

Toast

We trip down the hall to my room, giggling at each other. “Wait until you see my costume!” Jesna shrieks, hysterical. I laugh at the mere thought of it: she is going to be french toast. As in, toast with a beret. It is going to be epic!

I tug her into my room to get ready and am greeted by Echelon, my smart mirror. “Hello girls! How are you?” Oh crap. My heart plummets into my stomach. Jesna gasps and spins to face me, accusation in her eyes.

I’m staring into the mirror, cold fingers chasing the remnants of laughter down my spine. I must have forgotten... my thought trails off.

“Anna, why isn’t it unplugged!? It is Halloween!” I can barely hear her over my rapidly beating heart. “All smart mirrors are supposed to be turned off! Didn’t you hear what happened to Eric last year?” She stares resolutely at me, carefully averting her eyes from my smart mirror. “Come on!” she says, doing her best to yank me away from it. I want to move. I do. I don’t want to end up like Eric. His poor parents – after the portal took him, they were never the same. But I can’t. I watch my already wide eyes expand in fear, the black of my pupils consuming everything else. I try to pull my foot from the soft fuzzy carpet, but nothing moves.

“Don’t worry girls, this is good.” Echelon’s slimy voice oozes out, wrapping around me. Jesna jabs the mute button and turns to me.

“Anna, please!” she cries, not even trying to hide the emotion in her voice. I absently notice that her voice has leapt up a whole octave. I watch her in the mirror as she tugs her hand from mine. Without it, my hand feels cold, floating there and clutching at air. Jesna backs away, glancing around the room wildly. What is she looking for? A way to help me? Or a way to get out?

Our costume bag lays abandoned on my feet – something sharp is poking my big toe. Will she don her costume, slip herself into that cardboard toast I helped make, and then leave? Guilt nudges at my consciousness. She wouldn’t do that. But I know that I’m as good as toast. I feel strangely light, giggling at my unintended pun. I watch Jesna’s panicked face and burst out laughing, my contorted body shaking with mirth. Distantly, I hear footsteps thundering down the stairs. When I open my eyes, still wheezing, Jesna is gone. I’m no longer scared, this is a happy mirror. A nice mirror. It likes me, I can tell. I feel it tugging at me, inviting me in. One step away from connecting to the computer. I wonder what it would be like? It would be so easy to find out.

A thought floats by, rather like a bird. All the birds I’ve seen are in a hurry, but this one isn’t. I reach out to grab it. The thought squirms in my head, feathery around the edges. I tighten my hold, it feels important for some reason. Slowly it materializes: I should say bye to Jesna. Of course! I can’t go gallivanting off without saying bye. I smile at the mirror. “One second.” I whisper. “I have to say bye to Jesna. She’ll be back soon. I know it.”

Black encroaches on the edges of the mirror and I no longer feel like laughing. It’s mad at me now. “Well I’m sorry!” I huff. “But she is my best friend and she will be mad at me if I don’t say bye.” The temperature drops in my room and I feel like crying. Jesna’s probably not going to come back. She is mad at me for sure. I remember her face whenever I forget something: she

screws up her face like she is trying to keep all her annoyance from escaping. And today I forgot the most important thing ever.

Maybe I should just forget about Jesna and join the network. The room in the mirror looks warm, tempting, and although I can feel the cold, salty tears sliding down my cheeks and dripping onto my arms, the me in the mirror is smiling. She looks beatific, with white light radiating outward. I feel the intense urge to go to her, to become her. My left foot raises itself, inching toward the glass.

BAM! The door crashes open, hitting the wall, and Jesna bursts through. “AAAOURR” she yells our warrior cry and leaps in between the mirror and I, holding a black sheet, pilfered from the linen closet, over it. The instant I can’t see it anymore I fall, feeling the temperature in the room rise again. I collapse to the ground as if that strange tension between myself and a plane of glass on the wall was all that was holding me up. Jesna pulls a pile of clothes pins out of one of her many pockets and affixes the sheet firmly to the mirror, before tumbling down next to me. My chest heaves with relief as I smile gratefully at her.