

Short Story Contest

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 LIBRARIES



PROMPT: Late at night, at an empty 24-hour laundromat, someone reaches into a dryer to pull the last of their clothes out. Instead, something grabs their arm and pulls them in.

My Favorite Dryer Portal

by **Onyx Bard**

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Dying light bulbs shine from the ceiling, casting strange shadows over the floor. From outside, a single streetlight in the parking lot flickers through the window, illuminating a few of the machines in the corner. The moon is nowhere in sight, so when the streetlight finally gives in, there is nothing but darkness and silence outside these walls.

One person sits on a chair, scrolling through their phone and giggling. They look around as if to make sure they are alone before they continue to grin and squirm while reading something from the bright screen.

Beeeeep.

They leap to their feet and drop their phone, looking around wildly.

“Fuck. It’s just the dryer.” They sigh, taking a few deep breaths before reaching down for their phone. They inspect the screen for a moment before pocketing it.

“Took you long enough,” they grumble, glaring at the dryer in a poor attempt to seem menacing.

I grin a little. *How cute.*

They reach into the dryer, grabbing a handful of clothes. I hesitate for only a moment before I reach back, wrapping my hand around their arm. I yank them in, only a tiny squeak escaping them before I cover their mouth with my hand, preventing the scream bubbling in their throat.

I grin, breathing in the rich scent of fear. I can feel them panicking in my arms.

“Shhh,” I whisper into their ear. They go completely rigid, and I bite back a laugh as their heart rate spikes. “Just watch,” I breathe.

Their brows furrow before they turn their gaze outside the clear door of the dryer. Their heart rate slows slightly as they stare intently, waiting.

It starts as a low rumble, then gets louder. Louder. Glass shatters, raining down into the building. A flash of blinding white wings whiz by.

A flash.

Bang!

Shaking.

Then stillness.

The human stares at the wreckage of the laundromat. Almost nothing remains but for ash and unrecognizable heaps of charred machines.

Except, of course, for the dryer we are sitting in.

Smirking, I slowly release the human from my grip. “Now, no need to scream or panic -- well, too much anyway. And if you *must* say something, it should be a ‘thank you.’”

Maneuvering around the dumbfounded human, I make my way out of the cramped dryer. Once out, I unfurl my black, feathered wings, stretching them as far as they will go. I hum softly, enjoying the open, empty space. I glance back down to find wide eyes staring at me. The human has not moved out of the dryer. I let out a deep sigh.

“Come on,” I grab their arm, shifting the opening of the drying so they can leave it with ease. “Get out. Don’t think we’re out of trouble yet. The angels will be back soon to do a sweep of this place. You wouldn’t want to be caught hanging around when they return, do you?”

The human tumbles to the floor, staring at the sharp talons on the end of my fingers. I roll my eyes. Flexing my shoulders, I hide my demonic features, taking on the appearance of a normal human. "Hurry up, will you? Or else I'll just leave you here."

The human scowls, eyeing me suspiciously. "What makes going with you better than staying here?" They demand.

I scuff. "Well, do you want to take your chances with those who just destroyed a laundromat at three in the morning or with someone who just saved your life?"

"And why can't I just take my chances on my own?" The human shoots back immediately, giving me a glare only slightly better than the one they gave the dryer earlier.

Grinning, I lean in closer to them. Their eyes widen for a moment, and they fight not to back down from me. I let my eyes flash black before I speak. "Well, you certainly could try, but I don't think you would make it very far without the angels finding your presence. But if you come with me, I can disguise your presence from them and make sure you live long enough to finish reading whatever makes you laugh so much on your phone. So come, let's go." I turn partially away from the human and hold my hand out toward them, indicating that we should leave. Quickly. The human is obviously skeptical and seems to be gearing up for another round of questions when the sky streaks white.

They gasp, jumping forward and grabbing my hand tightly enough to make their dull, short nails dig slightly at my skin.

"Go!" Is the only word they manage to get out. Smirking, I wrap us up in a black smoke, preparing to take us away from the rubble of the laundromat.

"Just so we're clear, you owe me for this."

The human's head whips up to look at me. Their mouth opens, but the smoke does its job, and we are gone.