

REFLECTION

The young woman with the long brown hair was standing in front of her small vanity mirror, brushing her hair into a pony tail while she was on her tip toes, turning her torso from side to side and stretching her neck, trying to check if she missed any wrinkles on the blouse she had just ironed. The mirror never let her see much of her skirt and she had already given up trying that.

After a few minutes of contortions without too much success with the blouse, she gave up and simply finished her hair.

I really need to get a full length mirror thought Sara. This is getting ridiculous.

She finished breakfast with a last gulp of her coffee, gently tossing the bowl with most of the cereal still uneaten into the sink. There was no time for any more if she didn't want to be late for work. She had just relocated to this apartment closer to work after the last warning from her boss. But it seemed the closer she was to her office desk job, which was now only a brisk walk away, the more nothing changed. She was still rushing to be on time.

As she darted past the neighbor thrift shop, she came to an abrupt halt. Something in the window caught her eye. She walked back a few feet to get a closer look. It was what she thought it was, a floor length mirror encased in the most beautiful veined dark reddish wood, carved with intricate designs of various animals and encrusted with a greenish stones speckled with red and orange. And attached to the mirror in big numbers was the price tag—ten dollars.

That must be a mistake, she thought as she looked at the mirror again and then back to the price tag. *I'll have to check this out later.* She opened the door and ran up to the man behind the desk.

"Is that the right price for that mirror in the window, ten dollars?" she said hurriedly.

When the man behind the desk nodded, she said, "Don't sell that mirror to anyone. I'm interested. I'll be back right after work. OK?"

She turned and was headed towards the door even before she heard the man say "OK".

As she went through the doorway, she thought she heard him say, "Not to worry."

That was nice of him she thought. And he doesn't even know me.

The work day moved too slowly for Sara. She kept staring at the clock and counting the minutes in between phone calls, typing letters, and working some numbers for her boss. Right before lunch time, she asked her boss if she could leave a half hour early if she skipped her lunch and

smiled when he said yes. So when four-thirty came she was out the door, sprinting to the thrift shop.

As she entered the shop she read the man's name on the door. *A personal touch never hurts* she thought.

"Hi, Mr. Finley!" she said when she walked up to the desk, but not before taking a quick look at herself in the mirror. "I'm Sara. I asked about the floor length mirror this morning. I see you still have it."

Mr. Finley nodded. "No one really wants it," he said in a rather subdued tone. "It's defective. Reflections are distorted and there's even a dark strip across the reflection in the center of the mirror.

"Maybe it just has to be re-silvered," said Sara. "I've heard about that."

"I doubt that's it," said Mr. Finley. Not that you can see the silver that makes it reflect. Seems there's a thin layer of lead covering the silver and both seem to be melted right into the glass. I've had it tested and no one has ever seen anything like that before. Their tests show there is silver behind the lead, but they can't seem to melt the lead."

"Well, even if the mirror is defective," said Sara, "that frame is lovely. What's it made of?"

"I've check on that too," said Mr. Finley. "It's an exotic wood called Bloodwood from South Africa. Apparently the wood looks like it bleeds when it's cut and I've heard that the natives believe it has magical powers."

"Hasn't anyone wanted to buy the mirror just for the frame," said Sara.

"I've had a lot of customers ask about the wooden frame," said Mr. Finley. "But I've never been able to get the frame off the mirror. Every time I try, it sounds like the mirror is ready to snap. So I stop. I don't try anymore. Defective or not, it's still a special mirror and I wouldn't want to break it.

"What about the stones. They're beautiful. Doesn't anyone want them?"

Mr. Finley smiled. "They're Bloodstones. They're supposed to have healing powers. I can't get them off either. They seem to be permanently imbedded in the wood and the wood wouldn't cut. So it's all or nothing. But as I said, the reflection is distorted."

Strange, thought Sara. *I didn't notice any distortion or dark strip a minute ago when I looked at myself.*

“Hasn’t anyone wanted to buy it just to have in the house? It would make a beautiful ornamental piece.

“You’re not the first person to ask that,” said Mr. Finley. “Lots of couples inquire about it and argue over it a lot. The women like it and want to buy it, but when they look at it with their husbands they change their minds. One elderly woman actually bought it and took it home. But she returned it a few days later. She said the mirror told her to bring it back to me. I assume she referred to the distortion. Some other elderly couples also took it home but soon returned it with the same complaint. The men even said the mirror actually made them uncomfortable.

“So I thought I would just warn you what some people experienced.”

“Perhaps the mirror is twisted and that gives the effect of a distortion,” said Sara. “So if you look at your reflection a certain way, you don’t see it.”

“I’m sure it’s not that,” said Mr. Finley. “There’s no sign of it being out of alignment. I’ve even had it measured with a laser. The glass is an exact six foot high on each side and in the middle and an exact forty inches across wherever measured. The wood is exactly six inches all the way around—all very precise.

“And I’ve looked at myself in it at every conceivable angle, and my reflection is always distorted. Come! Take a look for yourself. Go stand in front of it!”

Sara stepped in front of the mirror again. She stared at a perfect reflection and admired the whole of herself for the first time in a long time. And as she did the dark red veined wooden frame caught her eyes and captivated her. It was beautiful, and mesmerizing. She looked back to the mirror.

“What is that engraved on the bottom?” she asked.

“It’s etched right into the glass,” said Mr. Finley. “It’s most likely the maker’s name, some B. W. Ayre and the number 1692. It could be a date, which would make it quite old. But I don’t see how they could make such a complex mirror back then.”

“Nothing seems to be wrong with my reflection,” said Sara as she stared again at her image, and she turned to Mr. Finley and shrugged her shoulders.

Mr. Finley gave her a look like she was poking fun at him and shook his head.

“I’m not kidding,” said Sara. “There’s nothing wrong with it. Here take a look.”

Mr. Finley walked over to the mirror and stood next to her. There in the mirror, both his and her reflection were distorted, with a dark black line across their middle. "See what I mean?" he said.

Sara wrinkled her brow and shook her head slightly.

Mr. Finley turned and went back towards his desk. As soon as his reflection was out of the mirror, Sara's reflection became perfect again, no distortion whatsoever and no dark line across the middle. Not only that, it seemed to soothe her as she looked at herself.

Not sure what's going on here, she thought. The mirror seems to be alright for my image but not for his.

"Perhaps something else would interest you," said Mr. Finley as he waved his hand in the direction of the rest of the store.

"No!" said Sara. "I'll take the mirror. It'll make a nice ornament. That wood is mesmerizing."

"Don't say I didn't warn you," said Mr. Finley. "If you want to return it, you'll have to pay for the pickup and delivery back to the shop."

"I'll take my chances," said Sara. "Can you have it delivered? I only live a short distance away and it seems a bit too heavy for me," and she laughed.

Mr. Finley nodded. "OK," he said, "but don't say I didn't warn you."

Sara gave him the ten dollars and her address and she went home. She had to find the right spot for it.

At home after walking around with a measuring tape, she found the perfect spot—in her living room between the two windows across from her couch. *Now I can see myself all the time* she thought.

On Saturday the mirror was delivered and the delivery men hung it and cleaned it for her, although it didn't look like it needed any cleaning.

Ah! thought Sara. *Finally my own full length mirror.* She looked at her reflection, curtsied, and twirled around once or twice. *Now I can see myself whenever I need to.*

On Monday morning Sara was up earlier than usual. She wasn't going to be late today. She showered, dressed and brushed her hair in front of her new mirror. When she was finished, she turned all around while looking in the mirror to make sure there were no wrinkles in her dress.

As she took a last look at herself in the mirror something caught her eye and she stopped to look more carefully into the mirror.

When the phone rang, she shook her head and blinked her eyes.

“Hello!” she said. There was a slight pause and then she said, “Who?”

The person on the other end of the phone said something that made her wonder what the person was talking about.

“Oh, it’s you Janice. Of course I’m alright. Never felt better. I’ll be in the office in a few minutes. Why did you call?”

“What do you mean it’s 10:30? I just got dressed and about to leave my apartment.” As she said this, Sara looked at her watch and flinched. Sure enough it was 10:30. “Please tell him I’ll . . . I’ll be right there Janice.”

All the way to the office Sara was trying to figure out what had happened. *I must have blacked out*, she thought, *while I was standing there looking at my reflection. But I just had a physical and there was nothing wrong.*

At the office Sara was concerned enough to call the doctor and told him what happened.

“Better come in,” he said.

She told her boss that she was late because she had blacked out at home and the doctor wanted to see her right away.

After spending a few hours at the doctor’s office and taking a series of tests, she was relieved to hear there was nothing indicating any serious physical problem and that she simply may have been fatigued. The doctor suggested going home and resting.

At home she went to her bedroom without ever looking at the mirror. She lay down in bed and closed her eyes. After a few minutes she thought she heard someone calling—from somewhere far away. She rose and went into the living room and looked around. There was no one there. She went to the door, opened it and saw that no one was there either. She closed the door and went back to the living room and sat down on the couch.

As she looked at the mirror, she thought she heard it again. But it wasn’t someone actually calling, at least not in words. It was more like a feeling that someone wanted her. She rose and turned to look all around the room and the feeling left her. Then she looked at the mirror, and there was her reflection and it looked just fine.

Maybe it's that frame, she thought and she remembered what had happened to her at the thrift shop. *Mr. Finley said it was supposed to have magical powers* and she laughed. *Well, just in case I'll cover it with some cloth and see if what happens.*

She took a bed sheet, tore it in half and draped each half over each side of the mirror's frame. With some other cloth she covered the top and bottom of the frame. *There, that should do it* and she felt better.

The next morning she went through her usual ritual of brushing her hair and checking for clothes for wrinkles and then again as she turned something in the mirror caught her eye and she stopped.

When the phone rang she seemed startled and her "hello" was followed by the same question from Janice.

"Just taking an extra day off," she said not wishing to have to explain all over again. "Doctor's orders. Sorry I didn't call first."

When she hung up, she looked again at the mirror. "I'm taking you back," she said out loud. "There is something wrong with you. It's more than the frame. Mr. Finley was right."

And as she looked at her reflection, the thing that caught her eye before appeared, but this time there was no trance. Her reflection in the mirror had a hint of a smile. But Sara wasn't smiling, not even a little. She was sure of that. Sara rubbed her eyes to make sure what she saw was real. When she looked at the mirror again, it was only her reflection, just as it should be.

Sara walked up to the mirror to get a closer look at her reflection. Everything was as it was supposed to be. She got even closer and stared at herself in the eyes. Suddenly the phone rang.

She blinked, turned and went to answer the phone. "Hello! . . . Yes doctor, nice of you to call . . . Well not really, I think I'm having some hallucinations right now . . . What kind of tests? I thought we did them all? . . . Oh, a brain scan and you think it's necessary? . . . Yes, I can come in tomorrow at eleven. Thank you!"

Might as well call Mr. Finley as long as I'm right here thought Sara.

"Hello, Mr. Finley? This is Sara the woman who purchased the ten dollar mirror. You were right. I wish to return it . . . Yes, I know I have to pay for it. But I would like it out of here as soon as possible. How Much? . . . Fifty dollars is fine. Tomorrow between eleven and noon is fine too. But I won't be here. I have a doctor's appointment. Is it ok to leave the door unlocked and leave the money in an envelope near the mirror? . . . Good! Thank you!"

Well at least that's taken care of and good riddance she thought.

She turned and walked past the mirror almost afraid to look at it and went into her bedroom. *Perhaps a rest would be good for me.*

As she lay on her bed, she had that feeling again, a feeling of being called. She rose and took a step into the living room. It seemed to be a little stronger and it seemed to be coming from the mirror. When she took another step closer, the sound stopped.

She walked up to the mirror and looked at her reflection. Nothing was wrong. There was no smile. *I guess I really do need that brain scan tomorrow she thought.*

But as she looked, she noticed something—something was not quite right. Her expression in the reflection, it didn't correspond to the expression she thought she had on her face. She touched her face and looked at the reflection. Then she got closer, studied the expression on her face in her reflection for a moment and touched the mirror.

Suddenly she was being pulled; something inside the mirror was pulling her in. She tried to pull away but she couldn't stop it. She was being sucked in. She screamed and as she did her whole arm was in the mirror and then her head. And then her whole body was sucked inside the mirror. Everything was bright around her and there on the other side of the glass was her living room.

This can't be she thought. It's just another hallucination and she started banging on the glass. "Help!" she yelled. "Someone help me!"

Then she heard someone behind her in the mirror laughing. "Finally!" said the voice. "I'm free."

Sara turned and screamed. She was looking at her own reflection.

"Hello, Sara," said her reflection.

"How can this be," she said. "I must be dreaming."

"You're not dreaming," said her reflection. "I am as real as you are now."

Sara turned again and looked out from the glass again. Her living room was still there on the other side of the glass, just as she left it. "Dream or no dream," she said, "I want out," and she started pounding on the glass again.

"I'm afraid that's not going to happen," said her reflection, "at least not for a while, perhaps a long while. So calm down and I'll tell you all about what's happened to you."

Sara turned back to look at her reflection and was quiet.

“My name is Virginia and I’ve been waiting inside this mirror a long time for someone like you to come over to the mirror, look at her reflection in the eye, and touch the mirror,” and Virginia gave a sort of smile, the same kind of smile that Sara had seen before.

“This is impossible,” said Sara.

“It’s not impossible. You are here, inside the mirror, talking to me. You’re inside this mirror just as I have been for the last hundred or so years. I did the same thing you did. I looked my reflection in the eye, touched the mirror and found myself here. Like you I was terrified and didn’t believe it. How could it be otherwise?”

“But the original occupant of the mirror explained it all to me and now I will explain it to you. She was a witch named Esmerelda. She lived in the outskirts of Salem Massachusetts in the late 1600s. When she heard that there were people burning witches alive in Salem, she decided to make this mirror to hide in and save her life. For some reason she had all the materials she need on hand to make the mirror and she poured all her magic into it, so that it would be her protection from anyone on the outside trying to destroy her. The mirror can’t be destroyed. It’s immortal. That makes you immortal too as long as you’re inside. Your spirit stays here alive and doesn’t age.

“I thought her name was Ayre,” said Sara. “That’s what’s on the bottom of the glass.”

“No it’s not Ayre. You missed it just like I missed it. In order to make all this magic work, she was required to give a warning to anyone who might want the mirror. For some reason it’s the witch’s code. So her warning was simply “Bwayre.” Of course, she didn’t make it easy.

“How could you do this to me?” said Sara. “How could you just reach out and grab me?”

“I didn’t do it,” said Virginia. “The mirror did it. In a way, it’s alive. It does what she intended it to do in order to free her. And now its freed me and perhaps someday will free you.”

“No!” said Sara. “This is not possible. I don’t believe it. I know I’ll wake up and it will be a bad dream.”

“It’s no dream,” said Virginia. “I’ve been here a long time, although not as long as the original occupant. When she exited from the mirror, she took my form and left.

“You can leave only when you get someone to take your place,” said Virginia, “but that someone has to be a young woman or it won’t work.

“Now it’s my turn to leave and take your form. You’ll get used to it eventually. It may take you a long time but you’ll get there. There may be a lot of crying too, but there will be no tears, not in here,” and Virginia leaped towards the glass and in a flash was outside in Sara’s living room.

As Sara looked through the glass, she could see herself on the other side of the mirror, in her living room, wearing her clothes, her hair fixed in a ponytail.

Virginia walked over to Sara's purse, took out fifty dollars and laid it on the floor in front of the mirror. "I'll do this much for you, Sara, to make sure you wind up in the thrift shop where the mirror has a better chance of being sold."

Then she primped herself, smiled, a full smile this time, waived to the mirror, and went out the front door, closing it behind her.

Sara pounded on the glass and screamed over and over. When she stopped it came to her—she wasn't dreaming. And she knew that no one would be able to hear her.