

The Bridge

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

As dusk settled over _____ Bay, The Siesta and its small crew cozies about a hundred or so metres off the shores of _____ Beach. Taking a privileged position amid the other small vessels, the Flag Day festivities and Port of Westbury fireworks are just about to start. The captain of the small sailboat casts an anchor over the port side and turns off the small motorboat engine.

“Come over here Champ!” The Captain shouts out to a runt of a Spaniel basking with his paws over the bow deck.

“What about a brewski, Hubert? The show is about to start.” The other member of the Captain’s crew hollers after lifting the lid off of a medium-sized cooler just behind the mast.

“Get me a Duggan’s Ale, Vinny! One of the cold ones at the bottom of the cooler. Please and thank you!” The Captain says with a slightly peppy and upbeat air.

With a slim crescent moon over The Siesta’s starboard side, a spirited and effervescent display of holiday fireworks begins to highlight the charcoal black sky with shimmering tones of speckled star dust and lively rockets of primary colours.

Soon, with the loud cannon-like sounds from ‘Gunpowder Barge’ nettled some twenty metres off shore, Champ begins to howl.

“Shut up you old mutt!” Hubert the Captain shouts out to the ship’s bow.

“If Champ doesn’t doesn’t stop howling at the moon, we should put ‘im in the cabin! Hube, ‘member that time one of the Revenue people were hassling you and you told him you lived in this here boat! Ha ha! They never did clue in to how much of a killing you have made in this town through the years!” Vinny says loudly.

“Those tax sharks don’t have a clue! They know nothing about my homestead in West _____ and I intend it to keep it that way!”

“No one knows it, but I bet you if they made a list of all the high rollers in _____ and totaled all their earnings, you’d be at the very top with the biggest an’ baddest mountain o’ cash!”

“If this next deal tomorrow night goes our way, my crew may out-deal the Sim-Sim Gang. We just gotta get our drugs from shelters to manors, all throughout the West Coast!”

As the final crescendo of fireworks peppers the night sky with escalating waves of sparkling light, fizzing notes of astral effervescence, a last set of drumming crackles and clash of fiery cymbals, The Siesta pulls up its anchor and sets its slow course back into the darkened bay toward Keypoint Marina.

The following morning, the rains beat down heavily over _____. With limited space in homeless shelters throughout town, numerous 'Tent-city' encampments were popping up like toadstools in parkland ravines, beneath underpasses and especially under structures like the old rusted Starktown Bridge to provide makeshift shelter and humble community to an underprivileged class, often struggling with narcotics addictions and other concurrent challenges.

"Mornin' neighbor!" A man with a tattered toque and large spectacles with duct tape around the tortoise shell frames says while poking his head out of a canvas tent.

"Morning Rusty!" Another fellow with a black hoodie and Texaco baseball cap replies as he warms his hands on a small Coleman stove.

"I hear there's a community supper tonight just north of here at Sanctuary Shelter. You planning on goin'?" Rusty asks.

"I think I'll stick around tonight. Got some extra sandwiches that I got at Courage Drop-in yesterday. Hope this rain stops soon so I can venture out again without gettin' drenched."

"I plan on goin' tonight. I'll see if they have any take-out food left over and I'll bring some back here for you, 'Boots', Petey and 'Lee-boy'."

"Can you get me a pair o' socks? My feet feel like they could get gangrene from this weather. Just ask Ann at the door and tell her 'Skippey' needs a new pair."

"Ok no problem. Sure you don't want to come tonight? I think there's extra chicken pot pie if you show up in the line tonight."

"Naw, I'm too tired. We're goin' to have a campfire tonight. Gonna have a nap in my little teepee then warm up and stay dry by the fire 'stead o' trekking 'round the city in this miserable weather. Peace bro!"

After waving goodbye to his friend, Rusty leaves the sheltered and shaded underparts of the bridge built some hundred or so years prior and ascends a flight of concrete steps where monochromatic gang graffiti is competing to cover all the bare wall space to his left. Feeling the rain gently tap dancing on his black poncho, he begins the slow on-foot commute to the Sanctuary Shelter. After meandering through the rain-soaked streets and high-rises of _____ like a small ant in a damp and hardscaped maze, Rusty reaches the shelter nestled at the north end of a small parkette. He then promptly joins a medium-length queue of other famished and soaked supper guests, many of whom, like him, will quickly grab their meals and not request to have their name put on a separate and limited list for a nightly shelter cot. After waiting about 10 minutes in the queue that snaked around the side of the shelter, Rusty grabs his take-out food offerings and makes a few requests on behalf of his bridge encampment buddies.

"Is Ann on-duty tonight?" Rusty asks as he clutches his set of plastic bags containing take-out containers of warm supper meals.

"One sec, let me get her for you. She's working at packing meals in the kitchen counter tonight." A helpful male door-person with an upbeat voice replies.

"Thanks."

"Hi there, I'm Ann, how can I help you?" A middle-aged woman with an apron donning the colours of the shelter asks in a friendly manner.

"'Skippey' couldn't make it tonight, but he needs a new pair of socks or two. The damp weather and trekking around town has made his feet need a fresh pair."

"Sure thing. I've got a big bin inside full of new donations. Tell 'Skippey' I said hi." Ann says heading back inside momentarily.

"God bless. Thanks for all the help." Rusty says after the long-time shelter volunteer promptly returns and enthusiastically hands him two warm pairs of new wool socks.

After putting the socks in one of the pockets of his wet poncho, Rusty starts his nightly commute through the soggy-damp streets, retracing his steps back to the crowded underbelly of the Starktown Bridge. Finally, still lugging the bags of take-out for a host of his pals, Rusty makes his descent down the same flight of stairs leading to the bridge's 'Tent-city' encampment. After slowly walking about 10 risers downward, he suddenly hears the shriek of a small Saw-whet owl leaving the area down below and flying almost in distress toward the upper levels of the confusing metropolis of concrete and glass. After watching the tiny and lightly speckled owl slowly disappear into the foggy distance, Rusty begins to hear some shouting down below.

"Raise your hands in the air and keep facing the other way!" A loud, stern, and unfamiliar voice hollers. Taking a frightened peek over the right barrier of the concrete stairwell into the old bridge's lower extremities, Rusty descries a group of armed security personnel in black and grey uniforms, one of which is pointing a gun at the backs of twenty or more of his friends and fellow community members, all lined up and facing the train tracks to the north.

"We're missing one squatter Boss. I searched the tent over there and looked behind all of the support pillars. One must have taken off on us." A younger and slightly lower ranked guardsman says with a gun and baton on each side of his slender hips.

"The order is a go." Another uniformed enforcer says after putting his mobile phone in his pocket and reaching for the pistol on his right hip.

"Screw that last guy. Let's just get this over and done with." A fourth agent says, approaching the long line-up with another loaded weapon.

"Drop to your knees!" The senior paramilitary guard yells out.

With a look of sheer terror, Rusty covers his spectacled eyes as his beloved friends follow the orders and drop to their knees. Forced to flee back up the steps from his secret perch at this very moment, Rusty hears his friend 'Lee-Boy' scream. He then catches one last glimpse of the four henchmen as they walk behind the lineup of kneeling 'bridge massacre' victims, felling them one-by-one, with a bullet in each of their skulls. Hearing the muffled sound of silencer gunshots and the cries of his fellow encampment-mates ringing and resonating in his head, Rusty drops the bags of food and rushes off into nightly fog, leaving his ragged tent and all of his sheltered personal belongings in Starktown.

The next morning, City Council convenes to vote on a motion regarding 'the safety of families and kids' in the streets of _____. The city's Mayor heads up to the podium in Council Hall, adjusts his reading glasses and opens a slim black binder at the lectern.

"I move that City Council adopt the 'Safe Kids and Families Act', along with the deployment of a special taskforce of police and special security guards to clean up the streets and make _____ safer in areas currently occupied and overrun by street hustlers and derelict homeless persons."

"I second the motion." The City Councillor from the Starktown Ward responds.

"All those in favour." The Mayor says, while eyeing the Council members seated in a small semi-circle facing him. In response to the vote, twenty-five hands are raised unanimously and without any of the slightest hesitation.

"Motion carried." The Mayor says closing his binder and leaving the podium to regain his seat. Once seated in his special chair, a female attendant passes the Mayor a message that a special envoy is waiting for him in his office to deliver a set of confidential documents. Soon afterwards, when Council recesses, the Mayor heads out of Council Hall and uses a special elevator fob to access the floor of his office. Once in the office waiting area, he recognizes the male envoy waiting for him.

"Hey Hubey! Been quite a while!" The Mayor says in a slightly informal manner.

"Just came to make sure the motion carried today. If it did, I'm putting in full capital." The secretly affluent Captain of The Siesta says with a hint of zeal.

"My part of the deal is done. Did you clean out Starktown?" The Mayor asks.

"I've got the documents right here and a separate list with twenty-two names with one circled in red." Hubert says methodically.

"What about the tape? I need a recording of the whole thing." The Mayor says with insistence.

"We have the 'bridge tape' from police street footage but that part wasn't in the agreement. I understood I was to only to hand over the planning documents for future

legal reasons along with the top-secret hit-list.” Hubert insists to ____’s most high level official.

“Who is this ‘forgotten man’ circled in red?” The Mayor asks after perusing the documents containing all of the street names and police photos of those rounded up and shot below the Starktown Bridge the night before.

“My men are searching the shelter system right now and we’ll update you once we’ve found this man ‘Dusty’ on the list. When I called back my agent last night after I gave him the green light, I learned they found an empty tent and quickly searched the area below the bridge but had to proceed with him missing from the lineup.”

“I’ll file these in my Mayor’s safe for now.”

After shaking hands with his secret associate Hubert and seeing him off, the Mayor returns to Council Hall where he talks to a press affiliate about a news story informing his city constituents about a spike in ____’s crime and a renegade man at large involved in several violent acts throughout Starktown.

The End