

Fireworks Season

In the neon light from his dashboard, his chiseled facial features looked ethereal. It was hard to imagine that he could be manipulative or dangerous. My eyes travelled to his hands as they fidgeted on the steering wheel, and the illusion disappeared. Blood and dirt were caked beneath his short fingernails. I wondered how long it had been there, and turned away quickly as it dawned on me that the blood may not have been his own.

"Where are we going?" I asked, a slight tremble in my voice.

"Why?" he replied, flashing a smile as his blue eyes turned to meet mine. "You got some place else to be?"

Anywhere, I thought, but I knew better than to say it out loud.

"Of course not, Glen," I whispered, sliding my hand up his arm.

"Good," he said, and winked at me. "I've got a surprise for you. I know Christmas wasn't the best this year."

His voice trailed off, and my mind slipped back to our empty duplex, sparsely decorated for the holiday we would not spend together. On Christmas Eve, he left to buy a few final gifts with money he'd somehow acquired despite losing his job a month prior. He kissed me, and left before I could argue.

He didn't turn up again until early January. By then, his bags were packed and the locks were changed on the front door. We barely spoke when I let him claim them, and he sauntered out like I was just another piece of furniture he'd cast off in an eviction. No explanations, no begging for forgiveness. Just a light switched off.

That was, of course, until that night in June.

I supposed summertime does that to a person. It makes us hit the road looking for fireworks in nostalgic places. Sometimes, when we can't find them, we have to make our own.

So he showed up around midnight, making all kinds of promises and apologizing for things that I am, to this day, sure were meant for someone other than me. I stood on the porch of our duplex, arms crossed and unrelenting.

Finally, he pulled his button up shirt back to reveal a pistol tucked into his jeans and said, "Just get in the car."

And, not knowing what else to do, I did. It was fireworks season, after all.

Thirty minutes into our rendezvous, his eyes strained as he looked out of the windshield onto the side of the highway.

"Pay attention, Char. Look at the trees."

I followed his gaze to the evergreens that ran along I45.

"There!" he exclaimed and jerked us over to the side of the road. He'd barely stopped the car when he threw open his door and shouted, "Come on!"

"Glen," I began, "you don't have to do this."

He slammed his door and slid over the hood. Then he opened my door and held out his hand. Suddenly, I wasn't afraid anymore.

"It isn't far," he said, "I promise. You can see it from the road in the daylight."

We walked in silence for a few minutes, my hand still locked in his, and then he stopped.

"Can you see it?" he asked, pointing to a tree a few yards from the road.

I nodded. It was beautiful. Right there on I45, in the middle of June, an evergreen stood out from the rest. It was covered in silver tinsel and dozens of bulbs of all sizes and colors.

"That, my queen, is for you. Merry Christmas."

I don't remember how long we stood there, my hand in his, as cars raced by behind us. But he took me home in the early hours of the morning, kissed my hand on what had been our doorstep, and vanished back into a world where promises are made to be broken and Christmas comes in June.

So you see, Officer, I am afraid I didn't realize I was trespassing today. These bones are getting old, and I don't move as fast as I did back then. It's getting harder to drive on the highway so late at night. But summer is here, and my ghosts are coming out to play in the heat. I'm feeling a little nostalgic. Won't you give me back my decorations and let a little old lady have one last Christmas in June?