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A CALL TO THE PORTLAND JR. FIRE DEPARTMENT

Hannah Hurt

We celebrated too early. With fireworks and flame in the cold December night. We commenced in an open field, empty except for an old red car, our means of transportation, and ourselves. The cows in the pasture over occasionally could be heard along with the small stream in the woods. The ashes of our last celebration still remain there and we were soon to add more.

It was maybe around ten on New Year’s Eve. We had found some fireworks leftover from the Fourth of July. We figured what better way to celebrate than with explosives. We grabbed blankets and jackets, loaded the fireworks into a tailgate, and divided our ranks between an ATV and the truck. The field was a short drive behind Seth’s house and behind his small patch of woods--technically walkable but not desirable in the cold and the dark. Behind the sanction of field is a cow pasture and a few crumbling barns with hay bales hugging their sides. The field was empty except for a rusted red car and a massive brush pile. It was a common place for us to have bonfires and even pitch tents. Every star could be seen from the field if it was a clear night, and tonight was no exception.

We laughed and shouted, some running around in the dead grass, others huddling for warmth. It had been a warm winter and now the sudden cold crippled some and energized others. And amongst the energy sparked light. Green, red, orange, and yellow shot from the roman candles. The car became the target as it has been before.

This is not the first attack on the car. It once had a purpose and saw many miles, but age turned it into nothing more than a mass of red scrap metal with gas tank and engine removed. In July, we busted the car with a baseball bat. I swung at rearview mirrors and watched glass shatter to my feet. Chandler busted out the right headlight where a wasps’ nest lay and was stung while the rest of us ran and took shelter. He cursed and then threw the bat into the back window, where we left it stuck upright like a knife in a piece of meat.

We found trashed nostalgia that hinted at who the previous owner may have been. That was when we caught the car on fire the first time. With bottle rockets and purple smoke bombs, we had started a fire in the back seat. It was small and manageable, and was put out within a matter of seconds.

A few months later, the car added bullet holes to the windowless, rusted body. It lay there innocent and helplessly as Seth shot automatic round after round into its metal siding. The sounds of gunshots hitting metal reverberated through the autumn chilled and still green field.
We had no intention of setting the car on fire, it was essentially an accident. Someone had shot a roman candle through the same hole that the bat had left in the back windshield and it landed into the air ventilator. It started just as a little glow. Garret and I took the ATV back to the house. We merely grabbed water bottles. On a second thought, we grabbed a fire extinguisher for extra safety. We didn't realize how quickly the fire had spread until we started to head back to the field and could see the flames through the woods 300 yards away. Garret slowed down the ATV then, knowing our ample water source was of no help anymore.

When we arrived, some were just watching while some were running around the flames. Garret and I dumped the water and extinguisher into a pile on a quilt in the grass. Garret ran to the aid of those around the fire, and I joined sides by those who watched. I don't know when, but someone grabbed our meager supplies. All the water in the few water bottles we grabbed had been dumped to no avail. The plastic bottles left to melt amongst the metal. Evan ran around the car in a trail of white exhaust in hopes that the fire extinguisher would somehow do some good. "Sole member of the Portland Jr. Fire Department" he screamed, covering his mouth and eyes from the heat and smoke.

Jordan found this funny and ran to the car. She began to sing in chants and dance as if she was a power warrioress reenacting her fight. Her long pixie haircut flopping around her face as she moved her body. Evan and Seth joined.

Then, there was the first explosion. All of us girls screamed at the guys to step away from the fire but they were like moths to a light. The heat was becoming too much for the tires. They exploded in a loud pop, as their air pressure couldn't fight any more, and sent the surrounding flames in whatever the direction of its burst. We watched, as one by one all four popped.

Unlike July, we couldn't put out the flames this time. The night was dark and cold, but the heat from the car kept us all to warm while the black plumes of smoke still managed to penetrate the night.

We were now defeated. There was nothing we could do but watch the car burn. The poisonous fumes were now traveling to our lungs and made our eyes sting. Jordan, the hippie friend who is so environmentally conscious that she does not even allow us to burn water bottles in our typical bonfires, was starting to worry that we will all now probably catch lung cancer of some sorts because have all inhaled burning plastic, metal, fabric, and whatever else.
We all piled into Garret’s truck, and sat listening to music as the fire continued. We listened to “Disco Inferno,” “Ring of Fire,” and other songs in memoriam of the car. We sat until the windows fogged up, wiped them clean, opened the doors to help ventilate the air for a moment, and then we would do the same thing over again. Finally, we left when only a faint glow remained. The next morning, a new day and a new year, the metal skeleton was all that was left.