

FIREWORKS

by James Douglas

FIZZLE, FWISH, BROOoo . . . POP!

One after another: the fuses of bright red bottle rockets are lit. Causing a chain reaction that sends a succession of hot jet fire flying into the air.

An elderly woman watches from the front porch as her grandchildren put on an explosive display in a cobblestone courtyard. It's her eightieth birthday, and they want to celebrate it with a bang.

"Hey Jack! Get over here and help me with these shells!"

The younger of the two brothers turned his attention away from the battery of bottle rockets, and looked up to find his older brother beckoning him to come assist with the heavier artillery.

"Coming Tom!"

He snapped his brushed aluminum lighter closed and turned it over a few times in his hand. It was fairly new, but had accumulated a few nicks and dings here-and-there from the experiences in which Jack had dropped it. He quickly clicked the lid open, and followed the motion by flicking the flint with his thumb. The flint sparked the wick, and a sizeable flame grew from the base.

Jack looked to the row of prepared-to-fire bottle rockets, and grinned.

"Hey grandma! Are you watching? Check this out!"

He placed the flame below the first rocket on the end of the row, and began moving to the left. Making sure to light each and every fuse on his way towards his brother. Sending a celebration of red, blue, and white light, exploding in his wake.

Grandma Haley was not doing well. In fact, she hadn't been doing well for quite some time. At the age of seventy-eight she had already had a stroke that had left her partially paralyzed. But her son had insisted on giving her this birthday present. Though anyone that knew him might wonder if he just wanted an excuse to buy fireworks.

With his classic silver lighter gripped tight in his sweaty palm, Tom made his way across the stone courtyard with an excited pep in his step. Hopping over the crates of unexploded gunpowder and the piles of spent, ashen cardboard. Arriving at his brother's side with a smile. Tom turned towards Jack with two fists full of paper machete shells, looked down, raised his eyebrows, and smirked.

"Ready to learn about the big guns?"

Jack looked up. “Hell yes!” he replied.

With both hands in his front coat pockets, Jack watched while Tom began preparing a volley of cardboard mortars in front of him. He placed a single round paper shell into the bottom of each tube and strung the fuse from the base up through the top, draping it over the edge. Once he had finished lining things up, he stepped back and smiled.

“Ready?”

“Yup.”

Tom reached into his pocket and pulled out an identical silver lighter with a great many more nicks, dings, and scratches along the casing. He stepped forward, knelt down, and lit the first few fuses himself. As he did this he made sure to lean back and create an opening for Jack to peer over his shoulder and observe how he went about it.

The boy’s father stood back on the porch behind their grandmother watching his sons with pride.

Tom placed the flame under the first wick and a moment later: a bright spark began sizzling across the chemical rope, up the length, over the edge, and down the cardboard tube. As the spark went inside the tube sound muffled for a moment before reaching its critical ignition point, upon which it went silent just before exploding into a *VOOMSH* of pneumatic pressure. The shell shot its way up the tube and into the air, where it burst into a circle of red and white sparks that came showering down above its spectators.

Their father tilted the wheelchair up towards the sky so his mother could watch the show.

Pop! CrAckLe, POW!

Red light, white light, red light, white light, red, red, red.

Grandma Haley had not been doing well.

Someone screamed. Something was wrong. Fireworks exploded. People ran. Directions were shouted. It wasn’t fun anymore. The sparkling display of fireworks was soon replaced by the flashing red light of an ambulance siren. Their father rushed to explain his mother’s condition, while Jack and Tom just stood there, staring at the mess they had made.