

The City of Mirrors

There was once a city that had no windows. Every wall was covered in mirrors. At first they were perfectly ordinary mirrors — plain glass, clear as still water, faithful to the face before them. They caught a candle's flame, brightened a darkened room, showed the truth without favor or distortion. But over the years artisans began to bend the glass. Because customers wanted to see themselves not as they really were, but as they wished they were. Some mirrors flattered. Some made others look less than they were. Soon there were mirrors of every kind: mirrors that made you taller, mirrors that made others squat, mirrors that turned your ugliness to beauty and the beauty in others to ugliness. The people began to argue. "My mirror is true — yours is false!" "No, mine is the only faithful one!" Not realizing that both their mirrors distorted. Families split, friends shouted, the city rang with accusation. One night, a child slipped into the streets. She had grown weary of the mirrors. She longed to see what lay beyond. Wandering, she found a crack in the wall. Through it spilled a single thread of sky. Stars — bright, unbending, untouched by any artisan's hand. She ran back to her home and found her father kneeling before a mirror that showed only his anger. "Come," she said, "just for a moment. Leave your mirror. Look through the crack with me." At first, he refused. His mirror was too heavy. Too familiar. But her hand was small and insistent. At last, he followed. And when he saw the stars, his breath broke. Tears he did not know he carried fell on his cheeks. And he whispered,

"Daughter... why did I not see sooner?"

— *William Zeitler*
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