

I regret nothing

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I meet Simon for the first time at Bettina's birthday party. He's not invited. I forget why I'm in the kitchen in the first place, just keep starrng as he lifts heavy bags of clanking bottles up on the kitchen counter. Bettina needs to come check on me, whispers in my ear that I can at least close my mouth when I'm drooling over her brother's pals.

The whole house is pounding. Pieces of cake and spilled beer marinate in the Persian carpet. Bettina is dancing beneath the living room chandelier, sparking like the crystals. The world is hers, the rest of us are just visiting. She has everyone's attention.

But not mine. And not Simon's.

We're on the porch when it starts to rain. People around us are running for cover, but Simon just pulls his hoodie up and keeps talking like nothing. I cover my beer with my hand, the rain cold against my skin. There's still a bit of sun left, lukewarm and golden, the dregs of the day. I swear, there should be a rainbow somewhere. But I can't see it. My hair is wet, clinging to my forehead, I have to tidy it off my face. He's helping me. Squinting as he moves chunks of hair to their place, his fingers gently touching my temples, ears, neck. Heart beating. Insides tingling. I wonder if he feels it too.

When Bettina's parents come home earlier than they said, and everyone escapes through random windows and doors, Simon takes my hand and helps me over the flowerbed. He's not letting go, even when he can. We run across the street, through the neighbor's hedge. The rain has stopped, but some drops are still hanging on to the branches. He's still holding on to my hand. Looking at me with the planet's darkest eyes, smiling with dimples and crooked teeth. He doesn't stop me when I lean in. He tastes of beer, his breath is warm and his hands fit perfectly in my back pockets.

"I've never kissed a guy before," he says when he opens his eyes. I'm not sure I believe him. "I have," I say.

"No shit." He lights a smoke, hands me the pack, I take one, say he can add me on Snap if he wants to. He wants to.

Bettina wants all the tea. I give it to her, and then some. I'm not hard to sway. By the time I'm done, Simon has a dick the size of the leaning tower of Pisa. Vibeke tells us to be quiet. "Bettina and Jakob," she says. "Silence, please."

I flip her off under my desk, but she doesn't notice. She's always been saying my name wrong. It's Jakub, or Jake, never Jakob.

We have RE and Vibeke talks about confirmation traditions, summer camp, coming of age, family and presents. "What's so cool about traditions," she says, "is that while they still represent the past, they evolve as our society changes." She asks us to raise our hand if we are planning our confirmation, which basically all of us are. This spring, next fall, in the church, civil, it doesn't matter. "How fun," she says. Everyone's excited. Bunad and PlayStation 5.

The class is halfway over by the time she mentions Catholic confirmation. I think of my Mom and shut up. Swallow a huge lump in my throat of all the things I can't turn down. Sit still at my desk, watch Bettina draw me in her notebook. A blue ballpen version of me, grinning from ear to ear, resting against a tall, leaning tower. I start doodling in my own book, tiny figures in the bottom corner. Stars, planets, an old man with a round halo. I keep turning the pages, making more doodles. When I flip through the pages quickly, it looks like God being choked by his own halo.

I imagine telling Mom and Svein about Simon. It's a conversation I've had a hundred times, in my mind. Sometimes, when we're eating dinner or driving somewhere, or maybe right before I go to my room to sleep, I picture just saying it. "Of course you are," my Mom says inside my head. "Oczywiście. We love you either way."

But I know it's just inside my head.

I'm not actually dating Simon. But I'm not *not* dating him, either. I mean, if he'd asked me to be exclusive or whatever, maybe I'd say yes. Maybe. If he'd asked. If he'd send pictures of cute animals or something and written *us*, if he'd introduced me to his family, if he'd wanted to hang out with me without, like, pulling his jeans down every fucking time. Not that I mind, you know. But if he'd made me a playlist, if he'd made me his lockscreen, so everyone could see it, if he'd lent me his clothes of something else that smells like him, I would've actually thought it was pretty fucking nice.

There are three things you need to know about my family: 1) Everything mom and Svein wants is for me and David to have a *good life*, and they repeat that at least once a week. 2) Mom, Svein, David and I have four different takes on what a *good life* is. 3) I don't know when, but one day we all decided to never speak of anything that matters, and we keep that up pretty well.

There'll always be a part of me that's missing. Before, when I was little, I was better at accepting it. You know, *accept the things you cannot change*, all that.

There's just a bit too much bullshit I kinda just have to accept: 1) A hole where a dad's supposed to be. 2) The fucking church and all it expects of me. 3) The fact that God just kind of created a whole universe with no room for me. I have too many issues. A holy trinity of daddy issues, if you will. Hello, my name is Jakub, and I'm the biggest fucking cliché since forbidden fruit.

We're in a circle, the priest, the catechists, the prisoners. That's how I think of us. Wonder if the others have chosen this, or if they're just here because their parents want them to. We're almost thirty people, almost everyone my age. We've been coming here since last fall. I haven't made any friends here, like, I haven't tried.

Ok, that's a lie, I tried once. In one of the first lessons, two former confirmands did this utterly awful gag. One of them pretended it was the other one's birthday. She was like super happy for her, had brought three ballons and a paper crown. She made everyone

sing Happy Birthday, for fucks sake. The girl whose birthday it was supposed to be, was all like against it. Got up with raised shoulders, didn't want any attention.

"But I got you a gift!"

"What kind of gift?"

"Open and see!"

"I don't want to."

"WHAT, don't you want to open the gift? Isn't that weird, guys?!"

And ... scene.

"That's how it is for God," said the birthday-less girl. "God has given you a gift. He has given you his son, and he has given you faith. He has given you the opportunity for mercy, to be saved. All you need to do, is accepting his gift and live by his word. His gift is eternal light."

Motherfucker, I thought I was gonna puke.

But when I tried to take the piss out of it, I got absolutely nothing from the others. They must've thought it was, like, normal behavior. Acceptable. Convincing, even.

So I decided to screw making friends. I'm just here. Staying in my spot, making a sulky face, getting my paper stamped. Thinking about splitting. The one catechist dude, with pale eyes and weird r-s, says that faith is like a key. It can open the door to God. But the key has a specific shape, you know, it can't adapt to its surroundings, then it just won't work. There's a right way to be, and a wrong one. Just try and fucking guess which one I am.

We've entered the part of the lessons where we're supposed to reflect on stuff, and stuff today is "love and fertility". That's right, *fertility*. The priest has this kind of smile where the edges are pointing down instead of up. He has a piece of tape on his chin, to cover up a cut from shaving. Or maybe a pimple. There's something hugely ironic about him teaching us the blessings of marriage and love. I mean, Catholic priests can't even get married, and good Catholics don't do extramarital sex. Easy for him to be sanctimonious when he's literally giving his v-card to God.

"God is love," he says. That's how he draws us in. Then he says the creator's design for fertility, marriage and children, is God's will. This is what's best for individuals, for the children, for our society.

“Sexuality belongs with fertility and parenthood,” the priest says. “In that context, queer ideology is implausible.”

I can't keep myself from coughing. The priest looks up. Our eyes meet for a split second. I look away. Then he clearly decides to ignore me. The discussion continues for five fucking months. I doodle discretely in the bottom corner of the red bible. Hide the pages with my hand. Draw a rainbow rising through ten pages, and just for the hell of it, a big cock on the last page with the rainbow as cum.

I'm the first to leave when the session's over. But someone catches up with me in the hall. “You know not everyone thinks like that,” he says. He's one of the catechists, square glasses, thick frames. “The Bible is God's word interpreted in its time. But the contents have to be interpreted to fit our time as well, to make sense for us. That's what I believe, anyway.” He smiles, this kind of *we share a secret*-smile, but like hell we do. “I'm here if you want to talk,” he says. I just nod. It doesn't matter. I'm not coming back here anyway.

Mom drinks her sweetened tea. Eats crispbread with cheese. Looks out the window with calm eyes, gently swinging her foot. *Tell her*, I think. “How was confirmation class?” Mom says. *It was absolute piss*, I think, but I say it was ok. *Tell her*, I think again. *Tell her now*. I clear my throat. Picture her face, the disappointment. “What is it?” she asks. “Nothing,” I say.

I count out loud: pride, greed, lust, gluttony, envy, wrath, sloth. I know I'm angry and lazy. Proud too, I guess.

“Do you think I'll do all of them before I'm supposed to do the confirmation thing?” I ask.

Bettina laughs out loud. “How long you got?”

“Fucking Pentecost,” I say.

Bettina looks confused.

“50 days after Easter,” I say, as if that’s something everyone knows.

“Wait, are you still going through with that?” Julia asks. Easy for her to say, her family are normal, chill Christians, she’s having a cozy confirmation without sacred oil and identity crisis. Bettina and Emmy are doing civil, humanist confirmations, and will only have to deal with critical thinking and hikes in the woods.

I shrug. “I refuse to do more of the lessons, but it’s hard to escape the thing itself.”

I don’t know if I even get to do it if I don’t have enough stamps, but that’s not relevant. That’s a problem for Future Jake. In either case, I guess I would have to believe it, that’s sort of the deal with the sacrament. You have to be willing to accept the damn anointing. Say yes, and mean it. I don’t actually think I’ll be able to give proper consent to all that. Shit, I really envy the girls that only have to worry about what bunad is the better gift, and how much money they’ll get.

“I think you have them all down,” Bettina says. “Except envy.”

“Right.” I say. “I don’t really do that.”

“What happens if you commit a deadly sin in Catholicism?” Emmy asks. “Do you, like, go to hell?”

“No, you just die,” I say. “You won’t get eternal life. That is, if you don’t regret it. You could regret it. You could get absolution for your sins, et cetera, if you repent, and never do it again. But you have to really regret it. Like for real.”

“How quickly do you have to regret?” Emmy puts both her palms on the table and lean towards me, faking huge interest. “Could you live a life in sin, and then regret on your death bed? Could you do it, like, at any time?”

“Between five and five thirty on weekdays” I laugh.

“Wait, you don’t actually go to hell?” Bettina asks confused.

“Depends on who you ask,” I say. “But there’s insanely little about hell in the Bible, so that’s a little comforting.”

We can’t actually go to hell, because we’re already here. But I don’t say that.

I bike home in the dark. The sky lies as a heavy blanket on the world. Everything is quiet. *Give me a sign, I think. If anyone's here, say 'yes'.* But no one's answering. Of course not. Don't know what I expected. A lightning, a burning bush, a fucking rainbow. But hope won't just show up like that, you have to make it yourself. No one comes when you need them.

I hold my breath, pedal fast towards the top of the hill, 'till my head feels airy, 'till I almost can't keep going. If the wheels spin any faster now, I'll take off. When I close my eyes, it's as if I'm flying. A car honks, sends me back to reality. I lose my balance for a second, the bike rocks from side to side, but I manage to keep steady. The car keeps honking, the lady sends me a mean look through the window. I give her the finger. Won't go to heaven today, I guess.

Simon lends me a book that's so small it could fit in my pocket. For something so small, it makes a damn lot of noise. But I don't really get it. To be honest, I don't think Simon gets it either. He just likes the way it makes him look. It makes him look deeper than he is. *Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone!* I fall asleep with the book next to me. Dream that me and Simon are on this boat, in the middle of the ocean. The water is so dark it's almost invisible. But there are sea monsters below us, I know it. I can feel it. Don't know what they look like or how big they are. Don't know if they can bolt us down, boat and all. Simon's wearing a sailor's uniform. You know, like this white costume with a hat and everything. His shirt is half-open and his chest is glistening. Damp hair. Massive cock, obviously. We screw to the rhythm of the waves. Suddenly, the whole sea is made of flames. I'm sweaty and exhausted when I finally wake up.

All humans are born sinners. Original sin, you know. We're fucked from the start. We have bodies and lives, and according to the Bible, our soul is trapped inside an already filthy container. But I think some of us are just born with more filth than others. I mean, why else am I like this. If I am to believe that God made everyone, why the fuck did he put me together using only pieces he doesn't like. I'm born a queer soul in a queer body. I don't

know where it starts and where it ends. I don't know what to ask forgiveness for. I'm sorry I'm lonely. I'm sorry I like how boys smell. I'm sorry I need the closeness of people who might want me. I'm sorry I say more yes than no, I make impulsive choices, I don't know where to stop. If I knew how to turn it off, I maybe would have tried. But I don't know how to fucking stop being me.

But I'm not in love with Simon. I just love how he makes me feel. I love how he looks at me, how he touches me, his hands against my skin. I love how he breathes in my face, how he strokes my hair behind my ears, how I look in his eyes. I just love how much he wants me.

Translated by: Ida Therese Klungland