

The Mirror

By Lola Montez II

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I peer at myself in the mirror, my tired green eyes gaze back, exasperated. “What the fuck?” I say aloud. I heard earlier in the night that a woman I vaguely knew had died the previous day, 45 years old, unexpectedly. Or was it really?

We attended the same meeting, her message was always good, saying the right things about the topics, making sure to smile and nod at the appropriate times when others were sharing. I had gotten the feeling we were on the same page, like she really understood. She appeared straight-laced, worked a white collar job and seemed to be there for her husband and children. Funny thing about the meetings. I don't know anyone outside the rooms and as a result, people are only what I hear in their words. All I could do is wonder how her life ended. Perhaps her struggle wasn't only with alcohol, maybe there were outside issues.

I finish up in the bathroom and head to the living room to read a bedtime story to my 9-year-old son. He's gotten so tall this past summer and I can't believe his feet are the same size as mine! His eyes were once bright blue now tend more toward green, an in-betweeny bluey green he likes to call aquamarine. He is growing up so fast and I reflect that it seemed slow getting him to this point while at the same time it doesn't seem that long ago that he was a baby. Or that his dad and I were splitting up over the weekend of his third birthday. 9 years old and I catch glimpses of a thoughtful, kind and generous human being within the rambunctious, clumsy child that he is. The woman will never know her daughters at this age and I contemplate that it's heartbreaking they will never know their mom.

We climb into bed to snuggle before he nods off for the night. I have to be careful not to fall asleep alongside him as I have a few things to do before I actually turn in myself. I kiss him and tell him I love him before curling up behind him and it doesn't take long for him to fall asleep. I lay awake, mind swirling with words, wondering how

an enamoured parent could ever leave their creation behind. Other people's choices baffle me and I know I have to write my thoughts down, otherwise I will never make it to sleep later when it's my turn to climb into bed. I've decided that writing is more important than putting the dishes away tonight and so I begin.

The words fly off the tips of my fingers and I can barely keep up, they're coming out as though sent from a higher power. I keep writing, examining my anguish, my discontent, my anger. Angst subsides as the keyboard bears the brunt of my mood and I feel myself letting go. Maybe I should spend some time considering my own sobriety while I'm at it. Maybe say some thank you's to my Creator. I realize it's been awhile since I've prayed to her and decide to take some time now. I ask her to watch over the grieving husband and daughters in their time of need, I ask her to help all those who suffer and the people they are hurting as well. I pray for many people, asking that others receive what they need when they need it. I also express gratitude for the abundance I have had in my life lately. It is a great day to be alive and my contented sigh relaxes me.

I seem to feel better and decide it's time to go to sleep, Sunday morning will come soon enough and we have a lot to do. I climb into bed and decide that I'd like to listen to a meditation about overcoming loss while nodding off and find something appropriate on YouTube. It never takes me long to fall asleep when I'm concentrating on wise words.

I wake up feeling rejuvenated, refreshed, energized, the loss of the woman seems a bit further away and I busy myself with the routine of the morning; stretching, writing, some meditation if I'm lucky to pull that off before my son wakes up. I pour boiling water onto the grounds in the coffee press and put dishes away from the night before while waiting the allotted time before plunging. The coffee tastes heavenly, particularly when I add my French vanilla soy creamer which has taken the place of Bailey's. I sit on the couch and review my words from the night before, yesterday's loss resonating more now that I'm awake.

Why would the loss of someone I don't know bother me so much? Is there a fear that I could somehow suffer the same fate as her despite my own personal desire to remain sober? Is there something I'm not being brutally honest about? I've gone through those steps, I know myself, so why does this natter away? I still don't even know how she died. The newspapers say it was a short, unexpected life-threatening illness. But I do wonder.

My son wakes up full of energy and I'm swept into his wave of enthusiasm for life. We make pancakes, they have to be just right otherwise he won't eat them. Not dark, or even slightly crispy. We eat them smothered in butter and syrup, I wash mine down with coffee while he opts for orange juice. It's time to brush our teeth and get dressed because we're heading to the skate park so he can scoot with a group of his friends. It never ceases to amaze me how social he is and how much enjoyment he derives from spending that time with his friends. I don't remember having close friends and I certainly would never have gone somewhere for a group activity until much later on in life.

We hang out there for a couple of hours and I chat with some of the moms. They're nice ladies but I never feel as though I fit in with them either. I don't really mind, I'm not a snob or anything, it's just hard to find things in common with them I guess. I'm in a relationship, literally the love of my life, but we don't live together in a house with a white picket fence. Okay, even at all. And we're pretty adventurous as far as activities that you'd talk about with your friends, so I'm not in the same head space. But I have a nice time, hanging out in the sunshine, watching the boys showing off and daring each other to try bigger tricks.

It will be time to get going soon; I need to drop my son with his father for the week. We've just started a new system of trading weeks and I'm not sure I'm sold on it yet. I'll need a few more exchanges before I'm ready to accept this is the way our life will be. I'm not unhappy, I just wish I could be more happy about it. Sundays are bittersweet as they're the day I say goodbye to my son, but the day I say hello to my love for the week. We rush home and pull together his gear before racing back to the car and heading to his dad's. He's so excited to see his dad that he barely says

goodbye as he opens the door. "Honey, I'm not going to see you for a week, I need a hug and a smooch," he acquiesces and I tell him I love him and that I'll see him the following Sunday. I also let him know, as always, that if he wants to make any changes to the living arrangements, we are open to ideas. He acknowledges this and then slips out the door to greet his waiting dad. I wave and leave them to catch up on the week.

I drive back to my place and grab most of what I'll need for the upcoming week at my boyfriend's house. I never worry too much about making sure I'm fully prepared as I work only 3 minutes from my place and can always swing by if I need anything. All my worries melt away as I begin the 10 minute drive to his place, anticipating an adventure-packed Sunday night. I daydream about what we could possibly find ourselves doing with the few remaining hours and drive a little faster. I burst through his door 8 minutes later, happy to taste his warm lips and feel his strong arms folding me against his body.

"Nice to see you babe," he says once we finally disengage, "it's been a long week!" We agree and quickly set to catching up. Laying naked on the floor of his kitchen he tells me he has something exciting to share. I can hardly wait as he runs upstairs to grab it and am delighted when he comes down holding a tiny package. "Ooooh, my favourite!" I exclaim, the exhilaration of knowing that I'm about to enjoy cocaine is almost enough to send me to the moon. I watch in breathless anticipation as he prepares it while my stomach flips and flops. I acknowledge there have been an unprecedented number of fentanyl overdoses in my area, but that's what happens when you live on the street and have no option but to buy bad drugs.

He hands me the rolled bill; I can hardly believe my good fortune, it's been quite the week. I can't drink because I literally turn into a stark raving lunatic. When I do get to spice up my life with a bit of cocaine now and again, it's just pure fun and enjoyment. I deserve this! Taking care not to exhale while I stand over the powder on the mirror, I inhale the first line in my right nostril and immediately fill my left with another. Suddenly, I'm laying on the floor and am having a hard time drawing in a breath. From a distance I hear my name being yelled and...gurgling? Is the dishwasher on? Odd. I think it's me. In my last moments, I feel sorrow at the thought of someone having to explain this to my son.