Leather and Cigarettes

By : H Coffman

A young man deals with the memory of his father, shortly after his father dies.

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Kyle opened the door of his fatherâ s car and sat behind the wheel. He took a deep breath and looked around. The inside of the car smelled like leather and cigarettes. It was a combination Kyle had always hated, but now he welcomed it. Kyle slipped out of his blazer and loosened his black tie. The moon was full and left a beam of light across Kyleâ s lap. The streetlamp light reflected off the falling rain like a shower of gold.

Kyle leaned over and reached into the glove compartment, pulling out his dadâ s pack of yellow American Spirits and a lighter with a picture of a moose on it. He lit up one of the cigarettes, closed his eyes and inhaled.

â Kyle, what are you doing? You donâ t smoke, you hate cigarettes.â

Kyle opened his eyes and looked at his father, now sitting in the passenger seat.

â I donâ t really care. Itâ s comforting.â

â That stuff will kill you,â his father said, and then laughed. â Thatâ s what your mother always told me. â Stop smoking, Hal! Youâ ll get lung cancer and die!â Never guessed it would be a bus that finally got me. She never saw that coming. Neither did I, come to think of it.â

â Dad, stop.â

â Was it a nice funeral?â

â You donâ t know?â

â Hell no! I wasnâ t there! You think I want to be in a room full of people I barely know gossiping about my death? Besides, your momâ s sister was probably there and I hate her.â

â It was a nice funeral,â Kyle said. â Aunt Millie did complain that you probably left her out of your will.â

â See! That old bat isnâ t even related to me. What would she be in my will for?â

â Momâ s gonna be staying with her for a while, she doesnâ t want to be alone.â

â Well, God bless her for that, I guess. That was the only thing that woman and I ever had in common, we both adored your mother. Give me one of those cigarettes.â

â Dad.â

â What? Iâ m already dead, why canâ t I live a little?â

His father laughed at his joke and Kyle rolled his eyes, but nevertheless handed him one of the cigarettes. Kyle lit the cigarette for him and they smoked together quietly for a few minutes. A car drove past

them and the headlights washed over them. In the light Kyle could see his fatherâ s face clearly. He looked younger than he had in years. His wrinkles werenâ t quite as pronounced and the gray hairs that had sprinkled his black mane were gone. He looked good.

â Dad,â Kyle said. â Do you remember the last thing I said to you before you died?â

â Would you feel better if I said no?â

â Be honest.â

â Yes, I remember. You told me you were an adult and I needed to butt out of your life.â

â I didnâ t mean that.â

â Yeah, you did. You wouldnâ t have said it if you didnâ t mean it.â

â I didnâ t know that-â

â You didnâ t know that I was going to die? No you didnâ t.â

â Iâ m sorry, dad.â

â I forgive you.â

â No, dad, you canâ t forgive me. Youâ re not here. Youâ re dead. Its presumptuous of me to assume you would forgive me.â

Kyle took a drag from the cigarette and looked at the empty passenger seat. The car felt suddenly cold and empty. Kyle shivered and put his blazer back on. Reaching into the pocket he found the crumpled program from the funeral. He ran his hands over the rough paper and tried to smooth it out as best he could.

â Dad,â he said, his voice hoarse. â If you can hear me, and I mean really hear me, I want to say that Iâ m sorry. Iâ m really sorry. If I could go back and take that moment back I would. I would have told you I loved you. I love so much, dad. I hope you can forgive me.â

Kyle rolled down the window and dropped the cigarette into the street. He leaned back in the leather seat and stared at the moon, and waited.

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