

## Wanting Danielle

by **Vesperae**

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A few weeks ago, I stumbled upon a series of new SF glamour clips that unexpectedly ripped some very old emotional wounds wide open for me. And I've found it very difficult to think of little else since then, so I hope that you'll indulge me by allowing me to tell the story of what led to those emotional wounds, both as a sort of catharsis for me, and perhaps for some of you as well who might have found yourselves in a similar situation. I've never shared this with anyone before, and with the exception of the name of the woman in question, this story is entirely true and autobiographical.

The model featured in the clips I saw recently was an utterly average and unremarkable smoker, except for the fact that she just happened to be virtually a dead ringer for my last nonsmoking girlfriend, who I haven't seen in nearly 25 years. I couldn't believe it. I was absolutely floored. I think that we've all imagined that out there somewhere we each have a doppelgänger, but to find such a perfect echo of this woman decades later in virtually every respect – her features, body type, hair, mannerisms, and even the sound of her voice – completely shocked me. To suddenly and without warning be presented with the embodiment of everything that I secretly fantasized about so long ago sent me reeling inward in a whirlwind of memories and mixed feelings that I'm still sorting out as I write this. Being simultaneously so deeply aroused and so deeply sad is a very unsettling experience, and the strength of my reaction to this chance reminder of my past speaks volumes about how deeply this woman and this relationship affected me.

In the summer of 1985, I took a ten week job that would provide me with some of the best and most memorable experiences of my college career. An acquaintance of mine mentioned to me early that spring that he was going to be vacating a position that he thought I'd be perfect for. To be honest, I primarily applied for this particular job because I knew that it would look great on my list of extracurricular activities for my med school applications. I also knew several people who had done the job, and based on what they had told me about it, I was expecting it to be a fun and easy way to spend the summer before the rigors of my Senior year. But I had no idea just how much fun it would be, nor how much the experience would change me.

The university hired students from across the various academic disciplines to be Orientation

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Advisors (OAs) for a series of two day sessions over the summer for incoming students and their parents. There was a modest work-study stipend, and free room and board in the largest dorm on campus, which was essentially vacant during Summer Session, except for the OAs, a few Resident Advisors (RAs) and the smattering of incoming students and their parents who chose to try out a dorm room for a night. There was lots of down time, and a seemingly endless selection of places to hang out and socialize in what felt like our own private little cinder block mansion.

The selection process for the job was rigorous, since the university sought only the best and brightest to represent it, which meant that the Summer Orientation staff consisted of 12 of the hardest working over-achievers on campus, who suddenly found all this time and space to collectively "let their hair down" and mingle. The gorgeous warm Midwestern summer nights, quality of the company, and circumstances of the situation made for a fertile and potent combination that resulted in all manner of soulful late night discussions, the development of intense friendships, as well as the inevitable smattering of romantic liaisons. It felt like a real life John Hughes coming of age movie for mostly carefree, optimistic young adults on the threshold of what seemed like bright, promising lives where anything was possible. It was easily the best and most interesting summer of my life, even though it also became an intensely stormy time for me privately.

By the second week of Summer Orientation, I became aware that the youngest OA, Danielle [not her real name], a very pretty, precocious, and shy 18 year old English major, was developing a crush on me. But I also recognized that she clearly wasn't anywhere near being out of the closet, and she obviously didn't want anyone to know about her attraction to me. I was 21, and was feeling very cautious about not only our age difference and her relative immaturity, but especially about her unsettled acceptance of her sexuality.

But I also couldn't escape the fact that Danielle had this incredible and inexplicable sexual gravity for me. I was drawn to her in a purely animalistic and instinctual way unlike I've ever been attracted to any woman before or since. And one hot and sultry June night – and completely against my better judgement – I pushed the two single bunk beds in my dorm room together, lit a bunch of candles, slipped into my silk robe (and nothing else), put a cassette of William Ackerman instrumental guitar music that I knew she liked in my little boom box, and picked up the phone and called Danielle's room to invite her over. Five minutes later, we were a sweaty writhing heap of limbs and torsos and hair, a scene that would play itself out again and again and again practically every night for the rest of the Summer Session.

For the next eight weeks, we carried on this incredibly passionate clandestine affair, although

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I'm sure that our attraction to each other was written all over our faces during the day, and that we were often the topic of conversation when we weren't around the other OAs. I never really worried about it, given the generally accepting and open-minded nature of the group, who I all very much liked and respected, and who all very much liked and respected both Danielle and me. (To say nothing of the fact that several of them were also in a similar situation, romantically speaking.)

I wish that I could say that it was great sex for me, but unfortunately, there were two things that constantly haunted me during our time together that summer, and during the various interludes we spent together after that summer. The first was recognizing that Danielle was ashamed of being with a woman, which wore on me constantly. And the second was, of course, the fact that she was a nonsmoker, and even worse, that she was also overtly anti-smoking. I remember well one late night discussion with a number of the other OAs in one of the dorm lounges several nights before Danielle and I became intimate for the first time, during which one of them observed with more than a little self-satisfied smugness that none of us were smokers, which he saw as evidence of our shared superior intellect. Danielle laughed appreciatively, and mentioned how much she personally hated smoking. I smiled, and of course said nothing.

It was so strange, because on the one hand, I was dealing with the issue of her sexual confusion and closeted status, and on the other, I was trapped in a very different sort of closet of my own, owing to my SF, and the life-long fear that "maybe I was the only one." By the time I was 21, in the middle of the androgynous and free-wheeling 80s, being a lesbian was no big deal to me, even though I didn't feel any pressing need to shout it from the rooftops, whereas coming out as a pre-med student with a kink for smoking prior to the revelations of the internet seemed more than a little terrifying to me. And even more so the thought of sharing this with a committed nonsmoker who had obvious sexual identity issues. So I was left with quiet guilty moments when Danielle wasn't around to flip through the folder of Virginia Slims print ads that I kept hidden in my dresser...

But Danielle was like the equivalent of pheromone crack for me. Every time I was with her, I got a little high, and there was something in her scent, and in the taste of her kisses and body that absolutely drove me wild and just made me crave more and more and more. And even though I was rarely able to have an orgasm with her, and only when I imagined her smoking, I took great and enormous satisfaction in my ability to pleasure her. To put my lips and tongue and hands on her body felt for all the world to me like worshipping at the alter of Aphrodite herself...like I was the first nymph on the ocean shore to greet and give myself to the Goddess. I can still hear the aching strains of "The Impending Death of The Virgin Spirit" by William Ackerman mixed with Danielle's orgasmic breathing as I think about those nights, and it still gives me chills, and makes me feel completely naked and vulnerable all these years later.

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As the idyllic circumstances of the Summer Session approached the inevitable end, Danielle became increasingly cold, and I decided that I'd had enough of the daily dizzying expanse between such incredible closeness and such incredible distance, and I broke it off as gently and as kindly as I could.

Once the Fall Semester started, we ran into each other on campus periodically and exchanged subtext-laced pleasantries and furtive glances, and every time it happened, I once again felt the intense desire to be with her, but managed to find the strength to cling to the relative peace of my solitude. And at that point, the reason for my ability to successfully resist her irresistibility had become much more than simply wanting to avoid the frustrations of being with her.

The events of the summer had the unexpected effect of motivating me to seriously contemplate at least experimenting with smoking for the first time, and I didn't want to have Danielle or anyone else in my daily life who might have crowded out the little free time I had to possibly do it. There was something about the collective sexual frustration of my time with her, combined with a sense of empowerment that I felt as a result of the other very positive friendships that I'd made over the summer, that allowed me to actually think about doing that which had previously been absolutely unthinkable to me. Even the smug anti-smoking comments of my fellow Orientation Staffer during that late night discussion lingered in the back of my mind like a kind of weird challenge. I can still hear his exact words as if he just spoke them: "*Can you imagine any of the OAs smoking?!*"

Well yes, as a matter of fact I *could* imagine it...and was doing so with increasing frequency.

By October, I had not only screwed up the courage to experiment with smoking, but had actually started smoking regularly in the privacy of my off campus apartment. (And if you haven't read the story, or care to again, you can do so [here](#).)

While starting to smoke was the most sexually liberating and fulfilling thing I'd ever experienced, I was closet smoker for the remainder of the time that I spent finishing my first undergrad degree, and during my one year of med school, partly because of the negative reactions that I feared from my social/academic circle, but mostly because I eventually broke down and fell back into an on again, off again relationship with Danielle during this time. I took great care with ventilation, showers, mouthwash, etc., but I suspect that she knew that I'd started smoking, and

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I believe that a friend of hers once saw me buying cigarettes, although strangely enough, Danielle never confronted me about it. But as always, the time we spent together continued to be incredibly frustrating for me, and each time I was the one to end it, until I eventually ended it once and for all.

The last time I saw Danielle was a completely chance encounter. It was years after we'd broken up for the last time and years after she'd graduated, and I was sitting in a park on the other side of town from the university where I'd returned to pursue my Art degree after leaving med school. She was in town visiting a friend and just happened to be walking by, and we were each the last person that the other was expecting to see. I glanced up from the book that I was reading and thought that I might have spotted her first, which I was thankful for at the time because I had just lit a cigarette, and I reflexively dropped it to the ground and covered it with my boot sole as she walked towards me from across the park with a quizzical smile on her face. I'd been out of the closet as a smoker for several years at that point, ever since I'd been back at the university as an Art student, in what I imagined was less judgmental company, but seeing her instantly shoved me back in. But looking back on the moment, I'm almost certain that she probably did see me exhaling a big plume of smoke with a smoldering Virginia Slims in my hand, although again she said nothing. It was every bit as awkward an encounter for both of us as you probably imagine it was, and then some. So awkward, in fact, that I wished it'd never happened.

I've thought about her many times over the years, wondering where she is now, whether she ever thinks about me, whether she ended up with a woman, whether she ended up with a man, whether she's alone, whether she has children, whether she's happy. Whatever her circumstances, I hope that she is happy, and that she's made peace with herself and with who she is.

I've also had a number of infrequent, but very intense dreams about Danielle over the years. In all of them we're in a very public place, and in one hand she proudly and comfortably holds mine for all the world to see, and in the other she's holding a cigarette. And every time that I have the dream, I become so happy and excited and physically aroused that it wakes me up...and then I realize that it was just a dream, instantly wish that I hadn't had it, and invariably end up crying myself back to sleep.

While the explosive sexual chemistry between us was undeniable, the truth is that I believe that we never really loved each other, simply because we couldn't. But I so badly *wanted* to love her, and to give myself to her completely, although I now realize that it was never possible for either of us, since we were both living partially closeted lives. She had her shame and confusion over being a lesbian, and I had my shame and confusion over having a SF, which meant that

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completely with each other. And to me, that seems somehow much sadder to contemplate all these years later than had we once actually been in love and later grew apart.

To be a human being is to be simultaneously biological and psychological, and to deny either in any way is to be incomplete and incapable of true intimacy and love. My time with Danielle taught me this painful lesson, perhaps without her ever even knowing it, although I want to believe that she discovered this for herself as well, and that wherever she is, she has the completeness of love in her life, even though we could never find it together.