The Art of Possession

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She searched and searched and searched for herself in reflections. Eyes and mirrors revealed to her all of her flaws, things she needed to improve. Every reflective surface was an opportunity to observe, reflect, and adapt. *You're too serious all the time. So become more carefree. You aren't trying hard enough. So try harder. You need to smile more. So smile more often.* She lost sight of who she was, or rather never even received the opportunity to discover herself. And when such an unfortunate time came as evil forces were able to grasp onto a piece of her, they spread ferociously, slowly and painfully infecting the self she had carefully crafted through years and years of improvement, as she proved too weak to resist the encroachment of her soul.

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Day 1:

I am getting ready. I pull my comb through my tangled web of black hair, then curl it using my curling iron, attempting to recreate the beautiful curtain bangs I see on TikTok. *Not great, but it will have to do.* I sit down at my vanity and start applying makeup – going for a "no-makeup" look. People have told me I try too hard sometimes with my makeup, that I would look better "naturally." But of course when they mean natural they mean makeup that complements your face but is not over-the-top noticeable. I decide to try it out today. I look at myself in the mirror. I may have overdone the blush a bit. But it would have to do. Just as I am about to remove the headband from my hair, *it* blinks. *It* – me, in the mirror. But I didn't blink. Because if I had blinked I wouldn't have seen *it* blink. Or did I blink? I am probably just imagining things. Silly me. This is what happens when I miss my morning coffee. I pack my makeup into the box and leave. What I don't

see is that my reflection is still in the mirror, smiling.

Day 2:

I am on the way back from work. Out of nowhere, gray clouds appear in the sky. A water droplet falls onto my head. *It's just a light sprinkle, it's fine.* A light sprinkle turns into a drizzle which turns into heavy rainfall which turns into hail. I am sprinting as water splashes all over the bottoms of my freshly pressed pants. My beautifully styled hair is soaked, and makeup dribbles down my cheeks and onto my neck. I approach an intersection. As I wait for the pedestrian light to turn on, I look down, about to take out my phone to scroll through TikTok. I then catch sight of my reflection in the puddle. I look awful. But something else is off about it. I am wearing a red hair clip. But mine is purple, isn't it? I had selected it this morning. I reach for my head and pull the clip out of my damp hair. It's red. I'm imagining things again. What is wrong with me? The pedestrian voiceover sounds loudly, and I run across the street, my hoodie down in the futile attempt to keep my head dry. Once I get onto the subway, I pull out my phone camera and attempt to fix my face, now covered in a blend of mauve, black, and brown. After I am somewhat satisfied, I check what my colleagues are up to – someone is hosting a party in a few weeks to celebrate her 25th birthday, and has invited the entire data analytics team. I am not generally someone who attends parties, but I recently have received feedback that I prioritize work too much, that I need to loosen up and learn how to have fun. So, I decide to RSVP.

Day 3:

Every time I look into the mirror, I have this tingling sensation that something is looking back at me. Something that isn't me. I try to avoid mirrors now – my sixth sense tells me that something is wrong. Doing this proves to be a difficult task – I usually end up looking into a mirror of some sort at least once every half an hour on a daily basis. I decide I must cover up all the reflective surfaces I can find – mirrors, TVs, windows. Not my phone, though. I can't survive without

my phone. After a job well done, I decide to reward myself with a refreshing drink. I head over to the kitchen, where all the pots, pans, and utensils are covered in dust from lack of use. I get a glass from the cupboard and decide to rinse it off. As I am rinsing, I see a flicker of light on the glass. All the windows are covered, how can that be? I look again and see an eye. An eye with a bright red pupil. I scream and drop the glass into the sink. My heart skips a beat, and I try to catch my breath. I can't leave the broken glass in the sink. I begin to hastily collect the glass shards in the palm of my hand. Of course, I get cut. It prickles – a slight pinch. Not unbearable pain. But then I see blue blood trickle down the inside of my hand and into the sink.

Day 4:

I roll up my sleeves and begin to wash my hands but then I see my arms. Veins. Grotesquely pronounced, writhing beneath my pale skin like a tangle of sapphire serpents, stretching my flesh to its maximum elasticity, threatening to rip the delicate fabric apart at any moment. My heartbeat is noticeable through the regular contractions of my veins, teeming with life, declaring to me with clock-like regularity that I am alive, a constant, irritating reminder. They seem almost *too* alive. I study my veins carefully, trying to read them like a map of the subway. They narrow as they approach the backs of my hands, where they become dark blue lines coiling around my fingers. They stretch up to my shoulders, weaving in and out of each other like a straw basket. As I lather my hands with soap I feel the veins, slimy and alive, rub against my palms. I hold my soap-coated hands in front of me, and I see them shake uncontrollably. I press down on a vein with my finger and see a dark blue bulge form, somehow connected to me yet yearning to break free and spill over my blood onto the quartz counters. I feel rapid palpitations in my hands, which now tremble as I rinse off the soap and dry them with a towel. Anything I do, my veins terrorize me, pulsing fiercely in complaint. I decide to measure my heart rate. I place my index fingers on a metal plate for 60

seconds. It reads 213. That's not possible. 213 bpm is fatal. I check again. It's 215. *The machine must be faulty.* I feel my heart beat impossibly fast in my hands, drawing blood from my head into my arms, making me feel dizzy. Hoping to calm my heart, I lie down and stare at the ceiling, trying but failing to fill my head with pleasant thoughts.

Day 5:

I go to the doctor. I hate doctors, but it would be unwise not to consult a medical professional at this point given the progression of symptoms. They check my heart rate. It's normal, around 70. The veins, which were so prominent when I was about to leave home, have returned to normal. Perhaps I was just imagining it. I can be so silly sometimes. I tell them that I saw blue blood come out of my hand a few days ago. The doctor says my veins probably just seem blue from above my skin due to the reflection and absorption of different wavelengths of light. I insist that I saw blue blood dribble down my wrists and point to the bandaid on my palm. The doctor orders a blood test for me and sends me to the lab. There, a man covered in personal protective equipment ties a band tightly around the skin just above my elbow joint and inserts a thin syringe into my bulging vein. The blood is red. A few hours later, I get the blood test results. Besides a slightly low red blood cell count, every metric is normal.

Day 6:

Now it is time for bed. I had successfully avoided all mirror or mirror-like surfaces today. After brushing my teeth and reading a chapter of *Atomic Habits*, a book gifted to me by a friend, I pull the sheets over myself and stare up at the ceiling fan. Something about it is captivating – its regular movement, the possibility that at any moment it could fall and decapitate me, yet it still stays faithfully attached to the ceiling. My eyelids begin to droop, and I finally close my eyes. But right when I do, I see an image flash in my retina. It is the reflection again. And it is smiling, its jagged teeth dripping with dark red blood. It licks the

blood off its canines and gulps it down. I shoot upright in bed and scream in absolute horror, my voice cracking mid-scream. I can feel my heart throbbing in my throat and grab my pillow for support. I sit in bed for a few minutes, but then the terror slowly fades, and I lie down to allow myself to become enveloped in a blanket of darkness, with no control over what enters my mind.

Day 7:
I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING IT KEEPS COMING INTO MY DREAMS AND SAYING WE'RE THE SAME WE'RE THE SAME WE'RE THE SAME IT CAN HELP ME DISCOVER MYSELF I DON'T KNOW WHO IT IS OR WHAT IT WANTS FROM ME CAN'T IT JUST LEAVE ME ALONE IT IS IT FEELS LIKE IT'S TEARING OUT MY SOUL AND TURNING IT INSIDE OUT IT'S EXCRUCIATINGLY PAINFUL BUT AT THE SAME TIME PLEASURABLE MY FEELINGS DON'T MAKE SENSE ANYMORE JUST LET ME GO.

Day 8:
I am sitting in my cubicle. Work is uninteresting. I stare at the code on my computer but it refuses to penetrate the folds of my brain. Where is the stupid bug? Why won't the code work? I slam my fist onto my table, and eyes turn toward me. Sorry, I mutter, as my cheeks turn red from embarrassment. I need a break. I go to the cafeteria to make myself a cup of coffee. I dump a tablespoon of instant coffee into my cup of milk and let it warm. Then, I see Kate approach. Ugh. Kate. We acknowledge each other's presence with a quick nod. She begins to fix herself a cup of tea. The microwave beeps and I take my cup of coffee out, forgetting to hold it by the handle and instead touching the porcelain directly. It is scalding hot and I drop it. Coffee splatters over my pants and I curse under my breath as my skin burns. This is the tenth time in three days that my clumsiness has made me a mess. Kate snickers. "What a shame, you've ruined the one nice pair of pants you own." Without knowing it, I am gripping the faucet tightly, and once I remove my fingers, the metal is deformed, an imprint of my fingers etched permanently into

it. Blood rushes into my cheeks and I cover the faucet with a napkin before someone sees, and leave as if nothing happened.

Day 9:

I am trying to respond to an email from my boss regarding the additional responsibilities he would like me to take on. But, as I stretch my finger, I feel a sharp pain. I look down and see my pulse vigorously in the veins of my hands. I imagine the blood being drawn out of my head and into my hands and start to feel dizzy. I need a break. I head over to the nearest bathroom on my floor and check if it is empty. No one is there. Good. I place my palms underneath the automatic faucet and allow cool water to run over my hands. I then splash water over my face and look up at the mirror without thinking. I can't see anything. Must be because my eyes are clouded with water. But then I dry them on my sleeve and look again. There is no reflection.

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Before she could claim herself, something claimed her.

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