

Every Mirror with Two Sides

by strannikov

Mordwina was taking her time this day, eleven o'clock and she was still sipping warm coffee. She'd had all the new things delivered at ten-thirty, she'd had Josephine lay them out on the backs of her two chairs and her love seat, only the two pairs of slacks draped over the back of her chaise lounge (she had to sit somewhere with her coffee, which she never did in bed). By eleven Josephine had begun clearing up from breakfast, had started the laundry downstairs, then commenced to sweeping, dusting, and vacuuming. Mordwina didn't start trying on each garment until after eleven.

Her full-length mirror was one she'd found in a junkshop five years earlier on a jaunt to Charleston. It was unframed but featured a palm-wide border of frosted glass all around, with lines cut down both sides as taut and thick as the strings of a lyre, with a frosted glass scroll atop each side, a frosted bridge at the bottom of each side notched for the glass strings. If the mirror were authentically art deco, it could not be as old as it looked, but Mordwina took it to be an artifact of the nineteenth century.

She interrupted Josephine at about eleven-thirty to take down some notes concerning alterations before returning the items to Basil at Beaumont's, she wanted the whole batch ready before her weekend trip to Asheville.

"These are all beautiful," Josephine confided, "you'll smile when you wear these!"

"I told him not to but he doesn't take 'no' for an answer, and he makes a point of not taking 'no' for an answer every time I take him shopping! I brought six pairs of shoes home just last week, one pair I'd been dying for the past year, they were all the rage in Milan a few years ago but only arrived at Le Vieux Cordelier last week. I'm trying to swear off black shoes, but these are just gorgeous!" And so

on and so forth, chattering with Josephine about Ambrose and his new enthusiasm for power yachts until her leftover coffee had grown cold, they already had cruises planned to Jekyll Island and Savannah in April and May, respectively.

“Just wait until one to take these back, Jo, they'll be closed for lunch until one-fifteen.” And only after Jo left on her errand did Mordwina discover the box that had slipped off her mahogany satin bedcover and almost under the bed on the other side. Inside was the peach seersucker top she'd picked up at Etude Noir just because it was in front of her eyes on a display hanger when she'd spun around from that ridiculous parti-striped pantsuit Mesmerelda had tried to foist on her.

Mordwina had never owned much in seersucker. The top on her looked like some puckered antique envelope at first, but the firm skin tone of her arms emerging from the softly puckered short sleeves was darker still, a contrast she took to. But this thing would only do in the right light, light too bright or too yellow would kill it, definitely for evening. Just as she began to slip it over her head, Mordwina spotted not a shadow but some dark something as she stepped toward the mirror to examine the fabric on the front.

She was gazing down at her two hands holding the peach seersucker top, but without blinking she saw four hands—ahh, idiot, the mirror! But in the next moment no, it was four hands, because two were now trying to pull the peach top from her own two hands. What the—?

Mordwina was startled then horrified as she glanced up into the mirror. She saw not her reflection, exactly, no, it wasn't, the woman in the mirror was thinner and was not even looking at her but at the peach top with a frenzied snarl, and she was pulling hard at the top, seeming not to care whether she ripped it apart. Mordwina grew instantly sick on seeing this woman's hands and arms emerged from the mirror, the woman standing behind them as if in a room-sized aquarium, a shimmering light rolling over her frenzied attack on the peach top. And Mordwina simply surrendered

all her strength to this sickening vision and collapsed headfirst into the mirror and disappeared from her own bedroom.

At the same moment, into the bedroom from the mirror stepped a lithe Warmondi, dressed only in the peach seersucker top, a mocking reproach still on her relaxing sneer, her forehead furrowing in anticipation of rejecting certain assumptions. Warmondi paused once to look back into the mirror she'd just stepped out from: there stood Mordwina, startled and sad and incomprehending. Warmondi's smile brightened instantly—then she spun clockwise on her naked heels, raced to the top drawer for the first pair of black she could find, and recognized Josephine's voice as she entered the townhouse fresh from her errand. On the back of the bedroom door hung a thick Perla robe, Warmondi slipped into it and tried clearing her throat softly as she stepped to the bathroom, tipping the door open. When she spoke, her register was about a half-octave lower than Mordwina's. When Josephine noticed moments later, Warmondi passed it off as a consequence of getting water into her ears in the shower. No one else ever mentioned it.

“Oh, and Josephine,” Warmondi called down from the top of the stairs at about two-thirty, “take this mirror over to Beaumont's when you leave and tell Basil it's a gift for all the alterations he's taking care of! I know he's had an eye on it for some time. And be sure to ask him if he can find a peach top in seersucker in a size two.”

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