

Nightmare

by Lisa Jana Melchert-Metzger

Content Warning:

The following short story contains graphic depictions of transmisogyny, sexual harassment, assault, mental health issues and alcohol dependency. It mentions police violence, suicide and racism. It also contains strong language.

*We live, even if we wonder why
We live, with trauma locked inside
We fight against the urge to die
Parched for love and cast aside
- G.L.O.S.S. "We Live"*

The pages of the magazine were torn all over the floor. There was an empty wine bottle on the couch, right next to the Aloe Vera plant, which was a little too dry and had a cigarette bud in it. The air was stale and smelled like tobacco with a slight pinch of the scent of burnt lasagna.

"What do you mean?," I asked her.

Cassie had just rambled about the day when it happened. She said something about how no one really understands the situation, and how everyone should have seen this coming, and be more prepared and how we had all been too chaotic and disorganized back then and whatnot.

Cassie sighed.

"Anyway," I said. "I'm going to bed. Need to be up early again."

"Oh, good point. Me too."

We hugged each other good night, and I watched her stumble her way into her bedroom, hoping she would be okay. I hate her when she's drunk. Well, hate is maybe too strong of a word.

But she always rambles at me when I come home, which sometimes just overwhelms me. And it makes me sad that these are the only times I get to see her these days.

We used to hang out more. We were best friends, actually, when we moved in together back in the fall of 2020. But after a few months, when shit started hitting the fan for real, she became depressed, and started drinking more and more and since I was struggling myself and didn't have the capacity to give her the support that she needed, we grew more and more apart. And when the Women's Protection Act was passed in June last year, I lost my job at the shelter, and had to start working double shifts to make ends meet. Which, well, wasn't particularly helpful for our friendship either.

I went to brush my teeth. I looked at myself in the mirror, and all I saw was emptiness and exhaustion. I felt worn out and kinda dreadful. There was a sticker on the lower-right edge of our bathroom mirror. It said "Smile! ☺"

It had been put here by the former tenant, who was a friend of my cousin. I had never really liked that sticker, but in that moment, it really freaked me out. It had always reminded me of old men on the street that tell you to smile when you just wanna walk by and mind your own business, but I still somehow managed to always ignore the sticker. But all of a sudden, it made me feel like I want to scream and smash that mirror into little pieces with my hammer and throw them out the window.

This was probably because of that one customer today. I had almost forgot about him already.

He tried to be flirty at first and repeatedly told me to smile while making compliments that were weird as hell until I had to cough and my voice started cracking. After that, he wouldn't stop screaming the most awful things at me until he was dragged out the restaurant by two of my co-workers.

I hate it how male entitlement plays itself out sometimes. Like, yo, you wanna be creepy and fuck me and know that you can just harass the shit out of me because you know I have to remain friendly cause I'm at work, but then you're the one who gets mad at me when you figure out that I have a dick.

But I didn't wanna give that d-bag the permission to ruin my day. And smashing the mirror would have been a bad idea anyway. Mirrors are a useful thing to have, over all. I mean, they can

give you dysphoria, but they can also give you euphoria, so that kinda evens each other out, I guess. And they do help with brushing your hair and putting on makeup.

I pulled a “Make Racists Afraid Again” sticker out of my pocket and covered up the “Smile! ☺” sticker with it. Why had I not done this years before?

I went to the kitchen to get some water before sleep. It was as messy as always, maybe even a tiny bit worse. Dishes were piling up in the sink, the cable of the toaster was still cut open at one point and making buzzing noises that were kinda scary and sounded a bit like crickets and the tomato sauce that was spread all over the desk and parts of the floor gave a slight hint that the person who had made lasagna here earlier probably hadn’t been completely sober during the cooking process.

I filled up my cup and looked at the picture that’s hanging over our sink. It shows me and Cassie in a crowd of people, all of us masked up, holding a banner that said “It’s not over yet. We are many. (A)”. It was taken by a lefty newspaper a few years ago, back in February 2021.

Even though so many bad things had happened around that time, I kinda miss the days. The masses in the streets, the spirit of our movement and the hope I had still been holding deep inside my heart back then. It was tremendous and it still sometimes feels like it’s all just a bad dream when I think of how all this energy, and the power I still truly believe we had had during these moments, had been suffocated by big clouds of teargas, hit on the head with batons and rubber bullets, locked up in jail cells and also just dispersed into nine to five routines. Nine to five is a euphemism though to be honest and only true for the most privileged of us.

But I didn’t wanna think about this any further.

When I finally made it into my room, I saw that Cassie had put some mail on my bed while I had been at work. Most of it was bills. I was happy to see that there weren’t any letters from my bank. They had threatened to freeze my account when they saw that I had sent money to In-House Pharmacy and I kept postponing dealing with that.

However, there was a letter from the state court. I quickly opened it, feeling adrenaline rushing through my body. My heart was pumping faster and all the exhaustion and anger and dread from my early shift at USPS and my late shift at Burger King seemed to have suddenly disappeared.

“Dear Mr. Morgan”, it said. Cringe! “We hereby inform you that the court will not hear you in your appeal case bla bla bullshit, no substantial claims were made by you yadi yada decision from the county court will be upheld.”

Ugh. Even though I had expected my appeal to be unsuccessful, I had still been hoping it would be dealt with in court. I had been going to use this as an opportunity to, once again, publicly speak about the injustice and suffering the so-called Women’s Protection Act had brought over our communities.

To talk about how I lost my job and how every single one of my colleagues was devastated to see me leave, and how they tried everything in their power to let me continue working in the women’s shelter.

To talk about my friend who was arrested for using a public bathroom, and about the lady who punched her and broke her nose, whose charges were all dropped cause she was acting in ‘self-defense’.

To talk about how suicide rates among trans teenagers have tripled over the last three years. Freaking tripled. And it’s not like they were low in 2020.

And while all this is happening, all this government does is passing a stupid bill that reverses my gender change in order to ‘protect women’. Protection from fellow women, granted by an undead creep who’s also a rapist himself. Good job, America.

Whatever. To be honest, it’s not even a surprise they’re not going to hear me in court. When the Democratic Party was temporarily banned – well, they say it’s temporary, but it’s been almost two years now – because of ongoing investigations regarding organized election fraud back when Biden almost got into office, the licenses of all lawyers, prosecutors and judges who had any ties to the Democratic Party were also revoked. And with BLM being considered a terrorist organization now, the few remaining lawyers who don’t watch Fox News every night and who wouldn’t love to see me lying dead in a gutter have become extremely busy.

Anyway, all that was left for me to do at this point was to cry myself to sleep. So that’s what I did.