

## The Mirror

Brian Waters sat in his favorite armchair, holding tightly to the day's first cup of coffee. He raised it to his lips to take a sip and nearly spilled the hot contents down his shirt as the phone rang.

"Can you get that," he hollered, both unmotivated and uninspired to get up. The phone rang again, seemingly louder now that the silence had been shattered.

"Anybody?" he called out, but was already pulling himself to his feet. With the cup clutched tightly in hand, Brian answered the cordless. He didn't remember letting go of the coffee cup, only the pain as the hot liquid splashed across his bare feet.

He digested the news as he sopped up coffee from the carpet. Doors slammed outside, and a moment later the front door swung open.

"Oh, hey honey," Brian's wife Deb said as their daughter Brianna bounced in, a bag of donuts clutched triumphantly in her small hands.

"We got donuts daddy! Donuts!" the girl sang loudly and danced in circles.

"Alright, Bree, you take those to the kitchen and we'll get a plate for you," Deb said, turning the girl in the right direction and giving her a loving nudge.

"Donut day," Brian said, suddenly remembering.

"Yeah, you want one with your coffee?" Deb asked.

"Uh..." Brian answered flatly.

"What's the matter Hon?"

"Phone call...about mom. She's gone," Brian muttered, still trying to make sense of the news.

"Oh honey, I'm so sorry. At least she's found peace," Deb said compassionately, and moved to console him. "Should we head down there, to help with arrangements?"

Brian raised his head and looked into his wife's eyes. He shook his head, as if coming out of a spell and cleared his throat. "Uh, no. I mean, they can't find her. They said the service showed up and she was just gone. It's been two weeks and I am just now finding out," Brian finished bitterly.

Deb sat back, shock and anger coloring her cheeks. "What?!" she growled, and cursed in a rather unladylike fashion. Brian filled her in on the other details. In her usually stoic fashion she waited until he was done to unload both barrels.

For what felt like a long time, Brian sat back and let his wife vent, about his family, and about their strange and dysfunctional relationships. Her passion reminded him why he loved her so much, because she could cut through all of the bull and see things objectively.

A week passed and they traveled the three hundred miles south, where they were greeted, in a rather lukewarm fashion by his extended family. They put on their best happy faces, shaking hands, hugging, and reminiscing.

The mortuary director insisted his mother was in no condition for viewing. He told them that by the time emergency workers found her; "she had been damaged". Brian found that he didn't have the fortitude, or the desire to press for further details.

Little Brianna, blessed with grace and wisdom well-beyond her five years, willingly served as an anchor for Brian and Deb, keeping them from straying too far emotionally. And at other times, she became like a small, but undeniably mighty coastal wall, allowing the strange and unrelenting waves of his family to crash against her, saving them from further awkwardness. Like always, Brian felt like he didn't belong.

Brian watched Bree pick her way through the crowd of his family, engaging uncles, aunts, and cousins with all the noblesse oblige of a trained dignitary. Thanks in no small part to little Bree, Brian and Deb survived the wake and funeral.

“We’re almost done!” Deb said supportively and squeezed Brian’s hand. They sat side by side around a large oval table in the conference room of Taylor, Taylor, and Schmitt, awaiting the reading of the will. Seemingly tired of her mother after only a few minutes, Brianna crawled over and settled into Brian’s lap. “Hello, Daddy the Brave!” she said, holding his face.

“Hello, Bree the Wee,” Brian said with a smirk and pinched her cheek. She giggled and cuddled into his chest as the lawyer entered through a side door.

No one spoke as the lawyer settled in, which felt like an unnatural situation for a room crowded with Brian’s family. Finally, after several minutes of opening folders, shifting papers, and straightening her suit jacket, the lawyer began.

First she read a letter written by his mother, addressed to all present. Brian swallowed down a hard lump in his throat, taken aback by the disembodied sentiments. Next, the lawyer opened a leather portfolio and cleared her throat.

“Before I get to Amelda’s legacies, I have to read a short statement prepared by the firm,” she said, and although no one spoke, Brian could feel the tension build.

“Amelda revised her *will*. Due to money mismanagement and inflation, much of the estate will be sent to auction to satisfy debts. Thus, her new *will* reflects a single bequest to each biological heir,” the lawyer read. The family shifted uncomfortably, but Brian didn’t find this a startling revelation.

|

Next the lawyer rattled off a short list, articulating which heirlooms his mother had left to whom and so forth. One by one the room cleared, until at last it was only Brian's little family and the lawyer.

"Brian Waters, your mother has bequeathed to you her antique mirror," she said in a dry, clinical tone and dropped the sheaf of paper onto the table before him. Brian picked up the piece of paper and stared at it, but it might as well have been in Latin.

An hour later they were cruising north on Interstate 35, the claw feet of his mother's antique mirror sticking out of the SUV's rear hatch.

"That mirror has been in your family for how long?" Deb asked.

"My mom always said that it had been a wedding present given to her great grandmother. So, a long time I guess," Brian offered.

"Hmm." Deb nodded her head appraisingly.

It took Brian and his good friend Shane working together to get the massive mirror into their house and situated. They first put it in their dining room, but quickly found that it was an unusual spot for such a mirror. Deb and Brian then hefted the intricately carved piece of furniture into his office, where it was placed next to his bookshelf.

Life settled down in the Waters household. Brian occupied himself, using his work to shut out the troubling thoughts of his lost mother and dysfunctional family. Deb would stop by the mirror occasionally, checking to ensure her scarf or hat was straight before bustling out the door.

"Dad, I saw grandma," Brianna said brightly one day, dancing into Brian's office and twirling to accentuate her princess dress.

|

“That’s nice dear,” Brian responded absently, not looking up from the stacks of papers. The following morning they found her asleep on the floor before the mirror, curled up with her favorite quilt. When they asked her why she wasn’t in her bed she simply said, “Because I wanted to put on a fashion show for grandma.”

Brian and Deb grew concerned when Brianna continued to hover near the mirror, and talked incessantly about her grandmother. Brian finally started locking the office door. A week later, Deb and Brian settled into bed to read before going to sleep. Brian heard Brianna slide out of bed, and the telltale pitter-patter of her feet. He waited, but when she did not appear around the corner he slid out of bed.

He was moving down the stairs when he heard Bree’s voice from the office. “Grandma, I’m coming,” he heard her say. Brian skidded around the corner in the living room, only to find the door to his office wide open. Brianna flashed him a wide grin and then took off at a run, headed straight for the mirrored glass.

Brian lurched forward, “No, stop!” he cried out, but the glass did not shatter as his daughter reached the mirror. Instead, she passed clean through. Frantic, Brian rushed over to the mirror, running his hands over every inch of the intricately carved frame.

“Deb! Get down here! It’s Bree,” he cried. He stood before the mirror, looking at his reflection in the glossy surface. But something didn’t look right. Tentatively Brian put his fingertips up to the reflective surface and as soon as his skin made contact everything changed. His stomach lurched, and the world flipped end over end. His body was moving forward, but it felt like his insides couldn’t keep up.

|

Everything plunged into black, and then he was stumbling forward. Bright sunlight spilled across a sea of radiant green before him. Brian shielded his eyes and squinted against the glare.

“Where in the hell am...I?” he mumbled, staggering forward. He was in a sheltered nook, bordered on three sides by gnarly, ancient-looking trees. Straight ahead, looming over the rolling hills of green grass was a massive castle, its flying buttresses stabbing high into the cloudless sky.

A voice broke the silence as Brianna appeared suddenly from around one of the ancient looking trees. An older woman in a magnificent dress appeared with her, the sun burning like a radiant cape behind her. Brianna dove into his arms as the older woman approached. Brian felt a strange sensation pulling in his chest.

“Welcome home, Brian!” the woman said warmly.

Brian squeezed Brianna tighter still. “Hello mother,” he said with a smile.