

SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EARS

by
Kyle T. Wilson

Kyle T. Wilson
2524 W. 4th St., Apt. 207
Los Angeles, CA 90057
323.397.7341
Kyletwilson@sbcglobal.net
Copyright 2005, Kyle T. Wilson

THE LIGHTS RISE: SHELLY, an older woman, sits, lit cigarette protruding from her ear. She is prone, still, alert to the cigarette and the effects it's having on her. After a beat, WAYNE, a younger man, enters. He regards this with bafflement.

WAYNE

You realize you're wasting your time with that. It's almost impossible to get cancer that way.

SHELLY

Cute.

WAYNE

Hey, these are my cigarettes, aren't they?

SHELLY

I don't know. They were just sitting there.

WAYNE

What the hell are you doing?

SHELLY

I can't hear you. I have a cigarette in my ear.

WAYNE

Seriously.

SHELLY

It's just a thing.

WAYNE

A thing?

SHELLY

A remedy kind of thing. I got water in my ear in the shower and it won't come out. I remembered a thing.

WAYNE

Putting a cigarette in your ear is a thing?

SHELLY

When I was in Guatemala someone taught me.

WAYNE

You were in Guatemala?

SHELLY

Yes, right out of college. A fellowship thing. I never told you about that?

WAYNE

I don't think so. Do you have pictures?

SHELLY

Somewhere. I have no idea where they are though.

WAYNE

You want me to look for them?

SHELLY

No, don't bother. They're probably lost to the ages.

(He starts digging around a bit.)

WAYNE

Could they be in here somewhere? What do they look like?

SHELLY

They're in a big shoebox marked GUATEMALA. I said don't bother! I've looked for them before, I can't find them, it's no use, I gave up, understand?

WAYNE

Geez, sorry.

SHELLY

(wistfully)

Still, it'd be nice to look at them again. All those beautiful pictures. The landscape was so different, so full of surprises. And I was so young, and attractive. You'd be surprised.

WAYNE

Have any pictures of you with cancer sticks poking out of your ears?

SHELLY

No! At least I don't think I do. Where did this come from? Was it that farmer with the broken English and the bright ideas? I don't know. But I remember, there's something about the filter absorbing the water, sucking it out.

Is it working?
WAYNE

No.
SHELLY

Hey!
(A beat. He walks to her, takes the cigarette, takes a drag.)

The whole cancer thing. Much more efficient this way.
WAYNE

So I'm told.
SHELLY

(She gets another cigarette, lights it. Puts it in her ear. He continues to smoke the other one.)

Did you go outside and water the plants like I asked you to?
WAYNE

No.
SHELLY

You couldn't even do that?
WAYNE

Well, sort of.
SHELLY

Sort of?
WAYNE

I tried.
SHELLY

And you failed?
WAYNE

I got some water out there.
SHELLY

No you didn't.
WAYNE

SHELLY

On a few things out back.

WAYNE

What'd you do, open the door a crack and throw some water outside and hope to hit something green?

SHELLY

Well not exactly, but--

WAYNE

Those plants are going to die, Shelly.

SHELLY

Oh, they'll live or they'll die like plants always do. They don't need me helping them out any more than anybody else does.

WAYNE

No, they'll live because I put the hose on them when I come over because somebody has to. And since you can't be bothered to cross the threshold to do it yourself.

SHELLY

I've been busy!

WAYNE

Doing what?

SHELLY

Well, I took a shower this morning.

WAYNE

And?

(Slight pause. SHELLY shrugs..)

Is that all you've done today?

SHELLY

Oh! I made some doughnuts too.

(She points to a plate of pastries.)

Apple fritters to be exact. And then the water thing started bothering me. And then I had this weird little memory. I'm not even sure who told me about it. Was it a bar trick? The little Guatemalan mother from my host family? I don't know.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

(beat.) That little Guatemalan woman was so sweet to me. I didn't understand a goddamn word she said. But the smile on her face. It just made me feel warm inside. What was her name?

WAYNE

Oh wait, you did tell me about that Guatemalan trip. Didn't you go down there to learn Spanish?

SHELLY

Among other things, but yeah, it was this intensive language thing. Very...intense.

WAYNE

Didn't take, huh?

SHELLY

No. I was a total failure.

WAYNE

That's too bad.

SHELLY

And there was that whole research of the textile factories I was doing down there.

WAYNE

Why'd you ever do that?

SHELLY

Interest. A side thing. Sweatshops are bad.

WAYNE

Yeah, they're crazy.

SHELLY

Yeah. Worse then, too. That was ages ago.

WAYNE

I always jump up and down when I get water in my ears. Have you tried that?

SHELLY

No. Does it work?

WAYNE

I don't know. Try it.

I'll feel silly.

SHELLY

I'll do it with you. We'll be silly together.

WAYNE

Okay.

SHELLY

(She stands up.)

Lose the cigarette first.

WAYNE

Oh.

SHELLY

(She takes it out. Hands it to him. He starts smoking it. If he's not finished with the other one, he smokes both of them.)

One, two--

WAYNE

Is it working?

(He starts jumping up and down. She joins in.)

Not yet?

SHELLY

Sometimes it takes a minute.

WAYNE

I'm starting to feel woozy.

SHELLY

Woozy?

WAYNE

I don't think it's going to work.

SHELLY

Why are you woozy?

WAYNE

SHELLY

I don't know. I feel, I don't know...light-headed.

WAYNE

Well don't get sick.

SHELLY

I'm not. I just...I want this damn water out of my ear!

(She jumps up and down with all of her might, finally collapses onto the chair.)

WAYNE

Any luck?

SHELLY

No.

(Slight pause.)

I'm hungry.

WAYNE

Didn't you have a fritter?

SHELLY

No! I forgot about those.

(She picks up a fritter, takes a big bite. She savors it a moment.)

Oh that takes me back.

WAYNE

I never liked those.

SHELLY

You're missing out. I used to eat these all the time.

WAYNE

Why'd you stop?

SHELLY

My girlish figure, of course.

WAYNE

Of course.

SHELLY

You don't have to agree!

WAYNE

I'm not, I just--

SHELLY

No, you're right. I certainly don't have to worry about that now.

WAYNE

Don't be hard on yourself.

SHELLY

Oh, it's just resignation.

WAYNE

Don't do that either.

SHELLY

I woke up this morning with a taste for these. I tried everything, applesauce, cinnamon in my coffee, even a spoonful from an old can of apple pie filling. But those brown lumps of lumpy dough. I had to have one. I found a recipe in my father's church cookbook. It wasn't very hard. I was surprised.

WAYNE

Your father cooked?

SHELLY

Oh yes. He was very good.

WAYNE

That's nice.

SHELLY

Are you hungry? I ran out of the apple pie filling and made a few of them plain. Just cinnamon and dough and a little brown sugar. Those are at the bottom.

(WAYNE pulls one off the bottom, takes a bite.)

Daddy used to make these on Saturdays when I was a kid. He was such a sweetie.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

(A beat. WAYNE eats and smokes.)

People don't eat when they smoke, you know.

WAYNE

Sure they do.

SHELLY

No they don't! It's disgusting.

WAYNE

What do you know?

SHELLY

I know it's disgusting! How do you taste anything?

WAYNE

I taste everything.

SHELLY

That's bullshit.

WAYNE

No, what's bullshit is you putting a cigarette in your ear to get water out of it.

SHELLY

Oh right!

(She gets out the pack and the lighter.)

WAYNE

(a warning)

I swear to God, Shelly.

(She desists, puts the pack down. Continues eating.)

SHELLY

I know that people don't eat when they smoke because there's a scene in *Annie Hall* when Colleen Dewhurst does.

WAYNE

Since when is Colleen Dewhurst in *Annie Hall*?

SHELLY

She's Annie's mother. The dinner scene. The Jew-hater grandmother who looks at Alvie and sees nothing but Yid.

WAYNE

That's Colleen Dewhurst?

SHELLY

Not the Jew-hater grandmother. Annie's mother. They talk about swap meets. She's beautiful.

WAYNE

Well if there's a scene where she does it then doesn't that prove that people *do* eat and smoke?

SHELLY

Let me finish! I saw that movie on a date and I remember the guy said how funny a detail that was because nobody eats and smokes. Which guy was that? Was it the Jewish guy? Makes a certain sense.

WAYNE

(taking a bite and a puff)

So is that all this is? A funny detail?

SHELLY

To be regarded and forgotten, I'm sure. Just like Guatemala, just like the whereabouts of shoeboxes full of photos, just like everything else.

WAYNE

Geez, that's depressing.

SHELLY

Isn't it, though?

WAYNE

No wonder you never leave the house.

SHELLY

I don't leave the house because I'm depressed.

WAYNE

I know.

SHELLY

Wait a minute, that's not what I meant. I meant the reason I don't leave the house has nothing to do with my depression. Or the fact that I'm depressed. Because I'm not! I'm not depressed!

WAYNE

Then why don't you? We could leave right now. Go somewhere. Do something fun.

(A beat. She thinks a bit, shrugs.)

SHELLY

Oh, I don't want to.

WAYNE

Why not?

SHELLY

Because I have my fritter now. I'm satisfied.

WAYNE

Come on.

SHELLY

Whatever would we do?

WAYNE

There's this movie I want to see. I think you'd enjoy it.

SHELLY

I'm not going to any movie. Movie theaters are crowded, filthy places. Popcorn and sticky soda trails everywhere. Bratty children. Cell phones. The whole enterprise infuriates me.

WAYNE

Maybe we could go to the video store. Find a copy of *Annie Hall*.

SHELLY

I hate video stores. Full of lurid types and bad lighting. Those empty boxes. Such a bizarre industry. Makes me feel like a pervert.

WAYNE

Come on, for me. I'll wait around while you get fixed up?

SHELLY

Why do I have to get fixed up?

WAYNE

Don't you want to find something nice to wear?

SHELLY

What's wrong with what I'm wearing?

WAYNE

Nothing. You look fine. Let's just go.

SHELLY

No. You said I looked bad.

WAYNE

No I didn't.

SHELLY

You implied it.

WAYNE

I didn't mean to.

SHELLY

Yes you did. You're a smart ass. Always were a damn smart ass. So cruel.

WAYNE

I didn't mean anything. We can go just like you are. I don't care.

SHELLY

No.

WAYNE

Fine, but one of these days you need to get out of this house. You could go for a walk, or come visit me.

SHELLY

Why should I come see you? You're always coming over here.

WAYNE

It'd save me the trip.

SHELLY

I thought you liked visiting?

WAYNE

Jesus.

SHELLY

This fritter is making me feel woozy.

WAYNE

Maybe that's a leftover from jumping up and down.

SHELLY

Maybe.

WAYNE

Why did I come over here?

SHELLY

Oh, I dunno, to pester me? To drag me out of the house against my will? To smoke my cigarettes and eat my apple-free-apple-fritters?

WAYNE

Well that too, but there was something else.

SHELLY

I have no idea what that could be.

WAYNE

Is the water still in your ear?

(She tilts her head, bobs it around, smacks her ear.)

SHELLY

No. It's not.

WAYNE

It was the jumping up and down.

SHELLY

No it wasn't! It was the cigarettes.

WAYNE

You wouldn't have jumped up and down if it was the cigarettes. It would've worked and there would be no need.

SHELLY

It was a gradual progression. The cigarettes started the process and it was only a matter of time.

WAYNE

Sure, Shelly. Fine.

(He sees a cellphone, picks it up.)

WAYNE

And this, my dear Shelly, is why I came over here.

SHELLY

What?

WAYNE

My cell phone. I left it here last time I checked on you.

SHELLY

Oh right. It was ringing. I wondered who the hell it belonged to.

WAYNE

Yeah, that was me calling. If you'd just answered it you would've saved me a lot of worry.

SHELLY

I'm not going to answer some stranger's phone.

WAYNE

Who else's could it possibly be?

SHELLY

You'd be surprised the traffic I get in here.

WAYNE

Oh yeah?

SHELLY

Dozens of men. Countless animal beasts, tearing at my clothes, mussing my hair, making me scream with ecstasy, beg for mercy, beg, Wayne. Beg!

WAYNE

I'm not going to beg.

SHELLY

You don't beg, Wayne. They do.

WAYNE

They do?

SHELLY

No, wait. I do!

WAYNE

I think that nicotine has done something funny to your brain.

SHELLY

Cigarettes are bad for us. Why do we smoke them?

WAYNE

Dunno.

SHELLY

They're smelly and they taste bad, too.

WAYNE

I like the taste. Especially with the fritter.

SHELLY

You do?

WAYNE

Yeah, lots of people do.

SHELLY

With fritters?

WAYNE

Sure.

SHELLY

Interesting. It kills them, though.

WAYNE

So they say.

SHELLY

They kill them.

WAYNE

No they don't. Not both.

SHELLY

An excess of either. Too many cigarettes, too many fritters. Or other donuts. Or sugary pastries. Buttery ones, too. Flaky croissants. People die Wayne. All the time.

WAYNE

Well that was the performance of the year.

SHELLY

Are you suggesting I'm histrionic?

WAYNE

Well, you never leave the house.

SHELLY

And?

WAYNE

You have to admit, it's a big gesture.

SHELLY

Histrionics suggest performance. I have no one to perform for. I seek out no audience.

WAYNE

What about all those men who throw themselves at you?

SHELLY

I was just provoking you with that. Honestly!

WAYNE

I'm not the jealous type, Shelly.

SHELLY

No, you're content to be relentless and smothering. You push yourself on me like an obsessed fan. Maybe I'm Garbo, maybe I want to be left alone! Leave me alone, Wayne! Leave me alone!

Fine!

WAYNE

(He starts for the door, opens it. A beat.)

SHELLY

(quietly)

Wayne?

WAYNE

What?

SHELLY

I watered the plants out back today. All by myself.

WAYNE

You did not.

SHELLY

You didn't believe me before, but it's true.

WAYNE

Which ones?

SHELLY

There's that tall flowering thing outside the kitchen window. What's that called?

WAYNE

Dunno.

SHELLY

Well it's pretty.

WAYNE

How'd you water it?

SHELLY

The hose thing at the kitchen sink. I opened the window and sprayed it out. Nailed a bunch of them, even.

WAYNE

I'm sure they could use that.

SHELLY

That tall flowery thing. It's so pretty.

WAYNE

Yeah.

SHELLY

And I want to go on living. So I watered it.

WAYNE

That's nice.

SHELLY

Did you hear that?

WAYNE

What?

SHELLY

I said "I want to go on living."

WAYNE

I thought you said "I want it to go on living."

SHELLY

Well that's what I meant. I meant to say that I want it, the plant, to go on living. But I said "I want to go on living."

WAYNE

I guess I just interpreted from context.

SHELLY

Of course.

(Beat.)

WAYNE

Well I have my phone. I should go. Have lots of calls to make.

SHELLY

Oh good. It's nice to stay in touch.

WAYNE

Yeah.

(He starts to leave.)

SHELLY

Surely that cigarette thing was some kinda bar trick, right Wayne? Some Guatemalan stud trying to make a fool out of me or something. I mean, what kinda wacko would stick a cigarette in her ear?

WAYNE

I don't know.

SHELLY

Jesus, I wish I could remember where that came from. Why is it that I can remember Colleen Dewhurst in *Annie Hall* and Daddy and his apple fritters and I can't remember where I got this cigarette trick?

WAYNE

You remembered it.

SHELLY

Sort of.

WAYNE

Better than nothing.

SHELLY

I guess.

WAYNE

Keep thinking. It'll come to you.

SHELLY

Maybe I should try to find those pictures.

WAYNE

That'll jog your memory.

SHELLY

Would you like to see them?

WAYNE

I'm going to try to catch this movie.

SHELLY

Okay.

WAYNE

Find them and next time we'll have a look.

SHELLY

That'd be nice, wouldn't it, Wayne?

WAYNE

Sure.

(WAYNE exits. SHELLY sits for a moment, takes another bite of her fritter, then heads offstage. Much noisy offstage rummaging is heard. After a moment--)

SHELLY

(Offstage)

Wayne!

(SHE rushes onstage with a big box under her arm labeled GUATEMALA. She rushes for the door, opens it, runs out.)

Wayne, I found them!

BLACKOUT