

The First Fireworks

A short screenplay
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EXT. PARK - NIGHT

A park bench on top of a hill, the paint flaking from the old wooden slats.

It is a quiet corner of a city park that is fenced off at night. It's New Year's eve and close to midnight but the area is deserted.

DAWN, a frail woman in her late fifties appears, coming up the hill towards the bench. She is wearing only a white hospital gown, her grey hair wild and her feet bare.

She sees the bench and slowly makes her way over. She sits gently and looks around at the park in front of her. Her face beaming, almost in wonder.

HELEN (O.S.)
(calling)
Mum ! Mum !

Helen's voice seems to rouse Dawn. She turns to see Helen approaching.

HELEN, a well-dressed woman in her early thirties appears, battling her way up the last few steps of the steep hill.

Helen sees Dawn.

HELEN
Mum !

She snags her dress on the branch of a tree - and lets out a little cry of frustration. She tries to pull the dress away and in the process we hear it tearing.

She lets out another angry cry.

Helen finally frees herself from the branch and stomps over to Dawn. She holds up the torn corner of the dress.

HELEN
Ruined, thanks to you.

Dawn smiles sweetly.

DAWN
Hello dear.

HELEN
Don't you -

Helen stops herself.

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.

Beat. Helen turns away from her mother. Not wanting to be won
over so easily.

HELEN
How did you get up here ?

DAWN
The hole in the fence. Same as you.

HELEN
I know that but how did you get up
here ? The hill almost killed me.

DAWN
I'm not sure. Maybe when you need
to find the strength, you just find
it.

Helen looks down, across the park. We see her POV of the dark
green landscape and then to the city lights in the distance.

She softens now, almost despite herself.

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

DAWN
They don't know about the hole in
the fence.

Helen smiles. She's losing her battle to stay angry at Dawn.

DAWN
Shouldn't you be at your party ?

HELEN
I was until Dad called.

DAWN
He will be annoyed.

HELEN
Dad ?

DAWN
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
Really ?

HELEN
Really.

DAWN
But I'm twice his age.

HELEN
Trust me.

Dawn smiles, cheeky, like a little girl.

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.

Beat. Helen moves over to her mother. She offers her hand.

HELEN
Come on, we better get you back.

Dawn slaps away Helen's hand. Helen is shocked.

DAWN
I'm not going back.

HELEN
Don't be silly Mum. Come on.

DAWN
(strong)
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.

Beat. Helen looks at Dawn. Suddenly the flash of anger is gone and Dawn taps the bench next to her, smiling at her daughter.

Helen shakes her head.

Dawn taps again, smiling even more sweetly.

Beat. Helen relents and sits next to her mother on the bench.

DAWN
Beautiful clothes. They look very
expensive.

HELEN
(indicating rip)
They were. Thanks to you.
(beat)
So I guess Gormond is good for one
thing.

Dawn places her hand on Helen's stomach and pats gently.

DAWN
Maybe two.

Helen smiles.

Mother and daughter look out to the park and the city stretching beneath them.

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. Beat. A trace of guilt on Helen's face.

HELEN

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

DAWN

Long time ago.

HELEN

Like yesterday. We got here just as the sun was going down. My 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."

EXT. FLASHBACK - PARK. NIGHT.

Over twenty years earlier an eight year old Helen sits on the park bench, her feet swinging gently above the ground, looking up at the sky in wonder.

Her face is illuminated by changing splashes of colour and we hear the distant boom of fireworks exploding above her, lighting up her eyes.

Over this the voice of older Helen continues.

HELEN (V.O.)
 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.

Young Helen covers her ears from the explosions, eyes still transfixed on the sky above.

HELEN (V.O.)
 I had to cover my ears the explosions were so loud.
 (beat)
 I'll never forget it. Looking up at that clear night sky, the colour and the stars. The muffled explosions ringing in my ear.

EXT. NOW - PARK. NIGHT.

We return to the present and older Helen.

HELEN
 It was my first fireworks.

DAWN
 You never forget your first fireworks.

Helen looks away from her mother, back across the park.

HELEN
 Did you ever bring Dad here ?

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.

Dawn rubs her hand across the old bench.

HELEN

But you brought me here.

DAWN

Back then when I thought of you - it wasn't like we were two people. So it made sense to bring you. I knew it would mean the same for you as it did to me.

For the first time Dawn reaches out and touches her daughter's hand. She strokes it gently.

Dawn looks at her daughter.

DAWN

Maybe I thought you needed to see it.

Beat.

HELEN

Do you still think that ? We're the same person.

DAWN

Sometimes.

Dawn is suddenly happy, excited.

DAWN

I knew you'd come. I wanted it to be just the two of us. Me and you.

HELEN

It's not fair to Dad. He should be here.

DAWN

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

HELEN

Mum -

Dawn holds her hand up to Helen's mouth, stopping her.

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.

Beat. They share a smile. Suddenly Dawn's smile becomes a
cheeky grin.

DAWN

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.

Helen does an elaborate crossing over her heart. Dawn laughs.

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.

Helen smiles at Dawn, tears welling in her eyes now.

Dawn bends down and presses her ear to Helen's stomach.

DAWN
Promise me something ?

HELEN
What ?

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

HELEN
We don't even know if it is a she
yet.

DAWN
She knows.

Dawn raises her head up to Helen.

DAWN
Promise me ?

Helen smiles.

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.

Dawn looks away now, anxious, worried - as if consumed by her
memories.

DAWN

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

HELEN

(trying to calm her)
Mum, it's okay.

But Dawn is in the memory now, as if it were yesterday.

DAWN

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

Helen's takes her mother's hand, assuring her.

HELEN

And they did.

DAWN

Lucky for me.

HELEN

And me.

EXT. FLASHBACK - HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT.

NEIL, a large, gentle man in his 30s sits beside a hospital
bed. In his hand he strokes the younger unseen Dawn's hand.

He looks at her, love and fear in his eyes, terrified she
might be taken away.

We move slowly towards him.

Over this Dawn's voice continues.

DAWN (V.O.)

Your father sat beside my bed all
night. I think that's why I made
it. 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.

EXT. NOW - PARK. NIGHT.

The face of the older Dawn, looking at Helen.

DAWN
We're survivors. Just like you.

Beat. Dawn looks away again.

DAWN
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 cry. 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.

The emotion comes now, overwhelming Helen, tears rolling down her face.

DAWN
And I'm going to miss you.

Dawn hugs her to her, stroking her hair.

DAWN
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 laughs involuntarily.

HELEN
Thanks for the advice.

DAWN
You're welcome.

Dawn looks at Helen. She strokes her face in her hands.

EXT. FLASHBACK - PARK. NIGHT.

Suddenly the face in Dawn's hands now is young Helen, a beaming 8 year old, on the night of her first fireworks.

And now we also see young Dawn as she was over twenty years ago. She looks down at Helen, smiling broadly. She strokes young Helen's face.

DAWN

It all goes by so ... fast.

EXT. NOW - PARK. NIGHT.

Suddenly the face transforms back to older Helen. Dawn stops stroking and slowly leans forward. She kisses her daughter on the lips.

Gently Dawn lifts her feet on to the bench.

DAWN

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

Helen is suddenly anxious.

HELEN

Mum ... how will I - ?
(beat)
Without you.

Dawn strokes her face again, assuring her.

DAWN

You'll find a way. I did.

Dawn kisses her again on the forehead. She lowers her head down into Helen's lap.

DAWN

Quiet now. No more words.

Her head is in Helen's lap now, her eyes start to close.

DAWN

No ... more ... words.

There is a silence. Helen looks down at her mother, stroking her hair gently.

Suddenly there is a distant explosion. A golden firework explodes above, showering them in rich, golden light.

HELEN
Mum ... It's starting.

But Dawn does not respond, still now.

We go in to a close up: Helen watching the fireworks, her face once more illuminated by bright splashes of colour, lighting up her eyes.

She whispers:

HELEN
It's starting.

We stay on Helen for sometime. Fireworks above, distant explosions - then slowly fade.

End film.