

MIRROR, MIRROR

Through the years the woman looking back
at me from my mirror has been so changeable
as to be unrecognizable, from time-to-time,
by those nearest and dearest, and even by me.

The early years, before my twenties, are blurry,
but I was in the fashion business then, so have
a photographic record at least. I can look at it
and say, oh – so that's who I was back then.

After I married, I would often look in the mirror,
and depending on the day, say to the woman
I found there – You are the luckiest girl alive, or,
What have you done? Where can you run?

There were times when I would stumble into
my bathroom, afraid to turn on the light,
terrified to confront the crone I knew awaited me
in the mirror, especially if she'd been there long.

Sometimes, I would glimpse her accidentally
and she would rail at me to end it all; I would
let her, listening intently, then crawling away
to whatever hidey-hole I'd fashioned, for a time.

The crone would never leave me willingly,
on her own—I would have to run away,
most often to a hospital, away from mirrors,
for a spell, to oust her from my house—

Then, when I saw a semblance of myself reflected—
in windows, water, anywhere—I knew I could return
to family, to sanity—to try again, and I would... reinvent
the woman I thought I should be, becoming wife, mother.

After many, many years—I found the mirror less
intimidating and the crone appeared infrequently.
Or maybe I became used to her and familiarity gave
me a certain advantage—I knew I could beat her.

Or even learn to live with her and so I did.
Now she and I are one—we try to live together
in a kind of truce, with a sort of wisdom.
I know she can take me down if she puts her mind to it.

She knows I am stronger than I used to be
and don't go to ground nearly as quickly
or without putting up a fight, as I did in the
good old days —we are making it work somehow.

There is an old adage about living your life
in such a way so that you can face yourself—
look at yourself in a mirror — I get that now;
I'm finally able to do it, at least today I can.

DRAGONS AT THE GATE

An unremarkable life for all that,
mine was, and taken for granted, just so.
Neither rich nor poor but, a good marriage,
great kids; and, 'we had our health'.

After all, you can't ask for more really.
Until, you wish you had, asked at least,
to keep what you had, or barring that,
learned the value of it while you had it.

Before the dragons, licking 'round the gates,
their tongues of fire, charring
just the surfaces of cells and synapses,
crumbling what was real and what wasn't...

Until, they— the demon stuff of fairy tales
and nightmares— became commonplace,
inhabiting most of every day and all of every night
and the stranger in the mirror laughed.

Insisted the only way to slay those dragons
was to actually slaughter them. It took every vestige
of reason you had left to stay their noise,
escape frantically, go to ground, unreachable, for now.

IN MY REAR-VIEW MIRROR

She was in the middle of a busy road,
late at night, waving frantically;
drivers had to swerve to avoid
hitting her; it was disconcerting.

I was almost upon her before
I realized she was weeping;
Weeping and trying to keep cars
from running over a dog.

A dog, stretched across the
centre line, probably already dead.
But I was by her before I quite took
the scene in, then tried to decide...

Should I pull over, go back, try to help
her move her large pet off the road—
I understood how hard it must have
been to see the dog get hit, killed

But to then have to watch it get run
over and over by other vehicles...
I knew I wouldn't have been able
to stand that either.

So there she stood, alone, valiantly
warding off cars and trucks,
trying to keep them from running
over her likely lifeless dog
stretched across the centre line.

Glancing in my rear-view,
while I was stopped at a light
and still wrestling with turning back,
I witnessed a miracle.

Two cars —one travelling south,
the other north—were stopped
in the centre lane; right smack
in the middle of the road,
on either side of the girl and the dog.
Both had their flashing hazard lights on,
creating an effective barrier around the two.

Trying to see through my tears, I drove on,
found myself hoping that maybe the dog
just looked dead, and one of those drivers
was even now helping the girl get her pet
to the emergency vet...

A LIFE LIVED FLAGRANTLY

Pieces of your early life fell
into my hands again, just yesterday
and surprised me so; such brevity
linked with such candor.
Still, I had forgotten how courageous
you were inclined to be
when writing down the memories
from that storehouse
in your mind, that great private
bunker where such personal
things are stowed.

Not for the first time I wondered
whatever had possessed you
to expose yourself
to the scrutiny of those
who would eventually see the lines
for what they were; the detailing
of a life lived flagrantly,
in defiance of what was expected
by almost everyone
you ever came up against,
or with whom you will
most likely have to coexist
for the remainder of your days.

To fly in the face of convention—
is that what drove you then
and what drives you still—
To pen the words
that crawl across the page
and seep into the minds
of all who view them,
without most even realizing
the effect of such seemingly
innocent notions
on the psyche and the soul?

As they peruse your verses,
your non-rhyming poems,
that serve to tell the tale,
without saying much at all,
but saying all, just the same.

Read between the lines, they said,
when first you wrote.
I remember the sound of your laughter,
and the incredulity in your voice,
'There's just space there,
what do they think they'll find...'

At the time, I thought you were kidding;
I searched with the rest,
and there was nothing, as you said.
It wasn't until much later
when I re-read your words.
I think, in fact I know,
it was soon after your brother died,
You began to write again.
Your new stuff very different
from what I remembered:
starker somehow,
and I wanted to compare.

It was as if I'd been given
new eyes, or maybe the years had
just granted me some much needed insight,
along with the inevitable
gray hairs and experience.
Your words made sense finally,
and I saw how very bare
you'd laid your soul.

At this second first glance,
you frightened me with your boldness.
I couldn't stand to read very much
of you at once, and wondered
how it was that I had been

so misled and blind the real first time,
or if I'd tricked myself on purpose,
not willing to imperil my own sensibilities
to such a raw emotional exposing
of one's deepest private thoughts
and feelings and essence really;
the very essence of you,
put into words for anyone,
to trace or touch, or roll off the tongue.

I've wondered
if you've ever found yourself
regretting such revelations,
or if the unburdening
was as freeing
as you always said it was.