

The Magic Mirror

A Strange Tale

By MARY S. BROWN

IT WAS a new house which we had rented for the summer. I was alone in the large living-room, watching two kittens frolicking on the floor, when some one near me laughed softly. On one side of the room was a full length cheval mirror, and diagonally across hung a triplicate mirror.

As I turned to discover who had come in, I saw reflected in the central glass of the three-fold mirror the piquant face of a young girl who was smiling softly at the kittens. She wore a large hat of gauzy material which partly hid dark ringlets of hair that clustered around the clear olive skin, and I noticed how white and perfect were the teeth disclosed by the parted lips. Suddenly two soft dark eyes looked straight into mine. A look came over her face like that of a child caught in some naughty act, and then she disappeared.

I rushed to the door to reassure her; I ran around the house; I vaulted the stone wall at the rear and hurried along the edge of the woods. Not a glimpse of the girl did I catch.

"Hiding behind a tree," I muttered. "I won't gratify her by hunting."

I supposed she must be some neighbor's daughter, but no one in the vicinity seemed to know of any girl that answered my description, and I was beginning to forget the occurrence, when she appeared again.

This time I was playing on the violin when, in turning the music, I noticed how the triplicate mirror was reflected in the long glass near me. I dared not move for fear of frightening this mysterious maiden for whom I had so vainly inquired. So I smiled encouragingly, and said quietly:

"Come in! Do not be afraid. Can't we be friends?"

She nodded brightly, but when I turned to welcome her the room was empty. I felt annoyed, and resolved to pay no further attention to so capricious a creature. Yet, when I returned to my seat, the face in the mirror was still gazing at me sadly and appealingly.

"Are you trying to play a joke on me?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"Would you not like to be friends with me?"

An emphatic nod was her reply.

"If you will not come in and talk to me, how can we be friends?"

A puzzled look came over her face, and then the mirror was empty.

"Of all the queer girls!" I thought, and this time I went outside, walked to the end of the piazza, and came back as mystified as ever.

"That glass is certainly bewitched," I said, thinking of the enchanted ones in my child-time fairy books. Suddenly fingers appeared in it, holding a slip of paper.

"Shades of Julius Caesar!" I ejaculated, "This house must be haunted, but, whether fairy or spirit, she doesn't look very formidable. I will see how far I can unravel the mystery."

I went nearer to the glass and read: "*I can come so that you can see me, only in this way.*"

Evidently she could hear and comprehend, so I said aloud: "Is it because you won't or can't?"

The paper disappeared, and soon another took its place. It read: "*Because I can't.*"

"Can you explain why?"

For answer she herself appeared and sadly shook her head. Now that she was nearer I saw that was very attractive. Her face was thoughtful, and her eyes, which had been merry as she watched the kittens, now startled me with their sadness. Impulsively, I advanced, desiring her to feel sure of my friendliness, but when I came close to the mirror her face disappeared, and I saw only the reflection of my own.

"I don't believe you really want to be friends," I exclaimed, somewhat angrily, and, turning away, I left the room.

THE stone wall behind the house divided our land from that of Professor Dolber, the world-renowned scientist. As he was called a recluse I was much pleased to be invited there a few days later for luncheon.

In the dining-room I was at first so engrossed in my host's conversation and in the subtle melancholy of his face that I was oblivious to anything else. At last I noticed two oil paintings on my right, and was much surprised to find in one a portrait of the girl in my mirror.

As the professor followed my gaze, I remarked: "That is a fine likeness, only now she looks older and more thoughtful."

He gave me a curious look, but said nothing.

"How old was she then?" I asked.

"Do you mean my daughter?" he said. "That was painted in Holland four years ago."

"Your daughter? I am glad to discover who she is. I hope we shall meet. I know we both like kittens."

His amazed stare checked me. I bit my lip in vexation. It occurred to me that he would scarcely approve of his daughter's coming alone to see me, so I changed the subject and began discussing a new scientific discovery.

When I reached home the daughter of the Episcopal rector was calling on my sister. This young lady was much interested in my good fortune in finding Mr. Dolber so sociable. Although he had many distinguished visitors from all parts of the world, she said he was a man whom strangers found it difficult to approach.

"Do you know his daughter?" I asked.

"His daughter? Was a young lady there? It must have been some visitor. He has no family."

"But the portrait—he told me it was painted from his daughter."

"Yes, wasn't she a beauty? It must have been very hard for him to lose his only child, and his wife died of grief only two months later."

No wonder the man had stared at me! He must have thought me either stupid or crazy! But the mirror—I had supposed that I had found a clue, but now the affair had assumed the proportions of a real mystery. How could I ever solve it?

The next morning the family went off on a week's excursion. I had intended to go with them, but now I changed my mind, hoping that their absence would give me a better chance to see more of my uninvited guest who haunted the mirror.

The next day, when I began my music, I was conscious of her presence even before I saw her face in the glass. There was one curious fact in regard to this. I looked directly at the triplicate mirror and saw nothing. It was only when I saw its reflection in the long cheval mirror that she became visible—just as if it required a four-fold reflection to enable the image to become apparent to my sight. This time the face was partly covered by a paper on which was written:

"Do not come too near. You were angry last time because you thought I had gone, but you came so close that you could not see me, although I had not moved."

"Forgive me," I said contritely, as the paper disappeared, leaving in full view the pretty face. "I will be careful. My people are away, so we can have a talk and get acquainted. I saw your portrait at your father's and I know who you are, so I stayed at home today because I hoped you would come again. We can talk quite well, for I can ask questions and you can answer by 'yes' or 'no' with your head, or you can write. First: Why do you come here?"

"I go to many places, for I am very lonely, but you are the only person that has seen me for two years. I was frightened at first, but when you offered to be friends I was glad. I have wanted a friend so long."

"You poor child! Can't you find friends anywhere else?"

She shook her head sadly.

"Can you tell me the reason?"

"Because I can neither come back nor go on," she wrote.

AT THIS moment the door-bell rang. It proved to be a college chum unexpectedly in the neighborhood, and I could do no less than invite him to spend Sunday with me.

Often in the lulls of conversation I pondered on that strange answer: *"I can neither come back nor go on."* What could she have meant by that? And for the first time since I had known him I was glad when my chum left and I was free to watch for my new-found friend again.

I waited nearly all the afternoon before she came, and then I reproached her for her lateness.

"I have been here several times," she wrote, *"but you were not alone, and today I was very busy."*

"Busy! What were you doing?"

"Trimming a hat," she replied, to my astonishment, and then I noticed that she did have on a different hat.

My ghostly girl, then, was not above coquetry, so I complimented her on the new creation, and she seemed as pleased as any ordinary girl.

"Tell me why I can see you only in the mirror."

She shook her head slowly as though in doubt, and after a minute's reflection she wrote: *"I can not explain, only that I am higher than you and you can not find the direction."*

"How, then, can I see your image in the mirror?"

"I do not understand it well myself, for I am not free from the body, but I think it is because I am permitted to get into the right angle of reflection, because they are sorry for me and they are trying to help me."

"What astonishing philosophy is this!" I mused. "What can she mean?"

Aloud I asked, "Who do you mean by they?"

"The ones higher up that take care of me—and, oh, will you tell my father that they take GOOD care of me?—only I am lonely because I don't belong anywhere."

"Why can't your father see you?"

"I do not know, but perhaps he can explain it all to you; he knows so much more than I do; but will you be sure to tell him for me, because he has grieved so every day, and he is so unhappy. They are calling me now and I must go. Promise me to tell him."

I promised, and instantly the mirror was empty. I was left to meditate on what she had said. She was not yet free from her body. How then could she be a spirit? Was it a dream I was living or was I becoming insane?

I sat down at once and sent a note to her father, asking if I could see him on a matter of importance, and received the reply: "Come this evening at seven-thirty."

WHEN I said I wished to speak of his daughter, Mr. Dolber answered, "No, no, I cannot talk about her. You spoke the other day as if you had met her, but how and where?"

"Listen to my story, which only you can explain."

Several times as I told of my experiences with the mirror he started as if

most excited, but restrained himself until I had finished, when he rose and holding on to his chair as if to steady himself said:

"Thank you for coming. The message is a relief and comfort to me, but tonight"—his voice faltered—"I must think—this has overcome me. I will send for you soon and explain what I can."

Early in the morning I received a telephone message from Hugelschon, asking me to come over at once. I found everything there in confusion. Professor Dolber had been found dead in the library. His physician had just come and pronounced it heart failure. As I was the last person to see him, and as on the table there was a letter addressed to me, I was sent for.

As soon as the doctor had gone the housekeeper begged me to come into the library. She told me she had been in the family for thirty years and that since his wife's death he had taken her into his confidence and had depended upon her in many ways.

"Something entirely upset him last night," she added, "for when I took in some tea as I often did when he sat up late, his head was buried in his hands, and when I spoke he did not look up nor answer."

I decided to tell her of my experience and what I had said to the professor, and to ask her advice. As I told my story she did not seem in the least surprised.

"I am glad you told me about this, for many things of a strange nature have happened here since Freda disappeared, and Mr. Dolber allowed no one but me to enter her room. All her things were kept just as she had left them, only many of them had to be replaced. That is the strange part of it and what worried my master most of all. In fact, night or day, he had no peace of mind for fear she might need something he couldn't remember. Ah, my poor master—my heart ached for him, and I am glad he is at rest." Here she broke down and sobbed bitterly.

When she was calm I asked: "What do you mean by things being replaced?"

"I mean that her clothes, hats, dresses, and many other things disappear. And we have to buy new ones." She lowered her voice. "We are sure that Freda takes them, for everything is kept locked and no one but ourselves has gone in there since she disappeared. It is all a mystery to me, but I never questioned Mr. Dolber, though he trusted me, and I bought new things as fast as he thought

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THE MAGIC MIRROR

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she needed them. But, sir, perhaps he has explained. Here is the letter he left for you."

I walked home sad and troubled. Finding my family away still, I sat down where I was wont to see her face in the mirror. I wondered if she would come again, but first I must read the letter, and I began to unfold it, when suddenly I felt the strange sensation I always experienced when I became conscious of her presence. I raised my eyes involuntarily to the mirror, and there—and I confess for the first time in my life that I was afraid—there, instead of Freda, was Mr. Dolber himself!

He smiled as if to reassure me, a smile so glad that the fear left me, and I was sure he had a message. I was right, for in a moment the writing came:

"Hurry at once to Hugelschon and go to Freda's room."

Then the mirror was empty, nor did I ever see in it anything but the reflection of material objects.

I NEVER thought of disobeying the command, so I hurried to Hugelschon. The housekeeper met me, saying excitedly, "I was just going to send for you. Come with me."

She led me upstairs to Freda's room and unlocked the door. We entered, and she locked it again on the inside—and then, to my wondering amazement and joy, I saw the reason for her caution, and for his message in the mirror. Freda herself lay on the bed apparently fast asleep. The housekeeper bent over her, and in a voice of mingled delight and fear, exclaimed, "Oh, what shall I do?"

She voiced my own feelings. How could we account for Freda's appearance? We must act quickly. Would the letter help us? I drew the envelope from my pocket, and read:

"For years I have been investigating every phenomenon that seemed in any way to suggest the presence of a higher space, adjacent to that in which we live. The record of my experiments and their results fills volumes. It is enough to say that I succeeded so well in my investigations that I became able to place objects, even animals, within this space. These objects were always connected with my experimenting table by tubes containing powerful magnetic currents, by means of which I could bring back anything within range of my vision again. The idea at last came to me that if I

could find an intelligent being, willing in the interest of scientific knowledge to co-operate with me, my discovery would be famous. Such a being, if sent into the invisible space, and reclaimed again into our own, would not only immortalize my fame, but also prove my theories by his testimony. . . ."

Here the writing abruptly ended. We could only conjecture the rest. He had undoubtedly used Freda as his "intelligent being." She had trusted him, but he had failed to re-attract her sufficiently for her to become visible again. Possibly a human being required more forceful power than he had calculated. Hence the grief which had caused the mother's death and his own torturing remorse. Death must have shown him the way to release her, and he had used the mirror as a medium of communication. He had believed that I would do my best to help Freda, nor was he wrong.

The only time we spoke of her curious experiences, Freda said: "It is not very clear to me now. I know that my father raised the rate of vibration in my body, so that it became invisible to people on this plane, but his formula for bringing me back refused to work—to his tragic dismay. While I was in this higher, or perhaps more inclusive, space, it became clear to me that nothing is ever really destroyed. It only changes its form, as ice becomes water, water turns into steam, and steam into an invisible gas; the elements vibrate differently, and each varying vibration has its own individual form. That is as much as I can explain in terms that you could understand."

Be that as it may, the mirror still reflects my Freda—and I am content. Who now, however, shall prove Professor Dolber's theory of the fourth dimension? I, for one, dare not try.

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