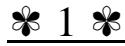


Reflection

By Anna Scott Wieler



She stared into the mirror, combing her golden hair, watching the strands fall piece by piece in rolling waves down her shoulders.

“Cissa, I think you’ve brushed your hair enough.”

She rolled her eyes, ignoring the impatient toe tapping of her friend waiting by the door. “We’re fine, Lilah. I’m not done yet.” The blue of her dress shines like the crystalline ocean waves of the Bahamas-- she would know, that was where she spent her thirteenth birthday. She smiled slightly, noting the shine of her pearlescent teeth in the mirror. That was a good birthday. There had been scuba diving and island dancing and private yacht rides, a spa day for her and her friends. But the best part was going to school the week after the trip, legs golden and hair sparkling from hours spent under the rays of a bright sun, her heart full of pride as people mentioned her shining skin.

Of course, it didn’t quite compare to croissants atop the Eiffel Tower on her sixteenth, but the Bahamas was good enough...kind of like how the dull black seams of Lilah’s dress didn’t compare to the shining blue silk of her own.

“Narcissa,” Lilah snapped, throwing her silver-heeled foot on the ground, “we’re going to be an *hour* late.” She ran her fingers through her midnight hair, sighing in exasperation. “It’s not cool. No one likes to wait on people. And I promise that Jeremy will be pissed.”

Narcissa scoffed. “I don’t give a shit what Jeremy thinks. He’s lucky to be holding my hand tonight.” She stared at herself a little longer, ignoring Lilah’s glare in the mirror, and decided her own eyelids needed more glitter.

Lilah marched over to the vanity, slamming a banged hand down on the ornate white wood. “Get up,” she grumbled.

Narcissa stared at her, taken aback. “I don’t know why you’re in such a rush...I’d put on more foundation if I were you.” She smacked her lips in the silence before picking her comb up to brush once more. But before she could stare at herself any longer, the comb was ripped from her hand mid stroke, and a handful of golden hair strands tore from her head in rippling stings.

“Damn Lilah, What the--”

Lilah stood above her, comb in hand. “You’re vile, Narcissa. If you’d rather sit here all night than be with your friends--” she paused for a moment, a mockery of laughter filling the room, “--if we even are your friends-- then fine. But have fun looking at yourself after this.”

Before Narcissa could blink, the golden comb was hurled through the air.

There was a crack. A creak. A shatter of fallen panes, a stomping of high heels, and an echoing boom as Lilah slammed the bedroom door.

Narcissa sat on her feather cushioned stool, staring at the broken shards that fell from the mirror’s corner. The cracks reached out like arms and long fingered hands, pressing against her reflection. Her high cheekbones and the straight edge of her short nose were bent and angled, creating a reflection that was entirely foreign to her.

A reflection that made her want to scream in fright.

The image of a monster.

While her nose wrinkled in disgust, it multiplied and shriveled in the mirror. She could feel her own eyes wide with shock, but in the mirror, they were jagged and deformed, vertical ovals like those of a cat instead of her wide pupils.

She shuddered and threw a sheet over the vanity.

Later that night, her ears rang from the absence of roaring music and teenagers. She lay still, her fingers cold and her heart heavy as tears leaked from her eyes and mascara stained the blush of her cheeks.

The mirror groaned.

Creak.

Crack.

Shatter.

She flinched, bolting up in bed and tearing the silk sheet from her body. Her dress still hung from her shoulders, rumpled and twisted as she looked at the vanity.

Her heart stopped when she saw her eyes in the reflection and not a draped sheet covering them. She edged near the mirror, looking at the ground for fallen shards.

She found none.

Narcissa stared at the broken, riddled mirror, wondering if there was a reason for her disjointed reflection. Because when she blinked, the reflection stared. When she frowned, the reflection smiled. Narcissa shook her head, her brows furrowed, but in the mirror she was still.

She stood there, her hands resting atop the ornate wood, leaning into the mirror, wondering why the face staring back at her with her same blue eyes, her same golden hair, was unmoving.

And then there was a knock behind her. Her shoulders jolted and her eyes scrunched in fear as she spun around.

But when she saw a pair of glinting brown eyes, she breathed so deeply that her shoulders sagged, and a laugh of relief washed over her. She rolled her eyes and jumped over the rumpled silk bedsheets to open the window where Jeremy waited.

“What are you doing here?” she asked him, rubbing the smudged mascara from her eyes.

“I should be asking you that,” He said, climbing in the window. “Why are you ditching me?”

He wasn’t angry like Lilah said he’d be. Instead, his big brown eyes stared down at her in empathy. And as she stood in his beauty, she could do nothing but fumble for an excuse as she hid her tear-stained face and molten black eyes.

“I- I’m not ditching you,” she settled on, smoothing the wrinkles in her dress.

“Really?” he said, moving around her to sit on her bed. “Cause you were supposed to meet up with me two hours ago.”

“Well, why’d you wait two hours to come find me?” she asked.

“That doesn’t work on me, Narcissa.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I know your games,” he said, rolling the silk bedsheet between his fingers. “I know you can’t stand to be less than or to go unnoticed. I know you’re pissed that Lilah left you alone after you insulted her, because how dare she leave you alone on prom night, right? I know you’ve been cursing her name, your friends’ names, *my* name, wondering why none of us came to get you before we went to the dance.” He looked back at her, dropping the sheet and standing up to take her hands.

She looked away from his penetrating brown eyes.

“Why were you crying ‘Cissa? What was so upsetting about tonight that you cried more than Lilah did, who we had to give a pep talk to before she’d even step foot in the ballroom?”

“I didn’t mean to hurt her feelings. It just came out and I couldn’t stop it and--”

“You don’t need to tell me that,” he said. “You need to tell her.”

“I know.”

“Do you? Because I think you want her to apologize to you.”

Her mouth dropped open-- how did he know that?

She shook her head. “No, no. No, I don’t.”

He saw right through it. “You have issues, Narcissa.”

She scoffed. “What, like you don’t have any? Sleeping around from girl to girl like some man whore freed from a cell of virginity? How do I even know you’re being real? How do I know this isn’t one of your ploys to get under my dress?”

He sighed. “I don’t know ‘Cissa. You’re just going to have to trust me.”

“And *you* need to trust *me*. Because right now I feel attacked.”

He rolled his eyes, a smile quirking the corners of his full pink lips. “I’m not attacking you. I’m trying to help you. Because if you don’t apologize to Lilah and mean it- I mean *really* mean it- you’re going to lose your best friend. And I don’t think you want that.”

“I don’t want that,” She muttered, bowing her head onto his chest.

“I know.”

They stood like that for a while, her head tucked under his chin with his hands running through her knotted golden hair. She peeked over his shoulder and into the vanity mirror. She stared at her reflection, looking at the rumpled dress and her streaked face. But this time she

didn't feel shame. She felt vulnerable, yet accepted, and that maybe this letting-people-in-thing was alright.

Maybe Jeremy was alright.

She thought the mirror might look a little less broken.

She almost smiled, but then his voice rumbled in his chest underneath her ear. "Uh, why's your neighbor staring at us?"

"Ugh!" She groaned, pushing him off. "He's such a perve," she said, glaring at the staring boy in the neighboring window. "He's always trying to look in here."

Jeremy's eyebrow furrowed. "Do you want me to talk to him?"

"What?" she said, drawing her white curtains together. "No, that's not necessary."

"Are you sure?" he said, peeking behind the curtain at the boy before looking back at her. "'Cause that's not right."

Her chest warmed with panic, but she kept her voice cool. Collected. "Really, Jeremy. It's okay. He's like, thirteen. His hormones are raging."

"I still don't like it."

"Well, you don't have to live next to him, so it's fine."

Jeremy hummed, eyes still on the window.

"Really, Jeremy. It's fine."

"Okay."

Narcissa stared at him for a moment, waiting for his eyes to find hers, and when they did, her shoulders relaxed a little. She remembered her mother's posture lessons... "*Prim and proper, always a showstopper.*"

She sighed. Her secret could fester for another day.

Later that night as she and Jeremy lay intertwined, she stared through the graying night and into the silver glint of the cracked mirror. She furrowed her brows, wondering why it looked to be less cracked earlier because now in the unforgiving dark, the cracks reached out to her at greater lengths than ever before. They lured her in.

Creak.

Groan.

Shatter.

And then all was truly black-- where dreams run wild within the mind while nightmares haunt reality.



Narcissa smiled as pink and orange dawn washed the black from the room.

That had been the best night of sleep she'd gotten in a long time. A night spent with a warm hand wrapped around her waist instead of cold silk wrapping her ivory legs. Her body tingled with warmth and excitement.

She'd never felt like this about anyone before.

She rubbed her fingertips against her eyelids, picking the hardened crust of mascara from her eyes.

When she opened them, she saw red.

She stared down at her hands and almost screamed. They shook as she held them to her eyes. Crust red caked her white fingertips, and a dried brown film coated her hands. She gagged,

and then she hurred as the rusted iron of dried blood wafted into her nose, overwhelming her. She sat there, choking on the side of the bed, spitting the reeking remains of yesterday's lunch.

And then she was tearing at the sheets clinging to her body and sent the tulle and rhinestone dress clattering to the floor as she ripped the sheets from the bed. She fanned her face. Sweat crawled down her spine. But then she noticed the dress lying on the floor, its crystalline blue replaced by an abundance of rusted red.

And then she was stumbling out of bed, cringing and gagging as her foot squished in the pile of mush puddled on the floor. She held her nose, eyes wide, heart hammering, breath shuddering as she looked at the bed. Her dress. The floor.

All of it- splattered, stained, soaked in blood.

That was when she screamed a shrill shriek of terror. Horror descended on her face as she stared at the blood staining her room.

Her chest felt like it was collapsing. Like the bones of her ribcage were constricting upon her lungs and squeezing the breath from her, leaving only wheezes for her to gasp.

She stumbled back, eyes pouring into every crevice of her empty room. But no matter how hard she looked, there was only blood.

And Jeremy was nowhere to be found.

She tripped on the vanity, leaving brown and red footprints along the dark wood floor. She faced the mirror, slamming her hands down on the wood and clutching the vanity like it was her only anchor amid the bloodied ocean of chaos. She breathed and listened to the frantic drum of her heart, staring at the blood on her hands, wondering how it had gotten there.

A gasp slipped from her lips as she looked into the mirror.

It wasn't cracked at all.

Her reflection was spotless. Perfect. Not bent and warped with shattered lines and creaking cracks.

“Narcissa?” a voice called.

She jumped, a hand flinching to sooth her pounding heart. “Mom?”

“Honey? Are you alright?”

Narcissa gulped, coughing to clear her throat. “Y- yeah. Yeah. I’m fine.”

“Are you sure? I thought I heard screaming.”

“Shit,” she mumbled under her breath, running her fingers through her hair. “I had a nightmare.” Silence. “But I’m fine, really.”

“Oh, okay.”

Narcissa sighed, leaning back against the mirror.

“Can I come in?”

Narcissa cursed under her breath before she snapped, “No, Mom. No.” Silence. She sighed, putting her face in her hands before her nose wrinkled in disgust as the rusted iron wafted through her nostrils. “I’m sorry, Mom. I’m sorry. I’m just not feeling well, and I think I should go back to bed.”

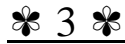
“Okay, honey. Just let me know if there’s anything I can do for you.”

Silence...the slide of slippers as her mom finally left her alone. Narcissa slid to the ground, sitting against the vanity, and retched. She wanted to cry. She wanted to scream. She wanted to know what the fuck was going on.

She stared at the fresh throw up on the hardwood. It crept forward, saturating into the hardening mush of the first morning bile.

She sat amidst the blood, one thought binding the chaos of it all.

What if I killed him?



She went to school that Monday with drooping, flat hair. Sweat coated her body under the fuzz of her sagging pink sweatshirt. She had gotten up an hour early to look over her clothes a hundred times, searching for lingering blood. Dark bags hung underneath her eyes, dulling her ocean blue irises.

She couldn't sleep. She couldn't eat. She couldn't think.

She was only here to show face. To prove she was innocent. To look torn up and distraught, because she *was*...but because she was worried she had killed her prom date, not because she was distraught over his disappearance.

Well, she was. But because she might have killed him.

And nobody else needed to know that.

She had burned everything. The sheets. The prom dress. She scrubbed the floors with vinegar and baking soda and saturated everything until the splatters were gone or so faint they couldn't be seen.

Maybe it'd be best to leave. To run away before the cops came to her house and arrested her under the charge of murder. Maybe she should kill herself-- that would work. She'd die out of exaggerated teenage grief for her missing Jeremy. There would be shrines with her name. Her face would glow in low orange candlelight amid bouquets of white lilies and pink roses. Her mom would be devastated. But what was worse, finding your daughter's dead body or watching

as your daughter was dragged from home, screaming and crying, jailed in some horrid orange jumpsuit, serving life for murder?

Narcissa shuddered. She'd either waste away in a prison cell or in a casket-- or maybe she'd waste away from the paranoia haunting her mind, but either way, she was sure her life was over.

And the worst part of it all was that she didn't even know how it happened. She didn't know if she killed him, but he *was* dead. There were no scratches on her. No broken bones. And her period hadn't come early-- she'd checked. So, with no mars on her body and with Jeremy's missing body, she was sure it was *his* blood caked under her fingers. She was sure it was *his* blood staining her burnt sheets and dress and that it was *his* blood still lingering over the surfaces of her room.

Her eyes stung with tears. How could she have done this?

"Narcissa?"

She jumped as a hand tapped her shoulder.

"Damn," Lilah whispered under the lecture of their teacher. "Why are you so jumpy?"

"What? I'm not jumpy," Narcissa said, picking her pencil back up.

"No, you definitely are. You keep looking over your shoulders, and I swear you flinch every time Mr. Hay looks at you. What's up?"

She rolled her eyes. "Nothing is up, Lilah."

Lilah scoffed. "Narcissa, you haven't looked this shitty since you got your wisdom teeth out. And even then, you looked better. Less pale."

“Well, is it crazy to think that I might be a little freaked?” *Lie, lie, lie*, a small voice urged. “I mean Jeremy is *gone*. And I don’t know what happened to him and I’m scared I might be next.”

“Next? What do you think this is? A serial killer?”

“Well, I don’t know but--”

“And why would he come after you? You and Jeremy were barely even prom dates. ‘*He’s lucky to be holding my hand,*’ remember?”

Narcissa groaned. “Yes, I remember. I don’t know. I just don’t have a good feeling about any of this.”

“Clearly,” said Lilah, looking back at her notes.

The two were silent for a moment, only Mr. Hay’s droning voice and unspoken tension hovering over them.

“Why are you even talking to me anyways?”

“Sorry?”

“No, I just--” Narcissa sighed. “I thought you were upset with me.”

“Well,” --Lilah’s eyes flicked up-- “I was. But I’m over it. I know that’s just how you are.”

Just how you are.

“You’ve got issues, Narcissa.”

Her stomach sank. Was she that bad?

“Who told you I was upset, anyway?”

Shit.

“God, Narcissa. Get it together,” she told herself, slamming her bedroom door before marching over to the window and opening it, the white curtains floating in the afternoon breeze.

She turned around, looking over her bed and to the vanity, the mirror still perfectly intact. Her reflection was perfect except for the fact that it didn’t really look like her. Her skin wasn’t glowing. Her hair wasn’t bouncing. Her eyes weren’t worth praising. She looked like a living corpse.

And then she marched to the shower. She washed her hair so vigorously that her fingers were covered in golden hair strands. She scrubbed her skin so roughly that her flesh was blush instead of pale. She picked underneath her fingernails until it was her own blood caked under them, not the imaginations of the long-gone rusted blood of a missing Jeremy.

When she was finished, she went back to the vanity. She felt a little better. A little lighter. Like she could breathe without her lungs collapsing and strangling the life out of her.

And then she saw a pair of eyes.

A pair of young, hopeful eyes reflecting from the window in the vanity mirror.

Narcissa smiled to herself; if she didn’t feel better after this, then she was broken beyond repair.

She dropped the towel.

The eyes in the mirror, green and full of lust, widened.

Water droplets rolled off her breasts and down her spine and around the curve of her hips. Her hair hung in curling waves down her back-- *drip, drip, drip*, the water pitters on the floor. She felt like she was back in the Bahamas, right after she and her friends ran into the crystal

waters, naked as the day they were born. They shrieked into the twilight sky as water sprayed their waists and their faces. They had glowed luminescent under the cascade of shining stars, their flowering bodies blooming in the night.

Narcissa watched as the neighboring boy stared at her through his window.

She didn't know which sight she enjoyed more, her own body or the wonder of another as he admired it.

She opened the vanity drawer and grabbed the golden comb, humming a gentle tune to sway to as she combed. She bent over, scrunching her hair, lingering longer than necessary. When she flipped her hair up, she did so with her back arched, her shoulders back, radiating power and strength and beauty, dominance over the eager boy. She stared at him, her blue eyes pouring into his green ones, *prim and proper, always a showstopper*, echoing in her mind.

But then she went back to looking at herself, locking her eyes onto the reflection.

Instead of looking into the deep ocean blue of her eyes, she was faced with red. Red, glowing irises burning through the mirror, boiling the blue of her own.

She yelped, jumping back. She stared in the mirror at her eyes. Blue, but red. So, so red.

She picked up the towel and wrapped it back around herself. She watched her chest rise and fall as she breathed a lungful of air, not knowing if this was real or if the red irises were just hauntings of her imagination.

Then she remembered the watching green eyes.

"Ugh!" she ground out, marching to the window, glaring at the boy whose mouth was agape with a glimmer of drool. "Get a life!" she shouted at him, slamming her window and drawing the curtains closed.

She stood before the curtains, clutching them, panting. She swore there was breath creeping down the back of her neck. A snarling breath. *In and out* it swooshed down her spine. Her bare skin erupted with shivers underneath the towel as she cringed away.

“Stop it!” she screamed, tearing around to face her room, to face the vanity.

But there was nothing there.

She stormed over to the mirror and stared. She leaned in, hands closed on the white wood. Nose-to-nose she stared with her reflection, waiting for her blue eyes to flash red.

“Do it,” she whispered. “Do it.”

Nothing.

“Damn it! I’m not fucking crazy! Please! Do something!”

She looked crazed, screaming at herself in the mirror. Her eyes were wide, red and purple veins creeping inward towards the blue. Her manic pants turned into shudders as tears flooded the whites of her eyes. Her cheeks turned red, and her lip quivered as she sobbed. *Drip, drip, drip*, the tears fell on the vanity as she cried and screamed at the mess of a girl staring back at her.

“What’s happened to me?” She choked. “What’s wrong with me?”

Her breath caught in her throat; an exhale locked in her lungs as she tried to stop.

But then her reflection was smiling. It was smiling so wide she could see all her teeth, shining and glinting in pearlescent spikes in the mirror.

She touched her own mouth, but it was stretched wide with horror and turned down in a frown as she watched her reflection laugh with malice.

“What are you doing to me?” she whispered into the mirror.

They stared at one another. Narcissa and Reflection, or Narcissa's Reflection, or-- wait-- Reflection's Narcissa, not knowing who was what or what was who.

Then the smile disappeared.

And Narcissa was left alone.



As she lay in bed that night, she stared at the towel covering the mirror. Her breath was slow as she watched, waiting for something to move. Waiting for something to happen.

But as the late hours of the night stretched into the early hours of the morning, she turned away from the mirror, rolling her eyes. She was going crazy. There was never an un-coordinating reflection. There were never red eyes. There was never a malicious grin. There was only her. Narcissa. Narcissistic Narcissa, who has to flaunt her body to a thirteen-year-old boy to make herself feel better. Narcissistic Narcissa, who insults her friends and expects *them* to apologize. Narcissistic Narcissa, a fucking monster.

"It's just how you are."

"You've got issues, Narcissa."

"I hate myself," she whispered into the darkness of the morning.

The whisper echoed, reverberating through the room. It seeped into every cell on Narcissa's skin, tainting her like poison. The thought crept throughout her veins and into her heart, blackening the beating blood within her.

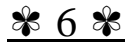
Crack.

Creak.

Shatter.

The towel fell from the mirror, and thousands of glinting silver shards scattered on the floor, scratching the wood and piercing the room with a high-pitched *bang*. She held her hands over her ears, a scream leaving her lips, and scrunched her eyes from the mirror, away from the nightmare.

She didn't open them until the light of morning.



Narcissa bolted up in bed, gasping.

Light trickled into the room, reflecting from the mirror in sparkling rainbows. The towel was still on the floor, but all the shards that had scattered in that shrieking pierce were back in the mirror, whole again.

She pulled her dimming golden hair. That's it-- she'd lost it.

She threw the sheets off the bed and stood in front of the mirror, staring at the smooth face of the vanity. Her once-perfect skin had broken out into dozens of blazing red pimples. Her eyes were bloodshot. She looked hazed. Drugged. Insane.

And maybe she was.

She threw on a sweatshirt, not looking at the brand or the color, and grabbed the first pair of leggings she could get her hands on.

She didn't care. She didn't care about her face or her hair and *goddammit, why was there blood back under her fingernails?* She didn't have the energy to question or to speculate or to

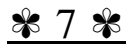
give a single damn. All she could do was go to school, try to be normal, and suppress the terrorizing imaginations of her mind.

And so, she left.

Next door, a woman pushed her son's door open to wake him for school. She called his name and turned on the light. But the bed was cold and empty, and colored not with the pink flesh of her sleeping son, but with a puddle of scarlet blood.

The woman screamed.

Narcissa didn't hear.



The first thing Narcissa saw when she pulled into the driveway was blue lights. Cars that read *Police Department* lined the street, and dozens of men in black uniforms with gold badges rushed in and out of the neighbor's house.

Oh God. Oh God, Oh God. What happened? Had the police figured out she was insane? Were they coming for her, waiting to ambush her when she stepped out of the car?

Did they find out she killed Jeremy?

She would have sat in the car forever if she could have. She would have sat in her car, head slumped on the steering wheel and waited for everyone to leave. But a man with red stubble tapped on her window, and she opened the door to step out.

“Are you Ms. Avery?” he asked.

Narcissa wanted to deny it. *No, no I'm not her*, she wanted to say. *I'll be anyone else but her*. But the truth spilled out of her lips instead. "Yes I am." Her stomach sank down to her feet as her heart shuddered in her chest. Part of her wanted to confess now. *Go ahead and take me*, she wanted to say, *I surrender*.

"I'm sure you're confused, Ms. Avery,"

You don't even know--

"Do you know your neighbor, Liam?"

Narcissa's eyebrows furrowed. "Liam? Yeah, I know him. We used to play games together."

The cop hummed. "When was the last time you spoke to him? Or played a game with him?"

Last night. "Liam and I haven't played together since I was ten, and I haven't spoken to him in months. Why? Is he okay?"

"He's missing. And we found a trail of blood that stopped in your yard."

Shit.

She shook her arms, letting the sleeves of her sweatshirt fall over her fingers. Her fingers, where blood was still caked. "Oh my God. That's-- that's awful. Did you find blood anywhere else?"

The officer sighed, taking off his hat to reveal auburn hair. "No, which is why we're about to leave. We searched the woods, both houses, your neighbors' houses...but there was nothing."

Her heart was beating so loudly she was worried the officer could hear it. "But you'll find him?"

“I’ll sure as hell try, Ms. Avery. I’m sure you’ll be seeing more of us around here, so I just wanted you to be aware.”

“Of- of course,” she stammered. “I’ll keep my eyes open for him.”

“We’d appreciate that.”

And that was it. The cops left but the yellow *crime scene* tape still ruffled in the wind. Narcissa retreated to her bedroom, hands shaking as she closed the door.

Maybe it was a coincidence. A coincidence that Jeremy and Liam were missing. Maybe it was all just a nightmare. How could she have killed Liam? There was no blood in her room like last time. How could she have left the house and not known? All she remembered was drifting off to sleep, shaking from the terror of the mirror, and waking up this morning. She couldn’t have done it. There was no way.

She rolled back her sleeves, staring at her stained nails. Her stomach churned, and she ran to the bathroom, opening the toilet lid and retching into the porcelain bowl. Sweat glued her hair to her neck. When she finally stopped, she panted as tears slid down her flushed cheeks.

When she opened her eyes, the toilet was red. Red and brown with chunks of food she never ate floating in the water. It reeked like the rotting flesh of death.

“Help me,” she cried. “Somebody help me.”

Narcissa flushed the toilet with pale, shaking fingers. She stumbled out of the bathroom and sat in front of the vanity. It was still smooth. Crack-less...

Except for a single shard that had fallen from the upper corner that now lay atop the ornate vanity. It was speckled with red.

She picked it up, staring down at her eyes in its reflection.

“Who are you?” she whispered.

She clutched the shard until blood seeped down her hand and *drip, drip, dripped* onto the vanity, staining the white a scarlet red. She stared into it until the golden sun had set and her room blackened in the night, only the luminescent shine of the silver moon illuminating the room in a dull, gray glow.

It was silent. Even outside, crickets did not chirp, and moths did not flutter against the window. It was like all living things knew she was surrounded by death and that it was seeping inside of her with every drop of blood seeping out.

Crack.

Her eyes snapped away from the shard and into the mirror, watching as the crack splintered and cut across the mirror from the hole in the corner. The mirror bent and groaned, and her reflection shook as it fought not to shatter and warp into a thousand different pieces.

Narcissa stared, her mouth agape as scratches gashed into the mirror. Side-by-side, lines slashed right and left, up and down, right in front of her eyes.

And in the mirror's hole, a long, yellowed claw tapped on the mirror. Finger by clawed finger the insidious green hand emerged, its claws glinting like decaying teeth, razor sharp. The six claws tapped on the mirror, fractured cracks reverberating from each *tip, tap. Tip, tap. Tip, tap.*

Narcissa screamed as the mirror shattered and hundreds of shards cut into her skin. She screamed as she stared into the black hole where her mirror once had been, and she flinched with every *stomp* echoing throughout the harrowing portal. She ran across her room, cowering against the wall with the bloodied mirror shard pointing towards the hole.

A drooling green monster tore through the vanity. She could smell every reeking breath it breathed, breath that smelt like decay and like the rusted iron of dead blood. Pussing warts

warped its abhorrent skin. Its toes tapped on the hardwood with nails of charred, molten black and its stomach was swollen with green sagging flesh.

It stalked towards her, its fangs snapping at the air, lethal.

She could do nothing but shriek.

As her vision blurred and her ears rang over the snarls of the mirror monster, she could do nothing but let the black death of night overcome her.



Darkness surrounded her. The cold ground was wet with a layer of God-only-knows-what and echoing splashes filled the black void as she climbed to her feet. She gagged as she breathed the repulsive air.

She stepped backwards, her head swirling from the reek, but she froze as a sickening *crunch* echoed throughout the dark.

She turned. There was more light when she faced this way, but she couldn't see why. Not when her eyes were glued to a half-decayed corpse. A corpse whose skull was cracked under her foot, moldering flesh only covering half of the bone. Fingers and toes lay scattered around, half chewed, with the nails ripped off. A twisted leg. The shattered bone of an arm. But worst of all was the brown hair encrusted in dried pools of dead blood. The brown hair that Narcissa had run her fingers through. The brown hair that had bounced as he had jumped into her room, but now it lies dead in the dried blood.

Jeremy's blood.

"Oh God," said Narcissa, "Oh Jeremy."

Tears rolled from her eyes and splashed onto the wet ground below. “I’m so sorry.” she whispered.

She looked into the light. It was her room. A perfect image of her bed and her hardwoods and her curtains and her window stared back at her as if it were right there, waiting for her to walk in.

When she saw it, she ran. She ran towards it, almost shouting with joy and with relief. But then she ran headfirst into a translucent wall. She held her head, groaning as horror dawned on her.

It was a mirror.

And she was on the other side, an outsider looking in.

She began to scream. She screamed and she cried and she banged on the mirror with pounding fists, begging for someone, *anyone to please God help me.*

“Help,” she croaked for the last time, sliding down the mirror until she sat slumped on her knees, sitting in the reeking wet ground. “Please,” she begged, the last of her tears stinging down her cheeks, “somebody help me.”

And then her bedroom door opened. And like a beaming ray of hope, her mother walked in.

“Mom!” Narcissa screamed, banging on the mirror again. “Mom! Can you hear me? MOM!”

Her mother didn’t even flinch.

“MOM!”

Narcissa watched as a tear rolled down her mother’s face. “Yes! Yes, Mom! I’m here! I’m right here!”

Her mother looked towards the mirror; her eyebrows furrowed.

Narcissa cried, snot rolling like a river down her face and tears warming her cold cheeks with tingling hope. She could have laughed with the joy pumping through her heart. “Yes!”

Her mother looked up. And then down. And then clucked her tongue.

The smile that had been pinching Narcissa’s cheeks fell from her face.

She watched her mother pick up a missing mirror shard from the vanity wood.

“No, no, no. No! Mom, No!”

She watched as her mother clicked the shard back into place, and the candle of hope that had burned within Narcissa just moments before, was gone with only smoking remains.

“Mom?” she cried, pressing her face into the mirror to be next to her mother’s, “please hear me, Mom? Please?”

Another tear rolled down her mother’s cheek as she stared at Narcissa’s empty bed.

“I’m right here, Mom,” she croaked, “I’m right here.”

Her mother shook her head and turned away.

“No. No! Mom!”

She lingered in the doorway for a moment. Narcissa was still, watching her with the smoking hope lingering in her eyes.

But then her mother’s shoulders rounded-- with heartbreak or denial or with a similar smoking hope, Narcissa did not know-- but what she did know was that her mother had shut the door and was gone.

“NO!” she screamed, pounding again, “No, Mom! No. No. No. *Please*,” she begged, her throat stinging with the fire of salt tears and snot. “*Please don’t leave me here!*”

“Don’t leave me alone.”

“Please.”

She hiccupped on the floor, her chest shuddering as she choked on the thick, wretched air. She couldn't breathe. And her heart was beating too fast. And she didn't have any tears left to cry, but she was still so devastated and crushed and horrified. *Terrified.*

She stilled as a *huff* and a *puff* of repugnant breath trickled down her spine. A splatter of drool. A tap from a moldy claw.

And then a thud as something fell to the ground.

Narcissa opened her eyes to look.

Staring back at her were young, green eyes. Green eyes that were always watching. Green eyes that she had loved to find reflected in her mirror. Green eyes that were once full of life, but now were vacant. Dead. Wide open with what Narcissa imagined was a dying scream.

In front of her was the decapitated head of her neighbor, Liam, staring at her again.

But this time, she stared at him as a leg was ripped from her body in a whirl of snarls.

And as blackness overcame her for the last time, she wondered how long she had been the monster, and this creature had been her reflection.