fire. And it was weird. I didn't seem to feel anything at all. Even though the flames licked at my feet, and glass shards flew at my face, I was totally undisturbed. I just continued to walk on, my eyes following that bright head.

Nothing for me was the same after that. Soon after following her into a crumbling building, I blacked out, maybe because of my alcohol intake, maybe because of the heat my body was experiencing without my knowledge. When I woke up, I was no longer in any place I recognized. It was surroundings that were fresh, and that my eyes had never taken in before. Something outside my line of life.

It was something like a small, rustic room, the only thing that could be seen outside being a wide night sky. I stayed there for maybe days without eating or sleeping, just sitting on the floor and thinking. I thought of nothing in particular. I went over no memories, and didn't make any speculations of the future. I just floated around in my headspace while maintaining a state of total homeostasis. Nothing changed, nothing happened, but at the same time a major growth was taking place. Something was growing, I could subconsciously feel it, and it was only until it fully bloomed that I stood from my spot on the floor and left the room I had been waiting in.

She was there. She had been waiting outside the door all along, and now she was standing in front of me with no expression on her face. She stared at me, and I stared at her, looking at what I perceived had drawn me to her: her fiery hair. And then I met her eyes and she spoke.

"You've grown well," she said with a voice that wasn't human.

"Thank you," I replied, because thanking her seemed like what I had to do at that moment.

"Are you ready to go on?" She asked, her expression never changing.

"What will I do?" I returned.

"Live," she said. "Live with a purpose. Live for others."

I nodded. I understood fully what she meant, even though she had barely explained it to me. I comprehended everything. I had grown- I had changed- and now it was time to live new.

She smiled at me, put her hand on my shoulder, and pushed me back into the world.