

MIRROR MIRROR
by Simone Adams

My reflection in the mirror haunts me. I should have put on more makeup to conceal the shadows under my eyes. Why do my eyes look so dull? They used to be my best feature but now I fear that they reveal too much about my unhappiness. I reapply my lipstick. I heard that if you're giving a speech you should wear bright lipstick or a colorful necklace to draw the attention to your face and keep your audience engaged. I hope it works.

A woman enters the restroom and I busy myself looking elsewhere, not ready to make eye contact with anyone yet. I steal a glance at her reflection in the mirror and catch sight of full thighs, sculpted calves, slim ankles, and designer heels disappearing into a stall. I wonder what her face looks like. I stand up straight, smoothing the front of my skirt, and walk out of the restroom feeling less assured than I care to admit. A quick glance at the time reveals I have an hour and half before the local chapter of Professional Women Empowered introduces me as the keynote speaker for their conference. I decide a breakfast cocktail is necessary, a little liquid courage to get through the day.

Raymond and I argued again this morning. I had been up late working on my speech and he had stayed awake trying to get my attention with his nighttime mating ritual. I ignored him, something that's harder to do when I'm asleep than when I'm in bed with a pile of papers in my lap. Eventually, he stopped rubbing my thigh and turned over in a huff. This morning I woke early and started rehearsing again. When he got up, he didn't greet me with a good morning kiss or wish me luck on my speech, he just lit into me about how I had ignored him. I explained the obvious: I was nervous about this speech and needed to concentrate. We argued back and forth until eventually that vein above his eyebrows began to bulge and I knew I had lost the argument. He was yelling something about my duties as a wife. My duty? I'm usually slow to anger, but my voice shook and I'm sure the tremors in my hands were because I wanted so desperately to choke the life out of him. I don't remember everything I screamed in retaliation, but I do remember saying that if sex was all he wanted from me that he could go get it from somewhere else. I knew it was a mistake as soon as I said it, and I don't think I meant it, but it was too late. His silence filled the room. He left without saying goodbye and his void filled the room too. Now, I have to shake all that off and stand confidently while I pitch my hypocrisy to a room full of powerful women. Score: Raymond 1, Me 0.

Today I am giving a presentation that encourages women to break from the mold and be fearless leaders of their own journey. A while ago I got bored with corporate America and decided to start my own travel company. When the internet annihilated the role of the travel agent, I adapted my business and started creating group travel packages for single women who wanted to see the world but didn't want to travel alone. It turned out to be a lucrative decision. My talk is supposed to hit three points: leaving when the time is right, adapting when things go wrong, and staying true to oneself throughout the process. The irony is that I have only applied any of these points to my professional life, my marriage on the other hand...

The hotel is a labyrinth and when I ask a young employee where I can find a restaurant that serves mimosas or bloody mary's, he offers to walk me there.

"Where are you from?" He asks, in an effort to make small talk.

"Oh, I'm local. I'm just here to present to a group in one of your ballrooms."

"Not the business ladies downstairs?" His brows scrunch together and he takes a step to the side to look me up and down.

"Yeah, why?" I find myself smoothing out the front of my skirt again.

"Please don't take this the wrong way, I don't wanna get fired, but you look way too hot to be with those old ladies. I mean they're nice and all, but well... they look like a buncha... well, they just don't look like you." He's blushing at his own words. He's kinda cute.

I can't help but smile. Boy, did I need this kid to boost my spirits right now. He is heaven-sent at a moment when I am feeling like something you scrape off the bottom of your shoe.

"Thank you," I say with a light laugh, "You made my day. Actually, I'm not part of their group, I'm just giving a speech today."

Why do I feel the need to further distance myself from these women he already finds so unlike me? Perhaps because I'd rather be compared to the woman I just left in the restroom—curvy, sexy, confident?

He stops outside the over-decorated hotel bistro and wishes me good luck on my speech. I want to talk to him longer. I want to put him in my pocket and pull him out on days when I need a pep talk. All of a sudden I'm needy and it bothers me.

The bistro is a little too dimly lit for my fragile mood, but I sit at the bar and choose a seat nearest the entrance. I order a bloody mary, "Spicy with extra olives, please," resisting the urge to make it a double. The bartender is standoffish, so much for conversation there. I look at the other patrons at the bar and feel a new low. It's a weekday morning so I didn't expect much but the company is sad. At the far end of the bar is an accountant-looking fellow with thinning hair. He has a round face, a round nose, and a round belly. He looks lonely. I wonder if I look lonely and, as if by reflex, I sit a little straighter on the bar stool. Between us are two younger guys in khakis and short-sleeved button-down shirts having an impassioned conversation about the latest ios. I'm the only woman at the bar.

I feel a presence behind me before I know he's there. A shadow looms over my right shoulder and a gentleman motions to the seat beside me, "Is this seat taken?"

I am mid-sip and gulp it down to answer, "It's yours." I look at all of the empty seats at the bar and feel both grateful and anxious that he chose the one beside me.

His name is Michael. He's a marketing consultant for a boutique firm. He has been in the city for a few days meeting with a client. And he is stop-and-stare gorgeous. His eyes are dark, with heavy lashes. They smile before he does. Oh, but when he smiles, I lose it. A hint of a dimple, perfect teeth, and soft full lips. Kissable. He has the build of an athlete and I can only imagine what he looks like under that tailored suit. Good god. Is it the liquor? I'm feeling a bit flushed.

We talk. He asks me questions about myself, my career, my dreams, my fears and I find myself opening up to this stranger in ways that shock me. Hell, when is the last time I had an

intelligent conversation with a handsome man? It's his smile that makes me weak and every time he flashes it I offer one in return. I linger on my one drink as long as I can but when he offers to buy me another I tell him that I need to keep my senses about me before giving this speech. At that, I check the time and realize that I need to hurry to the conference. I call the bartender for my tab but my handsome new friend insists on paying it for me so I can get to the ballroom.

"And if you feel so inclined, perhaps you'll meet me for lunch after your speech?" He gives me that damned irresistible smile again and I hear myself reply, "yes".

As soon as I say it, I grimace. A meal with a man I just met seems inappropriate.

"Look, you're hesitant so I won't even ask for your number. If you need to cancel you don't have to come up with an excuse. You can just not show up. But I hope you do. I'll be waiting."

He explains that he'll make a reservation for 1:00 at the main restaurant in the hotel and I can meet him when I break away from the event.

I agree again, this time less hesitantly. Lunch with a friend seems harmless.

With my confidence firmly in place and a smile that I can't wipe away, I am ready to give my speech. The president of the organization introduces me, rattling off my accolades and some trite line about women persevering through the odds. When she finishes, I walk across the stage towards the mic, absorbing the applause that welcomes me.

"My story is your story. I am every woman. My name does not matter. The color of my skin does not matter. My age does not matter."

I pause to look around the room. The hotel clerk was right: these women are old.

My opening is simple but I see the audience smiling and nodding. My nerves begin to ease and I remember to smile before I continue.

"I loved my job, but I wasn't happy. I would ask you to raise your hand if you can relate, but you may be here with coworkers."

The crowd snickers and a few women shoot their hands in the air anyway, which brings more laughter. I chuckle too and acknowledge them with a nod of my head.

"I was well taken care of with an enviable salary, benefits that would be hard to come by in today's economy, and the company matched my 401k dollar for dollar. When I told people what I did and who I worked for, they were impressed. My job looked good on paper. But my heart was not fulfilled."

I pause, letting the statement resonate. Of course, I'm aware of the parallelism in my marriage. I'm well taken care of and my friends envy my marriage. It looks good from the outside. But I'm in love with a man who doesn't look at me anymore. My heart is not fulfilled. My nervousness returns as I ramble on about leaving when the time is right.

I continue without stumbling over my words, using the gestures and inflection that I rehearsed. I get the responses I anticipated. I'm ready to close the deal.

"...is the moment your life will change. My life changed when I stopped looking for my

boss to give me a promotion and I gave myself one: Founder and CEO. When I stopped worrying that Expedia and Orbitz and Priceline were better than me and focused on my own unique selling point, I realized that I'm a woman and I know what the woman traveler wants. I don't need a man to tell me 'You're great, you can do it.' I already know I can do it. And I'm *going* to do it... because it's what *I* want to do."

I want to have lunch with Michael.

After the presentation, I am swarmed by ladies eager to thank me for inspiring them. Despite the rough start, my day is shaping up to be pretty remarkable. I shake hands, exchange business cards, agree to speak at two upcoming lunch-n-learns, tentatively book a few women for some upcoming travel, and all the while I am glancing at a clock on the far wall. I've labored over this idea of lunch with a stranger and my guilt has returned.

Finally, I break away from the ladies and decide to call Raymond. I'm not quite sure if I'm trying to abate my guilt or if I hope he'll make some declaration of his love for me that will convince me to change my mind about lunch. It's funny, as much as I want to have lunch with some gorgeous stranger who flirted with me, I'd rather have lunch with my husband. We used to steal time together over lunch a few days a week. Long long ago.

I dial Raymond's cell, forgetting what I had said this morning, forgetting that he holds grudges.

"What?" He answers in a tone so brusque it makes me stutter.

"I... I...", I don't know how to begin much less how to soften his anger. "I just finished my presentation and wanted to see what you were doing for lunch?"

"I left work early. I'm headed to the golf course with Dex. We're gonna hit the cigar bar after so I won't be home for dinner. I might be out late."

"Oh, okay. Well... the ladies here are taking me to lunch so..." My heartbeat quickens. It is rare I ever lie to my husband and when I have it was only to be alone, never had I lied to be with anyone else.

"Fine," *click*.

I look at the phone in my hands. My nervousness fades and I walk towards the hotel restaurant.

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The conversation over lunch flows as easily as it did at the bar. Michael is handsome and smart and funny and god, he is so sexy. I find myself staring at his lips and practically have to shake my head to draw my eyes elsewhere. The food is surprisingly good for a hotel restaurant. I'm in the mood to take a risk so I order the risotto with scallops and it comes out perfectly cooked. Michael orders a ravioli with Italian sausage in a brown butter sauce that looks delicious. Neither of us leave much on our plates and we even order dessert, something I usually don't do but I'm desperate to find a way to make the moment last longer.

Michael knows I'm married. He probably doesn't believe me that this is not my norm. I keep telling myself it's just lunch, but really it's validation. I want to feel special, even if only for

a three-course meal. I give Michael credit, he is a gentleman. The conversation is never uncomfortable, we never get too personal. We stay on the outskirts of anything remotely sexual or even sensual. When it's obvious we've drawn out the conversation as long as possible, he reaches to pay for the tab and I quickly dig in my purse to pull out my own credit card.

"Please don't insult me. I asked you to lunch. My treat."

Michael places his credit card in the jacket with the bill and motions for the server to take it before I have a chance to protest. The gesture brings my guilt back to the surface.

Michael walks me to the valet and I realize this is it, he boards a flight first thing in the morning and I won't see him again. As I move to say goodbye, to hug him, he cups my face in both his hands and kisses me on the mouth. The act is so simple, so intimate, so wrong. I am caught off guard, but my lips linger on his.

I pull away and turn my back to him. There are tears in my eyes and I'm not sure why they're there. I'm so ashamed, I can't believe this weird show of emotion. I detest any public show of fragility and here I've committed the ultimate act of weakness: tears.

Michael pulls at my elbow, swinging me back around to face him but I hang my head. How can I show my face? He lifts my head in his hands and uses his thumbs to wipe away the tears that begin to spill.

"It's okay," he says.

And that's it. He doesn't apologize for the kiss. Not that I minded. He doesn't ask me why I'm crying. Not that I would have an answer if he did. It's not like I was sobbing on his shoulder, but it is embarrassing all the same. If I were in a movie this moment might be romantic but in the glaring light of day, it feels obnoxious. He doesn't seem to mind it as much as I do. He lets me wipe away a few rogue tears before he pulls me close. I'm stiff at first, I don't know how to embrace a man who isn't my husband, particularly a man who has seen me in such a vulnerable state. He doesn't let go. The awkward moment passes and I feel my muscles relax. I let him hug me. I take a shallow breath, unable to breathe. Then I feel my arms lift, hugging him back and I let out a long ragged sigh. How could he know I needed this simple act of affection? Why didn't I know I needed it?

Michael mouths something to the valet—who has been impatiently waiting for my ticket—while he leads me back inside. He finds a couch in a quiet corner and we sit, saying nothing for a moment before he breaks the comfortable silence.

"It's none of my business, but I'd feel like an ass if I just left you like this."

I don't respond. What the hell am I supposed to say?

"Look, why don't you have one drink with me. You can talk or not talk. Seriously, I wouldn't feel right sending you home in tears."

He pauses to look at me and I cut my eyes at him, furious that he mentioned the freaking tears. But I still say nothing, so he continues.

"I have an incredible bottle of scotch this client just gave me. I didn't plan on opening it till I got home but I think you could use a glass. If you like Macallan and Glenfiddich,

this'll blow your mind."

Hmm, he listens too. I talked about my affinity for scotch when we were at the bar this morning.

"I know it's early, but it's 5 o'clock somewhere." He smirks, "and forgive me for saying this, but you look like you could use a drink."

Now it's my turn to smirk.

He continues, "I have a suite so we can stay in the living room, I promise to be on my best behavior. Scouts honor."

He throws up his three fingers in the Scout pledge and gives me a boyish grin. Damn that smile.

I'm afraid that if I speak, my voice will betray my heart so I just rise and wait for him to realize this is my "yes". He is confused for a fraction of a second, then jumps up and leads me toward the elevators.

At the door to his suite I begin to second guess myself, this situation. I feel both foolish and brave. Twice in the elevator I had opened my mouth to tell him that I didn't think this was in my best interest, but both times—as if he sensed my trepidation—he flashed that beautiful smile and my resolve vanished. He opens the double doors and steps aside to let me enter. I walk into a massive suite with floor to ceiling windows and a view of the skyline that gives me a touch of vertigo. He tells me to make myself comfortable and I walk to the wall of windows.

It's mid-afternoon, the sun is bright, shining on my face as if this is any normal day. The last time I was in a high rise in the city was on my third anniversary. Raymond and I slept with the curtains open and the next morning we made love with the city as a witness that once upon a time our sex was vibrant and our love was mutual. What happened to us Raymond?

Michael interrupts my thoughts, "Great view, huh?" He goes to a suitcase and pulls out an ornate black box.

"Yeah."

I bring my thoughts back to the present and watch Michael open the box to pull out a bottle of 21 year old Isle of Jura scotch and two scotch glasses. I've heard of this stuff. It's scotch of legend at the cigar bar where Raymond will be later. He would be so jealous.

Michael pours and hands me a glass. I tilt my glass and toast my new friend.

"To the moment," he says, winking over his raised glass.

I hold the glass to my nose and inhale the full fragrant notes of toffee and vanilla, maybe honey too. Michael is watching me, but I don't look at him. I take a long lingering sip and savor the taste on my tongue—sweet like a jam, no hint of smokiness like I expected, like I would have preferred. I appreciate the way it hits the back of my throat. Scotch is meant to be enjoyed slowly. I try to slow down, slow my heartbeat, slow my thoughts. To the moment, he said. I try to be in the moment.

I ignore his eyes on me and busy myself looking around the room. I wish this suite was

Michael's home and that it could tell me about him. I wish the abstract painting on the wall gave me insight into his adventurous personality. I wish the mahogany desk and the brass-studded leather couch were hints about his impeccable style. I brave a look at him and smile. Michael smiles, gives me a look I can't decipher, and takes a seat. I follow.

I'm a little embarrassed by my school-girl antics. I notice it, yet I can't seem to stop myself. I'm hyper aware of my behavior which only makes me more nervous. I dig in my purse just to give my hands something to do. He finally asks me if I've lost something and I stumble over a lame excuse. As the scotch begins to calm my anxiety, I catch myself leaning in when he talks, laughing at the simplest of his jokes, or staring at his lips and I wonder, does he see it too and if so, what does he think of me. When did I become so unsure of myself?

Is that why Raymond is so turned off by me? Does he see my self-doubt? He created it. Nurtured it. I bet you that's it. He fell in love with a self-assured woman and then tortured me with nagging criticisms, now he doesn't like the result? That's some bullshit.

Somewhere, between the elevator and the second glass of scotch, I made a decision. I wanted to take my time, I didn't want to rush out of the hotel like Cinderella only to wonder what would have happened if I stayed. I love my husband, but I'm lonely. I'm allowing myself this moment, whatever it is. I shove the guilt behind my need to feel desirable.

I'm nearly done with my second glass though I refuse to finish it. I'm not ready to leave nor am I sure I should stay. As long as the amber liquid remains in this glass I don't have to make a decision.

Michael is talking about music but I've zoned out, only offering a "mmm-hmmm" every now and again. He sets his glass down on the coffee table and it startles me back to the present. He pulls out his iPhone and selects a playlist. Like everything else about this moment, it is perfect—not overtly seductive, not a mood killer—a light instrumental worldly jazz kinda vibe.

It feels too perfect.

Without warning, I blurt, "Michael, I don't know what I'm doing here."

I gulp down the last of my scotch, feeling the burn at the back of my throat. I stand up, not sure if I actually plan on leaving or if I just want him to stop me.

He whispers, "Stay."

I know now that I wanted him to stop me. In that moment I know that the reason I haven't left my husband is because I fear he would never ask me to stay. What I want is to stay in my marriage, and for my husband to want me to stay, but right now Michael wants me to stay and the two thoughts get mixed up and I am in Michael's arms and kissing him and he is kissing me and I am staying.

I find myself floating in a sea of plush down comforters and pillows on a king-sized bed with a gorgeous man I just met a few hours ago—but I feel no shame. I do feel uncertain, unpracticed. Michael is none of these things and I am grateful. I don't even care if this was all calculated on his part but I convince myself that it wasn't. His body is beautiful. My fingers dance over his broad shoulders, chiseled stomach, slim waist, strong thighs. He takes his time and the slow seductive efforts makes me feel beautiful too. All of my flaws fade away and I see

myself through his eyes: soft and feminine. He says my name in a breathless gritty voice that excites me and I dare to answer by locking my eyes on his. He rewards my bold behavior by kissing me fully with a forceful passion that takes me by surprise. He places his hand between my legs and I am aware of how warm and moist I've become. I am trembling uncontrollably and the anticipation builds and I want everything he has to offer, but still he takes his time.

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*I smell of sex. Of him.
Of sweat and cologne and confidence and swagger.
I inhale, savoring the scent that lingers on me.*

I shower and wash it off before my husband comes home.

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I pretend to be asleep when Raymond gets home, it's after one in the morning. I'm hoping he's drunk enough to leave me alone tonight. He doesn't shower, just falls in the bed, still reeking of cigars and anger. I lie silently, until I hear him snoring, then I fall into a dreamless sleep with a smile parting my lips.

In the morning, I wake feeling like a new woman. I leave Raymond asleep and get dressed, selecting a long chiffon sundress that's a bit fancy for a Saturday when I only have errands to run, but I like the way the wispy fabric feels against my skin. It reminds me of the way Michael's fingers and lips felt on my skin yesterday, the way he touched and kissed areas on my body that I didn't even know could make me tingle. His lips on the inside of my elbows, the backs of my legs, the dip in my collarbone. His fingers tickling the area behind my knee, caressing the inside of my ankle. My whole being trembled with him and it sends a shiver through my body now.

I make my coffee and sit on the front porch. The sun is already high in the sky and I stretch in its warmth. I close my eyes and remember Michael's lips on mine. Raymond always gives me a peck that feels more brotherly than intimate. Yesterday, Michael reminded me about the power of passion.

I hear Raymond in the living room, turning on the TV. It is Saturday morning and he isn't out golfing so this means he is catching up on his DVR'd shows and will sit in front of the TV until late afternoon. I sigh and leave my spot on the porch.

"Good morning," I sing as I walk back in the door. He mumbles something without looking at me. Today, I don't care. I'm actually a little shocked at my lack of guilt.

I walk into the kitchen and begin emptying the dishwasher. My mind wanders and I find myself reliving the moment when Michael first climbed on top of me. I resisted only slightly, only so the moment would last longer. So he could nibble at the inside of my thigh a little longer, so he could tease my belly with his fingers a little longer, so he could tell me I am beautiful a little longer, but mostly so I could feel sexy a little longer, feel wanted a little longer.

"What are you making for dinner tonight."

I jump at the sound of Raymond's voice, I didn't hear him come up behind me. My heart

beats faster in fear that he can read my thoughts.

"Umm, I hadn't thought about it. Maybe seafood?" Maybe I'll try to recreate that scallop risotto I had at the hotel yesterday. I search Raymond's eyes for any hint of his knowing about my adultery.

"You wanna just go out?"

"Sure." I exhale, unaware that I had been holding my breath. If he's suggesting dinner out he must be in a better mood. We agree on our usual neighborhood spot where we know the manager and he returns to the television.

I finish in the kitchen and head upstairs to do the laundry. I learned the hard way that my husband expects his clothes washed and folded every Saturday. I resisted at first, standing my ground as a modern woman who would not be relegated to household chores, but after a few months of repeated arguments I decided to just wash the damn clothes.

Again, I find myself daydreaming about Michael. Not so much the man, but what he did to me and how he made me feel. I orgasmed three times.

I didn't bother to get Michael's number. After we made love, we lay in the afternoon sun and he asked if he could see me again. In that moment, I realized that I didn't want a long drawn out affair. Oddly, I didn't want to hurt Raymond. I told Michael that the moment was special because it was unexpected. I didn't want to taint what we had just shared by sneaking around trying to recreate it. My resolve surprised me, but I held fast. Michael's ego seemed a little jolted. He protested lightly, but then the idea that I could walk away must have turned him on because he buried his head under the sheets and used his tongue in magical ways that left me breathless.

I sort the laundry and put a load in the wash. I try to sit next to Raymond on the couch watching his shows, but I'm restless and fidgety. I get up and leave the house under the guise of running errands, but I really just want to be alone with my thoughts. I walk the aisles of the grocery store and I feel my hips sway, there's a confidence in my step that I had forgotten once existed. In the car I sing along with the radio and I catch sight of myself in the rearview mirror. My eyes are shining like they used to when I first met Raymond. I smile at myself. *Hey pretty lady, I remember you.* A car honks its horn and I see that the light has turned green. I laugh out loud at my silliness and speed through the intersection.

Dinner with Raymond is the usual. We say little to each other in the car and the conversation over dinner is mostly him telling me about his day yesterday. Someone pissed him off at work and he left early to work from home—a.k.a. the golf course. He recounts the golf game and fills me in on the marital woes of his friends. I wonder if he talks about our relationship to them. We order appetizers, entrees, and a bottle of wine. Not once does he ask me about my conference, my speech, or my steamy affair with the hot stranger.

After dinner, Raymond and I retire to the bedroom where he sits up watching *Real Time with Bill Maher* and I sit beside him reading a novel about a woman who walks away from an unhappy marriage and travels the world. The story is a bestseller but I find it a bit clichéd and unrealistic so I mark my page and kiss Raymond goodnight. He turns his face to greet my lips, but his eyes stay glued to the television. I look at the television, it's a rerun. I lay down and fall asleep remembering the taste of scotch on Michael's soft lips.

I had dozed off but I'm awake now, aware of Raymond's fingers searching for the hem of my nightgown and slipping underneath it. I know what will come next. He moves his hands in large circles on my thighs. This is Raymond's mating call. I pretend that I am not yet awake, buying myself precious seconds to loathe him and his damned predictability before I roll over to turn my hips towards the ceiling. I glance at the clock. 11:02. Of course, *Bill Maher* just ended. Raymond mounts me, methodically, like an animal. He is kneeling above me, with his legs straddled across my hips. The TV is off but I can see him clearly in the light from the moon shining through the large window behind our bed. His belly is much larger than when I first fell in love with him but his boyish face is the same. In the moonlight, I want to forgive him. I don't think he can see my eyes but if he could, I wonder what he would see. Early in our marriage he failed to see the desire I had for him. Now that the desire has faded, he fails to see the contempt. I don't get wet, or more accurately, he doesn't give me a reason to get wet so he reaches for the lube I keep in the top drawer of my nightstand. I had to purchase it to keep him from spitting on his fingers, an act that I find repulsive. Raymond squeezes the lube onto his fingers and reaches between my legs. I tense but he doesn't notice, or pretends not to, and positions himself just so, then slides inside me. He doesn't kiss me and his movements are jerky, erratic. His hands are kneading my breasts mechanically and I slide them down to my waist but in a few moments he is groping at my breasts again, rotating them like doorknobs. I want to look in his eyes but they are closed tight. I wish he would say my name but he just makes a growling, grunting noise instead. I sigh, wrapping my arms around my husband and pulling him close to me.

Raymond rolls off of me, panting as if he's done something worth doing. I glance at the clock. 11:09. A few moments later his breathing slows and he begins snoring softly. I get up and clean myself off. I catch sight of myself in the mirror and once again, my reflection is haunting. I slip into the bed and I curl up with my back to Raymond. I scoot further into the bed until I am touching Raymond and, instinctively, he rolls towards me with his chest against my back and wraps me in his arms.

"Love you," he mumbles, half asleep, and lifts his head to kiss my shoulder.

"Love you too."