

ONEONE

Van Nuys looks shitty. Not like South Central or Inglewood shitty and dangerous—more like middle America shitty. Soulless strip malls, gas stations and fast food joint endlessly dot the landscape for miles on end. Dan knew about this area. Not enough to help though, since he has no idea where to find an isolated pay phone.

Not that there aren't plenty of places to call from, there are phones everywhere. There is one at every corner and probably one in every store and restaurant and doghouse for miles which just went to show you that what the Valley lacks in character it certainly makes up for in public

phones. And donut shops. Lots and lots of donut shops.

Dan pulls off Sepulveda into the parking lot of a 7-Eleven and up to a space by the door. There's a pay phone attached to the side of the building, though he isn't too terribly interested in this one. He looks into his rear view mirror again. The phone he wants is across the street in front of the Amoco.

He checks his watch again. Then takes out the script you've made for him. Across the top, you've written in all caps—

READ SLOW.

Hale had suggested that he read it with a phony accent too. Nikko wanted Dan to do it with a southern drawl but was afraid that the radio station would just hang up on him thinking he was some liquored-up, trailer trash redneck. Hale nixed the southern thing thinking you'd appear to be some hillbilly militia instead

of world class terrorists. God forbid someone thought of you as the cruddy domestic kind.

“How about a french accent,” Dan had said back in your room. “Everybody hates the fuckin’ French.”

“They’d hang up figuring that you’d just blow your own dick off and then surrender,” you told him.

You thought maybe a proper British accent would be the funniest. Professor Henry Higgins, terrorist. The bomb in the john is mainly just a con.

“Just do it in your own accent,” Hale finally said, laughing.

“What are you talking about?” Dan replied. “I don’t have any fuckin’ accent.”

That’s the way you left it. Dan was just going to read it slow and clear and then get off the phone and drive back. Plain and simple. He reads through the script one more time and

turns the page over to make sure he has written down the phone numbers of those radio stations.

He goes in to the store to break a twenty and the clerk gives him a dollar in change with his smokes. He takes one last drag on a cigarette, crushes it in the half-full ashtray and gets out of his truck and crosses the street. It's a couple of minutes early but, sitting around and waiting was making him even more nervous than being in traffic. Besides, he had drawn the shit detail of the evening and all because Hale had a nicer car.

“Fuck those guys,” he mutters. “The next time they need to haul a stiff away they can put him in the front seat of Hale’s Camry and go use the carpool lane.”

The reason radio is considered a medium in L.A. is because it’s neither rare nor well done. The FM dial is crammed with some thirty-odd

stations, half of them Spanish. One of the things you learned on your drive across country was, nine times out of ten, your chances of getting anything worth a shit on the radio were slim to no-fucking-way. One day when you had just crossed the Rockies all you could pick up was country music and radio evangelists for eight whole hours. It was complete torture. You ended up listening over and over and over to a Cardigans CD Jackie had left in your glove box until you finally tossed it right out of the goddamn window. It wasn't until you hit the ocean that you finally found a station that played anything resembling AOR again.

One of the good things about living in Los Angeles was the handful of listenable radio stations to pop back and forth to. Usually you could only go so long before somebody would go and play something shitty like Rob Thomas or Hot Hot Heat and you'd just hit another preset

on your stereo. Hands down, the best station in town was KLXA who usually played the least amount of garbage and the DJ's kept the chatter to a minimum. Since their phone number was 949-KLXA it was easy to remember. That's who Dan decided he was going to call.

You didn't think that it mattered one bit which part of the radio station he called, so you told him to try the request line. You figured there would always be someone answering that phone. If you had known what was going to happen next you would have told him to call a newspaper instead. Look, you're no genius.

He drops a quarter into the phone and watches his hand shake as he punches in the number. In his other hand he holds the script and glances over his shoulder to see if anyone is watching him. It starts to ring on the other end.

After the second ring, a sedan pulls into the Amoco station. Dan thinks it might be a police

car and gets all spooked before hanging up the phone. The guy in the car pulls up to the cashier's booth, gets out to buy a pack of smokes and pulls away. The car is a Chevy Cavalier, which is only marginally more believable as a cop car than a Neon. Dan is getting scared for no reason. He watches until the Cavalier leaves before pulling his quarter out of the coin return to try again.

“Be cool,” he reminds himself. He punches in the number again and listens as it starts to ring.

Three rings and nobody is picking up. Dan shakes his head, thinking he'll have to try one of the other stations in town when all of a sudden there is a click on the other end. Before Fuckin' Dan can say anything he hears the DJ's voice blasting into his ear.

“Hey, you're the fifteenth caller! You just won a pair of Green Day tickets!”

“Oh my God!” he yells. “I can’t believe it!” Dan is in shock. The bastard is ecstatic.

Green Day had been sold out for months already. You and Dan wanted to go and you found a scalper with decent seats who’d sell them for two hundred bucks apiece. You told him to go blow himself because you sure as shit didn’t have that kind of scratch to spend, not on Green Day anyway.

“Who’s this?” the DJ thunders.

“Uh, Dan.”

“Hey, Dan, hang on and we’ll talk to you on the air after this song,” the DJ says and before Dan can get in another word, he is on hold.

Oh shit! he thinks to himself. The call. The goddamn bomb call. The whole gig. He looks at his watch. It was ten to eight, five minutes behind schedule. But Green Fucking Day tickets? Christ, how often does that happen? What luck.

“I can wait,” Dan thinks. “I’ll just call after I get them.”

You would think that most people would stick around to see their prank go down but you, Hale and Nikko want to be as far away from Beverly Hills as possible when the shit came down. When the cops roll up and the bomb squad arrives, you want to be back at the room sucking dope into your lungs. You are too busy whooping it up in the car, practically breaking your own arms patting yourselves on the back thinking you are geniuses. You think it’s over, that you have pulled it off. If all goes right, you are just going to kick back and watch it all go down on the news at ten.

Man plans and God laughs, remember?

Dan listens to the hold music which is what they are playing on air. The song has just started. *It’s*

okay, he thinks. The call can wait a couple more minutes.

The DJ comes back on the line five minutes later.

“Well everybody, I have our winner, Dan, on the line. Hey buddy, what’s your last name?”

“Uh, Durden...Dan Durden.”

You know things are going to be all fucked up the moment you hear Dan’s voice on the radio.

“Wait a second, shut up. That’s Dan!” you yell.

“What the fuck is that idiot doing?” Nikko screams from the back seat. No doubt about it. God is laughing alright. He’s just plain pissing himself.

“Does that mean he did or didn’t make the call?” asks Hale.

It’s a good question. How the hell are you supposed to know?

“Dan, where are you calling from?”

Hell, Dan thinks.

“The Valley,” Dan says.

“Well, Dan Durden, you just won yourself a pair of Green Day tickets for the show next weekend at the Staples Center. What do you think about that?”

“Uh,” Dan says. “Fuh... I mean, uh, cool.”

“Great, hold on Dan and we’ll get you those tickets,” the D.J. announces to all of Los Angeles. “After this break, ten in a row.”

Click, Dan is back on hold.

“Shit!” Dan yells into the phone.

“Shit!” screams Hale. “Does that mean he did or didn’t call in the bomb?” You look at him. The veneer is cracked slightly. He is definitely losing his cool.

“I don’t know!” yells Nikko. “I, oh, uh...FUCK!” He slams his hand on the back of your seat. This is a first. You are the prevailing

head of cool for once.

“Okay, wait, think about it,” you tell them. “He calls in a bomb and to congratulate him they put him on the air and give him concert tickets?”

“Scott’s right. No way,” says Hale. He points at the clock on the Camry’s dash. “It’s almost eight, he must have called the threat in before.”

“Yeah, but what phone did he use to win the tickets?” asks Nikko.

He is only on hold for another minute but it’s long enough for Dan to realize the most important thing about what happened by the time he hung up.

He couldn’t use this phone again.

The police would be able to locate the source of the bomb threat call because eventually they’d access all those MUD’s that Nikko had mentioned. If they saw that another

call was made to another radio station from the same phone just minutes before they'll know it was the same guy. Dan had just given KLXA and all one million of its listeners his full name. Calling from this phone now would be as stupid as calling from the one back in his room. He stuffed the paper into his pocket and ran for his truck.

Not only could he not call from that phone but he was pretty damn sure that calling from that neighborhood was out as well just to be on the safe side, and now was surely not the time to be playing this whole thing open-assed. His watch says it's eight o'clock and he jumps back onto the freeway, leaving a patch of rubber as his tires screech on the asphalt.

The speed limit is sixty-five and Dan isn't so much afraid of getting pulled over for speeding as he is that his truck is going to fall apart. He is barely pushing seventy-five and the truck is

shaking the fillings out of his teeth.

“The next time I need to call in a terrorist threat,” Dan says to himself. “I’ll fuckin’ borrow Scott’s car.”

He passes an exit for the 118 Freeway and keeps going, cursing the sputtering, clanking sound his engine is starting to make. His foot stays on the floor. He looks around. The truck had to hold together.

“You hear me baby, hold together.”

Up ahead he merges onto the 5. It’s not too terribly far from Van Nuys but he knows he’ll have to call really soon.

“Next exit,” Dan thinks. It was almost quarter after.

The Rebel Truck Stop is visible even before the offramp. This will have to do. A beat to shit white Chevy pickup truck isn’t going to attract attention in a place like this.

Dan is frantically looking for phone booths. There had to be pay phones in the diner behind the gas station but a phone out in the open like that was unusable for this kind of call. An eighteen-wheeler pulls away from the diesel island and he sees what he's looking for on the back end of the lot.

Three phone booths are standing behind the greasy spoon next to a pair of weather beaten soda machines. In the first one, a rail-thin trucker in a hat picks his nails while talking to someone, but the other two are empty.

I wish Skinny's dime would just run out and he'd paddle his fuckin' ass back onto the highway, Dan thinks. It would be best if there wasn't anybody around at all but he can't wait one more second. This is going to have to do.

He pulls the pickup in front of the booth farthest from Skinny, hoping the phone is working. The last thing Dan wants is to make

the call from the booth next to the trucker.

Sliding the door shut behind him, Dan steals a glance back to the other booth. Skinny is still jawing away and paying more attention to his greasy nails than to anything around him. Dan takes a second to see if he can hear anything the trucker is saying. He can, though none of it comprehensible, muffled by the layers of plexiglass and steel that separate the two of them. Digging in his pocket, he pulls out some change and the now crumpled piece of paper that he has to read from.

Turning the page over, he picks another station to call. This time choosing KNGW-AM, the all-news station, figuring that unless they were giving away Anderson Cooper tickets it has to be a safe bet. As he drops a quarter in and dials, he wonders if it's entirely possible to get hit by lightning twice. If it happened, it would be on a day like this. Murphy's law has a way of

lingering around like a bad dose of the clap.

The line rings once before someone answers.

“There is a bomb in...”

A familiar voice interrupts him with a pre-recorded message.

“Please deposit another fifty cents.”

“Fuck!” he yells. He’s traveled far enough out of the area that it isn’t a local call anymore. Immediately he looks over at Skinny to see if he’s attracting any attention. Skinny doesn’t notice anything. He has his back to Dan now and he is most likely still checking out his cuticles.

Frantically, Dan feels around in his pockets for more change, digging out two more quarters. The last of his change. If he gets cut off for any reason, he knows he’ll have to go into the greasy spoon to get some more.

He slips the quarters into the slot and waits

for the two beeps that tell him his call will go through. They come and once again the phone starts ringing. Dan takes a deep breath. Lights. Camera. Action.

“KNGW, all news, all day. How can I help you?”

Now in a town like L.A., it's a pretty safe bet a radio station like this gets its share of prank calls and rambling lunatics. As Dan starts reading your little threat, it takes the receptionist on the other end ten seconds to place this in her mental in-basket.

On the bottom of the page you had written in big letters the last thing he was to say to whomever he gave this message to. It was the only question that he was to ask.

“Do you understand?”

“Yu, yu, yes.” the receptionist's voice trembles.

Click.

Before the receptionist can even make a call to the station manager, Dan wipes his prints off of the phone with his shirt sleeve, jumps back in his truck and pulls away. He shoots one last look over at Skinny. The trucker now has his boot off and is scratching a dirty sock-covered foot, but at no time does he even look in Dan's direction. It is a clean break. Time to blow like the wind.

His hands are shaking badly as he pulls back onto the 5 freeway headed South, checking the rearview every few seconds.

He remembered to wipe his prints off of the phone, right? Yes, he thought. With the exception that he had made the call thirty minutes late, it had all gone pretty smoothly. How much difference was it going to make in the long run? A lot, but that would become the least of your problems.