

The mirror displays the image of a beautiful woman full of youth and courage. The mirror is a liar, for I am neither courageous nor beautiful; I am wicked. I've allowed myself to taunt the man I once thought I loved, into thinking that he is the man I still love today. I can barely stand to look at myself. *How can I get out of this turmoil? How can I face the man I've spent four years of my life with, and tell him in front of all our friends and family that I do not wish to spend eternity together?* I rather die than to spend my whole life here in West Valley, Kentucky, depriving myself of all the wonders the world has to offer.

"You nervous?" asks my Aunt Sheryl, wrapping her arms around me from behind. I whirl around to face her, surprised by her sudden entrance. Since both of my parents died when I was eleven, her and my Uncle Tucker have been the two people I've come to know as mom and dad.

"I'm ok," I reply, "I am just scared now that life as a married woman is about to begin." She chuckles.

"Marriage is not always easy. Take it from a woman who has been married for thirty-seven years. Sure, there will be a few rough patches along the way, but you're a tough strong girl, so I have no doubt that you will find a way to manage." I pull her into me. The smell of her White Diamonds perfume settles my fears, making me feel invincible and safe; just as it did when I was a child.

"You are a spittin' image of your mama at your age," she says, breaking the silence. As she pulls away, I have the urge to tug her back to me, not wanting the moment to end. She grabs a tissue out of the landfill in her purse and wipes her tear stained face. Before I can mangle out a reply, my Aunt Martha barges in the room, summoning my Aunt Sheryl to fix a wardrobe malfunction with my Uncle Tucker's Tuxedo. Once the door is closed behind them, I quickly sprint across the room to lock it.

"You can do this," I whisper to myself, "all you have to do is go out there and state how you truly feel. Just wing it and somehow it will work out." During my brief self-counseling session, I notice, sitting on my old nightstand, the picture of my parents and me at Disney World posing next to Cinderella. Without caring about ripping the veil trailing all the way to my heels, I

sit on the edge of my old bed, decked out in stuffed animals and fuzzy pillows, and stare blankly at the eleven year old photo. It had been taken one week before a man robbed and killed both of my parents in New Orleans after a Mardi Gras Parade. Neither the man, nor my parents' stolen belongings were ever found.

Coincidentally, I was sitting in the exact same spot that I find myself in now, when I received the news of their death. I can clearly remember the look upon my Aunt Sheryl's face when she told me the news. It was a collage of emotions: anger, hate, fear, sorrow, pity, confusion. The time was 11:17 p.m. I was awakened by the feeling of someone constantly tapping me upon my shoulder. When I opened my eyes, Aunt Sheryl stood above me, weeping into a dilapidated tissue. The rest of the night remains somewhat hazy to me, as if it were all nothing more than a silly childish nightmare. Unlike much of that night, one detail in particular sticks out among the rest. The words "your parents have been murdered" still ring within my head to this very day, as if Aunt Sheryl were trapped in that moment, constantly repeating the phrase for eternity.

If I would have went with them to New Orleans that weekend, then I too could have been murdered or worse. Instead, I decided to go and stay a few days with Aunt Sheryl and Uncle Tucker since it had been over a year since I had last seen them. Also, I just wanted to give my parents some time to themselves to celebrate their twentieth anniversary, without having to worry about taking care of me. The thought of my aunt and uncle's guest bedroom becoming my permanent bedroom, never crossed my mind.

I gently press the frame to my lips and place the picture back on top of the turquoise nightstand in its previous position. Aware that my aunt will be back at any moment to scold me for making the guest wait so long, I push myself off the bed and walk as fast as my mermaid style dress will allow me, over to the window across the room. Gracefully peeling back the polka dotted curtains, I take a slight peek at the patient crowd outside, cautious to remain unseen by any eye. They all look so happy and full of excitement. Many of my relatives, most of which came all the way from my home-state of Louisiana, are here. People are shaking hands, exchanging laughs and hugs, and intermingling to become acquainted with faces foreign to their

eyes. The scene weighs down on me, causing the guilt in the pit of my soul to heighten. I step back from the window, no longer interested in observing the jubilant view.

Yet again, I find myself in front of the wretched mirror. Trying my best to keep a collected composure, I pick at my curled black hair to focus my thoughts on my exterior. The commotion within my head is mute. I ignore my consciences attempts to guilt me into a no longer wanted marriage. "It's a beautiful day still. Stay calm. What you are doing is completely right. You are only doing what's best for yourself." After several minutes of failing to pacify myself, I become more agitated. I am thankful when I hear a knock on the door and a sarcastic voice mocking me from the hallway.

"You almost ready in there princess? The wedding was supposed to start twenty minutes ago!" Twenty minutes? I jerk my head around to face the unicorn clock hanging on the wall. I look at the clock in disbelief when I see 1:50 displayed in big bold numbers. *Holy cow!* "Give me a second," I reply, almost forgetting about Aunt Sheryl waiting in the hallway. I securely fasten my mother's pearls around my neck. "I know you'll be with me in spirit mama," I whisper, clutching onto the pearls as if they are a source of communication between us. I hurdle to the door, pausing briefly to steady my balance. *Here goes nothing.*

My face almost collides into Aunt Sheryl's when I open the door. "Well, look who decided she would finally make an appearance at her own wedding."

At first I'm convinced by a hint of anger in her voice, but the smirk on her face dampens the effect. She is too kind hearted to be angry at someone, even though her sarcasm tends to come off as slightly harsh. We share a final hug and she kisses me on the cheek. My Uncle Tucker walks in the house immediately closing the door behind him. "Everyone's ready when you are," he says with a slight tone of impatience in his voice. "I'm ready," I reply, attempting to convince him with a smile. "Good," he says, entwining our arms together, "now lets get this show on the road so I can get all of these people out of my yard." I chuckle. I assume now is as good a time to ruin such a beautiful day as ever.

As we approach the French style doors leading to the backyard patio, my heart rate fluctuates, causing an unpleasant feeling in my chest. *Oh dear Lord, please give me the strength*

to get through this. Before opening the doors, my aunt gives me a speech on my importance to her and her love for me. "...oh and Rosaline," she says, continuing to delay the wedding, "honey you may want to eat a mint before your big smooch with Toby." She hands me a mint. "Now break a leg." Her and my uncle laugh, finding the phrase for an odd reason amusing. I remain silent and still. Once the catastrophic event about to take place occurs, I know they will both be disappointed in me. I hate the thought of hurting them. Placing the mint in my mouth, I take a deep breath. "Cue the music," my aunt whispers into a walkie-talkie. The doors part, opening a glimpse into my future; marriage.

I step onto the bricked patio. The bridal chorus echoes throughout the yard. *RUN! RUN! RUN! You can't do this! Get out while you still can!* The commotion within my head breaks free from its muted state. As I approach the edge of the patio, I come to a sudden halt, jerking Uncle Tucker back. The scene depicted in front of me looks as if it is a creation by Picasso himself. All of the smiling faces standing in honor of the bride; me. A gorgeous pathway of rose petals trailing all the way to a gazebo covered in beautiful flowers of varying shades of pink. A man who I once thought myself lucky to have, dressed in a lavish tuxedo with a pink orchid, my favorite flower, pinned on his chest. It is a lot to take in at once, but I must calm my nerves and let all of my fears escape me.

The grass grabs my high heels, trying to pull me underground with every step I take. I smile and stare straight at Toby, my fiancé, soon to be husband. His bluish gray eyes are lost in my green ones; I am lost in him. He has the appearance of an angel, soft yet manly. I love his short dark ginger hair and his mostly blinding white smile. From the first moment I met him to now, he has remained the same man, but I have only grew wicked. Often do I find myself wondering why he would love me and stand by me for four years, even though I take him for granted and treat him like a child. I'm a selfish fool for not wanting to be married to a man as handsome, romantic, and adventurous as he. I have only thought about myself and not once about how this whole thing would affect him. For goodness sakes, he bought me a five-thousand dollar diamond engagement ring. I can't leave him now, for I know that he can quickly capture a woman's heart and have his pick of the litter. But after all, he chose me, and the thought of him

being with another woman sends a sense of hate and jealousy through me that I can't comprehend.

Pastor Gregory, the pastor of West Valley First Baptist Church, rapidly moves through the ceremony. I mostly forget to pay attention to him, distracted by the innocence and beauty in Toby's face. The way he looks at me is unreal. He makes me feel like I am superior to all women in the world.

"I love you," he mouths to me. I say it back. As we stand here hand in hand in front of everyone declaring our love for one another, I can't help but to tear up. This is the first time in years that I've actually felt blessed and grateful to have him in my life.

Toby's voice is so soft and mesmerizing when he says "I do" in response to Pastor Greg. His smile shows how happy I make him and how excited he is to spend his life with me. When the attention turns to me, a feeling of doubt overcomes me. "Do you, Rosaline Jane Scott take Toby Levi Briggs to be your lawful and wedded husband?" I panic at the question. Aunt Sheryl's eyes catch mine, telling me to choose what's best for me. *He's always going to treat you like a lady and stand by you through good and bad.* After a few seconds of thought and scrambling for a reason not to marry him, I become deadlocked on whether to leave him out of selfishness and curiosity for adventure, or stay with him because I know he is the love of my life. For a tiebreaker, I observe the look of despair spreading across his face. He looks heartbroken, convinced that I will opt out due to my slowness to respond. Seeing him sad makes me feel worthless and only intensifies my anxiety.

"Ms. Scott, have you made your decision?" asks Pastor Gregory. I glance at him and then immediately back to Toby's now tear stained face. As his hands slip from mine, the crowd shrieks in awe. I've never seen him this way. After four years, he's never once been upset when I was around him. Even when he had a stomach ache or any other form of pain, he always smiled as soon as I was in his arms or laughed when we talked on the phone. Seeing him sob and begin to walk out of the gazebo breaks my heart. I already miss the roughness of his hands and the warmth of his presence, and he is only ten feet from me. The fact that he would rather walk away himself than hear me say I do not wish to be his wife as much as he wishes to be my husband, shows how much he loves me.

“WAIT!” I shout. The yard falls silent. Everyone’s eyes turn to me, most filled with hatred and shock. “I do!” Toby turns around to face me. “You do?” he asks, his voice deep and soft. “Yes I do.” I overhear my aunt and uncle exchange a sigh of relief. “Continue,” I nudge towards Pastor Gregory.

“Do you promise to love, to cherish, to honor, to obey, forsaking all others, in sickness as well as in health, in adversity as well as in prosperity, for better or for worse, and be faithful only to him so long as you both shall live?”

“I do.”

As Toby slips my wedding ring onto my finger, a tear slightly slides down his cheek. I flirtingly wipe it away. “Rosaline, will you take your ring and place it upon the third finger of Toby’s left hand, and repeat after me this promise: This ring I give in token and pledge as a sign of my love and devotion, with this ring I thee wed.” I repeat the words, placing the golden ring onto Toby’s long chubby finger.

After many minutes of Pastor Gregory rambling on, I am relieved to hear the words “You may now kiss your bride”. Toby gently brushes his hand across my face and pulls me into him. His red face is cute and bashful. He gently presses his lips to mine, causing the wedding party to applaud and cheer as if we had just placed first in the Olympics. There is nowhere I would rather be than right here with him, feeling of his stubble upon my face. His lips are tender and wet. I want to live in this moment forever, I never want him to let go of me.

Once the wedding reception has ended, Toby, Aunt Sheryl, and Uncle Tucker, force me into a car. “Where are we going?” I ask, hoping for at least a hint. “You’ll see when we get there,” Toby says, laughing at my childish curiosity. He grabs my hand and presses it to his lips. “I literally thought you were going to give up on me today,” he says, “you really scared me. I don’t know what I would do without you.” An impulse to kiss him surges through me. “Come here,” I whisper. When he kisses me, it’s as if we transform into teenagers again; inseparable; crazy in love. I feel his hand begin to creep up my leg. I like it, I don’t want him to stop.

“Hey!” my Uncle Tucker shouts from the passenger seat, “Me and your Aunt are still in the car.” Toby and I laugh. “Put your seatbelts on, you both know Sheryl’s driving isn’t....” With

an instant glare from my aunt, he stops speaking. “That’s what I thought,” she says, mocking my uncle’s fear. Toby and I put our seat belts on. I lay my head on his chest and listen to the beating of his heart. The rhythm is a lullaby singing me to sleep. “Wake me up when we get there,” I say closing my eyes.

I wake to the sound of a plane zooming into the atmosphere. “Surprise!” They all shout, startling me. I lift my head off of Toby’s chest. “Where are we?”

“Louisville international airport,” Toby replies.

At dawn, we boarded a plane headed to New York, where we would then Board a plane to Paris, France. I take my seat next to Toby, still mind boggled on how this whole two week trip to Europe came to be. “How did you pay for this?” I ask him, hoping he wasn’t selling drugs or robbing banks. “Oh you know, I just used my credit card,” he replies, a huge smirk upon his face.

I roll my eyes and turn away from him. “I’m serious,” he says, “My parents gave me ten-thousand dollars because they knew we couldn’t afford to pay for a honey moon on our own. So I figured that since they gave me so much money, I would give you the adventure you’ve always wanted and try my best to make you the happiest woman in the world.” I can’t believe he did all of this for me. “I am speechless,” I say.

“Just say what you feel,” he says, grabbing my hand.

My sight focuses on my aunt and uncle sleeping in the seats across from us. I notice how their hands are joined together, just as mine and Toby’s are. It is stupid how not even a full day ago, I wanted nothing more than to leave my life behind, but now that I am surrounded by the three people in the world I love the most, I realize that they are my life; family is my life. I am embarrassed by my ungratefulness and idiocy. For Toby, for my family, but most importantly for myself, I will change and rid myself of my wickedness. I want to be pure, free, and happy; exactly how I feel right now. I only have one life to live, and the life I’m living is the life for me.

“I love you,” I whisper in a hushed voice, “oh and thank you for not leaving me after my brief moment of silence today.”

“I’ll never leave you...” His sentence is interrupted by the command of a flight attendant warning all passengers to prepare for takeoff. *Europe here we come.*