

THE MIRROR

Act One

The stage is a small one room apartment. What strikes one immediately is the simplicity of the room...almost Spartan in appearance. There is no furniture in the main room. Two people are sleeping on futons. Upon each is an elaborately designed and multi-colored tie dye blanket. To the right, backstage, separating the main room from the kitchen (which is off stage back and only imagined) is a book shelf, and in various spaces within, are tastefully placed sea shells and coral—green, blue, red twigs—like underwater life. The books—well-read copies of the Iliad, Tillich, Camus, Hemingway-- and coral should reach nearly to the ceiling, appearing as an enormous towering wave of words and underwater life, wallpaper but in three dimensions which covers the wall blocking the kitchen. The rest of the house is empty, the walls are bare except for a small mirror which rests stage left, next to a door which leads into an unseen bathroom.

The blankets, plus colors of the sea shells are incongruous with the Spartan surroundings and one soon begins to realize the room's quiet, elegant beauty contexting the splashes of color.

The lights should be dim and from backstage as the man slowly stretches and begins to rise. Only his shadow should be visible, the vaguest outline of form. Within ten to fifteen seconds the yawning and stretching should be finished, and he rolls over, In what appears to be a reflex motion, his shadow covers the person next to him and he begins caressing his mate. He holds her tightly to him, kisses her faces, rubs his hands through her hair, then says, barely audibly,

“My precious girl. Like an angel.”

She stirs slightly, sighs, moans, then turns back over to continue sleeping, with a small smile. He smiles back at her, then jumps up. The lights should be slightly brighter, but still keeping his form shadowed towards the audience. Walking to the middle of the room, he stops at a certain spot, and does twenty-five push ups, part of a morning ritual from which he never deviates.

Getting up, he walks to the bathroom, pauses in front of the mirror, stares for perhaps ten seconds, then continues into the bathroom offstage.

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Act Two

Twenty minutes have passed, and he returns hurriedly from the bathroom, switches the light on, so the room is now harshly bright. He notices the mirror has been turned around, the one into which he had earlier stared, so now a piece of oak wood is facing him. He starts to turn it back, gets half way, then returns it so it's still facing the wall.

“That’s a hell of good idea. Your kindness astounds me.” He assumes an oratorical pose. “First it was vegetarian diet based on Zen Buddhist macrobiotic formulas. The Buddha, incarnate as woman, you wanted to protect all animals and certainly, Buddha forbid, you didn’t want to eat your grandmother who may have recycled back as a turtle.

“For noble reasons, I went along. I gave up turtle soup. But now, now you’ve outdone yourself.” He points to the mirror. “Inanimate objects receive your kindness. I heard you moving around when I was in the bathroom. For what?” as he points to the mirror.

She begins to slightly sit up from the futon. Her eyes still closed, her face tired, an almost pained expression. She murmurs, “Really, you have to do your push ups and grunts while I’m still sleeping? Are you trying to prove something? Make a comparison to our differing activity levels? Let me sleep” and she pulls the blanket more tightly around her.

He does not look at her directly, ignores her comment, and continues with his wild flaring gestures.

“Did you hear the wall crying softly? Was the clarity of the mirror reflecting the room, our lives, human existence, so painful and distressing that the wall can't bear to see it? So you decided to act with kindness to spare the wall the mirror's unflinching view of reality as it is? The wall’s very existence was in peril, and you who have read about people who can speak to rocks and the rocks nodded back, felt in the depth of your empty yet empathic non –self that you

should respond to the wall's pain." His hands and head are now raised toward the ceiling. In a swooping gesture he returns his glance to her, saying, "Of course you expressed it much better than I translating your compassion into impeccable wall talk."

His voice stops short as he sees she hasn't joined him in the game. Is her silence a response, or just tiredness? Ten seconds pass. Now she is once again lying with her ear on the bed, but in a way so the audience can now see her face. It's a young face, not more than twenty-three. Long ponytail in back. Her eyes have a moist, almost sad look. Even though her skin is smooth, her expression is downcast.

She again pulls the cover tightly over her, hides her face and attempts to go back to sleep. There is still silence in the room. Slowly he tiptoes to her, sneaks this hand around the tie dye blanket and rips it off.

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Act Three

Suddenly she becomes animated, like an attacking grizzly, hands extended "GRRR!" and pulls him on top of her, folding her face into his shoulder, and putting her hands behind his neck. They roll over and caress, both laughing.

He starts to speak, but as he does so she puts her finger over his lips, jumps out of bed, and heads toward the bathroom, turning briefly to say

"What impeccable insight. You and only you are allowed to interpret me to the world. However, I'm not sure the world is yet ready to learn wall talk."

Then tossing her pony tail back, she continues: "Even if they could speak it, I'm sure they aren't yet ready to understand it." With that she walks into the bathroom, wearing only panty briefs. Her body is beautifully proportioned. Her breasts, not over large, are luscious and bountiful. Her stomach is tight and her hips are slim. He sits and watches as she gives him a few wiggles and then enters the bathroom. She, very self-consciously however, avoids look in the direction of the now covered mirror.

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Act Four

He folds up the tatami, goes over to the mirror and turns it around once again, so it is now facing the room. “I’m going to make some coffee. Sound good?” When she doesn’t respond, he looks into the bathroom and with a shy smile notes the slightly dimmed lights, but also once again how lovely she is. And she, looking at herself in the mirror, seems to agree.

He jokes, “Sorry to distract you from your self-admiration but I’m asking about coffee?” She makes an annoyed, though coyish nod in ascent. He then turns the mirror back to face the room, and goes off backstage, behind the book shelves, into the kitchen. She returns stage right, sees the bed folded, smiles, blows a kiss to him in the kitchen. As she does, she catches sight of her hand motion in the mirror and turns.

Almost against her will she walks over to it.

Spieglein, Spieglein, an der Wand,

Wer ist die Schönste im ganzen Land?”

She starts laughing but a bit too frantic. “I hate you,” she whispers. I hate you,” (a little louder), “you and your indifference. Sitting there watching me change. Every detail you reflect so accurately. Every change, every mark. But so indifferently, so uncaring” She puts her head between her hands and starts crying.

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Act Five

“Is today sugar and cream, sugar only, cream only or black?” comes a voice from the kitchen”

“Black only. ”

“Ah hah, great self-control. No splurge, eh?”

She ignores him and returns to the bathroom to dry her face. He carries a tray from the kitchen with coffee, milk, sugar; sets the tray on the tatami, and takes a table from next to the book shelf, unfolds it and places the tray on it. He

sits in a lotus position on a pillow and begins to drink his coffee, with just a small pinch of sugar.

When she returns it is evident she's been crying although she's trying to hide it with a smile. There is the slightest trace of make-up around the corners of her mouth.

He avoids looking at her, and says. "I brought sugar and cream separately. I'll let you have the honor of fixing your own proportions, as you wish." She smiles. "Thanks for the free will and vote of confidence." He is not sure about her tone, but doesn't want to ask, aware something feels different, but not sure what.

They both sip their coffee in silence, looking very small beneath the overhanging book case, the coral colors. both of them surrounded by empty space, submerged in their inner worlds.

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Act Six

He looks at her face intensely and comments, "You're wearing makeup now, aren't you? I can tell." He takes his finger and runs it along the edge of her mouth, then looks at the powder there. "Look." He sticks his finger toward her face" She pulls back in fear then defensively and taut lipped with raised voice, anger hiding tears, she pushes his finger away "J'Accuse!? Yes, and so what. So what if I wear a little make-up?" Now her voice rises even higher, almost screaming. "Does this remove me from an ideal woman? Am I blemished and disfigured, lesser in your eyes now that I have chosen to use makeup... are your illusions shattered?"

He remains calm. "You don't *have* to use makeup. Of all people to say that. You're beautiful just as you are."

She jumps up and runs to the mirror. "Look," she points to the line on her face. "What's that?" "This," (pointing to the mirror) "doesn't lie. It hides nothing."

He shrugs his shoulders. "You're missing the big picture. It's so small. You barely notice it."

Still angry and hurt: "Do you see it?"

“Yes, but it’s so....”

“Have you ever seen it before?” She stares intensely at him.” He seems to cringe under her gaze. He wonders what is the best way to avoid further escalation and to minimize the trouble he’s in. He decides on honesty. “When you point it out so carefully, yes, I’ve seen it before. In the mornings when I caress you, I see it.” (She starts to speak, but instead in a rage, takes the mirror off the wall and slams it on the futon).

He goes over puts a hand on her shoulder, while he calmly picks up the mirror and holds it up to her. “Look, you’re elegant. I love you as you. A small wrinkle...you’re acting as childish as you look. Your face is beautiful in the mornings.”

She leaves his hand, yet responds with a quiet but controlled fury. “It’s ugly. It’s vulnerable. And that’s how I feel in the mornings—you are like this mirror scrutinizing me when I’m just awakening and at my most exposed and unprotected. And I don’t need your push ups at that hour, either.”

He stares at her, bewildered, feeling helpless. Wondering if he should look at her or look away.

She rages, then starts crying, whispering, “Stop looking. Stop staring. I feel you are like sunlight, searching every fault, every defect.” She hides her head in her hands, again crying. He puts his hand on her hand. She bushes it off—through the tears: “No. I don’t want your sympathy. Your pity means nothing. It makes this no more livable. You can’t fix it.”

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Act Seven

“It doesn’t need to be fixed. It’s so small. It means nothing. I don’t understand.”

She blows her nose into a napkin, still tearful. “It’s more than a small wrinkle. I can love you only when I’m free to love you. Beauty gives me that freedom. I need beauty.” She stands up. “Beauty makes me free.” More sniffing then, “I want to be loved without worrying whether I’m worthy of it.”

He's afraid to hold her, so stays seated. "But you are worthy. I think you're beautiful. Elegant. But that aside, I admire your intellect. But that aside. It's you, just you, I love."

Angry at not being understood, she retorts, "I need more than love."

There is a long silence as both let these words sink in. She becomes calmer, then says, "I need to keep from decaying. The wrinkle is only the start. Slowly the furrows become deeper and deeper, better grooved, making my face craggy, contouring my features into ugly, twisted pieces of flesh." She starts to quiver. "I'm helpless. Even though I try, I feel myself slipping. I know I'm deceiving myself to think I can hold back this tide. Slowly the mirror shows me that deception. The battle is hopeless, uphill and hopeless." She quietly gets up.

"Sometimes I want to stop battling."

Again there is a long silence as she turns her back to the mirror "I want to let my hair become tangled and my stomach bloat out. I'm tired of walking straight and tall. I want to let stubbles grow under my arm pits and hair along my legs." Then, in almost a pleading voice: "Don't you see, I can't win, It's all so empty and futile, and no one can help."

She walks over to the mirror, puts it back up, facing outward, then returns to her seat at the table.

They both sit silently, in the dim light, slowly stirring the now cold darkened coffee.

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Act Eight (2023) :

The curtain starts to descend, gets nearly half way, down, then slowly begins to rise. As it does so, the lights in the room become slightly brighter. They are still seated. She reaches for a cube of sugar, looks up at him and tosses it toward him. "En garde, Monsieur."

He catches it. "Nice toss, worthy opponent."

“What a show off. Catches sugar and does push ups.” She’s now smiling. “As long as we’re battling the inexorable crush of mortality, there’s no reason we can’t add a little sweetness to today, some respite and pleasure. As he wisely says about the Old Man “Man can be destroyed..but not defeated.”

He smiles at her. “On that we can agree. It’s a long battle. It’s all about attitude. Might as well enjoy what we can...while we can....and do it together.”

She takes his hand. “Does that mean we still have to be watched by the mirror...and each other?”

He looks at her directly. She starts to avoid his glance, but then looks directly at him. He is aware of how beautiful her blue eyes are and tells her., “I love looking into those amazing blue eyes. Such beauty. Window to the soul and all that.” He squeezes her hand. “Yes, I want us to know each other, battle together into old age, still holding hands.”

She smiles, but also has a few tears. “I feel your love for me. I’m working on feeling that love for myself. As I am. As I age.”

“Wise woman.”

“Now, I could do without your silly morning monologues. A simple good morning sweetheart cuddle would be fine. And a few less and quieter grunts as you struggle to meet your push up goals.”

“Touché. Hitting me right where it hurts. How about when I begin with singing you Homer’s Iliad in the original Greek?”

The mirror, facing the room, observes them as they make up, and begin to cuddle like two little puppies on the tatami.

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