

Colours in the Mirror

by Adair Broughton

The girl reflected life like water, shimmered with flashes of light and sparkled as a diamond with droplets of the demure. To those bathing in her shallows she was clear and calm, serene and more than pleasant to behold. She could quench the thirst of eyes and drown any man with a tear. She was the siren of myth and the beauty of reality but all along she felt she could not swim, that the gentle lapping undulations of life would one day swallow her whole and that a mysterious current was toying with her as if she was driftwood floating aimlessly but with comfortable currents of friendship to lull and convince her the water flowed true.

This was all felt by other people, not herself.

This reasoning was languid, transient, and never more than ephemeral waves of thought but beneath it all she knew life had been too kind and it worried her. Something was just too good for it to last. Would it always feel that way; that true happiness could never lurk because her tranquil exterior denied the hidden depths and pressures ubiquitous because only she could sense this and feel it, without ever being able to grasp it. It was hers alone, this trepidation. But she had no understanding of what it was she feared, of why the creatures of despondency clawed their way into the recesses of her mind. They were shadows, fleeting images of darkness, a riptide with a whirlpool of intent that had not yet managed to swallow her.

Solitude could hide its existence to everyone but self. No one noticed it and with autumnal melancholy she faced the fact that no one ever noticed her. Not beyond her good bones and enigmatic smile. Not as a person inside of a china doll. Not as a soul.

The clock counted the moments as time passed by.

The more she wanted to shout this out, the more withdrawn she became. She couldn't tell anyone this. That would be admittance and throughout all her years from childhood to the fecund she always waited for tomorrow to be the day of difference, when a change would occur, when she could feel she belonged and enjoy her life without worrying about when she couldn't. Instead, they were days of diffidence. Nobody challenged her, questioned her or grabbed her to even ask if she was ok. Nobody saw the dying spirit in her eyes. Everyone thought her content, untroubled and in a way, perfect.

She felt nothing.

She was a breeze, less than wind but more than whisper. Strangers could not approach her; words seem to fail them as if they had lost breath even before they had begun to speak. They would all smile at her and think of her at night as they wrapped their arms around their wives. Her eyes were always the last thing they saw as the arms of Morpheus wrapped them in sleep. Her eyes had confused them, questioned them but they did not know what to think. They slept and then they forgot.

Women were not perturbed. Men's thoughts were hidden from them as they slept with dreams about a different pillow of flesh. If the women thought of the girl something soothed them before the poison of jealousy darkened their veins. There was no spirit to demolish, nothing to attack. They admitted her beauty and were comforted by its difference. They could not compare themselves to her so they could not offer the harsh criticisms they kept for other woman. It was small differences that created jealousy, large ones inspired awe. She was immune from criticism but equally she was not aware.

She didn't have to act a certain way to be liked and she could do nothing to be hated.

Her friends had grown up with her, saw a marble statue, pristine. She was lost to her own world, they could forgive this. They felt it deepness rather than aloofness. They liked her but she was quiet. Boys had always stayed away from her, coy smiles at a distance and showing off their strength as she walked by. She had never understood the strange games and loud voices as she passed. There was no instinct to be aware of bravado.

Her friends had always forgotten to tell her when some had asked about her. Was that deliberate? She seemed to fall out of people's memories far too easily. Soon the boys knew she was unapproachable and gave their efforts to the willing rather than the refrained. They could not match her beauty so why try. They admired but felt no comfort, no connection of possibility. She was a rare woman not to be approached by the false hopes of men. It would be sacrilege to kiss her, to think of touching her. She was somehow too pure, too feminine, and too beautiful. Those who did not try to swim did not drown.

Without others recognising it or her being aware of it she was esoteric. There was something more to her, or something less of her. None could understand.

But there were some who saw her; the spirits in the mirror. How else could she describe them? They looked at her with questions but she could reflect no answer. Out of her reach, a child to an adult or an adult to a child she could not talk, not even whisper. There was no voice; she could hear nothing and the glass was cold to touch but she often felt they were trying to talk to her. She tried desperately to listen. Numbled by loneliness, comprehension seemed far away, a distance she cared nothing for.

She would neither effloresce nor wilt in front of that mirror.

When she was lonely she went to the mirror, to feel comfort, to try and feel a connection. They looked at her until she couldn't look back. She always gave in first. It wasn't a contest but equally it was unresponsive communication, she denied them an access, they denied her peace. There was no feedback loop. If she could see anything human in them, behind that fog like form, it was that their eyes were cold like hers. But she wasn't afraid. They were not the reason for her thoughts. They were an aching proof of her difference but separate from her reality, the reality she had to live through outside. She was a blank slate, lost to barren years. She couldn't give them what they wanted, what they searched for. She didn't even know what it was they wanted, these eyes that weren't eyes and the faces that weren't faces.

They swirled in the ethereal, ghostlike shadows without form, patterns in a different realm maybe a dimension, the ones whose reflections had drawn her in only to deny her. As a young girl she had been fascinated, had looked in the mirror for endless hours, believing friendship was being lost to someplace else. That was her escape. She liked the patterns, the mystery. She liked the secret. Her friends would play outside, sometimes their screams of joy echoed into a dark recess of the room but she only wanted to see the faces, the shapes and the colours.

The colours had faded with time, imperceptibly. She could only picture that change as memory from years ago. The clock had ticked with more than lost moments, the rhythm turning rainbows into cloud. Each beat was one less person she would know, one fewer to hold her hand, to be more than just friendship through the motions.

Nobody else mentioned them. Did everybody keep this secret of the mirrors? Was it an unmentioned truth? Maybe there were people with the exact same thoughts, same belief to be nourished by the unknown. Through the years, with colours waning and realisation dawning, her desire to see them had gone. Solace was sought elsewhere even if she did believe it could not be found. They took nothing from each other. She cared nothing for it to even be sadness. They were a part of the bigger picture that she was unable to see, let alone paint.

If the times she looked in that mirror were now seldom, conversely the silent fear gradually encroached.

Were the walls she built around her the reason for that silence or the outcome? Were they the cause or the affect? It controlled her surreptitiously, a sneaky demon never exposing itself, always clothed with the clandestine armour of time. There was no way to strip bare what she couldn't see, what had no substance and continually hid from her. When she tried to comprehend it, there was a void, no response. For much of the time she had no proof it was even there, just a sense, a flutter of a butterfly's wing.

If she didn't understand the mirrors she understood the world outside even less.

Her etiolate existence gave her a sickness in health. Ivory skin was unblemished, carving her face into smooth but distinct pulchritude. It added to her purity; the untouchable pale princess. Her beauty whispered to the wind, but no voice echoed back the delicate words of charm she needed. The mirror offered a sad reflection, especially through a tear. Some things were too beautiful to look at. She was looking at memory, about how the mirrors used to be, about the life and energy they used to show. When the mists fell, when the clouds covered her eyes, only then would she move away from that mirror, to find a small peace in her bed, a little example of death with sleep.

There were times when she needed that mirror, when she risked forgetting how beautiful things had been. She wanted to keep hope that the mirror would give her back the eyes she had as a child. Wonder was so long ago compared to when it had been the horizon, the habitat of the future. She wanted colour, vibrancy, in a word, life. Why was this beyond her? Why wouldn't people relate to her with more than a beguiling smile? It promised so much but provided so little.

Often she could not sleep, listening to the earth's breath as it turned and spun and glided its majestic path around the gravity well gifted by the sun. She sensed the seas swell as she imagined herself on it. Then there was the pull of the moon felt more than the strange glow of its light, piercing her pupils into awareness of distance. She could reach out and touch it but the moon had no hands to reach back. She wanted to be touched, to be held, to just feel. Was everyone so weak to feel this need?

Time passed, passive but additive and still her life was too easy, comfortable. Each tick was an added thought, each tock accumulated regret. There had been no cataclysm to engulf her, nothing that could justify the years of ungrounded worry. How could she now look back and admit she had not lived through fear of living, that her whole life was a fraud, based on a lie of accepting that she was different.

She looked at the mirror and at the clock, both echoing precise boredom in their unique ways.

A brief exhale of air signalled fascination. Had the mirror been listening to her thoughts? She looked deeper into it. The steam from her bath was making its way around the room exploring with ghost-like hands and finding a friend in the mirror to help it condense. Droplets formed on the mirror, and it misted over, covering her reflection like a voile. The combination of colour and the spirits within the shapes were beautiful, enrapturing because she believed they had died with her childhood, now prettier and stronger than she had ever imagined.

The faces never formed but this time they seemed to be in her mind, close to her, a distance had been lost between them. They were delivering a message, a message of peace. Everything was now red in front of her eyes, a deep tide of colour to wash over her. Her naked body, the svelte form could find no reflection. Were her eyes even open?

She looked down. The warmth of the water reddened her skin, as she gently lowered her waiflike form into the bath. It gave her colour for the first time, the heat. She felt alive finally. She felt joy at

seeing the colours, seeing a depth to it that had been silent for so long. She could think of nothing but the red swirl of colour offering comfort. What were they saying? She was enticed by the message without word, a message sent by feeling.

She picked up the blade that would have swiped hair from her legs. The dark metal scared her as she looked down at it, an eternity passed between each breath she could now take. It could cut through life, through choice, through regret. There was no need to feel, she could silence her demons with that crisp and beautiful blade.

She cut lines of time in her wrist as her head lay back still looking at the mirror. There was no pain, something which surprised her but maybe that was just another failed expectation. She finally had answers for the voices, understanding the message they had always been giving her. The colours had given her expectation and desire even while subconsciously knowing this day would arrive. Why give her the colours back now on the day she finally understood? It seemed unfair, a teasing dance of what might have been. Was she reacting to or creating this imagery?

She was soothed by notions of peace, wanted to rest but it seemed the ticking clock began to beat faster, louder. The voices spoke of freedom, their tension aggravating her. This was her sleep, and time was still denying consolation, the tranquillity of endless rest.

There was no outside, none of that had mattered now. She had been given the touch she wanted, the touch of perfect liberty and knowledge, of the greater silence that awaited all. Fear had been confused with waiting. She was special because she was given comprehension by those that existed in the reflections of self. She couldn't afford to anger them; they too had been waiting for so long, for all those years she had failed to acknowledge what they had wanted.

The noise of time deafened her, spoiling the intimacy of her thoughts. A crimson tide lapped against her, the scarlet wonder of life being drawn from her. She liked the new weakness of her body that gave her strength in her mind. It was so hard to lift her arms, to pick up the clock, that denoted each moment that would never be.

She picked it up, with faltering arm threw with the last of her reserves of energy. The smash of glass was a symphony of freedom, music of the transparent. She had given them life, felt satisfied finally. The moment was ecstatic, to finally comprehend all there was to know and to reach out to undefined spirits that nobody was able to or even knew about..

Her eyes were misting over like the mirror used to do. Her thoughts slowed and she could not move her body at all. Her breath was shallow but still she could feel something wrap round her. It was them. The voices and shapes and colours of the mirror were becoming the arms that she had always wanted to hold her. It was their gift back. She could smile.

Her smile faded with recognition of a new message they were telling her.

Had she been looking at herself all that time? Was it true what they said? She was talking to a distant friend, her soul.

She desperately wanted to live.

They had been telling her to stop, these voices that were her. They spoke so clearly now. They had thought a child would free the colours, look for the mystery beyond. They had to stop the colours when they realised she would not destroy the mirror. All along she was meant to break the mirror not herself.

Sadness was not a word that could describe this moment.

They had wanted to tell her everything, how her soul had come to be trapped in the mirror but they could not give her any more time. She had killed them too. Their last moments approached. It was her soul but years of separation kept something distinct. They entered her mind, finding nowhere else in her dying body. She felt them absorb into the last part of her recognition.

Hope had gone, colours vanished, silence as much enemy as friend. She had belonged, had felt life, if only for one tick of the now silent clock.