

My Tail

When my tail falls out from under my dress, I roll it together and stuff it back into my knickers.
But Mum always sees it. She has sharp eyes.
I hate tape. The tape tightens and nips and tears my skin.
– More tape, says Mum. – And if I see that tail out again, there will be *consequences*.
– Really Mum ...
– I'm warning you!

The bus is hot. A trip to camp and a campfire are just the thing for me.
I've promised Mum to keep my tail hidden.
I don't want to have any of her *consequences*, even though I don't really know what that means.

The flames from the fire are blazing hot inside me.
I throw off my dress, my vest and my socks.
– Come, we're going to dance a bonfire dance.
I pat a couple of girls on the shoulder.
– Are we allowed to do that? Where are the adults?
– Come on, I laugh. – Let's dance!

I jump as high as I can.
I whirl, I fly!
Feel the flames of the fire.
There is rhythm in the flickers.
Wow, we all laugh. The dancing tickles as we twirl and tap and swirl and snap.

Moon dance, bear dance, wild-in-the-jungle-bum dance.
The rhythm beats in my body, in my tail, in the dark, in the thousand eyes of the night sky.
I can dance my dreams,
I can ...
... I can ... oh no!

Mum's eyes?!
... What is she doing here?
She stares without blinking.
I reach for my tail and try to roll it up, but it is far too slippy and sweaty.

She pulls me away while the others are sleeping. They snore and grind their teeth like a herd of wild animals.
– What have I done? I whisper.

– Hopefully, you know that yourself.
– Is it the tail, Mum?
She doesn't answer.

– Mum! You can't just do that! I whisper.
But yes, she can. It's time for consequences and Mum has lifted the scissors.
Everything goes blurry.
– It's my tail, I hiss. – It's *me!* ... It's *my* tail!

Mum throws it on the table. The tail.
– So! Now maybe we can have some peace in the family.
My brothers nod.
I wriggle free and kick the chair into the wall.
A roar of pain rumbles up from the pit of my stomach.
It starts coming up. Out of my mouth.
– WRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRGGGHHH!

I run.
Anger rages in me. Sizzling and crackling and scorching.
– They took my tail! I never want to see them again! Never!
Clods of earth, sharp rocks, tree roots tear at my feet.
I drag myself away.
Should I turn around? Run home and say sorry?
I made Mum angry, I promised her that ... But ... she *cut* me!

The cave is dark and deep. I curl up, close my eyes. Shake. Alone.
It hurts.
My heart is pounding way too fast.
A voice whines wretchedly, I think it's calling.
Is that my voice?

Slowly, I crawl out into the morning light.
Stretch.
The scent of tree trunks, sweet flowers and wild water lilies hangs in the air.
Something splashes.
A girl is standing in the lake, in water up to her bellybutton.
– Good morning, she smiles.
– Good morning, I whisper, rubbing my eyes. Only now can I see who she is.
– Are you coming?
I throw off my clothes and jump in.

– Wow, the water is soft and warm and ... I freeze and stare at her.

– You ... you have a tail?

– Of course, I do, she laughs. – Everyone does.

– No ... my mum cut mine off.

– What? Why? ... It's *your* tail!

I nod.

The raft tilts when we dance.

I've never screamed in a forest before. We scream with EVERYTHING we can. And we whistle like birds, eat red berries, put water lilies in our hair. Then we lie down and look up at the clouds.

– Do you know what I can feel? I whisper.

– No, what?

– Everything.

The girl is braiding the outermost part of her red tail.

I turn my bum towards her. – See! It has already grown a bit.

– Of course, she nods.

But then she stops braiding. She stares at the bathing jetty, I nudge her.

– What is it?

– I think it's ... your mum?

When I stick my head out the window, every colour of the forest slaps my cheeks.

The car drives over a bump. It tickles my stomach; I turn towards Mum.

– What did I do now?

She doesn't answer.

– But Mum ... you yourself have a ...

Her eyes flicker, the car speeds up.

Mum's homemade bread rolls taste delicious with melted butter and jam.

She comes over with the scissors. My brothers aren't eating anything, they are just staring.

I don't care about that scissors, now that I know my tail will grow back again.

I swallow my fifth roll. I stand up and lift up my dress:

– Mum, you don't have to bandage me up.

I pull down my knickers, and bend forward so the stump of the tail is free:

– There you go. Just cut!