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# The Mirror in Her Words

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*Gobles High School*

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Gobles High School

Gobles, MI

Grade: 11-12

Genre: Non-fiction

First place in the Non-Fiction Genre for the 2013 Best Midwestern High School Writing  
Competition

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## The Mirror in Her Words

*"I am important to her. She comes and goes  
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.  
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman  
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish."*

from *Mirror*, by Sylvia Plath

The nurses began to clear off the small, rickety table, wiping little bits of construction paper patients had left behind while making their daily crafts. One nurse took a folded-up table cloth and, with a fluid motion, spread it out across the table. An elderly man in a wheel chair sitting at the table pulled at the edge of the cloth so that each side hung down even and smooth. I watch his old hands shake slightly, slow with age, laden with intention.

The nurses bustle about the room, sometimes leaving for a moment to dig in the closet for plates or to put something away. They all look exhausted, ready for their shift to be over, ready to escape what old age holds for us all. Outside, a lean russet bird descends from its flight in a graceful manner to bathe in the decorative birdbath. It totters through the dainty pool before finding rest in the center, submerging all but its delicate head.

Nearby, my grandma is chatting away to my mom and sisters as I day dream. Her conversations are simple, but at least now we can comprehend what she is trying to tell us. Only a month ago her health had taken a tragic downfall, going from living on her own and being perfectly healthy to not being able to leave a wheel chair in a nursing home, unable to recall half of what her mind should remember. Today, she recognizes my face, even remembers my name.

Across the room, another patient catches my eye. Her dark, feathery hair is a bit tangled and unkempt, her small beady eyes transfixed in my direction. I smile kindly at her, although she does not smile back. She sits and stares at me, silent, completely trapped in her own world. I continue to smile anyways, wishing there were a way for me to make her day. I always feel sad at nursing homes, with people just sitting around with no family to be seen, waiting to either get better or die. If there were something I could do, I think I would. But what can I offer? I slowly look away from her, and watch my grandma speak instead.

Suddenly, a new voice rises over the polite chatter. A faint, desperate tone that drew attention to the corner of the room. My head jerks back up, searching for the source of discord, chirping voice.

The elderly woman has not moved her eyes from my face. She has found enough life inside of her to grab my attention. Other faces in the room turn to her as well, showing me that this is a rare occurrence. I strain my ears, desperately trying to hear her mumbled words. It takes a moment; the last remaining nurse in the room is walking briskly towards the door, going to grab dinner for the patients.

"Let me talk to her," she shrills, still continuing to stare right at me. I bite my lip, and turn to look behind me. My family is to my side, outside her line of vision. She only has eyes for me, a tunnel created from her field of vision to my face. I watch her a moment longer.

“Please let me talk to her!” she pleads, and her eyelids flutter closed for a few seconds. Still confused, I look around curiously, attempting to figure out who she wants to talk to.

The woman doesn’t make me guess much longer. Pointing a bony, wrinkled finger directly at me, she demands, “Just let me talk to her!”

There is no more doubt left inside of me now regarding the subject of her pleas, although I am not sure how to address the issue. My feet will not budge. I am trapped, prisoner to my own body, frozen from the decision I’m now faced with.

The patient is likely victim to Alzheimer’s disease or Dementia. I know this from my oldest sister, Becca, who is graduating from college with a bachelor’s degree in nursing, who is also a visiting nurse for hospice patients, the little dawn of recognition in this stranger’s eyes is a likely sign that she has one of the mental illnesses of old age. Deep inside, I want to talk to her, see what she wants to say, or figure out who it is that she thinks I am, but something within in me holds me back. What is there to say to her? Besides, isn’t it cruel to go along with her illusions, pretend that we are good old friends who go way back?

I feel ashamed for not having the courage to talk to this poor woman, and drop my eyes back towards my own family. Moments later, an alarm sounds throughout the room. I whip around to locate the source. A nurse bounds into the room, rushes towards the wheelchair that the elderly woman had been sitting in. To my astonishment, she had attempted to flee her wheelchair and set off a precautionary alarm in her attempt. The nurse pants, face flushed with nerves and fear. “You about gave me a heart attack!” she scolds lightly, before smiling and assisting the woman back into her chair. My mom senses chaos, says goodbye to my grandma, and herds her children out of the room.

The woman’s eyes never leave my back as I walk away.

At first, this unusual experience seemed odd, even frightening. What if the lady had thought she knew who I was? What if what she had to say was something threatening or that I couldn’t understand? What would I have said to her, anyways?

I also feel guilty. The poor, elderly lady had merely wanted to speak to me. Why had I pretended not to hear her? Why had I acted so selfishly?

I am silent the entire car ride home, absorbed in my thoughts. Sometime later, I understand.

At times, I remember. Other times, I have to claw at little soap bubbles of memories, desperate to have a mild idea of what happened to me, what I did to myself. But, just like the little soap bubbles that children create in their youth, some descend away, out of reach, while a few may be touched, consumed by your palms. Sometimes I can’t think back to those delicate moments, and sometimes, every thrashing detail returns to me in a whirlwind of soap and hot summer sun and fresh, undiluted wind. Then, I am honest with myself.

Vaguely, I see a young girl, thin and pretty, smiling at everything that passes her path. She laughs loudly and sweetly, and never forgets to say ‘thank-you’ or ‘I love you.’ Always in a pretty dress, floating around the house like a little princess. I can see her, and I always smile at her, and I even sort of recognize her. But rarely do I remember being her.

Sharply, violently, she transforms into a monster, like how a small, decorative keychain quickly coverts into a pocketknife. Violent, her thoughts are little daggers in her brain, puncturing her happy

memories and letting them deflate, the endorphins in them leaking slowly from her eyes. Ugly, chubby, uncomfortable in her own skin, she's the benchwarmer on every sports team, the backseat in every car, the second-best in her own mind. I recognize her, can feel her skin whenever I touch my face, recognize her eyes in the mirror, even remember the things that she did.

I had tried everything in my power to forget 'her.' I wish that part of me had never existed, that it didn't have to be suppressed still to this day. After this experience with this woman, I began to feel as if God, Fate, or whoever it is that sends me quirky little messages, was reflecting the deep recesses of my mind.

This woman, because of her mental state, had imagined me as an important figure in her life, even risked hurting herself trying to reach me. And in a way, I want desperately to do the same thing. I want to reach within myself, pull whatever beauty I may have to my surface, and distribute it throughout my entire being. Maybe if my personality is purified with genuine kindness and love, and my features enlightened by happiness and an elegant physique, I will be able to love myself and become comfortable with the way I fit in with society.

I want to visit who I've been and whatever remains of her, and tell her the things that I now know. I want to speak with her, too. I want to let her know that I'm okay.