

# Beautiful Hangover

A Short Story

By

Cynthia Ayaia

“All you have to do is lure him back, it shouldn’t be that hard for you. Once a druggie, always a druggie.” Jay took a long drag from his cigarette. Why was Daniel being so difficult? All he had to do was lure stupid fool Travis back to dark depths...where he belonged. The wind blew his black hair into his eyes. He would have gotten a haircut if Samantha hadn’t once said that she loved his hair as it was.

“This is wrong. I won’t lure him back. He’s my friend. He has a new life. I won’t help you ruin it.” Jay watched Daniel shake his head back and forth. Lines creased his forehead, made his eyes crinkle like a sheet of paper dried in the sun. The conflict he felt was made even clearer as he wrung his hands together, as though trying to wash away something that wasn’t there. The scene almost wanted to make Jay laugh. He flicked his cigarette onto the concrete roof on which they stood, stomping out the coal like fire as ash surround his black sneakers as he made his way to the stairwell door to leave the grey cold roof.

“Yeah, you will. You love him Daniel, and if I know you, you want him all to yourself, just like I want her. She only needs a push to be with me. You have that push in that stupid briefcase of yours.”

“Don’t insult me Jay,” he said smiling up at him. His light-brown eyes saw more than they should, making Jay want to stroll on over and punch him. “You had a chance once with her, she chose him. Don’t be an idiot into thinking she loves you. She doesn’t.”

“Just do your job and sell him those drugs. You’re just as selfish as me; don’t be stupid enough to thinking you ain’t.” Jay swung the door open and stormed down the stairs. Halfway down he took the pill container from his jacket pocket and popped two delightful red and white pills. *Time for a wild night.*

Travis watched Samantha from the top of the stairs. She was staring out the glass panel as though she were a caged bird. Her long black hair was pulled into a topknot. She just stood there, staring out at the beautiful day that awaited them. Why did she look so sad, he thought as he walked down the stairs covered in snow white shaggy carpet. Samantha looked at him, her hair barely moving as she turned her head, and gave him a sad smile. Her green eyes were lifeless, dull not anything like before. Just like their new house, it was devoid of life.

“Are you okay?” he said approaching her.

“Why wouldn’t I be?” Her cheeks perked up, setting dimples harshly into her stone. One side was perked higher than the other, accentuated by the slight tilt of her head. Her eyes dulled her smile that would have lit the room.

“I don’t know. You just look sad.”

“I’m not.” He could tell she was lying, hiding something that was so clearly bothering her. Travis leaned against the glass panel and stroked her face. Samantha held it close to her cheek and

looked up at him endearingly with her green eyes. A tiny spark was there, it only needed oxygen to flourish. He would not bother her about it anymore.

“Do you like the house?” he asked changing the subject.

“It’s lovely.”

“I’m glad. Jay is coming by later to visit. He wants see the new place.”

“What? But this place is a mess, we’ve barely unpacked.”

“Jay won’t mind Sam, he just wants to take a look around. And there isn’t much of a mess since we haven’t unpacked all the big stuff.” Travis kissed her on the forehead, taking her in his arms.

“Are you sure you’ll be okay?”

“I told you I’m done with that stuff. I’ll never go back, not from this new life, not from you.” Travis cupped her face. “God Sam, I love you and I’m not about to risk losing you ever again.”

“Travis I—I love you too.” Travis believed her but he saw the look in her eyes, the pained look of something troubling her. The way her eyes furrowed deep, creating a large V in her beautiful forehead, he knew something wasn’t right. The doorbell rang, a sweet sounding chime, like church bells in the air, pulled Samantha away from him. Watching her walk towards the door in her black and white spring dress, he knew that there was something wrong with her. Her feet dragged a little on the white carpet that was still fluffy and vibrant in the new house. He saw specks of dust jump into the air with every step she took, as though trying to survive her path of destruction. Looking at her, in her black and white dress, she looked like a reflection of the house. Detached and stripped of life.

Jay wasn’t alone when he entered the house with his usual toothy grin of a smile.

“Daniel, what are you doing here?” Travis never told Samantha that Daniel was his dealer, but he had a feeling she knew anyway. She wasn’t stupid.

“Jay dragged me here, he thought I should come by and see the place.” Travis didn’t know what to say as he stared at Daniel with his captivating appearance. Travis shouldn’t hate Daniel, and honestly, he didn’t; he just hated his profession. He hated, that without regard, Daniel had kept him attached to haze of living, and thought nothing of peoples well being only of the cash that kept his pockets burning. Nevertheless, Daniel...he was his oldest friend.

“I’m glad. It has been a while. Um, well come on in you guys.” Travis greeted them both with a hug, although his hug to Daniel was stiffer than he wanted it to be. Daniel though gave him one just as stiff. Friends. *That’s all they used to be*, at least that’s what he kept telling himself.

“Sorry this place is a mess,” said Samantha following them, her hands wringing together, tying her fingers into knots.

“This place is hardly a mess,” said Jay looking around. “This place is amazing. Kind of shocked you were able to afford it Travis. No offense man.”

“None taken. Sam and I actually bought it half-and-half and the previous owners were willing to take what they could.”

“I’ll get us some drinks,” Samantha quickly interrupted him. Travis watched her walk briskly to the kitchen.

“She okay?” asked Jay leaning against one of the white walls of the house.

“Y-yeah, she’s fine.”

“Kay, cool.” Jay took the place in, examining it with his keen hawk eyes. “This place is really drab.”

“We just moved in.”

“I know,” said Jay smiling mischievously. “That’s why I brought it up. You should hire me to paint and decorate.”

“I don’t know.”

“Oh come on, I know what you and Sam like, I could do a great job and all you have to do is pay expenses.”

“I guess, but—”

“Travis, let him paint the house. He won’t shut up until you say yes.” Daniel had been like a mouse, so quiet Travis had almost forgotten he was there. Daniel looked at him, hesitantly. His brown eyes meeting his catching Travis in the moment, sending his memories back to those long nights in Daniel’s lavish house. However, he noticed that he was hiding something as well.

“You’ll have to talk to Sam about it, she gets rights over decoration.”

Jay’s mischievous grin widened. “All right then.”

Travis watched him leave and stood in uncomfortable silence with Daniel. It was hard pretending as though nothing had ever happened, so he took a tentative step forward, quickly regretting it. Daniel’s light brown eyes met his and memories of their past together resurfaced. Memories that lived in fractured hazes in the deep recesses of his mind.

“I should go.”

“You don’t have to.”

“Maybe not for your sake but for my sake I do.”

“Daniel, please, we were friends once we can go back to being that.”

Daniel shook his head sadly, his light brown hair swinging over his face. “No, no we can’t go back Travis, not after everything that happened.” A soft scoff left his light pink lips. “You just don’t understand. I’m sorry, but I need to go. Besides, I don’t think your girlfriend wants me here.”

“She doesn’t know about you.”

Daniel’s lips curled into a small smile, eyes cast down, half-closed. “Guess that fits, not like there is anything about me to know.” Daniel looked at him one last time and his eyes held his again, making both his heart beat fast and cheeks heat up.

“Daniel...”

“She said yes!” exclaimed Jay walking from the kitchen, his arms in the air. Travis watched Samantha laugh and smile as Jay did his victory dance, swishing one leg in front of the other while he bit his lip in his way, pelvic thrusting the whole time. It was nice to see her smile like that again.

“You’re a bastard,” said Daniel taking a long drag of his cigarette next to Jay on the roof of his apartment. It was a cold and chilly night but he didn’t care. It would help him clear his mind.

“Yeah, I know.”

“He’s your friend.”

“So? He doesn’t deserve her.”

“You’re not one to talk,” said Daniel throwing down his cigarette, stomping on it angrily.

All Daniel wanted to do was punch Jay in his jaw and wipe that conceited smirk off his face.

“True, but she never has to know. I just have to say what she wants to hear.”

“I could say somethin’.”

“To who? Travis? What would you say?” said Jay in a mocking tone.

Daniel eyed him hatefully and crossed his arms. “When do you start painting?”

“Tomorrow afternoon. I knew she would hire me.”

“You’re a freaking ass,” muttered Daniel.

“I know,” said Jay again, that smirk on his face turning into a Cheshire cat grin.

Jay liked being alone with Samantha. He liked seeing how nervous he made her. Sam never looked him in the eye, always stayed an arm’s length away with her arms crossed and her hands tightly clamped onto them, turning her knuckles bone white. Her head was turning and turning, and she paced like a rat in a cage, looking for something to do.

“Do you mind if I take a break?” he said, climbing down the ladder he was using to paint the higher parts of the wall.

“No, go ahead Jay, you’re welcome to do whatever you want.”

Poor word choice, he thought smiling. “Yeah, that’s not completely true and you know it.”

“Jay, please don’t start this again. Sleeping with you that one *and only* time was a mistake.”

“Maybe, but what about those kisses we shared and the looks we share now?” Jay approached her slowly. She took two steps away from him and shook her head, tightening her grip on her arms. Her nails turned white as they dug into her arms.

“Those were mistakes too.”

“If they were you wouldn’t be acting this way.”

“Stop it Jay, please, if you care about me, stop it.”

“I do care about you Sam, so much. It’s why I can’t see you like this. You just stand here. You stand here and stare outside holding yourself like you’re trapped! God, I can’t stand to see you like that!” He lunged at her and pried her arms off her, pinning them down on her sides. *God, she’s beautiful.*

“Jay, I, it’s not what you think. I’m happy here, I love Travis.”

“No, you don’t.” Jay took a moment to take in her features. Her big wide almond shaped green eyes, the little scar on her forehead from a school injury, her delicate nose and finally her lips that were covered in nothing and were still plump and soft. Finally he kissed her, moving his hands up her arms to cup her head. Samantha never pulled away so he led her to the sofa and held her close.

“Leave him Samantha,” Jay muttered between kisses.

“I can’t, he needs me and I do love him.” Every time she said that his anger rose and he smothered her in kisses just to shut her up. *She was so stupid sometimes*, he thought, *good thing she was gorgeous*.

“Jay,” she said pulling away, “please stop. I care about you and a part of me wants to be with you, but he needs me.”

“He doesn’t need to know,” said Jay pulling her into a kiss. Samantha neither pulled away nor said no.

Travis was shocked at how well the house was turning out. Of course Jay was being very meticulous about it and taking his time. Travis didn’t mind. Every day that passed, Samantha looked as bright as the house itself and Jay’s company made her smile. She looked like the girl he met years ago, so full of life, who was the angel that saved him from himself.

Travis looked at his watch. Taking half a day off work had put him in a great mood. He could not wait to surprise Samantha with the dinner reservations he made at P.F. Changs. She had been in such a great mood lately he just wanted to celebrate everything.

He pulled up to his driveway on Florence St. taking in the bright blue sky of Medford. Seeing Jay’s van there didn’t surprise him; he just hoped that Jay wouldn’t mind leaving early. He opened the door, smiling happily, until he saw the empty living room. Travis closed the door and stepped inside his colorful and lively house. He looked around warily until he heard it. Above him, he could almost imagine horses were galloping. His heart constricted, his breathing became labored and all the while on his way up the steps, he knew what was happening, except he only wished it wasn’t. Travis didn’t need to walk far; they hadn’t bothered to close the bedroom door.

Travis ran out of the house as quietly as he could and vomited in the bushes. How could they, he thought, crying there on the stoop like a pathetic moron. He looked up towards the upstairs

windows, where the thin white shades were drawn. He was so stupid. He should have known, should have figured it out. Instead, he played dumb, ignoring the world around him. He needed to get away, he thought dizzily, making his way back to his car as the world spun around him, fumbling like an idiot with his keys before finally managing to stick it in the ignition and drive away.

“I’m coming, I’m coming!” said Daniel, stumbling off his brown leather and stained couch. He rubbed his eyes and opened the door to tell whoever was knocking to go jump off a cliff. He wasn’t in the mood to supply whatever idiot came walking by for a fix. The words, though, caught in his throat as he stared at Travis, who looked more beaten down than he had ever been. A part of though had thought, and hoped, that Travis had forgotten where he lived.

“Travis, what’s up?”

“Can I come in?”

“Yeah, of course.” Daniel quickly regretted it, taking in the slouched back of Travis as he entered. He never wanted to see him like this again. Daniel wanted to tell him to go, whatever had beaten him down, and Daniel knew he wouldn’t be able to help. Sam was good for him that way; she had done what he had never been able to do. Where he had been selfish, wanting to keep Travis by him no matter what, Sam had helped him. She may not love Travis more than him, but she took care of him in better ways.

“I need a drink,” said Travis, heading straight to Daniel’s kitchen. Daniel watched Travis cross his shaggy grey carpet and make his way to his black tiled kitchen floor. More than confused, Daniel felt dismayed. It was like *déjà vu*, seeing Travis once again in his house with the look of pain on his face. He could only imagine what happened to send him back here, where his darker days had been.

“I thought you went sober,” said Daniel crossing his arms as he watched Travis take a swig from his most pricey tequila.

“Sam is cheating on me with Jay.”

*Damn you Jay*, thought Daniel, digging his fingernails into his arm. “How do you know?”

“Came home early to surprise Sam for dinner.” He took another long swig from the bottle. Some drizzled down his chin, flowing down his adams apple. “There they were, in *our* bedroom.”

“Travis, I’m sorry. What do you want from me?”

Seeing the look in Travis’ eyes made him shiver. He knew that desperate look, could see it as his eyes dilated and his jaw line tightened. “You know what I want. You know why I’m here.”

“You’re clean, you don’t want to do this.”

“Don’t tell me what I want to do.” Travis threw the bottle of tequila against the far side of the kitchen, against his marble counter-top, sending it into a hundred shards that bled gold liquid, distracting Daniel long enough for Travis to lunge at him, grabbing him by the collar of his blue t-shirt and slammed him into the wall. “Don’t argue with me Daniel, just give me what I need or I’ll trash the place looking for it.”

*Damn you Jay*, he thought dismally.

Travis stumbled into his house, laughing at himself pitifully as he dropped his keys twice trying to get them into the sparkling silver lock of his house. Walking in made him dizzy. All the color, the bright yellow and red and blue, having them all swirl together unyielding like a kaleidoscope made him want to collapse onto the ground and vomit. But it was such a pretty sight, he thought, bumping into a table and knocking over a vase of pretty white roses.

“Travis!” He heard her voice, but he didn’t bother to look up. Instead he watched the vase fall, watched it hit the ground and shatter into pieces and fall like droplets of rain that caught light

from the dim light outside and covered the white floor with rainbows. The water washed over the white roses, drowning them, filling up his nose and air with the smell of freshly cut grass.

“Travis?” Travis looked at her as she rushed down the stairs as if she actually cared. “Oh my god, Travis are you okay?” she asked trying to reach out.

“You slut,” he said shoving her off against the wall.

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me,” he drawled, stumbling in his spot. The world felt like it was moving.

“You’re a slut.”

“Oh my god, you’re drunk and high aren’t you?”

“Yeah, I am, because of you!” Travis exclaimed pointing a finger at her and almost falling over. “I came home early and saw you with Jay. You’re a slut, a stupid slut.”

Her eyes widened, caught in the accusation like a deer in headlights. She pulled at her hair, playing at the frayed edges, looking around his feet. “Stop calling me that. You don’t mean that.”

“I do. Get out.”

“Travis?”

“You heard me, get the hell out! You don’t love me. If you did you wouldn’t be cheating on me. So get the hell out of my house you stupid slut! Get out!” He shoved her towards the wall. He heard her fall, saw the hatred in her eyes as she looked at the glass on her legs and hands. He watched her stumble up the stairs, crushing the white roses beneath her feet. The petals scattered across the floor in her hurry, the water soaked into the carpet, turning it into a storm cloud. Travis bent down to pick up the broken flower, only to fall onto the floor and blackout, remembering nothing more than in the colorful ceiling.

Daniel sat at home on his black leather couch in the dark, drinking a glass of whiskey and ice. He had not slept at all that night, too busy to focus, only caught up in his worrisome thoughts about

Travis. Did he get home okay? What had happened with Samantha? Had the sudden and quick relapse killed him? The thoughts kept swarming in his mind, swishing this way and that way, remembering the last look that had been on his face.

Daniels' phone vibrated in his pocket. The caller id made his anger fuel up.

“What do you want Jay?”

“You should head over to Travis' house. He was passed out on the floor.”

“How do you know? Better question, why do you even care?”

“I don't, but I thought you might. I went late last night to pick up Samantha and help her pack. She's living with me now.” Daniel could practically hear him smile over the phone.

“Go to hell Jay.” He hung up his phone, shoved it back into his pocket, grabbed his black leather jacket and car keys and ran out the door, slamming it behind him.

Travis was on the staircase, staring outside the glass panel doors to his patio. He drank some bourbon, from a glass today, his fifth of the day before noon. Someone knocked came at his door. Travis didn't bother to look towards it, just shouted that it was open and kept on drinking.

“Travis? Are you okay?”

Travis looked at Daniel. The concern on his face made him look even more handsome, despite the creases that were a gift from the worry. “What are you doing here?”

“Seriously? I was up all night worried about you, I didn't get a wink of sleep.”

“Should have drunk up, sure as hell helped me.”

“Dammit Travis.” He made his way to him, his black combat boots pounding against the ground, making his white carpet floor even more dirty, crushing glass beneath his feet. “Pull yourself together.”

“Or what?” Travis raised his glass to his mouth, but before he could even take a sip, his glass was smacked from his hand.

“Or I’ll drag you kicking and screaming to a rehab center before you totally fall down the damn dark rabbit hole...again.”

“Why do you even care?” mumbled Travis, his lips feeling numb against each other.

“Shit, are you just a complete moron today?” Travis wanted to answer but he could not. Daniel cupped his face and pressed his lips against his. Travis remembered this, this feeling. It was the only good thing he remembered from his haze that had been six years. His relationship with Daniel, the nights filled with warm embraces and sweet loving kisses.

“Daniel?”

“I love you idiot. And I won’t let you drink in misery. You want to drink for fun? Fine, go ahead. But never again, I swear to you, never again am I going to let you take a single pill. Never again am I going to let you drown yourself in your stupid misery. I love you Travis.”

Daniel stared at Travis as he knelt there cupping his face. His light-brown eyes held him, and his hands were warm on his face. They felt nice, holding him, giving him support. Looking at him, staring into his eyes, he knew. So he kissed him back, losing himself in it, wrapping his arms around his waist and pulling Daniel close. Just like he did years ago, when the nights weren’t so hazy and his heart soared.