

On Reflection

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From far away, with hypertrophic eyes, one can train the pattern as a dream, from the dreamer, into the eyes' own-mind.

It wasn't much of a sign, rusted and dangling in the breeze that should have been too weak to shift. Yet, it was apprehended as one nonetheless. *OWN-EYE RICK*, it read, spaced-out in bolded, grey lettering. What kind of fucking name was that? sneered Nathan to no-one, to the other side in the head. If *I* had the bloody chance to name a mirror shop, he sniggered, I would've *reflected* a bit more on the name. Neck bent backward, continuing to stare upward at the sign, his mind momentarily glanced the edge of something. A flicker. How its letters were a strange display: marred as a dusted grey, specs and flecks of black and white, spaced with perceived, yet curiously unnoticed division. It seems to be, having closely observed closeness, that observation dismantles before rebuilding. So, standing on the concrete outside, candidly on the suburban street-side – not without making sure no one was looking – Nathan peered inside the glass, eyes-cupped-by-hands to avoid stray reflection.

Taken from behind, considered as benign beneath the sign, Nathan was built very similar to a man. Like a God, like the perfect solder that joins the metallic corner with blinding strength; golden hair, skin like syrup. And, from the front: light, bright, wasted eyes. Staring, but not seeing, all sides of the sign. Taken from within, there was resemblance of an early scaffold, a structure – certainly – albeit as inanimate and cold as animation permits. Cold, like the leaf eaten to the vein-bones. Old, like nighttime visions, continuously rinsed behind eyes. Above his body, the store-shop sign continued dangling sadly, singing a soft, wakeful pith.

The abyss, considered as no-thing, tasked in the womb of the woman, certainly awakens and shifts. Nathan's hand-cups fell from face to flanks as Melissa approached the storefront from the street-side, strutting with a deep pride. Forming and formed from the complex abyss, Melissa certainly was, perhaps and not, one to kiss. Kiss the air with sweet wisps of the honeyed-scent that would not and could not tear him down. And, as she entered the stupidly named mirror-store, Nathan definitely did not cast an internal sigh as his bright eyes glided about, around and down the curve of her tight little ass, rippling in that slight little belt of a jiggle that works when women walk. Nothing, *no-thing*, tears a man down. So, he followed her inside.

Followed the ripple inside.

Just. I was just.

The store was small and crowded; infinite, in a simple way. Some mirrors were stacked, out of use in the back corners. But most were on display. Plastered and propped along the walls in ornate figures, the suspected division of the walls into grids, like in most mirror stores, like in most instantiations of conventional representation, was not adhered to. Instead, there seemed to be corridors, multiple paths or floors through which one could walk to make the final purchase. Strings of lights ran up and down in strategic webs, creating the illusion of lumened infinity, the aesthetic marketing strategy so contemporary. Each pair of walls constituting each corridor had different depth, a different communication of extent, depending on the width of the mirrors' separation. The narrow corridors, letting one figure shuffle through awkwardly with their body rotated to the side, like a trapped crab, gave shallow, finite glimpses of the infinite. The wider corridors, on the other hand, granted real suspicion of the culmination of infinity, and much was lost and gained from glimpses, either way.

I was just. Looking for uh-hh, mirrors? said Melissa to the clerk. Evidently, she had made it to the till. Mirrors *are* for looking, winked the clerk, whose hands and face were greying, displaying a peppered speckle of hairs coarse and thin. He disappeared

into the back room, for what seemed like a moment too long. Melissa looked to the ceiling, which immediately, surprisingly or not, reflected back fourteen and tenfold versions of self. Each was just as gorgeous, just as blonde and plump-lipped. She blinked, as a wink, to herself, for herself; and the other sides returned the half-gaze. Fluffing her hair now, each ceilinged self exposing the cleavage she would never reveal to the guy, shaped like a man, traipsing through the door of the mirror store to greet her.

Though it looked like Nathan was beside her, he had not yet made it through the single arterial corridor leading to the till. The clerk, arguably senile, had at one point, or perhaps many, busied himself with forging specific illusory grounds, using certain mirrors placed at certain angles and prominence, to lead impatient patrons to believe their figure had completed the maze in amazing time, simply by setting foot in the store. Nathan saw the forfeited light of his body uptaken beside Melissa, and allowed the thought of an expanding future in the motel room next door to unfold and embolden. He tried to tap her on the shoulder, but struck glass instead.

Her giggle cascaded through the tunnels, taunting as the gauntlet he required for his next step. Nathan's jaw set; back arched.

"Is this a fucking joke?"

"Now now," said the clerk, returned from his mild endeavours, just a moment too soon. He had a cardboard box tucked underneath each armpit, and he laid them onto the counter before him. "My name is Rick, and I welcome you to my humble store. Do not be afraid to look."

"Ok, Rick," Nathan seethed through steaming teeth. "You've got three seconds to tell me the steps, or I'll show you and your precious fucking mirrors my fist."

Melissa and the clerk both sighed.

It seemed only shutting one's eyes would provide the slight difference to hinder the hindrance of careful visual dance. Or, put simply, Melissa had shut her eyes and

felt her way through the corridors before. Fortunately or unfortunately, Nathan prided himself on being thick: thick in musculature, armature, girth, wit and whim. Fortunately or unfortunately, his skull had not avoided the attack of thickness, too.

“Oh, honey,” Melissa cooed. “Close your eyes and let my voice guide you.”

So, uncertainly, motivated by the prospect of not-ever being torn down, Nathan closed one eye and stumbled. His hands flew out before him, shattering and shuddering into the glass walls. Irregular and haphazard as his temper, shards spluttered about the floor, revealing the black backboard of the mirrors he broke. Staring, just for a moment into the shattered mirror, Nathan saw the outline of himself with the inside missing. The fingertips, hair and outline of the silhouette moved and breathed, but the volume of the centre did not reflect back; the main parts were indeed, gone. Or – perhaps – they never were. Aghast, he stumbled back, shattering a second reflection, which would have been whole, behind him.

“Get me the *fuck* out of here,” he stammered, cut and clambering around on the floor.

Melissa and the clerk smirked slightly at the sight of the empty man punching his way through the window of the store to escape. If he had looked upwards, he would have seen the mild arrows plastered in masking-tape on the ceiling, directing customers through the vision, although (not once) directed past the till.

“Does this happen often?” Melissa mused, staring at the glistening red shards. She had chosen to wear ‘Periodical Red’ as her lipstick shade, earlier that morning.

“Almost every month. My insurance premium capped after the first financial year of owning this store,” he mused on a similar but different wavelength, rubbing the greying stubble on his greying skin with the back of his hand. A series of strangely spaced scratches marred the back of his left palm – lines clustered and crusted with red specs, each receding, somehow, into a dust that was almost, but not yet, gone.

“That’s cute,” she said, smacking her lips together. “Can you show me the set-up?”

“Certainly, ma’am,” he nodded, moving to unwrap the boxes from the backroom. “It would be, certainly, a pleasure.”

Taking a knife to the boxes’ middle, the clerk sliced a thin and wobbling hairline down the center of each. Peeling the halves to the side, he revealed the two initial reflectors to the customer.

“You place them like so,” he remarked, gesturing with his eyes to his hands’ quick positioning of the two rectangular, certainly not peculiar, mirrors.

They faced each other quite simply, propped up with a wire-stand. A single string of lights was wound around the inner border of either mirror, and he flicked a switch to turn them on. The lights mumbled as they flickered to find the steady pulse. Pushing the mirrors closer made the depth lessen, pulling them further the opposite.

“That’s it?”

Her tone removed the question from its utterance.

“That’s it.”

His was never intended as question.

“Alright, then.”

She removed the wads of money from her wallet. He eyeballed the remaining notes wedged between the folds.

“The price has increased from last month, ma’am.”

Melissa’s gaze glossed the linear path from the clerk’s eyes to her hands.

“Oh no you don’t,” she scowled, pulling her moneyed-hand away. “What’s in that for me?” She eyeballed the two-mirror setup. “It doesn’t look anything different to what I’ve seen you sell to all the others. Why should I pay for the cost of a third that’s not there?”

The clerk started tutting. “No, no. You see, you clearly don’t see.” He clucked and muttered and pointed to the space between the mirrors. “You must look for yourself, with your own eye. Please place your head here.”

His index finger tapped the counter impatiently. “You will see. Follow my voice.”

Not without trepidation, Melissa bent down to look between.

Gazing slowly to the left, a sea of selves was revealed: strung backward, winding as a staggered outline toward a vanishing point that did not exist; that was engineered and posited as a believable, flexible double. The two bred the third, the third implied the fourth, the fifth and six and seventh breathed as though they were borne before the blink. She remained stuck there, time dilating so delineation fruitless, the loop of self positioned as the accumulation of infinitesimal temporal slices constituting the volume of the certain self-less moving point, speeding as a double, as the-tip-of-the-tongue-but-just-beyond, always beneath or beyond, so we run, always run and turn to keep away or stay insane, we race and bend and forge the name, chasing and turning to catch glimpses of moments that were never lost or replete. Lost or complete. Turning to face the middle, Melissa’s peripheries picked up the chains of selves-information from both mirrors, now, which was certainly not advertised in the fine print as a fine thing to do, which the arrows definitely did not advise, which certainly began now as overlapping through the mind in a single image too large for singularity, suspended above the head, capturing the way they braided and snaked, double-helixed, as she swayed. Twisted in the braid of light she traveled, silent as sirens did the self retreat, unbraided and remade as negation, the sensation of voidation that consumes, splits and spits one out as the whole constituted by holes, as whole-parts of the whole which, at times, at points like now, morph into an auspicious moment of translucent, opulent webbery without weight.

The shimmer.

At the final glance, the fractured-chain collapsed, condensed, as a textured blur spun around an infinitely twining spine curling inward toward the vanishing point that now, only, Now, did exist.

“It’s—I’m—they’re all...” The woman stood up again to face the face that now seemed blank and hidden. “I didn’t—I never even knew. Are they all—you know...*me?*”

He smiled at her gently. “Oh, oh, oh. You better look again, to see.”

And so she did.

And, as she did, as she bent to glance deeper into the diaphanous nature of self-ish chains, the clerk named Rick struck a hand behind each mirror, closed his eyes, drew in a breath, and swiftly smashed her skull betwixt.