



A GIFT
by Paul Smith

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CHARACTERS

ALEC – mid 60s

LAURA – mid 60s

A bench in a park overlooking a town. Secluded.

ALEC is standing looking at the view. It is breezy. He takes in the whole horizon and his eyes sweep a full 180°. A small document case is on the bench.

LAURA runs in from the side. She is in a neat tracksuit with hat. As she stops by the bench she takes a look at her sports watch and clicks the button at the side. She bends over to catch her breath. She has been unnoticed by ALEC who continues surveying the scenery. LAURA takes a water bottle from a belt holder, or maybe she has one of those which you can hold, and has a healthy gulp of water. She sits down on the bench and shuts her eyes to take in the sunshine. ALEC moves backwards to the bench and inadvertently bumps into LAURA. ALEC speaks with an Edinburgh accent.

ALEC Oh I do beg your pardon. I had no idea you were there.

LAURA I just crept up behind you.

They laugh

ALEC You didn't just run up that hill did you?

LAURA I did.

ALEC Heavens. Rather you than me. It was as much as I could do to walk up it.

LAURA Practice. I come up here a few times a week. Just my way of trying to stave off the inevitable.

ALEC Far too unfit myself. But it's a nice day, if a bit breezy, and it's a good view from up here.

LAURA Yes I love it. Even after all the years I have lived here. It's a running challenge I don't mind too much. All downhill from here on!

ALEC Well good for you. I think I need some incentive of a kind.

LAURA Join me in running a marathon!

They laugh

ALEC Think that ship has probably sailed.

LAURA Fair enough. ***(pause)*** Are you looking for somewhere in particular?

ALEC Not really. Trying to get a better sense of the place.

LAURA Ah. Moving here?

ALEC No, no, just doing a bit of research. Nothing serious. Just personal.

LAURA Sounds interesting.

ALEC Well, we will see. Who knows?

LAURA I probably should be getting back before I get too cold.

ALEC Yes, it's very breezy today isn't it.

LAURA Very. Well, goodbye.

ALEC Cheerio.

LAURA starts to go when a gust of wind blows some dust into Alec's face and a grain ends up in his eye. He cries out in some discomfort. LAURA returns. ALEC clutches his face in pain.

LAURA Are you ok?

ALEC Yes, yes I am fine. I think. Just some dust or something. In my eye.

LAURA Come on over to the bench and I will take a look at it for you.

ALEC Thank you. It's not a problem. Thank you.

LAURA leads ALEC to the bench and they sit down. ALEC still clutches his eye.

LAURA Let me have a look.

ALEC Are you a doctor?

LAURA No. But I used to work in a school and often had to deal with pupils in a similar situation.

LAURA takes a handkerchief from her pocket and tries to remove the dust.

ALEC I am not a good patient I am afraid.

LAURA It's ok. I know how to deal with tricky customers.

They laugh.

ALEC Well I will try to be brave.

LAURA Good. Hold still, I think I have it.

ALEC Arrggh.

LAURA Be still.

LAURA slowly moves the handkerchief from ALEC's eye and holds it out for him to see.

LAURA There you are.

ALEC Oh, thank you. Thank you so much. How can so much pain be caused by something so miniscule?

LAURA Eyes are funny things!

ALEC They are indeed. Good job I've got a spare one!

They laugh.

LAURA I should bathe it in warm water when you get home.

ALEC I will. Thank you. Thank you so much.

LAURA Bit of a Brief Encounter moment.

ALEC What? Oh, oh yes. Yes, of course. Goodness are we about to start an illicit affair?

LAURA Oh heavens. Well, it's alright. I am divorced.

ALEC And I'm a widower, so we're not fooling anyone.

They laugh. ALEC suddenly bends his head down.

ALEC Ooooo.

LAURA Are you ok?

ALEC Sorry, just a bit dizzy. The sunlight on my sore eye I think.

LAURA Just stay there for a while. I'll wait here.

ALEC You're very kind.

LAURA Not a problem, it's a nice day despite the wind.

ALEC What did you teach?

LAURA P.E.

ALEC Ah, hence the running.

LAURA Probably. I did a lot of that at school too. It stuck. Retired now of course.

ALEC Retired as well now. Was in brought up mainly in Edinburgh, but been working abroad for some years. Embassy work.

LAURA Interesting. Where?

ALEC Japan. Tokyo.

LAURA How fascinating.

ALEC It was yes. Came back for good last year. My parents both passed away.

LAURA I'm sorry.

ALEC Thank you, but they were both in their 90's so not much to complain about. I zipped back and forth to see them.

LAURA Always thought Japan must be quite a place to visit, but never got round to it.

ALEC You should go. It is a great country. Full of frustrations and wonderment in equal measure. Much like any country really. I never got used to all the quirks! But it's good to be back here.

LAURA Getting used to British quirks again eh?

ALEC Oh and there are many. The climate, the economy, the politics, the state of the roads.... But all far outweighed by the freedoms and the sense of humour. Well that's what I think anyway. Angry Scot that I am.

LAURA Are you?

ALEC What?

LAURA An angry Scot.

ALEC Not in the slightest. It's an affectation accompanied by a wry smile!

They laugh.

LAURA So, you have moved to the area?

ALEC Nope. I live in South London, but when my parents died I uncovered a few documents of great interest, so I embarked on the ancestor trail.

LAURA How wonderful.

ALEC Yes, it's been more than a little illuminating.

LAURA And you found connections with the town?

ALEC Yes, my parents were from here originally.

LAURA Before you were born?

ALEC Well, I moved away before I could remember it.

LAURA It's changed alot, but there are a few parts which are much as they have been for all the time I have lived here.

ALEC A long time?

LAURA For about 40 years.

ALEC Remarkable how a town develops over time.

LAURA Although the view has changed from here it has always been a quiet part of the area. Secluded. Even a bit romantic.

ALEC Perfect for a brief encounter eh?

LAURA Oh heavens. How are you feeling?

ALEC A lot better thank you. Thank you so much for your kindness.

LAURA That's ok. Happy to help and have a chat. I rarely meet anyone up here. It's a really nice change.

ALEC Look, I am sorry to sound a bit forward, but I am staying at the Park Hotel tonight, I am going to be dining alone. Would it be rude to ask if you are free this evening. I really could do with some company; just for the meal you understand.

LAURA Of course I do. And yes. Yes, that would be lovely.

ALEC Oh excellent. That's fantastic. Maybe that illicit affair is on the cards after all.

They both laugh.

ALEC I jest. I promise.

LAURA It's fine. I promise too.

ALEC I will be able to tell you a little more about my hunt for the truth.

LAURA The truth?

ALEC Oh, sorry, yes, the truth about my upbringing.

LAURA Ah.

ALEC You see some of the documents I found when my parents died revealed that they weren't actually my natural parents.

LAURA No?

ALEC They never told me and why would I have ever found out?

LAURA That must have been a real shock.

ALEC Totally. Blew my head off.

LAURA I can imagine. Especially learning so... well when you are that bit older.

ALEC It's difficult to put into words, but it has left me with a mystery to solve which is strangely addictive.

LAURA Well I wish you well in your quest. I had better go home and freshen up before dinner.

ALEC Shall we say 7?

LAURA Perfect. See you at 7.

ALEC I will.

LAURA starts to leave and then stops and turns back.

LAURA I may be able to give you some pointers on family history.

ALEC Oh?

LAURA I was adopted too.

ALEC Really?

LAURA I came back here when I found out it was where I was originally born.

ALEC Here?

LAURA Yes.

ALEC You were born here.

LAURA Yes, but my parents told me I was adopted. I was 8 when I found out. When I married, I somehow found myself living here. I love it.

ALEC Well.....

LAURA I haven't seen the world quite as you have.

ALEC Maybe not.

LAURA Anyway, I am sure we will speak more at dinner.

ALEC No, please. One moment. Just wait a moment.

LAURA Are you al....

ALEC ...no, it's fine. I am fine. I am perfectly ok. It's just that When your parents told you of your adoption, did they say anything further about your biological family?

LAURA A little, but I never knew much about my real parents – just that they were called Reg and Rose – no surname. I never tried to track them down.

ALEC And you were an only child?

LAURA As far as I know yes.

ALEC Likewise

LAURA Ok.

ALEC Please take a look at this.

ALEC takes a document the case and hands it to LAURA.

ALEC It's ok, it's just a photocopy. It's my proper birth certificate.

LAURA Steven Richard Carnforth. Parents, Reginald and Rosemary Carnforth.

LAURA looks up at ALEC in amazement.

LAURA But.....

ALEC My biological parents. Now read this.

ALEC hands another document to LAURA

LAURA Alice May Carnforth. Parents, Reginald and Rosemary Carnforth.

ALEC and LAURA stare at each other.

LAURA But.... That's. My...date....of.....

LAURA is overwhelmed with emotion.

ALEC birth? Alice?

LAURA Laura. Steven?

ALEC Alec.

LAURA Hello Alec

ALEC Hello Laura. My sister?

LAURA My brother?

ALEC Dinner? Shall we? Shall we?

ALEC and LAURA embrace as the lights fade.