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Mirrors

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Mirrors

Author Bio

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Mirrors

NATALIE ORGA

“...But in her web she still delights
 To weave the mirror’s magic sights,
 For often thro’ the silent nights
 A funeral, with plumes and lights
 And music, came from Camelot:
 Or when the moon was overhead
 Came two young lovers lately wed;
 ‘I am half sick of shadows,’ said
 The Lady of Shalott.”
 -Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “The Lady of
 Shalott.”

“So...you sure you’re okay?”

Lacie’s sister stood facing the oven, her hair gleaming like a sheaf of wheat in the fading afternoon sun. Her elbows jutted out as she lifted the kettle from the burner, steam curling around her wrists.

“Yes, Anna. I’m fine. I mean, of course I am,” Lacie responded. She sat cross-legged on the kitchen table, picking at pills in the sleeves of her sweater. It was her favorite; massive and knitted, a hideous heap of burgundy fabric. Their mother hated it, but Lacie kept it year after year. It calmed her.

“You are? You’re fine? Because it looks like things are getting...maybe...worse?” Anna’s tone was one of carefully manufacture nonchalance. She didn’t look at Lacie as she opened the cabinet and grabbed two mugs, the ones that Lacie had made as a kid. Little glazed pictures of foxes and squirrels dotted the sides, their faces smiling and impossibly round. Lacie had left the background of the mug blank, the animals floating against the white ceramic. When their mother asked her why, she’d said that the animals were playing in the snow.

“What do you mean?” Lacie asked dryly. Of course, she already knew what Anna was referring to. She just wanted to hear it said out loud. Or maybe she didn’t.

Anna sighed, her shoulders drooping, and turned to face her sister. She was only twenty five, but as much as Lacie hated to admit it, she looked older. Anna’s round, smoke-grey eyes were surrounded by webs of worry lines,

the space between her brows perpetually creased. She had a thin frame that always seemed to be straining against the weight of many lives. Now, with a massive baby bump bulging through her loose t-shirt, Anna seemed especially burdened. Lacie had always been told that pregnant women glowed, but Anna just looked small.

“You know what I’m talking about. It’s...” Anna trailed off, rubbing her temples, “...It’s the mirror thing.” Her eyes darkened with concern, flitting involuntarily to the gleaming silver surface on the table beside her sister. A hand mirror.

Lacie instinctually reached for it, tracing the old-fashioned brass frame with a fingertip.

“Yeah. But it helps me. How can it be bad if it helps?”

Anna turned back to the oven, reaching for a tin beside the coffee machine. Lacie didn’t drink coffee, but since the device had been a gift from a friend, she had felt strange getting rid of it right away. “I feel like it might be making you even more scared of the outside world. Like it’s...enabling you, or something,” Anna continued hesitantly, rummaging in the tin. Her hand emerged with two paper-packaged tea bags.

“Enabling me?” Lacie swung her legs from the kitchen table, a bubble of frustration rising in her stomach. “Do you think I want to be trapped in a crappy old apartment, terrified of walking out the door? Do you think this is my choice?” Anna winced.

“No. I don’t think that at all.” Anna whispered. She flattened her palms against the kitchen counter, stealing a glance at her sister. Lacie swung her legs restlessly from her perch on table, staring dejectedly at the mustard-yellow linoleum floor. She hadn’t left the apartment since she’d moved in three years ago, and it showed. Lacie was pallid and delicate-looking, with mousy brown hair that fell to her hips and a scrawny, un-muscled body.

Anna couldn’t help but be reminded of a ghost. And maybe that’s what Lacie was. She panicked at even the thought of walking out of her door. She couldn’t even look out the window anymore; she had started using a hand mirror to look outside, claiming that staring out of the window itself was “too direct.” Every day she seemed to retreat further.

Anna pressed the heels of her hands against her eyes, fighting a sudden stinging sensation. When she removed her hands, Lacie’s mugs sat before her, the gallivanting foxes and squirrels grinning up at her smugly.

“The mirror calms me down. I’m agoraphobic. Shouldn’t calming things be encouraged?” Lacie was saying, sliding from the top of the table and onto one of the kitchen chairs.

“Lacie, I don’t want to argue with you about this. I just came here to bring you milk,” Anna sighed, lifting the tea kettle and beginning to pour. Hot steam clung to her cheeks, reminding her of winters at their parent’s

house. Their mother always made them hot chocolate when they came inside after playing in the cold, back before Lacie stopped leaving the house.

When was the last time Lacie felt cold, truly, wildly, bitterly cold? Cheek-pinching, nostril-stinging cold? A decade at least, Anna thought.

Anna set the mugs of tea on the table and grabbed the half-gallon of milk from the fridge. She sat down heavily in the chair across from her sister, using her arms to lower herself. For a moment, there was silence as the women stirred their tea, lost in their own minds as the golden sunlight began to melt into dusk.

"I'm due in three weeks," Anna finally spoke, passing her hand gently over her stomach.

"I know. You still don't want to know the gender?"

"No. But I have a theory. I think it's a girl."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I just know," Anna smiled, lifting her mug to her lips, "And you know what else?"

"Hm?"

"I want you to be there with me. When she's born."

Lacie set her cup carefully onto the table. It was their parent's kitchen table, marred and stained from hundreds of cups, meals, card games. Now only Lacie used it.

"That's not fair," Lacie said quietly.

"I'm not trying to guilt you," Anna rushed, "I just wish you could be there. That's all."

"I would love to be there, but you know I can't go. You're just being cruel."

"No, I just want my sister with me. When this little girl comes into the world, I want you to know her. I want her to know my big sister. Please, Lacie," she folded her hands over Lacie's, her grey eyes pleading and wet.

Lacie tugged her hands free. Silence enveloped the apartment.

"Look. The sunset," Anna murmured, more to herself than to anyone else. Lacie lifted the hand mirror, tilting it to reflect the sky.

It was pale blue, but the clouds were stunning. Crimson and violet, rimmed with gold as bright as a renaissance painting. A memory rushed into Lacie's mind, unbidden: her and Anna, ages five or six, rushing outside after the first snowfall and tumbling like puppies into the crisp expanse of cold white. Above them, dusk was falling rapidly, dying the snow pale pink. Their laughter rang out loudly long after the sun had set.

"Shit!"

Anna had reached for the milk without paying attention, her hand knocking the bottle. It now laid on its side, the milk gulping faintly as it gushed onto the wooden table. Anna leaped from her chair and hustled off

towards the sink, hunting for paper towels, but Lacie sat motionless, stunned. Some of the milk had splattered onto the mirror.

She gazed at it, transfixed, watching the creamy droplets travel and collect at the bottom of the frame. Her hand tilted the surface, just a fraction of an inch, but it was enough. Lacie could see the grass outside her window, and the little sidewalk winding through the apartment complexes. But with the milk dashed across it, the mirror showed her something else, something that she remembered in the marrow of her bones.

Snow.

Slowly, Lacie stood. Her pulse thrummed in her ears, heart hammering. As if she were sleepwalking, she drifted towards the door.

“Lacie?” Anna tore her eyes from the window. “Are you okay?”

Once, the two of them had built an igloo in their backyard. Most kids didn’t have the stamina or the patience to press so much snow into so many blocks, to line them up and wedge them together in the freezing cold. But they were determined. Countless hours were spent building up those crystalline walls, until finally it was just the two of them, huddled and impossibly warm, pink-cheeked and safe from the rest of the world. The two of them had created a home together, and Lacie thought that it was the igloo that made her feel so safe. Now, however, looking at Anna’s soft, worried gaze, she realized that it was her sister that made her feel that way. Her home, all along. The door was inches from Lacie’s face, taunting her. On the other side, the world waited. Actually, it was just the quiet apartment hallway, but it was close enough.

The familiar sensation of panic seized Lacie’s throat, closing it as if a hand were wrapped around her windpipe. Her breath came in hard, shallow gasps, sweat gathering above her lip. Her hand was clamped on the door knob, and although every nerve in her body screamed at her to snatch it away, she tightened her grip until her knuckles whitened.

Anna watched, shocked and silent, one hand on her belly. Lacie thought about that belly, that little girl.

That little girl who would want to build an igloo someday. With a quick thrust, Lacie shoved the door open. For a moment, the silent hallway stared at her in surprise, the carpet muffled her breath. Then it was over. The door was closed again. Anna was beside her in a moment, her arms clutching, her breath whistling in her ear.

“I...I didn’t think...I can’t believe...” she stuttered, her voice choked with tears.

“I’ll be there, Anna,” Lacie whispered, “Three weeks from now.” Suddenly, she was almost certain. And if she wasn’t ready then, she would be, some day. One little step at a time, she would make her way into the snow.

“I’ll be there.”