

They Do It With Mirrors

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova



THE BALLERINA

Alone at last! Oh, I do love seeing the old, familiar faces and places again, and I rejoice in the attention of people who don't crave a piece of my fame, or keep me in a cage. But after the past few weeks and especially the growing fear inside me, it feels so comforting to be alone in a chamber with no one to chase or follow me. I love that, for a few moments, I can stop running and looking over my shoulder. For a few moments, I can put down the imaginary mirror I use to make everyone believe that I am the happiest being on earth, with no care in the world...

Mirrors... I'm surrounded by them everywhere Above. They are in my dressing room in the theatre; in every hotel room in which I spend lonely and cold nights wherever ballet leads me, in the eyes of all those I have met in my life.

There are barely any mirrors down here, and yet I feel their cold reflection every time I talk to someone and look into their eyes. Cold because I see myself in them. It takes effort to fight that reflection, but I've been successful with using my own mirror on most of them, bewitching them with smiles and recalling glorious memories on stage. Yet, there are those who can't be tricked, who know that I am not the person I pretend to be, those who truly *see* me through the cracks in my mirror...

Father. He *always* saw through me, without doubting, without prejudice, though; I have to give him that. Always straightforward with me, always trying to be fair, yet never being fooled by my words or actions. When I expressed my sincere wish to become a dancer, he was supportive, that's true, finding a Helper who was giving me my first ballet lessons. I assume that, at first, when I was just a child, carefree and a bit untamed, Father thought my interest was only a brief phase, something every child goes through - here today, gone tomorrow. But it didn't take him long to understand that I was being serious, and from that moment on, he knew my passion for ballet would always come first, before my friends and Tunnel family. Even before Vincent...

Vincent... I could trick him once, when we were so young and so... Oh, I truly never wanted to cause him pain, but back then, I wasn't fully aware of how deeply the look into my mirror could hurt him. His adoring attention was something that made me feel like... *someone*. Not just another abandoned girl in the Tunnels, but a girl with potential, a future star...

Did I ever love him? That is a question I've asked myself often in the past few days. I always liked his presence, his quiet ways... so much in contrast with my unbridled ways of expressing joy and excitement. I guess the foundling's destiny we shared made me feel closer to him. I too had no notion of my birth, my family or why I was abandoned. He understood, he knew what it felt like having no roots... And his different looks were in a strange way exciting to me. I liked him, I liked him very much, and I still do, but love... If it ever was love, it was the selfish, foolish love of a teenager, infatuated with someone adoring them - until the incident in the Great Hall...

I wish I could turn back time, for both of us - for myself, so that the incident would never have happened, and for him, so that he wouldn't have to drag the feeling of guilt with him through life. I've been in the Tunnels only for a couple of days, but after what happened tonight with Catherine, I can see that the infatuation of the boy has long gone, replaced by something much stronger and steadier, directed at someone else now, something I have never experienced myself.

Catherine... My mirror doesn't work with her either; no wonder Vincent cares so much about her. Ever since we first met, that night after my performance, her eyes have always shown me the real me, even before she got to know me, and yet I never felt the cold that I do when looking into the eyes of the people around me. Her eyes behold warmth that goes right through me, making me believe that there is still hope for me... And her words tonight have made me realise that mirrors are only good when we stand with an honest heart in front of them. We can't make tricks with them, or our image will appear distorted. I don't want to appear distorted any more; I'm tired of pretending...

It's so quiet here! I have forgotten what it feels like not to hear the roaring applause of audiences, or the mad clicks of reporter's cameras following me everywhere. I have to admit, that although ballet will always be my passion, despite knowing what lies ahead of me in court now, more and more I have been thinking about what life is like when the music

stops... I've been dreading it my whole professional life and now that the time has finally come, I don't know what to think, what to feel – fear of losing the one thing that makes me feel special and fulfills me or relief that the chase is finally over and I can find some peace of mind, free of great expectations and demands?

Confusion is still fogging my brain, and the thought of giving up dancing is tearing my heart. However, the clarity about two things prevails: the necessity of my standing as the crown witness in that damnable trial, and the fact that my mirror has been broken, once and for all.

I don't know what will happen to me now, where will I go and what, or who, will I turn to. Either way, it's time to find out who I really am, without all the glitter and lots of fake or dangerous acquaintances and admirers. Vincent was right – when is he not? Illusions fade and mine faded and crumbled to dust a long time ago...

I'm so tired... All I want now is to sleep, sleep and forget about the world Above that I have to face tomorrow. And forget about the shards of my own heart that I will have to pick up and piece together to make a new mirror for myself – one in which my image would appear sharp and real...

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THE BEAST

I'm suffocating here tonight... I feel like I'm walking on thin ice over a frozen river, trying to keep my balance and not fall through before I reach the other side. My mind is tortured by the painful memories of the past, my heart is torn by the seemingly impossible choice between keeping my secret or revealing it and risking losing the woman I love forever...

I've been restless ever since Catherine left two days ago, pacing endlessly in my chamber when I'm alone, chasing my own shadow on the walls - walls that have no mirrors on them.

I have never needed a mirror before. Although he never spoke of it, I think Father didn't want mirrors near me, because they would remind me of how different I am from others. He wished his son to feel included in the community, being a valued member of it. For the most part of my early years, I never thought about their significance for me - until the day my hand struck Devin's face... My hands suddenly became the mirror of what I was and why. No matter how hard the effort, I would never fully be like one of the others.

It's a mystery why I forgot about that mirror when it came down to Lisa, but then again, Lisa can make almost everyone forget about anything... I was young, too young and inexperienced, to know how deceiving affection can be. The exhilaration, the unexpected feeling of how thrilling the presence of another being can be, how it can make us believe that nothing can stand in our way.

I didn't know. In my naivete, I *couldn't have* known how devastating the truth can be sometimes. For a moment, I forgot what I was, what my fate was. In a few seconds, all my hopes and dreams shattered, as I was staring at my clawed hands, bearing almost no resemblance to human hands in my eyes. Those hands which hurt the person I felt so strongly about, the hands of a beast...

Father tried to warn me, but I wouldn't listen. I didn't know back then what true love between two people was. My whole understanding of it was that it is strong, goes deep and feels uplifting. I've come to realise that what I felt for Lisa was the infatuation of a boy, whose only knowledge of that precious feeling was formed by books. It was a boy who had a dream, for him an unrealistic dream, of becoming something to someone. A boy whose only mirror was the liquid surface of the Mirror Pool - until that day in The Great Hall...

It was Lisa's eyes that showed me myself as I really was. No more tricks, only pure, harsh reality. At that moment, I despised myself, a feeling that wouldn't leave me for a long time. Her fear, flashing from those frightened eyes so painfully, burning my eyes, was the most devastating pain I had ever felt, back then...

Today I *know* real love. She's been guiding, holding, teaching, warming, taking care of and healing me, ever since that fateful April night almost two years ago. From that night on, a new imaginary mirror has been put in front of me - one showing me *who* I am, although fully accepting *what* I am as well. This time, there are no tricks involved. My reflection in that mirror doesn't despise me. When I look into it, I see a protector, a safe haven, a place of comfort and hope, a man in love, deeper than he could have ever imagined - a different one but still, a *man*...

My claws and non-human face are still in that reflection, though, and I cannot help but feel terrible anxiety whenever my love threatens to spill over and make me cross that dangerous line... The possibility of physically hurting Catherine is the most terrifying fear that dwells deep in my heart. Although she has been trying to rid me of it, I am still too weak (or too cowardly?) to allow her to succeed, and yet, there is nothing I wish more...

There are still no real mirrors in my chamber, for now. They would only remind me of the odds that I can't overcome, in order to give the woman I love from the deepest part of my being *all* of myself, without doubt, without fear.

Oh, Catherine... You have been looking into this strange, imaginary mirror for days with me now. What reflection of me do you see in it? One that is distorted, deceiving, an illusion as unreal as it is painful for you? A false illusion that I am in love with someone else...

I need to destroy that mirror. You *need* to know, you need to hear in my own words what has truly been keeping me away from giving you *all* of me. You need to understand, that although I appreciate you loving me and your acceptance of what I am, I cannot give you everything you want, everything you deserve, because it might cost you *everything*. You need to know it, but once you do, I am terrified of losing you forever...

When we met, I read you Charles Dickens. And it was he who said, "*I hope that real love and truth are stronger in the end than any evil or misfortune in the world.*"⁽¹⁾ It is with these words on my mind that I will be making my way to you, when I gather enough courage, and pray that it will not desert me in the moment when needed the most.

Be my mirror again, my love (how wonderful and magical it feels to call you like this, even if only in my mind and heart!)... The one that stands still, unwavering in the restless tide of time and circumstances, and shows me who I truly am, and who I could be. Who *we* could be. And when I tell you what you need to know, don't let me stand alone in the cold; show me that fear can never conquer trust, that the past can never dismiss the future, and that true love *can* withstand any evil or misfortune in the world...

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THE BEAUTY

Three days... It's been three days since I saw him last. Why that evasiveness? What is that truth that is keeping him so scared of talking to me? I can feel his love deep inside me, and yet at the same time, I feel that there is a solid and impenetrable door that is keeping us apart, a door I don't know how to open...

Strange... I'm staring at my reflection in the mirror on my dressing table and I can't see the real me. All I see is a woman lost in her memories, her doubts and fears, a woman who has the strength, but is clueless about how to solve this riddle.

Where are you, Vincent? Why don't you want to talk to me? We have never withheld the truth from each other, so why now? Why can't you put your trust in me, into *us*, and let it mend whatever was broken in your life in the past?

The mirror has two faces: the first shows us what we look like, the second, who we really are. Looking at myself, I'm trying to find the second, but am not able to because something important is missing there to make the image appear - a part of my heart and soul, living and breathing deep below the city streets.

I can fool strangers, or people who don't know anything about the world Below, and act carefree. But I can't fool Father or Vincent. And above all, I can't fool myself. That is not who I am. The mirror that the man I love put in front of me, over two years ago, is standing firmly. It's in his eyes, deep and blue as the ocean on a sunny day, showing me the *real* me, the one that doesn't thrive on pretending, but on honesty and truth. And the truth is that I'm scared - of losing the only man that has ever loved me as one should love another...

Honesty is something I haven't seen recently in a different mirror... When I first met Lisa in her changing room in the theatre, she was looking into her dressing table mirror. The reflection in it confused me. Her smile was as feigned as the look in her eyes, trying to appear composed and contented, but looks are deceiving, as I've learned many times before. Something in those eyes told me there was a mystery in them, a fear of being seen for who was hiding beneath the surface of the famous and beloved star.

Now I can explain part of that mystery, and pieces of Lisa's true self, but I still don't have the full picture. Do I really want to have the full picture? Isn't it the fear of learning something that might crush my heart that is truly keeping me away from Vincent? Can he feel my fear and rather stays away than hurt my feelings?

I must stop assuming. Assumptions can be as deceiving as pretty looks. I have always trusted Vincent and I must do so even now. I must be patient. He will come to me when the time is right for him, and we'll work it out somehow. But will we truly?

I can't look into the mirror anymore, I'm not there anyway. There is only a reflection of a shadow, a pale image of someone feeling hollow inside. Oh, Vincent, why won't you come to me? I miss you...

I never minded the quiet in my apartment, especially when coming home after a long and hard day at work; it soothed me. Tonight, I find it oppressive, uneasy and cold. Something within me is crying out to hear the voice of someone else, someone close... whatever he would say to me.

I keep hearing one melody in my head and can't silence it; *The Unfinished Symphony* is sweeping around me, lifting me up and then letting me fall again. Even my subconsciousness knows that some things need closure, issues that weigh heavily, not only on mine but especially on Vincent's heart. If we could only pick up the shared moments of joy, to find the strength to face the moments of pain that I'm certain are keeping him away from me...

Come on, Cathy, don't give up. There must be a way, and Vincent *will* find it; he always has done. What we have is all that matters, and he knows it just as well as I do. It's worth everything, even painful conversations and revelations that might make or break us.

What has Lisa done to you, Vincent? What have *you* done to *her*? Surely nothing that terrible, if she still holds you in high regard, and after our talk at the Court, I know she does. Talk to me, you know you can. Come to me; I'm waiting for you, no matter how long it takes...

I'm still staring into the mirror. It seems it has some indescribable power over me, though the reflection in it is different now. I see myself, but my face is not pale and lifeless anymore. The hollow feeling inside me has faded all at once. My heart is beating faster, as the mirror is showing me an image that makes me hopeful again - in it, I see myself, smiling, and *he*, the beautiful spirit of the underworld, is beside me. This is where he will always belong...

Something is drawing me out onto the balcony. I need to feel the breeze on my face, reminding me of *him*, of every night we spent in that private place that belongs only to us. I will open the French doors and... No, I dare not hope, and yet... I *do* hope.

Enough of mirrors. Time to face reality. So I better go and open that door; something is telling me that my fate, my *life* might depend on it...



"It is an absolute human certainty that no one can know his own beauty or perceive a sense of his own worth until it has been reflected back to him in the mirror of another loving, caring human being."

— John Joseph

Powell

____(1) Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield* ____