

PURGING

by Paige Alexis Rudnick

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With a sniffle, Daniel fought back the tears pooling behind her eyes as her little six year old right hand moved the logs in the fire pit out of the way to make room for the dolly she was white knuckle clenching in her left hand. The dolly was hers, a prize hard won but, she knew she could not keep it.

On first spotting the dolly hanging out of the side pocket of the backpack of the girl sitting next to her on the school bus, Daniel's insides had begun to swirl. Then, on the thought of trying to say something to the girl about her dolly, that was what set Daniel's heart to start beating so hard she thought it might burst out of her chest. There'd been so many things she'd

wanted to say, to ask like, "What kinds of clothes did the girl have for the dolly?" But, Daniel held her tongue.

Miles and bus stops had passed in anguish, in terror over what she would do if the girl got off? The dolly had to have been brought special that day only for show and tell after all. If the girl got off or if the bus got to Daniel's stop, she would have lost the chance at her moment. A private moment, of just being one of two girls sitting and talking to each other on the bus ride home. To make her moment happen had been a question of what to say and how to say it so that if anyone heard, they wouldn't pick on her later.

"D--" she'd stammered, "Does your doll have a car?" That had been good, right? That wouldn't attract attention cause a car was involved, right? That was something a boy might ask a girl he liked?

"No, but she has a house," the girl had replied, "And a sister." She paused to look at Daniel. "Do you have a dolly?" Daniel remembered feeling her body tense up yet some relief from knowing she could be truthful in her reply.

"No. No dolly, I have some action figures though," she'd said. The girl had nodded, looked at her dolly then turned back at Daniel and tilted her head to the side studying her. After a moment she'd looked to her left, then right to check for

onlookers before leaning in to whisper in Daniel's ear, "Do you want this dolly?"

All warmth then drained out of Daniel's body. Was this a trap, a trick? Daniel wondered. Something setup by the boys in her class?

She'd closed her eyes, bracing herself for the trap if it turned out to be one and let herself say, "Yes."

The pair rode in silence before finally the bus stopped, and the girl got up eyeing the dolly as she left it sitting to Daniel's side. "I forgot her," she'd said as she crawled over Daniel for the walk way that would take her off the bus.

Daniel had sat stunned letting out a very half hearted, "Hey, you forgot your dolly," that must have carried for all of two inches out from her.

That, had been a good day.

Today, was not.

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A tear leaked out and around from behind her eye to collect on her cheek. Daniel wiped it away with her arm. "Boys don't cry," she told herself.

Oh how she didn't want to be here now, doing this. Preparing this. Daniel wanted so much to be in her room making a home up for her dolly. Even if that home was just a shoebox.

With folded playing cards for furniture. That would do, yes, neither she nor dolly needed more than that. All that mattered was to be together, where they deserved to be which was anywhere but here with Daniel preparing dolly to burn. Dolly didn't deserve the fire. But, Daniel didn't know what else to do.

The month since the dolly and come into Daniel's life had been filled with more joy than fear, but fear had come in no small amount. Fear over what Mommy would do if she found out. Fear from what would Daddy do if he found out! Daddy was a kind man but...

If he found out...

Then came the fear, the outright terror from what would happen if her Pastor found out. The Pastor who said that her playing with a dolly made baby Jesus cry because Daniel looked like a boy and it was long made clear that the boy she looked like, was more important to the world than the girl she knew she was. While dolly didn't deserve to burn, if Daniel kept her Daniel knew she would surely go to Hell so, dolly had to go.

Right?

She had to do this right? The Pastor was right, right? There was no real choice here, right?

Daniel paused her panic and lifted her left hand up and toward the hole she'd cleared in the logs. She couldn't take the

chance, she couldn't risk Hell.

"I'm so sorry," Daniel said, unable to keep herself from crying any longer as she began to cover dolly up with the logs. She was going to have to be strong now, Daniel told herself. "Tough" like boys were. Like Daddy said she should be. Yes, dolly would burn and so then she would become a real boy. It was only fair right? Dolly would be offered so Daniel could become a real boy. The boy her Mommy and Daddy and family thought she was.

She would become a boy.

She would be spared Hell.

Daniel's gut twisted as she placed the last log back.

Why did this hurt so bad? She was going to make so many people happy, make her bullies go away.

Why couldn't she breathe?

Daniel didn't question any further. Stuffing back her tears she turned around and headed up for her house to find and play with the toy cars she liked well enough and that her Mommy and Daddy and Pastor would have no problem with.

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Summertime Saturday bonfires were a near weekly event at Daniel's home. S'mores and friends and family at an all around happy time. In her mind, Daniel was set upon making this evening

no different. But, no matter how she threw herself at running and jumping her toy cars off things, her heart weighed her down.

"Is everything ok sweetie?" Daniel's Mommy asked. Mommy was always there for Daniel when she needed her. But, Mommy couldn't learn the truth about what was going on. Lying may make Jesus cry too but Daniel had lied before and everything had stayed ok. Sure, she had to endure time in the corner once or twice when caught in a lie but caught or not life carried on as normal. She wasn't punished by god for it, as near as she could tell. So, Daniel reasoned, she could lie to protect herself. She just couldn't get caught with the doll.

"Yeah," Daniel began, "I'm just a little sad. None of my friends were home to come over and play," Daniel really had no idea if any of her friends were home or not as she didn't make any calls to invite anyone tonight. She just knew her Mommy would believe the lie that no one was home. With only a handful of close friends, boys brave enough to risk playing with a well known "sissy", finding all of them gone for a bonfire night had happened before.

Daniel's Mommy continued to look at her for a moment before reaching out and taking her hand. Mommy's lips were thin and her eyes shimmered in the evening light. Daniel knew she was hurting Mommy by not telling her what was going on. She tried to, once.

Daniel asked Mommy if she wanted a girl or a boy and when she replied, "Oh! I always wanted a great little boy like you!" Daniel knew she could say no more. She couldn't hurt her Mommy by telling her the truth and taking the son Mommy thought Daniel was away from her.

"I'll be ok Mommy," Daniel said with her best brave face on as her Daddy walked by heading down for the fire pit. After a moment, Daniel's Mommy leaned in and kissed her on her forehead.

"My special little man," She said, wiped her eyes, then turned around to go back to the guests that had arrived. Daniel waited a moment to gather strength before beginning a solo procession behind her Daddy to follow him.

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Daniel's heart found her throat from the fear that Daddy had one last chance to find dolly before the fire consumed her. At least this was it, this was the last time she'd have to worry about being found out. Despite the fear, despite the pain that was already stabbing at her from the next moment when Daddy would toss the match that carried the fire that would light the paper and logs and dolly ablaze, Daniel kept her tears back.

"Enjoy the fire son, but stay back ok? I'll let you start the fire when you get a little bit bigger," Daniel's Daddy said as the match hit the paper and the fire began to spread around

the pit.

"Yes Daddy," Daniel promised, expecting the promise to be an easy one to keep as her Daddy walked by and up for the house. Her legs, after all, were frozen in place.

Why did this hurt so bad? Was this the girl burning away? Was this the boy being born? Why did this hurt so bad?

Daniel watched as the fire grew. She watched as a log became weak and fell, exposing just enough of dolly to make it so she had to watch her go as Daniel found her gaze was as frozen as her legs.

Daniel watched as dolly's long beautiful blond hair wooshed away, down to a length her own hair would surely never be allowed to pass before burning away completely. She watched as dolly's hips softened and flattened, melting into her legs and making them as straight as Daniel's own figure would remain. She watched dolly's torso flex, making her shoulders go wide, mutating the femininity out of dolly as surely as Daniel's own fated pubescence would mutate her body.

And did, mutate her body.

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Eight years ahead, alone on a Friday night and a little to six year old Daniel's left Daniel sat at another fire. Another purge of the feminine gains she made. Clothes she was now too

old for and clothes that now failed to conceal her boyish features were going up in smoke. All clothes that failed to grant her even the illusion of the girlhood that blessed her female classmates for real.

This time it would be over. The fire would set her free, this time. She would be the boy the world told her she needed to be!

Why then did she hurt so?

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To her left and six years later, Daniel was at another Friday fire, another purge. With breast forms she'd ordered poised for offering to the flames in hand. They were good forms too, they came with a medical adhesive that she could and did use to affix each breast to her chest. Forms that would warm to her body temperature and hang with this agreeable, comfortable completing weight off of her.

Sure, they weren't perfect. There would be no wearing of low cut tops with them on. But. With the right tops and kind lighting she could look in the mirror and know joy from a reflection that looked complete. Whole. An image she could enjoy in the solitude of her home, away from the eyes of the world.

That did not, of course, mean that she was secluded from the eyes and judgement of god. The god she'd learned thought of

her as an abomination.

She, for wearing women's clothes and for applying her breasts that together finally helped her know peace that, made her an abomination according to the Old Testament. She was damned by god by that which made her feel at ease. Because she'd been damned to be a boy, she was now damned to be a man. If she continued to seek her peace in this life, Daniel remained sure that the fires of Hell awaited her in the next.

With a grunt, the forms went sailing through the air and into the fire.

Daniel cussed. She wailed. To her left, and on a Friday night five years on, Daniel cussed and wailed through a slur.

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She was alone, finishing the scotch she'd bought in hopes that it could serve as fuel for a male bonding moment with one of her few friends. It didn't work but, much like inviting friends over that night she set dolly to burn, she didn't try to invite anyone over. The hope of bonding served only to cover Daniel's own eyes from seeing that, she was going to the liquor store quite often and her liquor cabinet was almost always empty despite the trips.

She also held a Bible. Well, most of a Bible as she'd already fed a few hundred of its pages to the fire. Daniel was

milking the torture, prolonging the suffering of the book and the god she knew from it. The god that cursed her life, damned her life until she could know the purported mercy of the next.

The life that book, her Pastor and her god had given her had set Daniel to her breaking point. Her life had been about fire and she didn't give a damn anymore if fire was all she would know in the next.

Ripping a chunk of pages out of the book, Daniel fed them to the blaze and took a swig from her bottle. It was too late for her she was sure. She was in her mid-twenties. If she transitioned now there was no way she would be seen as the woman she was. Her male puberty and advanced age ensured she would be a freak if she transitioned now. She was trapped, looking out through eyes of a body that made it impossible for onlookers to see her.

She wailed.

She stumbled and fell.

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Two feet away, to her left and another five years out Daniel, now legally known as Danielle, stood looking to her right on a Saturday before another fire. Sober now four years, living as the woman she'd always known her self to be for three, she stood at peace wearing a necklace with a small gold cross

looking over her past marveling that she was here and that she was standing. Her heart ached for that little six year old girl, suffering in silence. Such a huge weight on such a little body that caused her to grow up so fast.

She looked at the fire that was for her not-so-feminine features marking her history of being Daniel in her present. Danielle told herself, being dissatisfied with her body really just made her a woman all the more.

Looking at the fire for her false breasts, she adjusted the bra that held the fruits of her second puberty. Her breasts were a little smaller than she'd like due to their late start, but they were hers and they were therefore beautiful and just fine the way they were.

Looking at the fire of her crisis of faith, Danielle reached up and touched her necklace. She didn't know what God wanted, didn't know or pretend to know or listened anymore to men who said they knew what God blessed and what God damned. She did know that God made no mistake with her being born the way she was. The path she was put on had taught her so much and saw her embrace a faith of forgiveness, and listening, and love and oh so not fear or judgement of herself or others.

She looked back from the fire to see her Mother and Father and family and friends that outnumbered her family at the top of

the hill waiving down at her, inviting her up to join them. She was, happy. She was home.

She was home.

Danielle turned to look once more at that six year old child before she'd head up the hill. There was nothing she could do for her. Still, she felt compelled to try something. "Hang in there girl," she said letting the word "girl" hang for a moment before adding, "It, your life, gets so much better."