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A New Year

by Fran Duffield

New Year 1955

Five years ago I had hoped so much for this. Now I have it, the hope, the promise and the fear. I thought it would never happen, after all we tried for three years. Of course, the doctors said was that it was probably for the best, given my dicky heart. I've always proved them wrong before, dancing, rambling, singing. I was never going to give in to being an invalid, Cousin Helen on the couch, being virtuous. That would have suited Mother, so she could be a saint and martyr.

Now I lie on the bald lumpy couch, cold even in my coat, having to be virtuous, punished for having been so wicked. The baby is full of energy, I can feel it, but mine is draining away. Mother still doesn't know, she hasn't spoken to me since I got the flat and she found out about Frank, I don't know who told her, but someone couldn't resist it. What a lovely parish scandal, 'and at her age too with that strip of a lad from the choir'. I can see their mean disapproving faces enjoying it like a good meal.

The gas seems to eat shillings, and I have to admit I am very lonely here, but the radio he made me buy gives me some company and even more, my music. I miss my piano dreadfully: I'm afraid I may have forgotten how to play.

I keep the volume down, and I think it better not to sing. I can't risk anyone complaining to the landlady, and anyway it would only make me feel sad.

As I stare through the grimy glass, the view of the foggy park below keeps reminding me the year will change: the light will come, the trampled mud will be green again, the fat buds will open. The baby will come with the Spring, and I must live. Even if I don't know how.

New Year 1994

Five years ago I had hoped so much for this. Now I have it, the hope, the promise and the fear. I thought it would never happen, after all we tried for six years. Of course, the doctors said was that it was probably for the best, given the miscarriage. I've always proved them wrong before, and albeit with a bit of scientific help, I did. I'm still working at my drawing board on the last artwork commissions, but it's getting harder. I can feel my energy draining away.

I was never going to give in to being an object of pity 'such a shame, she can't have children, you know'. The pregnancy has made the mother-in-law like a cat with cream of course, she's revelling in her son having a baby. It's me that's pregnant, but you wouldn't know it.

What she doesn't know about is the unannounced home visit from Dr.Kay, with our half-finished Christmas tree in the corner and the gas fire hissing in the silence after he spoke. The test that showed the risk, but he couldn't be sure unless I had the second, dangerous test. The one where you could lose the baby. I have already lost one, I will be 39 when this baby is due.

As I stare through the rippled Edwardian glass, the view of the foggy garden keeps reminding me the year will change: the light will come, the bare mud will be green again, the fat buds will open. The baby will come with the Spring, and he and I must live. Even if I don't know how.