

A Handmirror Named Sincerity

by Edith Lyre

Nobody cares how you look in the sun, she thought. They can tell you're not meant to be there. She walked loose of the shadows and asked her device on what side of the avenue, tonight, the evening market would open. Back through her device, answered her friend, the south tonight: You'll stay on the north?

North yeah, she said, and also said she was hanging up a moment, as in was removing the phone from her ear, because she was crossing a road, then, the road crossed, she returned the phone to her ear, to explain, actually, the phone had to leave her ear yet again. She was about to buy a coffee.

It's so hot, said her friend.

My grandma says, she disagreed, it's good to drink hot things when it's hot.

Is your grandma, laughed her friend, a Matryoshka doll, an old Latvian crone-shaped Matryoshka doll, with a different, new, like, classical wisdom on each new little doll? Is your grandma a tiny painted sequence of three or more wooden measuring cups?

But yet again, her ear was gone. Long black, one sachet of honey? Please?

One sachet?

Of honey.

So just one sachet?

Of honey. Just one. What's on the north tonight?

On the north side? asked her friend. Nothing.

What about on the other south, north of the north side?

There's a street-play.

A Midsummer Night's Dream? I'd love that.

I'm going to the evening market.

I think what I'll do, she decided, is go to china-town now, get nothing, get a lot of garbage tofu-nothing and eat it at home.

It's not impossible to be where he is.

Yeah no, she laughed. It's impossible.

It was the eighth day of their schedule for the fortnight, her ex's and hers. He'd gone, as such, by the proper method; added it at an advance of two months, a footnote to another schedule, mentioning he'd planned buying tickets, for around this time-period, if it was okay? Because they knew that meant she mustn't go? She counter-footnoted, when she reciprocated with her schedule, that yeah no totally, that's fine. I was thinking about it, I mean, her footnote continued, but definitely you've said it first and have more people going, so it'd be good to save money, anyway.

As I'm concerned, she told her friend, the evening market doesn't exist.

Other people exist. They could see A Midsummer Night's Dream with you.

No, no, she shook her head, phone tilted away, collecting a barrage of hair-noise, strands hitting mic, as to cue to her friend she was, as a matter of fact, shaking her head. My footnote said I wanted to save money. I said that on the schedule. What if he leaves half-way and then also goes to A Midsummer Night's Dream?

I don't think...

The point is it's a hot day, she said, sipping her coffee. So I'm going to lie down. So I'm tired.

That's one solution, said her friend, and also, I have to leave. Enjoy sleeping.

Love this — look what I'm eating — tofu shaped like cheerful, friendly squids.

Tofulopods? Are the tofulopods cheerful because they're about to die? said her other friend (whose existence she had forgotten, her other-other friend wasn't wrong).

They're frightened heaps. But they don't want to show me fear. I'm eating them each by each and at random, but every squid thinks there's a pattern. They reckon it's the complainiest who get eaten. They pretend to be happy so I'll eat them last. But the facade will come off when it's the final one, and he'll just be crying. Tears of tofu-squid-ink. Weeping soy sauce.

I don't know, said the friend. Maybe someone will survive. Do you have time to eat them before the street-play?

Am I going to the street-play?

Mhm, you are.

I guess I am. I guess it sounds like I am. I guess not. Some will live. They're still wrong if they think there's a reason. Dumb luck, huh, you delicious monster: laughing upside-down, tentacles writhing like Medusa-hairs — that's the only reason.

Some people gave up a wall of a fountain, and her friend and her friend's girlfriend and she were the closest of everybody, so they had to sit down, but now they couldn't see. Should we stand up?

But her friend said I can see.

And her friend's girlfriend asked, If I get drinks, is that okay?

Please do, she said. Please get drinks. Whatever white they have? Large? If there's multiple, their second cheapest?

Do me the same order, her friend said, absently, watching a play she couldn't see.

Her friend's girlfriend left. Enter Puck.

How now, spirit! whither wander you?

It's great you can drink here. Can you see alright?

Nothing. But I don't want to. I'm just mad other people can, but you know, the fountain's a nice spot. I don't want to be up there, all those swaying people. I couldn't spill a drink at the Shakespeare play.

Far too scenic.

Way too scenic. My back's all getting drenched from the water, but a seat on the side of the fountain's an okay level of scenic.

We can move.

Did I say I wanted to move?

Her friend gestured at the central clearing, at whatever things were casting pink light up the canopy of the tarmac-sweeping, plastic willow (under the leaves of which, the actors changed). I'm the only one who can see.

Then slouch more, if you need us to be the same. It's nice down here.

Her friend slouched.

It was late when her friend's girlfriend came back with their drinks.

A line, such a long line. Are we not standing up?

We're preferring to sit, said her friend.

She took a riesling with thanks. But the thanks were crowded out by Bottom's mumbled line: *If I were fair, Thisbe, I were only thine.*

Whether or not the mumbled thanks were welcome was also hard to gauge; *O monstrous! O strange!* was erupting from the stage, and her friend's girlfriend's answer was unintelligible.

Three together anyway, they sat on the fountain-side, backs frosting with cool, teal-dyed foam.

Someone who was friends with her friend's girlfriend and also with her, but not with her friend, came over and sat and quietly talked to her friend's girlfriend and no one else (although they did smile at each other (her just-arrived friend and she did) across her friend-she-came-with's slouched back), and this left her friend-she-came-with and her alone, to as it were carry on.

It's what my buddy said about my hands, she said after a while.

Excuse me?

(What he'd (her buddy had) said about her hands, she was saying, was the start of why she mustn't go to the evening market — however much her friend and friend's girlfriend and other-friend might wish to go, as two of them had decided they did.) When we were teenagers, and he'd say things like that, she went on.

What did he say?

He wasn't a teenager, I mean — but it was like when we were.

What did he say?

So, she said, He said, Those sort of facial expressions cost a lot of money. I was like, Say that again? and he said, It costs money — to not feel disgusting when you're moving your hands like that, expressing yourself that way. Move your hands how you like, I told him. And he said I'm wearing a hoodie. He said I'm wearing my shit hoodie, dude. Be an adult about this. And I was like what the fuck does it matter he's wearing his hoodie? Also I am an adult.

I get what he was saying.

I get what he was saying now, but the point is what was his point, saying it then, in that context?

With him, you mean, after you'd had a terrible day?

And through Wall's chink (sang out a too-grim, not-enough-anxious Quince), *poor souls, they are content to whisper.*

Yeah it was a terrible day. No I wanted to talk to him and all he did was, like intentionally, try to make me dislike myself.

Did it work?

Yeah, it did work. It did. And I had my mirror.

Sincerity, your mirror?

I had it and I was looking at it while he was talking to me and he grabbed it from my hands.

He asked whether I were looking at it when he and I were talking?

Not himself, he meant?

He meant— yeah. We were— it was the day I sent the message, asking hey, can you be separate from my space and so on? I was feeling rattled after having to do that, so asked if he wanted to get food, if my buddy wanted to get food, and we got burritos and then alcohol and now we were talking about it. I'd talked about a certain way he'd said something, my ex'd said something, and then the certain, like, very-good-way I said another thing back? Then he, my buddy, starts with this thing about my hands.

And were you?

Was I looking at Sincerity?

At Sincerity? Were you?

The entire time we were talking.

Would you desire, jibed Theseus, *lime and hair to speak better?*

When the ex and you were talking?

Yeah— when we were talking. The entire time I was looking at it and now he was looking at it.

He being your buddy now?

Yeah, and he said, moving his hands everywhere, looking at it, that it didn't look real. He said it's the least accurate mirror I've seen in my life.

It's just that it's old, I said.

He said it's your grandma's? — Which I'd told him ages ago.

I was like, It was. I don't know anything about it. No idea how old it is. But she called it Sincerity then I stole it from her and never admitted I'd stolen it. So I've kept it forever since. And now it's mine.

He was everywhere over his face, saying this is so weird and not real, and then he said, The joke is I always look this all-to-the-side and off, right?

I'm like *don't*.

He's looking at his face and saying, No I mean, the joke with the name.

Like I *know*.

And he's saying, It's not my little object. I don't need to not blaspheme against it.

So I start like alright, I'll have it back now, and he doesn't give it back.

Instead he looks at it and he says, The joke with the name is this is the first time I'm seeing my actual face. It's sans, he sings, and it's wax. He starts laughing now and he turns the mirror to face me and he's moving it backwards and forwards like a phone-torch waving in my eyes, and says, If you're an urn and you're sincere, that means you're complete.

Finally I grab it back and look in it again, like I'm worried if I look in it now, his face is going to be there. So I check. He's not laughing anymore, and is kind of listening, so I remind him I'm having close to the worst day of my life right now, and he's being a low-quality friend.

Then he's like I'm having a really bad day too.

So I say that's okay. Can we talk about that too, but after me?

Then — because we're sitting at a glass table — he starts looking down in it like a lake and he's poking his face over and over in the top of the table, and he says I don't want to talk about it ever.

You, ladies (said the Lion), you, whose gentle hearts do fear the smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor...

Her friend said I get it.

But let me, she said. I want to finish this part.

No of course. Finish the part. Don't hurry, either.

But I'm there. I'm pretty much there.

Okay.

Okay so then's when — when he said I don't want to talk about it ever — I said, you know, being embarrassed that you're a shit person isn't the same as being depressed. It's not even the same as having a conscience.

Her friend asked, Why would you say something like that?

Honestly. The lesson I've learned now, she said, is to never let people take my mirror. Like my grip's got to be white-knuckly on that, from now on. Then's when — anyway, this is what I was telling you about — after rattling his nails all over the top of the table with his eyes shut, he starts getting up.

He said I'm not trying to imply plans of non-good sorts, but all the same, he said, now I'm going home and there's a chance — other than the internet — I'll never see you again. So I mean. Just letting you know. Then he literally takes up his fucking coat and leaves.

You didn't do anything?

It was my bad day!

Her friend sighed.

So I don't have him and now also I don't have my really-good buddy, who's apparently been overseas since then but do you know where he is tonight?

Holy shit — her friend was smiling — he's at the evening market?

It's stupid as well.

Him being angry?

I said as well.

What's stupid?

Everything in my body now's just like, just say never mind.

Lovers, to bed (Theseus again); *'tis almost fairy-time*.

Jesus fucking Christ, if you say that to me.

I find it really funny, the thing is.

The stupid thing?

I was laughing yesterday, like insane. There's a video on the internet, about a Garfield strip.

Actually a chance you could've stuck with never mind.

It was like Odie the Garfield-dog — it was so ordinary of him, looking at Sincerity — when Garfield sees him through the picture-frame and starts screaming. Garfield thinks it's a mirror and thinks he's Odie on the other side, that he's the dog.

Jesus.

It reminded me of him and I couldn't stop laughing. I swear to God I'm trying but I can't take him seriously.

Puck's back.

I swear to God I'm trying. We're almost free?

Soon.

I'm starving. I've got the rest of my octopus buddies still to heat-up, but as well, first, I'm dropping in at the shop for more. I'm nearly out.

And this ditty after me (the Fairy King, sweating), *sing and dance it trippingly*.

Let's everyone go to a shop after we're free. We'll all buy microwavable tofu animals, after we're free, and if there's time, I get discounts at the further-away one, closest to the market.

The evening market?

No. The normal market. They're closed but the shop there's open.

She had her mirror somewhere around, she could feel it, at the bottom of her bag, she thought about taking it out. What tofu animals will they have, she asked? Will they have cats? All my friends know strange places I don't know, and I don't know how they know them.

We don't have to go anywhere different, if you're worried. If you're worried anything might be not easy to process. But yeah, it's vegan. Yeah, all the usual animals, and fake.

As though she'd removed the mirror, as though she were holding and looking at it, she moved out her empty palm and stared across, at her friend, waiting, smiling. What a solid good honest pal. As long as the animals are the same and they're all fake, I'll be fine. It's not a thing. Everything makes sense. Let's go, we're free now, let's eat.