

Waiting for Fireworks

by A. W. Pafford

I think she's on edge, still. It's been a few years since the divorce spiral started. I'd been there.

I walk up behind her and pull that gold hair away from her neck. It's been so long since I had long hair that I only vaguely recall that feeling good on a hot day. She sighs. I remember our drinks.

She's sitting in hot July wind, ratty coral-colored shorts, in an embarrassingly sun-faded folding chair on my high-rise balcony. The grey fabric seems to turn to dust and blow away whenever her hand rubs across it. I should have thrown it away and bought new. I keep putting it off. Not sure what I want.

My chair's no better. Part of a set. I guess I've just left them out here since I bought them. Rain and ice. We never really had the picnic we planned. Or the grand hiking weekend. The road trips.

We're overlooking the park, waiting for fireworks, but it's going to be awhile. There's still sun through the iron bars.

If we're lucky, they will hit right in front of us. She loves fireworks.

I hand her a mimosa. Champagne is her favorite. Maybe it will calm her down. Doing something for her occupies my mind. I've been doing a lot for her lately. For me.

There're people in the distance, milling around on top of the big World War I memorial in the park. They're small and blurry even with my glasses. If the wind blows right I can hear a laugh. Families holding hands and taking photos. Creating memories. Waiting for fireworks.

I'm thinking again.

I take her hand. More grey dust rolls off the arms, over the railing, into the wind. It's embarrassing and I let go. I think she told me to throw them away months ago.

I rub her bare thigh. She laughs real soft like. The corner of her lip curls up.

That smile is how we got here. We both needed it.

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My fingers pull at the coral hem. I'm teasing her now. Coaxing out anything new.

She's responsive. I'm shameless.

I trace the sheltered skin. Higher. She looks a bit uneasy, but her hands are still on the dusty grey arms. Still that curled lip.

I feel her heat in my palm. The light fur she started trimming for me just before we met. Everything's a reminder. I press in.

The tourists watch a child's balloon drift up past the tower top. They point off at it as the child cries.

She nearly noticed. I kneel before her on the dusty cement six stories high. My back to the railing. Knees hurt already.

She gasps. I'm not sure why. She knew me by now. The smile's gone.

I tug the frayed coral hem revealing her to my lips. Her hands stay still on the dusty grey arms. She's breathing.

She could never initiate anything. I think that flight to me was the closest she ever got and that was probably still my doing, if I'm honest. Making her let me try.

Just the birds now, on a hot July wind.

I slide a hand up her scarred belly. Her nipples always get soft again just before. They tell me what to do in a way she never could. She rises up briefly before settling down.

She's finished. So are we.

I stand up, more awkward than I'd like. Using the railing and chair for support—more dust.

Her hand in mine, I do my best not to let on, and lead her inside.

Applause. From tourists in a park, behind us now. She looks at me and turns red. But they were so far away. They couldn't see—couldn't know for sure. But they'd guessed. Just as surely as I knew what I was doing, they did.

Neither of us can bear to look back. We're going to miss the fireworks.

