

Shattered mirror

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Telephone secret

“Why don’t you put your phone down.”

I’m lying next to my boyfriend, stroking his dark hair. I plant kisses on his face and neck while I caress his bare skin, press into it. When my fingers run over his firm muscles, my desire grows stronger and stronger.

“Dánil, can’t you put down your phone? You’ve just been gone for the entire weekend.”

I’m getting annoyed that he isn’t paying attention to me, that he won’t even look at me. I turn my back towards him in anger and pull the cover over my head, so he’ll understand that I’m disappointed.

“Are you angry, honey? What’s the matter?”

Dánil puts his phone on the bedside table and turns to wrap his arm around me.

His warm body distracts me and I forget why I'm angry. I'm just happy that he's finally holding me. He pulls me closer, and it isn't long before I feel his hard prick rubbing against my butt. Dánil kisses my neck, while his fingers brush my nipples. He runs his hand further down across my stomach and between my legs.

"You're so sexy, honey. I love you so much," whispers Dánil into my ear.

My desire comes back, I get wet.

My breath changes, and my sighs make my wishes known. Our lips meet in warm, sweet kisses.

I wake up when Dánil's phone chirps.

It's dark. The phone is the only light. I take a groggy look at the clock – it's four thirty. I hadn't planned on waking up yet, and I pull the cover over my head and wrap an arm around Dánil. He's sleeping like a log, like always. I feel so affectionate. It's finally just the two of us now, even if it's been a bumpy ride. I think of how happy we are. Dánil is my one great love.

I've almost fallen asleep when the phone chirps again. And again. I reach for the phone on the bedside table. It feels like a knife is ripping open my chest. The panic floods my body while I sit at the edge of the bed crying in the darkness.

My hands are shaking as I hold the phone and read the messages lighting up the screen.

"I miss you already, Dánil."

"You should have been here, your hands all over my naked body."

"I like being your dirty little secret, even if we already got caught in the act once before."

It's Sofe who has sent the messages, and she's sent a few naked pics as well. A thousand thoughts, a thousand feelings, a thousand images swirl around my mind. As if everything has come crashing down. There's a proper war going on in my head, in my body. Anger and pain are fighting over who will take control. The longer I stare at the phone, the more clearly I understand that they've been in contact the whole time. Even though Dánil promised a year back that it was all a mistake,

that Sofe didn't mean anything. That he loved me, not her. He begged for forgiveness, begged me not to leave him. And he supported and comforted me when he saw how badly I had taken it, and how much effort it took me to get back up.

My heart leaps into my throat when I hear Dániil's breath behind my back. I stuff my clothes under my arm and slip out of the bedroom. In the foyer, I pull on my clothes and my sneakers, even though it's winter. But I didn't seem interested in that. The cold nips at my cheeks when I open the door, and at the same time it freezes my tears. I sit down in the cold car. The windows are frosted and it barely starts when I turn the key.

I drive out of the yard. I want to get far away from here before anybody notices me. I set the heat to defrost the windows so that I can at least see a bit of the road. I imagine the events from every angle, every perspective. I can't stop. It's like I'm stuck in my own head and it's showing me all the possible scenarios

that I don't want to see. It's so clear now, what's happened. I don't even need to ask whether it's true. But I can't understand why, why it's gone like this. Why haven't I seen, understood. I can't disentangle the thoughts and feelings racing through me. Whether it's my fault. It's definitely my fault. I hit the gas as hard as I can, but it's not enough speed to outrun my thoughts, my feelings. I try to escape the pain, but I can't get away. It's like an ugly, unyielding storm swirling around me. The wheels just spin when I try to take a turn that comes out of nowhere. A black fog covers me, suffocates me. What will happen if I crash into that deer over there at this speed?



#metoo

Mia is sitting in her car outside her workplace. An uncomfortable, heavy feeling spreads through her chest. She'd rather not come here, but she has to. Anyway, how is she supposed to make ends meet without work. Her steps towards the door are heavy. The door handle feels red-hot when she grabs it, and the door feels so heavy when she opens it, as if there's someone holding onto the handle on the other side. She takes one step inside before she stops again, listening. There's people in the break room, chatting and laughing like every morning. I'll keep an ear out for who's there today. Since it has such an impact on how her day is going to go. She needs to come inside, even if it's with heavy steps; she can't stand in the entryway all day.

“It would look nicer if you were cleaning the floors instead of the manager,” Juhá says to Mia as she walks by the break room, where her manager is cleaning up some mess on the floor.

Mia doesn't say anything. She just walks past them and disappears into her office. She sits there crying when she hears how her colleagues laugh, and Juhá has the loudest voice among them. The discomfort spreads through her chest. How long does this have to last?

Mia has been sitting in her office working at her computer for a few hours when Juhá appears.

“You sure are looking beautiful today, Mia. Why have you put on such a shirt?”

Why this shirt? She knew exactly what Juhá was thinking and because of just that she'd put on this wool sweater that didn't reveal her chest.

“You need to show a little cleavage, so that I can take a look and enjoy it when I see you.”

“Cause it's not yours to look at and enjoy. Only my boyfriend gets to do that.”

“Can I squeeze them a little bit?”

“No, you can’t!”

Before she even realizes what’s going on, Juhá has stuck his hands into her shirt and is squeezing her breasts.

“What are you doing! Get out!” screams Mia and pushes Juhá away. “Don’t you touch me!”

Juhá smiles and follows her every motion like a hungry wolf. Mia sits back down in front of her computer. She can feel the tears fill her eyes, how she’s quaking in fear. But she has to contain herself so Juhá won’t see. He watches Mia for a moment, as if he’s waiting for her to let him grope her. But when he doesn’t get any attention he disappears back into the hallway.

Mia jumps up and slams the office door shut, collapses to the floor, and starts to cry. She grabs her phone and calls her boyfriend, Eskil.

“What has happened?” Eskil gets worried when he hears Mia crying.

“Juhá. He won’t leave me in peace, and just now he crossed the line when stuffed his hands inside my shirt,” says Mia with a snuffle.

“Well shit, what an asshole. You need to talk with your manager about this, Mia. Go talk with him now and then come home. Or should I come over there?”

“Uh-uh, you don’t have to. I can talk with him now and come home.”

It’s lunch when Mia finally comes out of the office. She knows that most of her colleagues head to the café or go home to eat. Her manager should be alone. He’s sitting in the break room, with two colleagues.

“Would you have time for a quick word, Lásse?” Mia’s voice trembles.

“Can we just talk about it here and now? I’m in a rush to get to a meeting,” her manager asks before stuffing an open-faced sandwich into his mouth.

“Sure, we can.” Mia doesn’t care that the two colleagues are still sitting there. “I’ve had an uncomfortable experience here at work. After this conversation, I’m going to go home, since I can’t stay here after it.”

Her manager sits silently and eats while listening to Mia. The two colleagues also sit in silence, their interest piqued.

“I have had an uncomfortable experience because Juhá has been making sexual comments towards me for a while. And today, he came into my office ...” Mia stops. Her voice shakes, her chest is heavy, and the tears crowd her eyes. She has to swallow a few times before she can continue.

“He put his hands inside my shirt and groped me without my permission.”

It was silent for some time. It seemed like an eternal silence in Mia’s mind before her manager said anything.

“Well, he was probably turned on,” her manager responds. He doesn’t seem to be taking Mia seriously.

“So what if he was. It shouldn’t affect me!” Mia retorts.

“Indeed it shouldn’t. What do you think we should do about this?”

After the talk with her manager, Mia goes home. Once she gets there, she calls her doctor for sick-leave approval.

For Mia, the conditions at work had become unbearably heavy, and she wouldn't have believed Juhá would go so far. Mia thought her manager's reaction was strange. He didn't seem to be taking the matter seriously. But it probably wouldn't be that long before Mia get back to work, since her manager had promised to talk with Juhá.

Two weeks have passed and Mia is again sitting in her car outside of the workplace. She is reluctant to go in. Is Juhá still there? Has her manager spoken with him? Her steps towards the door are just as heavy as before, but Mia tries to comfort herself. *After all, it really should be better now that I've already spoken with my manager about the matter.* When she opens the door, she hears her colleagues laughing in the break room. They seem to be in

a good mood. And she can't seem to hear Juhá. The entire break room goes quiet when Mia enters.

"Good morning," says Mia before walking over to her own office.

Everyone just stares at her and as she closes her office door she hears them start talking again in the break room. A strange feeling fills Mia as she sits down in front of her computer and sees an email from her manager:

Mia

*We are terminating your employment.
We no longer have the ability to offer you work
at this location. We regret this. We wish you the
best all the same.*

*Sincerely,
Lásse
Manager*



The burden of childhood

The sun is shining so beautifully. It's rays have warmed this entire area and have melted almost all the snow. The yard is so mucky that all of the cars are covered in mud, and as soon as I step out of the car I get my new, white sneakers dirty. In the city all of the paths are completely dry and there's not this inconvenience of mud all around when you step outside.

It's Sunday, and, as is our habit the first Sunday of every month, my family is gathering at Grandma and Grandpa's place to have a meal. Everybody else has already gotten there

when I arrive. As always, I'm the last one, and I have the longest drive to get here from the city.

I'm reluctant to head inside. I know that this Sunday is going to get lost in hearing about the gossip from this tiny place and what all is going on. My family, you see, is full of gossipy people. They talk about and know everything.

As soon as I open the door I hear everybody chatting in the living room, especially Grandma, who is talking about how homosexuality is just some kind of a trend and that today's young people are filthy for thinking it's ok to be with somebody of the same sex. It's a great shame for their families, and God himself has ordained that man and woman should be together, since a man can't impregnate another man.

I realize how ashamed I am in this family, they're just so prejudiced. I try to sneak inside without anyone noticing me.

"Aleksander, don't you have some friend who's a homosexual? What was his name again? Marcus? I suppose you're not really

friends with him anymore?” Grandma asks before I can even sit down on the sofa.

Everybody turns towards me.

“Of course I’m still in touch with Marcus,” I respond and I notice an uncomfortable feeling spreading through my chest: shame. My heart is racing so fast in my chest that I’m pretty sure everybody can hear it, and my head is working at full speed to prevent myself from saying precisely what I actually would have liked to say.

“But isn’t it a little uncomfortable to be friends with this kind of man, who shares his bed with another man?” asks Grandma again. Luckily, I don’t get a chance to answer before Grandpa enters the living room and asks us all to come to the kitchen to eat. The meal is ready.

In the kitchen the conversation continues on the same topic, but I don’t participate at all, instead just sinking into my own thoughts. As far back in my childhood as I can remember, my family has always been critical, and has had prejudices against everybody. The more

they see and hear about gay people, for example, the more entrenched my family's opinions become about them. They don't like the fact that homosexuality is becoming more and more accepted.

I remember when I younger that Grandma told me her cousin had died. She used to say how handsome a man he was, but that he was different. He was gay, and because of that, he decided to leave. He was the same age as I am now, 30 years old. Now that I'm an adult, I understand better why he did what he did, because this family doesn't accept such a lifestyle. My thoughts are interrupted when Grandma asks me another question:

"Aleksander, have you by chance found a girlfriend? You are so handsome, and you shouldn't have to live alone."

"Right now, I'm focusing on my studies," I answer as concisely as I can, even if I want to tell it how it is. That I wouldn't even want to take a dog with here, they way they criticize everyone and everything. As if they themselves were so much better than everyone

else. Grandma has a whole flock of children, by four different men. But I don't dare. I don't know what consequences it would bring. So I choose to remain silent and keep my own life in the city a secret.

After the meal, we all gather again in the living room after we've cleaned and tidied up in the kitchen. Grandma and Grandpa bring out coffee and sweets.

"I need to get going back to the city. It's a long journey, and I have school work that I need to finish for tomorrow," I say as an excuse to leave early.

I feel that I need to leave before I lose my mind here. They don't let me go easily, but since it's a matter of school work, it's not too hard to escape. I slip back on my white sneakers, covered in mud, and walk out to the car. I'm nearly running, as if I were being chased by a stállu*. It's a relief when I'm back on the road for the city, and I can't stop myself from going over the speed limit. The journey home

* The stállu is a violent ogre in Sámi folklore

usually takes two hours, but this time it didn't even take an hour and a half. When I arrive in the city, at my own small apartment, I realize how good it is to be back home. I have never regretted moving to the city, since here you have the freedom to live how you want, and you don't need to be afraid of what people might say around town.

It's dark at home. My partner must still be at work.

I must have fallen asleep, since I wake up to my partner wrapping his arm around me and kissing my cheek.

"The trip to visit your family was so exhausting?" he asks.

"Yeah, I can tell you that it was. Sometimes I wish I could swap families, or, actually, pretty often."

"I understand. I probably don't need to ask whether you told them about us?" He seems almost disappointed, but he's trying to hide it.

"I didn't tell them. It's not that I don't want to, but, of course, you understand that."

“What are afraid of? I have to ask. After all, I’ve told my family.” My partner is getting impatient.

“I mean, you know what kind of a family they are. They’re exactly the same as they were when we were in middle school. Nothing has changed, at least not for the better.”

My partner doesn’t say anything more, and he leaves the bedroom. I just lie on the bed for a while when I hear him in the kitchen. I can certainly understand why he’s disappointed and that it’s difficult when everything is so secretive. He’s probably right that it’s time to tell it how it is, no matter what my family is going to say. It’s my life, after all, and I don’t want them to control my life. My partner is still in the kitchen when I go and wrap my arms around him.

“You’ll come with for our next Sunday gathering, and we’ll tell them together.”

It’s been a month since I last visited Grandma and Grandpa. This time, I’m not alone when I drive into the yard. A month back, everything

was mud – now it’s all dried up and there isn’t even a fleck of snow left. It’s a bit cloudy, as if it’s about to rain. This time as well, everybody has already gotten there when I arrive. I notice how anxious and afraid I am. I have to take a deep breath before I can step out of the car. My steps towards the house are heavy, and I have half a mind to turn around and drive off at full speed back home to the city.

“It’s going to go well, honey. Take it slow, and hold my hand.”

We open the door and everybody is chatting in the living room as they always do. My heart is racing so fast that it hurts. My hands are sweating, but I hold my partner’s hand as we step inside all the same. There’s no point in turning back now. Everyone goes silent when we come into the living room.

“Do you all remember Marcus?”



