

THE FIRST FIREWORKS

by ALEX BROUN

CHARACTERS

HELEN
DAWN

SETTING

A park bench.

TIME

New Year's Eve.

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THE FIRST FIREWORKS

[New Year's Eve. Close to midnight. A bench on a hillside.]

[DAWN, a frail woman in her sixties enters, wearing a white hospital gown. Her feet are bare. She slowly makes her way to the bench. She sits on the bench, panting heavily. Pause.]

[HELEN, a well-dressed woman in her late thirties enters.]

HELEN

Mum? Mum!

[SHE GOES TO DAWN.]

HELEN

What are you doing? Dad's going out of his mind.

DAWN

He'll be alright.

HELEN

The whole hospital's turned upside down. Everybody's looking for you.

DAWN

But you're the only one who found me.

[PAUSE.]

HELEN

How did you get up here?

DAWN

There's a hole in the fence.

HELEN

I know but how did you get up here? The steps almost killed me.

DAWN

I'm not sure.

HELEN

It's a good spot. Wonder more people don't get up here.

DAWN

They don't know about the hole.

[PAUSE.]

Shouldn't you be at your party ?

HELEN

I was until Dad called and told me you'd vanished.

DAWN

He will be annoyed.

HELEN

Dad?

DAWN

No. What's his name?

HELEN

You know his name.

DAWN

Do I? What is it again? Gordon, Gormond –

HELEN

Garan.

DAWN

That's right – Garan. Sounds like some kind of rash. "Oh no. I've got a nasty case of Garan on my arse."

HELEN

Mum, he's my husband.

DAWN

More fool you. I always liked that other one. Simon. He was –

HELEN

Wet.

DAWN

Considerate. He was always so nice to me.

HELEN

Probably fancied you.

DAWN
Me? Really?

HELEN
Really.

DAWN
But I'm twice his age.

HELEN
Trust me.

DAWN
Garan reminds me too much of someone else.

HELEN
Who?

DAWN
My husband.

HELEN
Dad's alright.

DAWN
You try being married to him for forty years.
[PAUSE.]

HELEN
Come on, we better get you back.

DAWN
I'm not going back.

HELEN
Don't be silly Mum. Come on.

DAWN
Helen – I'm not going back. I hate that awful room full of all that stuff. People keep ringing me and saying "What can I bring you?" I say, "Don't bring me anything!" I don't want any more things.
[DAWN TAPS THE BENCH ALONG SIDE HER. HELEN SITS.]

DAWN
Beautiful clothes. They look very expensive.

HELEN

They are. So I guess Gormond is good for one thing.

DAWN

[TAPPING HELEN'S STOMACH]

Maybe two.

DAWN

How did you work it out where I was?

HELEN

It wasn't hard. New Year's Eve. Where else would you be?

DAWN

My chair. My view. Surprised you remembered where it was.

HELEN

Come on Mum, it hasn't been that long.

DAWN

Five years.

HELEN

Five? Really.

[DAWN NODS. PAUSE.]

HELEN

I still remember when you first brought me here. I was eight years old.

DAWN

Long time ago.

HELEN

Twenty years.

[PAUSE.]

I remember it like yesterday. We got here just as the sun was going down. My little legs got tired so you had to carry me up the last fifty steps. And I kept asking: "What is it Mum? Why are we here?" And you just smiled and said: "We're going to my chair. The best view in the city."

DAWN

I remember.

HELEN

And I kept asking: “But what are we going to see?” And you wouldn’t answer. You just put your finger over my lips and said:

DAWN

“You’ll see my love.”

HELEN

And then when it got dark you pointed to the sky and said “Look” and suddenly the sky was full of light. Huge explosions of colour. Orange, pink, blue, green. And noise. Terrible noise. I had to cover my ears the explosions were so loud. I’ll never forget it. Looking up at that clear night sky, the colour and the stars. The muffled explosions ringing in my ear. It was my first fireworks.

DAWN

You never forget your first fireworks.

HELEN

Did you ever bring Dad here?

[DAWN SHAKES HER HEAD.]

DAWN

No matter how much I loved your father I needed to keep something to myself. And this was mine. My chair and my fireworks.

HELEN

But you brought me here.

DAWN

Back then when I thought of you - it wasn’t like we were two people. We were the same person so it made sense to bring you. I knew it would mean the same for you as it did to me. Maybe I thought you needed to see it.

HELEN

Do you still think that? We’re one person.

DAWN

Sometimes.

[PAUSE.]

I knew you’d come. I wanted it to be just the two of us. Me and you. Our twentieth anniversary fireworks.

HELEN

It’s not fair to Dad. He should be here too.

DAWN

I've said my goodbyes to him. And besides forty year's of being a wife, thirty years of being a mother. About time to just be me.

HELEN

Mum –

DAWN

This is my last fireworks Helen. And I wanted to share them with you. If I can't play favourites now, then when can I. Can I tell you something?

HELEN

Of course.

DAWN

Big secret. Biggest secret ever. Never told before.

HELEN

Tell me.

DAWN

Not even your father knows.

HELEN

Cross my heart and hope to die.

DAWN

Before you were a born - I always wanted a boy.

HELEN

Mum!

DAWN

My own little Tiger Tim. My Percy Piddler.

HELEN

Mum!

DAWN

But once you came out – once I saw the child you were, the woman you were growing into – I got down on my hand and knees and thanked God for sending me such a gift. I have been so lucky to have you as my daughter.

[DAWN PRESSES HER EAR TO HELEN'S STOMACH.]

DAWN
Promise me something?

HELEN
What?

DAWN
That you'll bring her one day to watch the fireworks. And tell her about me.

HELEN
Of course.

DAWN
What was, what is and what is about to be. Three generations of Pringles.

HELEN
Our name is Heath.

DAWN
My husband's name is Heath.

HELEN
Mum!

DAWN
My name is Pringle. And so is yours. Helen Pringle Heath.

HELEN
It's actually Rogers now.

DAWN
But you're still a Pringle. You are continuing in a long line of proud, strong Pringle women.

[PAUSE.]

I remember when we almost lost you. About a month before you were due.

HELEN
Don't remind me. I still get goose bumps.

DAWN
I woke up in the middle of the night. Blood everywhere. Neil rushed me to the hospital. I was hemorrhaging. Seemed you were just too big for me to keep inside. They thought they were going to lose you. And me. Had to get you out – right away.

HELEN
Christ.

DAWN
And they did.

HELEN
Lucky for me.

DAWN
Your father sat beside my bed all night. Holding my hand. I think that's why I made it through the night. Hung in so long. Just looking up at his eyes. I knew he wouldn't be able to bear losing me. So I pulled through. I survived. Like my mother before me and her mother before. We're survivors. Just like you. That's why I never had any more children.

HELEN
I feel like I should say sorry.

DAWN
Why? We already had the most wonderful child you could hope for. A beautiful baby girl. How could we begrudge God that.

[HELEN WIPES AWAY A TEAR.]

DAWN
Don't be sad my daughter. I've had a good life. People who loved me. A husband who worshipped me. A daughter. I had a home. I had a family.

HELEN
I'm going to miss you.

DAWN
And I'm going to miss you. Just don't be so successful in your work you forget to be a good Mum. And if Gormond ever starts rooting around – tell him to piss off.

HELEN
Thanks for the advice.

DAWN
Your welcome.

[DAWN LOOKS AT HELEN. SHE TAKES HELEN'S FACE IN HER HANDS AND STROKES HER HAIR.]

DAWN
Twenty years. It all goes by so ... fast.

[HELEN SMILES. DAWN LIES DOWN ON THE BENCH. SHE PUTS HER HEAD ON HELEN'S LAP.]

DAWN

I'm just going to lie down for a little while. Wake me up when they start.

HELEN

Mum ...

DAWN

Quiet now. No more words. No ... more ... words.

[DAWN CLOSSES HER EYES. PAUSE. WE HEAR A DISTANT EXPLOSION.]

[FIREWORKS EXPLODE OVER HEARD, SHOWERING THEM IN BRIGHT BURSTS OF COLOUR.]

HELEN

Mum ... It's starting.

[DAWN DOES NOT RESPOND.]

It's starting.

[BUT DAWN DOES NOT MOVE. HELEN WATCHES THE FIREWORKS.]

[FADE.]

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