

Cigarette Smoke

by Nix Winter

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Cigarette Smoke

A Daniel and Taylish Story

He knew it was coming. It felt like a shadow slowly growing to cover the back of his head, to swallow his soul and there was nothing to be done. He held onto the shirt he was folding, the soft cotton of Taylish's tee-shirt in his fingers. He pulled it to his face, hiding in the fluffy scent of the fabric softener, hiding from the acrid smoke that he didn't really believe was in their apartment.

And he didn't escape and the flashback had him.

Cigarette smoke clung to the sheets and to him. He hid his eyes against his arm, and the smell of cigarette was thick. A curtain of hair, obscenely red, brassy, golden, lay over his arm hiding his face.

“Are you still crying?”

“No,” he lied through swollen lips. The evening sunlight lay golden over his floor, making his sheets glow. He imagined they were like the angels in his current game, bright and sparkling and they'd come if he called them.

But it wasn't a video game and there was no escape from the hand sliding down his bare ass, tracing a track between the bright red circles zig-zagging down the firm curve of his backside. “Only two more to go, Daniel.”

“Please,” he whispered, knowing it wouldn't help, wishing. “Please, don't.”

“Oh so pretty,” the man said, the warm end of his cigarette butt sliding through the same path his finger just had. “Get the pillow, put it under your hips, honey.”

“Glen,” he whispered, moving graceful and seductive by nature, as he got on of his pillows and positioned himself, ass in the air, hands holding fist-fulls of sheets. “I'll be good. I'll be really good. Let me do it? I'll do it myself.”

“Oh but honey, you wouldn't hold it long enough,” Glen said, voice kind. The cigarette butt trailed down between the valley between Daniel's ass. “Turn your head so I can see you. God you've got pretty eyes!

Someday, I'm going to buy you completely and it wouldn't be your ass we play with."

The other end of the cigarette touched Daniel's skin and white-hot light flashed in his mind. The cigarette smoke was real. The tee shirt twisted in his hands and he backed away from the clothes basket, torn between the dark world of his present and watching the glowing red end of the cigarette against his skin.

Burning, smoke, cigarette, and silent as a mouse he backed and backed, until the wall had him, the corner of the room imprisoned him. Tears ran down his face from sightless eyes. The pain from the past went forward like a movie he couldn't stop watching. Screaming, crying, and alone, on the floor of his room. His leg had hurt too much to move, and banging his head on the wall slightly, he tried to remind himself, it was over.

It was a long time gone. He was safe. But there was cigarette smoke in the house. Someone could be here to hurt them. Someone found them. Glen found him. It didn't make sense. He knew it wasn't coherent. Taylish. Taylish. And his mind just locked into that track, terror rocking him back and forth.

"Daniel? Daniel! What's wrong?" Taylish asked, but when he reached out, there between his fingers, hard and round and slightly rough at the end. The stink of the smoke was so thick.

"Please don't hurt me! Please! I'll be good!"

"Daniel, what is it? What happened? Daniel? It's me, Tay."

"Don't burn me, please!"

"Oh god," Taylish said, and the window opened with a swoosh. "I'm sorry, Daniel! It was just a bad day. Maya about got shot today and I was just stressed out. Shit! I'm sorry. I just wanted a couple cigarettes to calm my nerves. Shit, shit."

Daniel sank down to the floor, pulling his knees close, rocking still, tears wetting his jeans. "My fault. It's my fault. I'm sorry. I'm sorry! Not your fault."

"Oh my fuck me. I have to shower, get rid of the smoke. I'll be right back Daniel, I promise. Wait for me, believe in me. I love you, very much. I'll never hurt you."

Taylish stepped back, a hand over his face, his heart torn. Someone somewhere had hurt his Daniel, bad. And he loved him, loved this shaking and sobbing man curled up in the corner.

Fast, leaving his clothes on the floor he threw himself in the shower and washed away his cigarette smoke. He'd never touch them again. Ever. He didn't have time to cry himself, just grabbed a towel and kicked his clothes over by the garbage.

Wearing a towel he moved to the clean clothes and got himself a pair of sweat pants and a loose tee-shirt.

“Daniel?”

“I'm sorry, Tay. I'm sorry. It's not your fault. I'm just broken.” Daniel was still trying to climb farther into the corner and he flinched when Taylish touched his arm.

“It's gone, the cigarette. No one will burn you, ever. I promise. Daniel, let me hold you?”

“Just leave me alone,” Daniel said, face pressed to the wall.

“You've been alone too long. I need to hold you. Please let me?”

Taylish ran his fingers along the edge of Daniel's hand and then they connected, Daniel taking his hand and holding on for dear life. Easily, Taylish slipped an arm under Daniel's knees and one behind his back and lifted him.

“Daniel Morgan,” he said, caressing Daniel's forehead with his cheek. “You are not broken. You are so strong and brave and I'm so glad you're here with me.”

“But I cry and I'm stupid. I can't tell the past from now.”

“I'll help you,” Taylish promised, “and you'll help me.”

The chair was thick and warm, the big brown leather easy chair. Taylish sat down and pulled Daniel close, shifting him just a little. “A little better now?”

“A little,” Daniel said, deeply embarrassed. Hard flashbacks had hit him only three times since they'd been married, but they were getting more frequent, he feared. “What if I'm not sane? You can divorce me if you want.”

“Never,” Taylish promised, rubbing Daniel's back in comforting motions. “You are not insane. Damn, whatever happened to you, do you think it would have affected me different? Do you think I'd be all just fine if someone had done that to me?”

“I wouldn't let them!” Daniel nearly screamed, both arms around

Taylish's neck, holding him tight. "I wouldn't let anyone hurt you. I love you. I would do anything to protect you. They can't find us. We're safe. And that can't happen to you."

"Daniel, shhhhh, it's okay. We are safe. Everything is safe, Daniel. And it's okay to remember things. That's what happened, isn't it? You remembered something bad?"

"Yes," Daniel whispered.

"Loren said this might happen remember? That the safer you felt that you'd start to remember things?"

"I don't want to."

"Then you don't got to. No one is going to make you, but if you do, then I'll be here with you."

"I'll wear you out. I'm not worth your time."

"Daniel, put your hands on my face."

Daniel sat up a little more and shaking fingers touched Taylish's face, fingers on his lips, another hand on his cheek, feeling the movement of his face.

"Now listen to me clearly, feel my lips, feel that I'm not lying. I need you, Daniel. I love you. I feel happy when I know you're here. You are everything to me. What happened wasn't your fault and it wasn't okay. You are innocent and I love you."

Daniel's face clenched up, eyes squeezed tight as tears rolled down his face. "I love you too!"

And it was better, not perfect, but better. Taylish held him, humming softly. They were safe, were together, hands together, until sleep eventually took them both, right there in the big chair.

Read the other Daniel and Taylish stories!

Shadow of Wishes is available from Venus Pressed

Arrested Kisses is available on lulu.com