

## The Bonfire

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

This afternoon after my usual work day at the office, I took the 607 tram West to Rua la Casa, where I lived alone. It had been rainy earlier in the morning, so I had both my briefcase with my laptop and work folders along with a stout bumbershoot umbrella that my mother had given to me for my thirtieth birthday. As I approached Medeiros Avenue, I pulled the cord signaling my stop to the driver and absent-mindedly grabbed my briefcase with one hand while forgetting my umbrella with the other. I then waited for the middle doors to open and got off the tram without realizing that I had left the umbrella on the ground just below my seat. As I stepped off the tram, a wall of muggy July heat rushed to greet my face as I crossed the intersection and headed past the Portuguese butcher shop at the North end of my street. When I reached Medeiros Avenue, I suddenly felt awkward without anything in my right hand and felt a sudden panic as I realized that I had forgotten my umbrella. Feeling a bit defeated, I gazed at the tram as it slowly continued its course westward to Gilliam Station. As I walked slowly down my familiar street, I looked back over my shoulder one last time, and noticed that the 607 was lumbering slowly onward in heavy evening traffic. Determined to save my mom's gift from a waste bin at the transit terminus, I started to run along Main St. in a final attempt to catch up with tram number 2066. Clinging to my briefcase, I ran along the busy sidewalk causing pedestrians to shuffle over to one side and stare. I reached Dundern St. and crossed on an amber light as traffic began to let up on the street to my left. Beads of perspiration poured off my face as I tried to intercept the tram at the next main intersection at Main and Caulfield. Worried that I'd lose the coveted rain cargo and deplete my already spent batteries, I made one last push West hoping that the traffic lights would go in my favor. Finally, green turned to amber at Caulfield and the tram halted just enough to let me back onboard. Exhausted, I caught up to the last car, pushed the button and the doors opened. I boarded the tram from the rear and caught the glances of commuters who had possibly watched my mad street dash through crowded intersections. As I made my way to the center of the tram to regain my seat, I noticed a pair of legs crossed seductively where my umbrella had been forgotten below the commuter seat. My gaze then shifted upwards and I noticed an attractive young dark-haired passenger looking out through the tram's window to her left. As I approached the seat, our eyes met and I became lost in the green and hazel of her stare.

"I think I must have forgotten my umbrella..." I articulated awkwardly, still mesmerized by her sultry aura.

"You must be tired! I saw you running after the streetcar through those two intersections." She said in a playful tone as she handed me the umbrella.

"I hate losing things." I said, feeling a bit dim-witted about being noticed chasing traffic in such a frenzied manner.

“We never would have met otherwise. I’m Jazmine by the way.” She said to me shuffling over on the twin seat to let me sit down next to her.

“Thomas. Nice to meet you.” I said to her as I sat down next to her with the streetcar proceeding further away from my abode in Rua la Casa.

Jazmine and I chatted for some ten minutes on board the 607. Before I left the tram, she gave me her phone number and urged to call her to hang out some more. I got off at Millstone Rd. and walked all the way back to Medeiros Ave., which took me close to twenty-five or more minutes. When I got back home, I looked at my mom’s umbrella and was amazed at how different the day had gone since forgetting it on board tram number 2066.

The following day, I called Jazmine to ask her out.

“Glad I got called back.” She said with a hint of sassiness.

“Are you up for getting drinks someplace tonight?” I ask with some hesitation.

“Some friends of mine are meeting up for an outdoor kegger. Maybe we should go together.” She told me.

“Sure. Where should I meet up with you?” I asked.

“How about I pick you up and take you out there!” She said with a tone of flirtatious assertiveness.

“Sounds cool.” I said curtly.

“I’ll come by your place at 8:30pm tonight. Don’t bother bringing booze, just bring yourself!” She said to me coyly before hanging up.

After running a few errands like stopping off at the laundromat and tidying up my flat, it was soon time to ready myself for the night out. After changing into a pair of khakis and a Hawaiian shirt, I chilled out on the sofa ready for a honk from a car or the sound of my doorbell. At roughly twenty-five after eight, I heard footsteps on my porch followed by two loud rings.

“So this is where your pad is!” Jazmine said loudly as I opened the front door.

“This is my place.” I said noticing her slightly curled dark locks.

“It’s a bit of a drive to the kegger but it will be well worth it!” She told me as we both walked together toward a dark beaten up Corvette Stingray parked just in front of my walkway.

“Brad, this is Thomas.” Jazmine said to introduce me to a man with blondish hair who sat in a dark corner of the driver’s seat.

Jazmine and I then sat together in the back seat of the cramped sports car. As we drove along to the freeway, I looked out from my back seat window after the sun had

set, leaving a thin rim of light on the horizon. After about an hour, we turned off on a dirt road lined with tall coniferous trees that whizzed by with punctuated regularity. After driving along the near pitch black dirt road for twenty minutes, we got to a small cabin in the woods lit up slightly by an immense bonfire some thirty or more yards away. Once the car stopped alongside the cabin, Brad put the car in park and we all got out feeling drawn to the lively fire pit with its tall forking flames licking the night sky with hues of red, orange and yellow.

“Thomas, meet some of my of my best pals from ‘The Right Collective’.” Jazmine said to me as we sat down on a wooden log together.

“Have some suds Thomas!” A man with an army green ball cap said as he handed me a yellow plastic cup filled with beer.

“You all know Jazmine through school or something?” I asked with a hint of shyness.

“I’ve known Jaz from way back!” Another man said to me who wore a red and black plaid lumberjack shirt. “We’ve always been involved in right-wing political activism since as far back as our high school days together.” He added.

“What are those books for?” I asked, pointing at a large stack of books piled directly across from me about ten feet away from the blaze.

“You didn’t tell him about this Jaz?” A fellow with a crew cut with bulging blue eyes asked.

“We’re burning commie books tonight!” The same man said pointing to his right bicep which had a tattoo of an eagle interlaced with a Nazi swastika.

After hearing this, I started to recoil from the group slightly, glancing every so often at Jazmine who was very much enthused by every new book thrown into the tall inferno.

After sitting by the bonfire for some three or so hours, Jazmine and I were driven back into town by Brad who was our mildly intoxicated chauffeur for the night.

When I got back to Rua la Casa, I gave Jazmine a drunken kiss before leaving the car, and quickly crawled into my bed alone, still feeling slightly dizzied by the carbonated concoction that the ‘pals’ of Jazmine had served to me at their bonfire kegger.

After sleeping in until noon, I got up for breakfast and checked my email account on the laptop which rested on the kitchen table. After typing my username and filling the field with my password, I noticed a series of strange messages sent to me earlier in the morning.

One message read: “WE KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE. IF YOU’RE NOT ONE OF US, WE’LL END YOU!”

After feeling a bit shaken, I quickly searched the web for a criminal database and found a local one for my area. As I searched the local police dispatch for cybercrime, I noticed a mug shot of a man who looked like the book burner with the Nazi tattoo from the night

before. I quickly locked my door and decided not to hang out with Jazmine or the 'The Right Collective' ever again.

The next week I felt quite apprehensive at work, especially when walking alone on my commutes. At the end of the work week, I took the 607 tram back home as usual and was worried about running into Jazmine but never did. After exiting the tram through the rear doors, I walked back through Rua la Casa and reached my homestead. I quickly checked my stainless steel mailbox and noticed a pamphlet. When I looked at it up close, it read: "Join Us at the City Hall March of Rights" and at the bottom was a logo with the words 'The Right Collective' spelt in gothic font. I then flipped the pamphlet over and noticed a hang man drawn in red ink with the name "Thomas" scratched out at the top. I quickly looked around on the street feeling another anxiety attack coming on and rushed indoors to lock myself in. That same night, I hardly slept a wink, occasionally clutching a little league baseball bat close to my bedside window. The next day, I compulsively started to pack up some things in case the man with the tattoo or others at that cabin bonfire were to show up in the neighborhood. The plan was to spend one more night in Rua la Casa and possibly make a getaway to mom's place up in the Northwoods if the insomnia brought upon by the skinheads persisted through Saturday night. By lunch-time, I had packed up enough for a three week stay along with my laptop and briefcase to do my work remotely from up North. I put the pamphlet with the death threats in a small Ziploc bag in case I needed fingerprint evidence of foul play and again felt intense panic as the night approached. After dinner, I went to bed early and again tried to sleep but to no avail. At midnight, I looked at my alarm clock and wondered again if the bonfire rogues would make a covert approach on the house. At 3am, I heard noises outside and looked out of my bedroom window. Suddenly, I spotted a man wearing a darkish hood planting a small wooden cross on the lawn by my walkway while another wearing a baseball cap doused the cross in kerosene. The same Corvette from the night of the kegger suddenly pulled up to the curb with both men finding their way into the back seat while the driver got out briefly and launched a small lit tiki torch in the direction of the wooden cross causing it to ignite in the pitch black darkness. The Stingray then drove off with a loud muffler sound waking up the apprehensive lighter sleepers in my neighborhood. Two hours later I restlessly shot out of bed and went outside on my front walkway. The small wooden cross still burned slightly with a dim orange ember emanating at its base. After trying to photograph some of the evidence of the nocturnal cultish activity, I grabbed my things and headed straight over to Central Bus Terminal. From there, I caught the 7:30am bus out of town to the Northwoods. As I sat in my window seat, I saw the bus pull out of the loading bay and noticed the small bumbershoot umbrella tethered to my knapsack. My thoughts then drifted to all that had come about since that recent late afternoon when I had left it on the 607 as I disembarked to head back home.

[The End]