

The Girl in the Mirror, High School 11-12

The Girl in the Mirror

Mother would graze her fingers down my face, telling me that I was beautiful. I knew I was, but the mirror would never show me. Every time I walked down the endless hallway, the long rectangle next to my bedroom would draw me in, forcing me to stop and acknowledge it. It would tease me, making me hope that the next time I would look into its captivating surface I would see myself. But I never would; Instead I'd see a different girl standing before me. I would study her extensively at every opportunity. I was drawn in by her piercing blue eyes that never trailed from our magnetic gaze. Her lips were chapped, her eyebrows thick, and her face was perpetually fixed in a grimace. She resembled me. When she brushed away the thick brown hair that shielded her face, she would reveal the source of her misery. Pink, elevated skin was strewn in jagged lines over the left side of her face; Her eye was swollen by the hideous patterns that took over her complexion. I would look at her, and she would look back at me with two saddened blue eyes. We would share the same thought: She was hideous.

My every encounter with the girl in the mirror left me thankful that I did not suffer from a similar appearance. She must have endured a lonely existence. What person would be able to look at her without cringing? Any impulse of compassion would be overridden with an accidental look of disgust. Her appearance was certainly accustomed to repulsion, but I felt bad for the girl. She wished to be beautiful like me. Every day, she would replicate my clothes, even her hair would be styled in the exact same way as mine.

The similarities were so vast that years ago, when I was six, I thought I was the girl in the mirror. I used to think that I was unfortunate like her. I spent endless hours looking at the mirror and despising it for portraying me with those horrible fleshy scars. I would run to Mother's room in the earliest hours of the morning, when the sun was ready to rise over the horizon and create that radiant orange glow I admired through closed windows. I would curl myself under her linen sheets, tears streaming down my cheeks and hitting the pillow I rested my troubled head on. I always seemed to startle her because when she woke up and looked at me she would scream like she had just seen a monster. She would focus on my face and scan it with her guilty eyes, her mouth falling into a slight frown.

“Child! What’s wrong?” she would say.

“Mother,” I would begin, breathless from crying, “I am ugly. Why does the mirror tell me that I am ugly?” I would ask innocently; I didn’t know the truth.

“You are beautiful, child. You are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen,” she would reassure me.

“Then who is that girl in the mirror? She is not beautiful.”

“She comes out to admire you. She wishes she could be beautiful like you. Everyone wishes they could be beautiful like you.” I went to wipe the tears from my eyes, but Mother stopped me. She reminded me that I should not touch my face because the grime on my hands could tarnish my perfect complexion.

Even now, four years later, Mother is still concerned with maintaining my beauty. She rarely allows me to leave our house. She never tells me why, but I know her secret. She doesn’t want to make average people envious of my beauty. She fears others would be intimidated and treat me horribly. Mother says I am very fragile, and one cruel word could ruin the entire perception of myself that I know is true. The one she has spent years drilling into my head. She does not want me to believe that I am not beautiful; She does not want people’s lies to pollute my mind. So I am stuck in our increasingly dreary house, spending lonely hours wandering the halls. I am not allowed to go to school like other children. I do not know anyone my age. My best friend is our maid, Cara. I like to play hide and seek with her. She spends hours chasing me around the house, our shoes clicking like racehorses against the wooden floorboards. I slow down when we reach the hallway leading to my bedroom. I stop in front of the mirror, waiting for the girl. She’s wearing the same clothes as me again. The pale blue ruffled dress fits her body just as it fits mine, falling just above her knees. Even the white bow in her tussled locks rests in the same position atop her head. Sometimes I still think I am the girl in the mirror.

“Am I beautiful?” I would ask Cara, quizzically turning my head slowly from side to side, watching the girl imitate my every move.

“Yes, Miss. Mabel,” she would respond. I had overheard Mother years ago instructing Cara to respond like that every time I asked her that question.

“Is the girl in the mirror beautiful?” I’d ask, readjusting the bow in my hair. The girl would do the same.

“She is beautiful on the inside. As are you, Miss Mabel.”

I could tell Mother did not like her very much. Cara knew something Mother wished she did not know, but she forced Cara to protect her secret. I didn't know what it was, but one time Mother caught Cara telling me I was beautiful on the inside, and Mother's face turned red, her nostrils flared, her jaw clenched. She grabbed Cara violently by her calloused hands and looked at her intensely with her deep blue eyes that matched mine. I could see fear rushing through Cara's body, as she shrunk in terror before Mother. Mother would yell, "People will only tell you that you are beautiful on the inside if you have ugly outsides. And Mabel does NOT have ugly outsides." Mother let go of her, and before storming off, looked at me remorsefully. Cara's rich brown eyes dropped and her head shook in sorrow. She did not speak for a while after that. I knew she was hiding something for Mother.

I knew I should not have spent as much time with Cara as I did, but she would talk to me about things other than my beauty, unlike Mother. I was enchanted by the stories she would tell me. She would help me understand what it was like to be a normal girl, one that was not cursed with my unearthly complexion. She would illustrate to me what it would be like to run outside and laugh with my friends, to feel the sun's rays warming my pale skin. Once she even told me about a park near my house with an expanse of rolling, green hills and a pond as deep a blue as my eyes and as clear as the finest crystals in Mother's jewelry box. I longed to play in the grass and laugh until my stomach hurt with my nonexistent friends. I desired new human interaction so badly, I didn't care about making others jealous.

I set out one day to the park, without telling Mother or Cara about my plan. I was not sure that there would be kids for me to play with, but I was content with experiencing the world outside the walls of my house. The walk to the park provided the most enchanting sights. I only distantly knew of the sky and the trees through the vivid pictures encapsulated by frames I later realized were windows. Now they were real. The sun danced lightly on my skin, and the breeze gently played with my hair as I began to feel more and more normal. I wandered along the pebbled walkway that lead through the park, observing the assortment of brightly colored flowers to my left and the sun shimmering against the pond to my right. I listened to the birds chirping their happy songs in the trees towering above me, when I was taken out of my enchantment by a faint giggling in the distance. I peered toward the direction of the hopeful sound, and I could make out the outlines of three children. A boy and two girls, were playing by

the edge of the pond at the end of the walkway. As I walked closer, I saw their smiles and the giggling grew louder and louder until finally, only a few feet separated me from my new friends. “Hi, I’m Mabel!” I exclaimed. No response, just giggling. “Can I play, too?” They refused to meet my eyes, keeping their looks amongst themselves, never fully acknowledging my presence. I knew this was the sort of reaction mother was trying to protect me from. Just as I turned my back in devastation, one of the girls spoke.

“What happened?” She asked me through muffled giggles. She tucked her sun-kissed hair behind her ear. I could see the dirt beneath her fingernails, but she touched her face freely.

“What happened to what?” I asked her, puzzled.

“To your face!” She replied, and the three broke out in hysteric laughter. I shouldn’t have left the house. Mother was right, these kids were nothing but jealous. I could feel my spirit slowly diminishing, but I stood tall.

“What’s wrong with my face?” I asked, crossing my arms over my chest, shooting them all a sullen look.

“It’s UGLY” The boy exclaimed and the group toppled over on their backs in laughter, much like I had imagined we all would together.

“I know you are just saying that to make me feel bad because none of you are as beautiful as me,” I replied firmly. I could hear Mother’s voice in the back of my head, “Everyone wishes they could be beautiful like you,” and knew I could not let the other children’s lies affect me. I was beautiful!

“Look for yourself,” chimed the other girl, pointing towards the pond.

I looked hesitantly at each of them, my face furrowed in rage. I held my head high and walked purposefully to the very edge of the pond. I feared they would push me in, but I didn’t let them know I was afraid. I noticed how clear the water was and knew that it would return a very true reflection of myself, not one like the misleading mirror in the hallway. I looked down, joyously anticipating my real reflection. But there she was, the girl in the mirror; she looked back at me. Plasticky, discolored scars devoured the left side of her face just as they had in the mirror, her eye was still swollen by the hideous burn that had stripped her of her beauty.

“Who is that?” I trembled, taking a small step backwards.

“That’s you,” replied the boy, “Can’t you tell? The pond shows everything for what it really is.” I lifted my quivering hand and ran my fingers over the left side of my face. I felt the plasticky

scars; the melted skin beneath my touch was rough and uneven. I looked back into the pond, caressing my face as I had never done before. I could now see and feel the rough scars that extended over my cheek and eye. I felt a tear roll down my deformed face and watched it fall into the pond, causing ripples in the water that held my reflection. Mother deceived me. Everything she had told me about being beautiful was a lie. I was anything but beautiful; I was the girl in the mirror. I had always been the girl in the mirror.

I ran, crying and scream, back down the walkway that had brought me to this horrible, revealing place, the giggling still ringing in my ear. I ran through the front door of my house past Cara. She pleaded that I calm down; I'm sure she realized that I had found out. I raced up the curling staircase and into Mother's room. She was sleeping. I walked slowly over to the edge of her bed and examined her. I looked like her, but her face was clear with no sign of a monstrous accident. She looked peaceful, her chest rose evenly with every breath she took. Her lies did not seem to affect her. I tightened my jaw, trying to contain my tears as my breathing grew unsteadily. My hands were shaking and my heart was beating so rapidly it threatened to fall out of my chest. I unclenched my fist that held a box of matches. My hand shook as I opened the box to remove a single match. I wiped the back of my hand against my cheeks, wiping the tears from my eyes from my clouded eyes. I swiped the match over the back of the box; vibrant red dots and an orange flame sprung from my finger-tips. I felt the warmth of the flame against my face. I inhaled deeply, filling my lungs with burning smoke. I took one last look at Mother and flicked the match onto her linen sheets. I stepped back, watching the flame slowly grow, licking the edge of the bed frame and engulfing Mother in it.

"Now you can be beautiful too, Mother," I said as I locked the door behind me.