

The Trickster's Mirror

At dusk, as the last rays of sunlight painted the town square in gold and violet, a traveler arrived. He wore a cloak woven from mismatched fabrics, each patch a different color, and his sharp eyes glimmered with something between amusement and knowing. He carried little, save for a tall mirror framed in wood so aged it seemed as if it had always been there.

He set the mirror down in the center of the square and turned to the gathering townspeople.

"For a single coin," the traveler announced, "this mirror will reveal your future—exactly as it will unfold."

A murmur rippled through the crowd. Most scoffed, but two stepped forward.

The first was Edric, a man of boundless confidence, who believed fortune favored the bold, certain that the world was full of limitless opportunity. The second was Mira, cautious and quiet, who lived with the unshakable belief that disaster lurked around every corner.

The traveler beckoned. "Step forward, if you dare."

Edric did not hesitate. He slapped his coin into the traveler's palm and stood before the mirror.

It shimmered. The image that formed was dazzling: he saw himself draped in fine robes, wealth overflowing from his coffers, surrounded by admirers who hung on his every word. He was respected, honored. His future was assured.

Edric grinned. "I knew it!" he declared. "Everything will be as it should be!"

He turned from the mirror with a triumphant laugh, already imagining the riches that awaited him. There was no need to struggle, no need to prepare—his future was set.

Then came Mira.

She hesitated, but stepped forward anyway. She hesitantly placed her coin into the traveler's palm and stepped before the glass.

The mirror darkened. Shadows coiled within it, and when the image cleared, Mira saw herself destitute, alone, struggling against forces she could not control. Her home was in ruin. Her hands were empty. The world had turned its back on her.

"I knew it," she whispered, voice hollow. "Everything is doomed. No matter what I do, I cannot change it."

The traveler watched as she turned away, her shoulders heavy with defeat. Unlike Edric, who strode from the square full of confidence, Mira withdrew from the world. She avoided risk, certain that to act was to invite catastrophe.

The traveler smiled, though no one noticed.

Seasons passed.

Edric waited for his future to arrive, and in time, it did—but not in the way he had imagined. He came into wealth, just as the mirror had foretold. But with it came endless obligations, false friends, and admirers who whispered behind his back as soon as he turned away.

The riches that had once seemed like a promise of happiness became a burden. He learned that wealth demanded constant tending, that its weight grew heavier with time. He was surrounded, yet lonely. Respected, but not loved.

His future had come true, yet it was not the paradise he had imagined.

Mira, too, had seen her vision unfold. She lost what she had clung to, and hardships came, just as the mirror had shown. But when misfortune arrived, it did not break her as she had feared. She found new paths, unexpected kindness, and strength she had not known she possessed.

She had spent so long fearing ruin that she had never considered what might come after it. She had thought herself fragile, but in the face of hardship, she discovered how strong she truly was. The future had brought trials, but they had not destroyed her – indeed they had revealed her indomitable spirit.

Eventually both Edric and Mira realized something strange: the mirror had told the truth, and yet it had also deceived them.

One evening, as twilight deepened into night, the traveler returned to the square.

Edric and Mira were waiting.

"You tricked us," Mira said. "The mirror... it showed us things that weren't real."

"Oh?" The traveler tilted his head. "Did they not happen?"

Edric hesitated. "They did," he admitted. "But not how I thought they would."

"Ah," the traveler mused, as if this was no surprise at all. "You saw a glimpse, and mistook it for the whole. Fortune is never as bright as it first appears. And misfortune is never as dark."

He turned the mirror toward them once more.

They hesitated, but when they looked, they saw something different from before. The shimmering glass no longer reflected certainty—it showed possibility.

Edric saw that his riches, though not the key to happiness, could still be used for something meaningful.

Mira saw that hardship had not ruined her, but transformed her into someone stronger than she had once thought possible.

The traveler chuckled. "The mirror only ever showed one version of what could be. But it is your choices, your patience, and your willingness to move with time and circumstances that shape what becomes real."

And then, with a flick of his cloak, he was gone.

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