

BONFIRE

Written by

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EXT. LAKESIDE BONFIRE - EVENING (6:00 PM)

The sun hovers over a crystal lake: blue skies, clear water, chopped wood, the threat of flannels and copious amounts of beer. Please, come sit by the fire with us.

Three chairs surround a fire pit. NATHAN is carefully bringing the fire to life, lighting his collected tinder and gently blowing into the flame. Though it's not catching immediately, there's not a worry in Nathan's head.

COREY (O.S.)
Heads up!

Suddenly, a beer can is hurled towards Nathan. He catches it with ease and grace.

COREY and JAKE approach the firepit, each with their own beers in hand. Jake is glued to his phone, while Corey is instantly drawn to the meek flame.

NATHAN
Thank you, kind sir.

COREY
She's not looking too hot, pal.

NATHAN
Don't you worry. It'll get there.

COREY
Hope so, because I might be calling it early tonight.

This is enough cause to break Jake away from his phone. His head shoots up.

NATHAN
Like hell you are.

JAKE
Booooooooo!

Corey takes a seat at the head chair: the one directly in front of the fire.

COREY
I'm tired! I could just use a bit of sleep tonight. Is that alright?

NATHAN
That is absolutely *not* alright.

JAKE
Yeah, you're staying up.

Jake sits on one of the side chairs.

NATHAN
It's the last night of summer. I'm making a killer campfire. And my guitar is already tuned for everything but Wonderwall. You're staying up, Corey.

JAKE
Do you really want to be the first guy to go to bed? Don't be the first guy.

COREY
Fine! Jesus! Sorry for trying to miss all the excitement.

NATHAN
Speaking of...

Nathan stands up, revealing the start of a beautiful fire.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
I think we're off!

Corey and Jake give Nathan his respect, clapping and cheering.

JAKE
Well done, good sir.

COREY
Beautiful work, Nate.

Nathan takes a little bow.

NATHAN
Thank you. Thank you.
(beat)
But I'm done for the night. Corey,
you're feeding the sucker.

COREY
What? No. I just said I was tired!
Why can't Jake do it?

Jake quickly deflects, standing up and raising his beer.

JAKE
How about a toast?

NATHAN
How about a toast!

COREY
(sarcastic)
Yeah, how about a toast...

Begrudgingly, Corey stands as well.

An awkward beat.

It seems Jake didn't have an actual toast in mind.

COREY (CONT'D)
So?

JAKE
I didn't think this far ahead.

Nathan steps in, raising his beer even higher.

NATHAN
To whatever comes next!

Jake follows suit.

JAKE
To whatever comes next!

It's Corey's turn, but he doesn't share the same enthusiasm for the future...

COREY
Yeah.
(beat)
To whatever comes next.

In unison, the boys all crack open their beers. Nathan's, having been thrown, fizzes over. He immediately begins to chug, not letting a drop go to waste.

Corey and Jake laugh as he belches.

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. THE LAKE - INTERLUDE

TRANSITIONAL SHOT of the still lake. It glimmers as the sun starts to set...

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE BONFIRE - SUNDOWN (8:00 PM)

Empty beer cans are accumulating around the fire. The seating arrangement has changed slightly, with Nathan and Jake having switched positions.

The head chair is vacant, however. And Corey is nowhere to be found.

Jake is staring blankly at his phone.

JAKE

What do you think of this? I'm thinking I say, "Well, how about we study together this semester."

NATHAN

You like this girl, right?

JAKE

(hesitates)

I- I think so.

NATHAN

Then keep it simple. Just ask her out. You don't have to tiptoe around it.

JAKE

I'm just-

Suddenly, Corey sprints towards the chairs, clearly distraught. He zips up his fly manically, having just returned from a lakeside piss.

COREY

Jake! Jake! Search it up! I had the feeling again.

JAKE

Not again...

NATHAN

What?

COREY

Just search it up! My phone is inside!

JAKE

You know this is ridiculous, right?

NATHAN

WHAT is ridiculous?

COREY
Please, Jake! Please.

JAKE
Alright! Alright!

Jake opens his phone and proceeds to make a search.

COREY
(out of breath)
Thank you.

NATHAN
Please include me in this.

Corey takes a deep breath, as if preparing to relay
biblically bad news.

COREY
(with conviction)
I think that Stevie Wonder died.

NATHAN
Whoa! Why?

COREY
I had a feeling.

NATHAN
A feeling?

COREY
Yes. A feeling. It's like this
weird tingle I get sometimes. I
can't really explain it... but I
think it's warning me that- that
someone important died.

NATHAN
And you think it's Stevie?

COREY
I figure if it's someone
important... Best check all the
bases.

NATHAN
(to himself)
That's one base?

Jake puts down his phone, annoyed.

JAKE

Well, I'm happy to say that Little
Stevie is still kicking.

Corey lets out a huge sigh of relief. He can finally take his seat at the head chair.

COREY

Thank God.
(beat)
That was a close one.

JAKE

No. Not really.

NATHAN

Does that mean someone else important died?

Corey takes a long sip of his beer.

COREY

I'm not sure...
(beat)
Maybe.

He stares into the fire, watching it flicker with each gust of wind. It could die at any moment.

He throws in some kindling, keeping it alive a little longer.

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. THE STARS - INTERLUDE

TRANSITIONAL SHOT of the cloudless sky. The stars are out over the countryside. It's endless. Freeing...

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE BONFIRE - NIGHT (10:00 PM)

The sun has set and speech is getting slurred. The fire serves as the only source of light.

Nathan is now sitting in the head chair, with Corey and Jake seated across from one another.

Nathan admires the clear sky, before inching forward towards the fire with a sadistic grin.

NATHAN

Alright boys. It's dark out.

COREY

Oh no...

NATHAN

Oh yeah...

JAKE

Do you have a spooky story for us?

NATHAN

I dare say I do.

Corey and Jake scoot forward, all on the edges of their seats. They rub their hands with excitement.

Nathan clears his throat. He turns on his phone flashlight and shines it upward at his chin.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Have you ever heard the real story about this lake?

(beat)

Well, you see, these waters weren't always a lake. 50 years ago, this lake was actually a bountiful forest. Acres and acres of beautiful trees, tall and large. Children would go into this forest and play for hours - so much to explore and imagine. It was beauty in its truest form. At least, until it all came burning down.

(beat)

You see, a bunch of lumberers had gone into the forest and gotten drunk during the daytime. They decided to make a campfire... just like this one. They laughed and boozed until the sun slowly crept towards the ground. Content, they decided to put out the fire. They unzipped their flies and peed over the flame.

(beat)

Now, as you well know, peeing on a fire creates this awful sickly stench. A truly putrid, sour odor. It is also among the least effective methods for putting out a fire. So despite the drunkard's best efforts, the fire raged on.

(MORE)

NATHAN (CONT'D)

And it began to grow, and grow, and grow... until it was out of control. Nearby trees began to catch fire and it didn't take long for the fire to devour this once great forest. The lumberers scurried off before they could get affected...

(beat)

Before they can hear the screams of the children.

(beat)

You see, the children had been playing in the forest that same evening. Before they knew what was happening, they became consumed by the fire. Burned. Charred. Ash.

(beat)

With the forest burned down, the mayor decided to create a lake - thinking that they can bury the horrors of the once great forest.

(beat)

Years after the incident, a group of young adults found themselves by this very same lake - renting a cottage for the weekend. However, there was one condition; never, under any circumstance, make a campfire. And if you do not heed that warning, By God, at least have the good sense to put it out.

(beat)

But the young adults didn't listen. They didn't care. They got drunk and let the fire burn and burn. What's the harm? Well, while the young adults slept soundly in their little cottage, something horrible emerged from the lake.

(beat)

Suddenly, a rancid smell possessed the land. It's the very same smell that comes after peeing on a fire. The children, their black charred bodies, emerged from the lake. Their bodies still on fire. They slowly creep their way towards the cottage, walking through the campfire unphased, unbothered. They-

Nathan hesitates, losing his train of thought.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Shit.

JAKE
Shit? Shit what?

NATHAN
I forgot the rest of the story.

JAKE
WHAT?

COREY
Are you kidding?

NATHAN
I figured that I'd remember it
along the way...

COREY
You started a story without an
established ending?!

NATHAN
Ostensibly.

JAKE
You've wasted my interest and my
time!

COREY
That's deeply unsatisfying! You
know that, right? What was the
meaning of all this?

NATHAN
Some would argue that it's about
the journey, not the destination.

JAKE
You dirty tease!

COREY
Yeah, maybe in real life! But this
is a *story*. There's supposed to be
a reason! Structure!

NATHAN
Who's to say this story isn't real?

Corey and Jake reach for empty beer cans and throw them at Nathan. They have no tolerance for hokey humbug around this campfire.

Nathan just laughs, happy to have gotten a rise out of them.

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. CRUSHED CANS AND BOTTLE CAPS - INTERLUDE

TRANSITIONAL SHOT of the empty beer cans accumulating. The metal reflects the growing fire...

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE BONFIRE - NIGHT (12:00 AM)

Jake is now seated in the head chair. He's staring at his phone screen, growing more anxious by the second. His leg is shaking, he's biting his nails, rubbing his forehead...

Finally, he turns off his phone and exhales, releasing air like a pressure cooker.

JAKE

I'm just not going to do it, okay?
I'm not going to do it, so get off
my back about it.

COREY

Dude!

NATHAN

Come on, Jake.

JAKE

I don't know what to say.

COREY

Yes you do. Just ask her out.

NATHAN

This isn't weight watchers. You
don't need some seven week plan,
man. Just be straight forward. Ask.
Her. Out.

JAKE

I don't-
(beat)
I don't think I'm ready.

Corey and Nathan turn towards each other, finally understanding what's been plaguing their friend.

NATHAN

Oh man...

COREY

Jake...

JAKE

I know! I'm sorry. She broke up
with me six months ago. I just
don't see a way...

Jake struggles to get the words out, unable to articulate his feelings. Corey and Nathan stay respectfully quiet for a moment, but Jake just shuts down.

Finally, Corey speaks:

COREY

Amelia was a long time ago. And she
was just awful to you. You have to
move on.

Jake looks up.

JAKE

Have I ever told you how it
happened? How we broke up?

Corey and Nathan shake their heads.

COREY

You never said...

JAKE

We used to take improv classes, me
and Amelia. It was just a fun
little activity for the two of us
to do together. And occasionally,
at the end of classes, some teams
would go up on stage and perform in
front of the other students. Amelia
and I were up and we were bombing.
Just doing terribly. We didn't have
any connection. The class knew it.
I knew it. She knew it.

(beat)

She started breaking up with me,
right on the spot. Which was
confusing... because I thought we
were still in the scene.

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)
So I was playing along, "yes and"
and all that, as she described in
vivid detail why she wants to break
up with me and what is
fundamentally wrong with me as a
person.

(beat)
It was the most amount of laughs I
had ever gotten in improv class.

Jake covers his face in shame, holding back tears. But Nathan
can't help it. He lets out a chuckle.

Nathan immediately covers his mouth, but the flood gates have
now opened...

NATHAN
I'm so sorry.

The laughter is now airborne and dangerously contagious. A
grim creeps across Corey's face. He begins to laugh as well.

COREY
Goddamn it, Nate.

Now they're rolling. Corey and Nathan's chuckles build into
full fledge guffaws.

Jake is irritated. Upset. But as the sound of laughter begins
to travel across the vast lake, he can't help but smile too.
His face softens as he joins in the amusement.

NATHAN
When did you realize the break up
was real?

JAKE
She was supposed to be my ride
home!

The boys explode into hysterics, wiping tears from their
eyes. They laugh until they can't any longer.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Okay! Okay. You know what? I like
this girl. I'll text her.

COREY
Good!

NATHAN
Great!

Beat.

JAKE
What should I say, though?

COREY
Jesus Christ!

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. THE GUITAR - INTERLUDE

TRANSITIONAL SHOT of Nathan's guitar perched up against his seat. A bonfire isn't complete without music...

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE BONFIRE - NIGHT (2:00AM)

The night is approaching its conclusion.

Corey finds himself in the head chair now, feeding the fire. He can't seem to look away from the flame. He watches, hypnotized, as it consumes the last remaining logs.

All the while, Nathan is casually strumming his guitar.

COREY
Are you guys-
(beat)
What do you think is going to
happen this year?

NATHAN
(singing)
Who knows?

Corey exhales deeply.

JAKE
What's on your mind, friend?

COREY
I just don't feel like- I just
don't know how much I can do
another year. You know? I'm losing
the part of me that cares- that
cared... And, I don't know. I'm
just not ready for another year.
(beat)
I'm just-

JAKE
Tired?

COREY

Yeah. I'm really fucking tired.

No one really knows what to respond.

COREY (CONT'D)

Could use some optimism, guys.

Nathan thinks for a moment. He looks to the sky as he pieces together a subtle melody. His singing is loose and free-spirited, completely improvised:

NATHAN

*I have no advice to give,
I have no wisdom to offer,
We will live through this year,
In the next there will be another.
It would be so nice to just rest,
But alas we keep on living...*

(beat)

*This is harder than it looks,
Jake please take over the singing.*

Jake sits up in his chair, nervous. Though, he's not one to shy away from improv.

JAKE

Uhhhhh...

(beat)

*I am constantly nervous,
My hands are always clammy...*

Nathan cuts Jake's bizarre verse short.

NATHAN

Nope!

(resumes strumming)

*Corey,
I don't know what to tell you,
There's a long road ahead,
I have no resolution for you,
But it's sure better than being
dead.
So keep that passion alive,
Keep... staying alive?
Because in a year I'll make another
campfire,
And maybe you won't be so tired.*

Nathan's impromptu song comes to an end, as he leans forward in anticipation of applause.

COREY

You're a cocky son of a bitch,
aren't you?

NATHAN

Not bad, eh?

COREY

Yeah, not bad.

(beat)

Thanks. I'm going to head inside
for another beer. You guys want?

NATHAN

Yes, please!

Corey stands up and walks towards the cabin. Jake turns towards Nathan.

JAKE

I have crippling anxiety. You have
a song for that?

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. THE FIRE - INTERLUDE

TRANSITIONAL SHOT of the fire dwindling. It can't burn forever...

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE BONFIRE - NIGHT (3:00AM)

One bonfire and a couple cases of beer later, the boys are starting to get tired. Corey's struggling to keep his eyes open as his body sinks into the head chair.

Nathan's head keeps dropping like a toddler that falls asleep sitting upright. Meanwhile, Jake is passionately crafting a text message.

SWOOSH! It's sent.

JAKE

BOOM!

Corey and Nathan's eyes shoot open from the sudden exclamation. They nearly fall over.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I sent the text! She has been asked
out, fellas!

COREY
You did what?

NATHAN
Just now?

COREY
It's 3:05am. You don't send that
text now.

JAKE
What? Why not?

COREY
Because now it seems like you're
either really drunk, or really
horny.

JAKE
(freaking out)
Oh no. Are you serious?

NATHAN
Not a great look, bud.

JAKE
Shit! Fuck!

NATHAN
Nothing to do now, I'm afraid.

COREY
Godspeed, Jake. Godspeed.

Nathan stumbles his way to his feet.

NATHAN
On that note, I think it's high
time I hit the hay.

JAKE
Oh yeah?

NATHAN
Yeah. Corey, you're good to put out
the fire?

COREY
(hesitates)
Yeah. I guess.

NATHAN

Alright.

Nathan starts to walk off. However, he stops and turns towards the guys. He tries to finish the story.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

So the charred children walk up to the cottage, each step leaving behind a small flame. They surround the house. And all they do is touch it, transferring their fire to the cottage. The cottage goes up in flames, burning the young adults to a crisp. But the young adults were do damn drunk... they didn't even feel it.

Corey and Jake let the story sink in for a moment.

COREY

Is that the real ending? Or did you just make it up?

NATHAN

All endings are made up.

Hokey humbug. Corey and Jake reach for the empty cans, preparing to chuck them at Nathan. But he quickly concedes.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Okay! I made it up. It's just simple. Nothing wrong with that.

(beat)

Good night, guys.

Nathan salutes the boys and walks off. He enters the cabin, with Jake following his every movement. The second the door closes, Jake lets out a sigh of relief.

JAKE

Finally, I thought he'd never go.

COREY

Why?

JAKE

I just didn't want to be the first one to call it.

Jake stands up.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Congratulations. You're the last
one up.
(beat)
Guess you're not so tired after
all.

Jake exits, and the sound of the cottage door opening and closing is heard once more.

Corey is left on his own.

CUE MUSIC: "She Feels Like Summer" by Edwin Raphael

He stares into the fire - a noticeably weaker flame than earlier in the night. Corey inches forward, desperate for the warmth.

He finishes the last remaining sip of beer, tossing the empty can on the ground with the others.

This is it. Simplicity. Peace.

Finally, Corey stands up and takes a final, dramatic look at the fire. He can finally rest now.

But before he goes inside...

Corey undoes his belt, unbuttons his pants, and unzips his fly. He's going to pee on the fire.

TITLE CARD: "Bonfire"

THE END.