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Essay #1
CM 200
January 31, 2002

Mirror Image

I'm a firm believer that a girl needs those few moments at the end of the night to sit at her vanity in her underwear or even naked, her choice, take off her jewelry, take off her makeup, let her hair down, and reflect. It's amazing what one finds in their own reflections. You look in a mirror expecting to see something that you know, something ordinary, perhaps even unchangeable, but by definition, reflection just doesn't work that way. Often what hits the mirror bends and looks back at you with a new face. Being twenty, being a girl, being me, I look into the mirror with a secret hope for change, an insight, the keys to a door I've always deemed locked, a reason to appreciate.

It's 3 am. The door opens with a pesky creak as I walk in. I flip the switch to my desk light, kick off my flip-flops, click the AOL icon on my computer, and begin to undress. First pants, then shirt. They both end the evening balled up on the floor. At this point I don't really care. I'll pick them up later. Life's too short for laundry. At least today it is. I move to the dresser, pull out an old t-shirt, and reach for my favorite cotton pajama bottoms with the little stars on them. That's very me, those stars. I throw the pajamas on the bed and take a seat at the desk, also known as my vanity, for a few moments out of the day at least. Thus the conversion begins. I lift the keyboard, lay it atop the printer for a little extra room, and reach for the little mirror at the end of my dresser. Realizing I've forgotten the box, I sigh, reaching a little further. Damn thing! After fumbling over a few picture frames, I catch the handle with my finger and reel her in. I never thought I'd have this much make-up, let alone commit the girl cliché of spending money just so it can have a home in the very fabulous Clinique make-up box, \$6. Okay, okay, given \$6 is not a large chunk of change, but still. Considering the last beauty tips I took were excerpts from Miss Piggy's Guide to Life at age five, this is a big step. I unbuckle the latch and lift out the top tray, reaching for my make-up remover and a Johnson and Johnson cotton square. I place the square over the opening of the tiny blue bottle and flip three times for the proper amount. My eyes tingle a little as the cotton square runs over her lids and lashes. Removing eye make-up is a tricky thing. It takes a learned technique to conquer the bottom lid liner without getting any in your eyes, causing watering, puffiness and god knows what else. Needless to say I'm not quite an old pro so its no surprise finding the faintest black shadows of smeared liner under my eyes when I opens them to view my work. I don't mind though. As I makes one more careful swipe, a thought pops into my and I am filled with brilliant storms of laughter.

On nights when you're sitting drunk with your girlfriends, and they're telling you how funny you're being, and you lay all over each other and laugh and laugh and laugh, so hard that you're suddenly crying, and all your eyeliner has smeared down under your eyes, leaving you with one heck of a raccoon impression, you begin to appreciate being a girl. In any other situation you'd be embarrassed and run off to the ladies room to fix

yourself, but here you're all raccoons. You're all dressed up, and you have great make up on, and yet you're rolling on the floor of your friends new apartment just like you did when you were six. The beautiful thing is that you don't care. The beautiful thing is that suddenly those eyes have become something to treasure simply because it is something you share. **The beautiful thing is them.** You want nothing more than more of this. You sit around and have flashbacks, flash forwards, tears, and pant pissers. You look around at those girls with their raccoon eyes on those drunken nights of ecstatic reverie. You love those girls. Forever. You look at them. You look at those raccoon eyes with their mystery and growing interest. You look at them knowing that they have given you something to believe in, given you reason to believe in yourself. They all seem to glow for you. They're the light that reflects off of your eye creating those shiny spots up next to your dark pupils, like tiny night-lights or twinkles of one of those stars I keep wishing on.

They shine in yours and you shine in hers. As you sit here now and read over what you have just written, you hear her voice in your head. "Pissers?" Your mother would say. "Well that's nice! What am I going to do with you?" She knew Daddy would just laugh. After all you two were kindred from the start. So she shrugs and smiles at her baby with one of those mother smiles.

I close the remover and throw it carelessly back into "the box." Back at the mirror, I run my fingers across my cheeks and lips, finding a new beauty mark. Good luck Mommo used to say. As I inspect, looking in the mirror, I notice a torn nail. My initial reaction is to bite the pesky tear and leave it at that, but any girl will tell you that won't do. Frustrated I reach for a nail file. I look down at my nail. This one is larger than the one on her left hand. The nail is more rounded and elongated. The other is shorter, weaker. I again look down and smile.

You came home from school with a bandage around your unnamed finger of your right hand. It's not the thumb, not the pointer, no not the middle nor the pinky, but the other one. You'd slammed it in one of the castle doors on your way to Spanish class. You were in a hurry. You didn't want to be late. So you ran, dropped your books, and quickly grabbed the heavy oak door and slammed it behind you. Needless to say your finger stayed behind as well. To think the one time you wore polish, your finger gets slammed in a door. The polish becomes pointless as it is now covered in blood. Figures. This is why you don't wear it. The beat of your heart moved from your chest to the nail bed of that nameless finger while drips of blood stained your gray plaid uniform skirt. You went to the nurse and she fixed you as always. On went a bandage, on went the day. When you came home and told her the story she smiled and said, "Well, it looks like we both should have been named Grace." Mommo held out her right hand and pointed to her nameless finger. She'd done the same as a child on that very same finger of that very same hand. Her case was a bit more serious. The door took a tiny piece of her finger with it. Doctors had to take a small piece of skin from the inside of her right forearm to replace that which she'd lost. Her baby used to run her little fingers across that spot when she was little, never knowing why it was there or how it came to be. It was about the size of a quarter and softer than the rest of her skin. Her baby thought it was special. Mommy kisses your

nameless finger. When you're hurt, she's hurt. She gets that look in her eyes, as if she actually feels that door slamming all over again. It's as if she feels her heartbeat move from her chest to her finger. The experience is relived. She hugs you and you get this overwhelming, warm, comfortable feeling, like when you got into your bed after she'd laid in it for a while, and at that very moment it hurts a little less. That's a mother for you. Graceful or not, her love is comfortable and healing and unconditional. She will love you even if your fingers *aren't* perfect. It's in those moments, you realize why you should appreciate the woman she is, the woman you are, the woman maybe someday you'll grow to be if you're lucky. It's those moments when you see your own reflection shining in her gentle eyes that make you want to be a mother. Though you may not have always understood the undying shine a mother gives, somewhere inside, you know one day *you'll* understand, one day when *you are older*, just as she says.

I look again into the mirror. The hazel eyes she gave me twinkle at the thought, but it is soon coldly interrupted by the confusion of my youth. And one day *I would* understand? One day when *I was* older? My own blank face stares back at me, unchanged, unbridled, frustrated. Thus it begins.

Am I older yet? Should I understand yet? Because in your twenties you don't understand ANYTHING! You're tumultuous and passionate about your beliefs, reckless and also philosophical, smart and dumber than dumb. You don't understand love. You are surrounded by it and absorbed in it whether you choose that or not. You can't stand another moment of it and then without it. People around you are always asking about the love in your life as if its some project you need to get started on before the deadline is passed due. Will I have to pay a fine? You look at them, at yourself, with those twenty-year-old eyes, cheeks, lips, skin, and you think to yourself are they serious? You're twenty. You have plenty of time. These moments drive you insane. They lead you to that panic of having to cram. Your twenties are filled with these moments. Yet then there are those calm peaceful moments when you beam with confidence and know exactly where you're going in life. You think you don't need anyone else because you are your own messiah. You are penniless, with no religion, no rules, only ideals. You can't be argued with because you're right and that's that. Then some days the phone doesn't ring, and your clothes don't fit, and it's raining. You beg God. Let me live. And then you realize **YOU ARE ALONE**. Oh no you'll never get through. Your friends don't love you. All you need is your family. *All you need is love*. Oh and some money. Insatiable. Did I mention in your twenties "insatiable" is your middle name. God I'm not even one year in and see I'm already overanalyzing. That would be your confirmation name. It's the confirmation that you are in your twenties, *yes* you are a girl trying to make it in this world, and *yes* you are crazy, but *yes* you'll learn more here than any other period of your life. A deep breath cometh. Gee I can't wait to see myself in my sixties.

I adjust the mirror in such a way that my face is lit up by the reflection of the desk lamp. Areas that were lost in shadows before are now out in the open. The scar on my right cheek makes its appearance. It's faint outline creeps out along my lower jaw line. It hangs there about an inch long and a quarter inch wide. By looking at it in the reflection,

it's easy to see that this is a piece of memorabilia. My skin has grown and stretched since its arrival and thus it looks a lot better now than it had then. Its thin boat like shape implies the villain. A nail, a very small nail, left this mark.

You were just a child then. You didn't understand consequence then. You'd been arguing all morning with your best friend. At recess the fire burned deeper and the smoke of Rebecca's anger clouded all chances at logical reasoning. The cats began to fight. The friends circled around us. Darcy, Lauren, Courtney, and Amy from England; the gang was all there. It seemed everyone wanted a piece of this. The teachers ran down the hill to the Maple tree where these animals lost control. Lots of hair was pulled. Headaches from the tears began to swell. Suddenly skin was broken. A drop of blood fell from the wound and gently glided down your chin. Ding Ding! Fight over. You were sorry. She was sorry. You got up, dusted off your uniforms, grabbed one another's hand and went back to school.

You bled, you now bore the scars, but you could still look at one another and see all the reasons that you were friends glistening back. You were still beautiful in one another's eyes.

A woman of sixty-five, with the face of a dame not aged over 50, Elora Jacqueline was a southern belle. When she was a child all the ladies down the lane and all the fellas too admired her face. They said she was the mirror image of Elizabeth Taylor. The mirror image except of course the long scar that runs from the bridge of her nose down and across to the crease of her left nostril that she earned while playing with her brothers. She was running through the clean sheets playing hide and seek when she tripped and fell on a tin can of snuff. She bled and now she bears the scar, but she's still beautiful. Elora moved to the big city when she was still a girl. It was there that Elora became Mommy. It was there too that Mommy became Nanny though she was no nanny at all. It was a name attached to her by the first grandchild who had full naming rights reserved. One summer evening Mommy sent you down to her house on the Magothy River. You parked the car on the street, slipped off your shoes in tradition, and ran to the front door. The summer grass under your feet was so cool and smooth with dew from the humidity. You ran your fingers along the twenty-five foot Robalo in the driveway, passed over the pavement where you used to play Hungry, Hungry Hippos, and glanced down at the seashells in the garden boxes. You opened the front door and breathed in with delight. Your Grandmother's house smelled the exact same way as it always had; like salty sea air, old bay, and Chanel no.5, her personal touch. You walked up the stairs and found her at the kitchen window cleaning sweet corn. That evening you sat in the kitchen you knew by heart. When you were a child you never paid it much attention, but on this occasion you found yourself examining each and every object with care. The wallpaper is aged, but in your opinion classic of a grandmother's house. A shelf of nick knacks hangs in the corner. A mustard colored refrigerator covered in photographs, schoolwork, and an old newspaper clipping of John F. Kennedy and his family in Camelot hide to the left. She covers the table with newspaper, hands you a wooden mallet and table knife, and sets a beer down in place of your normal Coca-Cola. It surprises you. You make one of those faces the way you did when your mother gave you an exceedingly large amount of

greens. She chuckles and says; “I think you're old enough now to have a beer with your Nanny. Just don't tell your mother.” You have no complaints. She lays before you a pile of steaming Maryland Blue Crabs. The smell is tantalizing. It's one of those smells that clear your nose passages with its overpowering zest so much so that the next smell you encounter is completely pure and clean. That evening she told you things, things you *were now old enough* to hear and understand. She told you the story of how she met your grandfather. She told you one more time about the scar on her nose. She told you dirty jokes until you could hardly keep yourself from *pissing* right then and there. You shared your stories and told her things you'd never told anyone. Some of it was happy, some brought tears to your eyes, but most importantly it brought you to a new level of understanding. You left that table respecting one another not only as a grandmother and her grandchild, but also as two beautiful women who bore their scars with grace and dignity.

My scar has grown softer with time. As I look into my reflections one last time, noticing everything in my face in a different light, I discover a bent image staring back at me. My hair is down. All of my make-up has been wiped away. My jewelry lies before me. I'm naked. I sit in firm belief. A lady needs those few minutes at the end of the night to sit alone with her own mirror image. She might hum. She might sit in silence. She might find something. Maybe, just maybe, she forgets all about the raccoon eyes that her eye make-up leaves behind, her torn nameless fingernail, the insatiable thoughts that run rampant through her restless twenty year old mind, and the scar running across her jaw. Maybe, just maybe she can somehow rediscover her own humanity. Perhaps, even if only for a few moments, she appreciates her own beauty and remembers why she loves being a woman.