



# ON REFLECTION

by Nina Kiriki Hoffman

Standing on the sunwarmed stoop in the evening, Malcolm opened the front door into darkness. A breath of cool air bearing the faint scent of Ivy's herbal shampoo wafted out past him. He set his briefcase on the floor inside the front hall and reached for the light switch. He flipped it; no response. He flipped it again and listened to the clicks of connection without result.

Facing him in the gloom were dancing slivers of light surrounding a darkness. After a moment he realized he was looking at his own reflection, a shadow surrounded by westering light.

On Reflection  
Nina Kiriki Hoffman

## The Urbanite #5, 1995

He had left Ivy alone in the house that morning, as he had every morning since he married her two years before. Early in their marriage, he had known what he'd find when he came home: Ivy, happy to see him. A glass of wine, sharing time, and a dinner that would be ready half an hour after he walked through the front door. Over the past eight months, though, since he had changed his focus from therapist to forensic psychologist and started working late, he didn't come home at any pre-ordained hour, and he was never sure what he'd find.

This time was stranger than most. First data: No light bulb or a burnt out light bulb in the front hall, all the drapes drawn in the downstairs, and a mirror facing the front door. These things were new since this morning.

Add them to other information: Ivy's silences had stretched, and what used to be her annoying and reassuring tendency to demand his attention at inopportune moments had turned into a self-absorption that rendered her invisible until he became aware of her by omission.

He no longer knew how to predict her behavior or how to explain it.

He shut the door behind him and stood leaning against the wall beside the coat-tree, his eyes closed, waiting the ten minutes or so it would take to adjust to this darkness. While he waited, he listened to the house.

Faintly above the sound of his own breathing he heard Ivy's voice, the tiny quick pulsing cries she could never suppress even though she knew he preferred that their lovemaking be silent. Without voice, he could pretend that there were no people in the bed, just hot wet movement driven by a force without intellect. Her voice meant there was a brain beneath him, possibly evaluating him from moment to moment, not a comforting thought; but he had managed to incorporate her cries into the animal nature of passion, pretending it was a bird's song happening somewhere nearby. He had eventually grown to cherish her small sounds.

Listening to them from this distance — they came from the direction of the bedroom upstairs — he realized how long it had been since he had heard her sounds.

Months.

Work had picked up, swallowing time and energy, since he had figured out exactly what language lawyers wanted in his reports about the sanity, the abuse, the misconduct of his evaluatees. He had learned that people wanted to talk about themselves, and, if asked the right questions, would tell him almost anything. Submerging himself had been the hardest lesson he had learned, and the most useful. When people could forget he was in the room, his gentle voice became the voice inside their own heads, and they seemed convinced they were talking to themselves when they told him about the drugs, the treatment of the children, the schizoid instructions that came from heating vents or parking meters; they stopped censoring.

He had been working long hours these past eight months, and he came home exhausted, forgetting that Ivy had a little panting voice of her own.

When he was with her, she had never gone on this long, and never this loud.

He opened his eyes.

Even with the drapes drawn, there was enough light for him to pick his way across the front hall to the foot of the staircase. Stepping on the inside ends of the stairs close to the wall, he crept upstairs, wondering what he would do about the person Ivy must be with, searching himself for the desire to shoot or maim, and finding only detached curiosity. How long had this been going on? Who had she found, and where? Since she had married him, she had lived a pretty quiet life, not getting out much. Maybe she'd met someone at the supermarket, or at the laundryland the time the washer broke down, or maybe even someone right here in the neighborhood....

He moved along the upstairs hall, his shoes muffled on the carpet. Light was odd up here, too; after a moment he realized there were two large new mirrors on the walls, facing each other. He crept toward the doorway to the bedroom, moving past his doubled sneaking image. Holding his breath, he peered around the sill into the room.

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Neither she nor anyone else was lying on the bed. Instead, Ivy was pressing herself against the full-length mirror on the inside of the open closet door, rubbing up and down, her cries now rough-edged and deeper than he had ever heard them, mingled with the nudging slippery groans of wet flesh against glass. Her eyes were closed. One of her hands squeaked up and down against the hand of her reflection. The other hand was captured between her and her image, down below her stomach.

Disappointment flooded him. He realized how much he had hoped to see her with someone else; anticipation had hardened him. He slid back along the hall and leaned against the wall, trying to analyze his own reactions. Across from him a dim image lurked in one of the new mirrors, its brow furrowed and its hands fisted. He closed his eyes.

After a moment's confusion he found himself creeping back downstairs and outside. This time he slammed the door open, flipped the lightswitch without result, and cried, "Ivy? Ivy? What's going on down here? When did the light burn out? Ivy, you home?"

She showed up a few minutes later at the top of the stairs, a white terrycloth robe wrapped around her, her face flushed. She peered down into the darkness at him. "Wha? I was just taking a nap." She wiped her forehead on her sleeve and said, "Aren't you home a little early?"

"I think we need to talk," he said.

"Why?"

"Because we haven't talked in a while."

"I'm not complaining." Her lips were red and swollen.

"Why not? Why aren't you complaining? I thought that was one of your strengths."

Damn. He shouldn't have said that.

"A person can change," she said. "I've heard you say so often enough." She sounded sullen.

He shrugged. "So do you want not to talk?"

"What do you want to talk about?" She was already drifting toward the hall.

"Just wondering how you are, what you've been doing with yourself. I know I haven't been paying much attention lately."

"That's okay," she said, her voice already thinned of interest.

"I don't think so."

She yawned. "Malc, I'm still sleepy. I can't talk now, 'm too fuzzy. 'Scuse me." Soft as a shadow, she vanished down the hall.

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In his office Malcolm had a painting of a soothing landscape facing the couch where clients usually sat, and a more abstract picture across from his own chair. This morning's evaluatee was too restless to let either painting operate on him.

"Did you shoot up in front of the child?" Malcolm's voice was neutral. No judgment from him now; judgment had to wait until he was talking into the dictaphone, crafting sentences that the prosecution could present to a judge, a jury. And even then he was supposed to submerge his feelings, report objectively, invoke established diagnoses and quantitative scaled test scores. During an interview, his job was to be invisible and to listen.

"Sure I did. Kid's got to learn about the realities of life, right?" Belligerent. The man paced, restless, his hands opening and closing, transient fists.

So maybe Malcolm's voice held judgment after all. Malcolm thought through his mantra: I am a mirror: they see nothing in me but what they bring. Under the surface of himself, he pushed his reactions away so he could be present without condemnation. "The realities...." he murmured.

"You can kill yourself with a needle if you're not careful. Had to show her how to shake the bubbles out." The man stared up and to the right. "Gotta teach her to protect herself. Tough job, taking care of a kid. You have to think harder." His voice had steadied, and he stood in one spot, consulting himself.

Malcolm listened.

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"But tonight's our poker night with the guys from the public defenders' office," his office partner Jason said.

"I have to go home," Malcolm told him. "I have to see Ivy." Had Malcolm ever told Ivy about poker night, or did she just accept that he was gone most of the time? She had probably learned his patterns. She wouldn't be expecting him until late tonight.

"Is custody work upsetting you?" Jason asked. "You've been acting strange lately."

"What?" said Malcolm.

"Just because you're spending a lot of time with people whose relationships don't work doesn't mean there's anything wrong with your own relationship."

"What?" Malcolm said again.

"On the other hand, if something really is going wrong between you and Ivy, remember, I'm pretty good at divorce evaluations."

"Is that a joke?"

Jason smiled and shrugged.

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Malcolm turned the key in the lock as quietly as he could. He had replaced the missing lightbulb in the front hall fixture that morning, but it was burnt out again, and again curtains shrouded the downstairs in funerary darkness. This time he had brought a flashlight from the car. Still, he slipped inside and stood in the quiet darkness a while, listening.

A murmur of conversation, edged with pleased laughter. It came from his study, beyond the living room to his left. The door into the study was closed.

He switched on the flashlight, startled by its twin shimmering to life in the mirror across from him. After he breathed out his shock, he shielded the flashlight beam with his hand so that it shone in a narrow oval on the floor. He crept closer to the voices, watching so he wouldn't trip on the edge of the living room rug or bump into the sofa. The odor of dust and dried flowers made him wonder when he and Ivy had last sat in the living room. He couldn't remember. Breathing shallowly, he leaned against the closed study door and switched off the flashlight.

Voices? One voice. He couldn't make out the words, but the timbre and pitch were Ivy's. A phrase raised at the end, with a giggle tacked on: a question. And then, in the same voice, an answer.

A chill lifted the hair on his forearms, the back of his neck. Just that afternoon he had sat invisible in his comfortable office chair, watching a man speaking with himself, asking questions, answering them, facial expressions altering as he took different roles. In moments Malcolm forgot the handcuffs on the man, the sheriff's deputy outside the door, transfixed by the drama of four people quarreling in one body. None of what the man said made sense, but everything was phrased in the tones, pitch variations, breaks and distances of a normal conversation. Malcolm had not surfaced until an hour later, recalled to a sense of his job by the deputy's knock on the door.

From his study, Ivy's voice murmured another question. Ivy's voice answered, a little spurt of anger in the reply. Ivy's voice cried, "But—" and Ivy's voice interrupted, low, intense, upset.

He took deep open-mouthed breaths, trying to slow his heart. He crept back outside and around the house to his study window, but the curtains were closed, the window shut.

When he came home after midnight, his usual time on Wednesdays, he took a quick look in the study, whose door was open now. Standing on the bookshelf was another new mirror. He considered turning it to face the wall, then decided not to; he didn't want Ivy to know he was getting obsessed about her new obsession.

Ivy was in bed already. She murmured a sleepy greeting as he slid in beside her. She smelled of sweat and salt and sex. He lay curled up in the darkness with his back to her and listened to her slow even breathing. He was afraid to sleep.

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When the alarm went off he jerked awake, his muscles spasming and his breath speeding. He rolled over to discover that she was gone from the bed. As he got his breathing under control, he heard the shower running, heard her singing. She had a nice voice, solid and true. He lay on his back, listening to her sing some country song about an unfaithful lover. The tension washed out of him with the terrors of the night before. Then he frowned. Something was wrong. Her voice was undeniably hers, but what was that—?

Before he could pinpoint it, she stopped singing and shut off the water. She emerged wrapped in a towel, her hair wet and flat around her head and shoulders.

"Ivy?" he murmured.

"Morning," she said. A smile flickered across her face, vanished.

"What was that song?"

"I don't remember," she said. "Something I heard on the radio, I guess." She yawned against the back of her wrist. "Want some coffee?"

"Sure," he said, trying to make it sound normal.

"Okay, I'll make some." She wandered through the room and out. "Good morning again," he heard her say in the hall. And then, "Hasn't somebody forgotten to blow-dry?" And then, "I'll put the coffee on and get back to you." Kiss-kiss noise.

He lay on his back, his arms at his sides. He came home to become solid, after spending his day at the office invisible, shadowy. If Ivy was actually splitting—or had she always been split, and he oblivious to her?—maybe he would have to be invisible here, too, speak softly and get her to tell him what was going on.

A shadow in his own home? The idea made him tired. He glanced at the clock. In an hour he would have to be at the office, facing his first client of the day. He groaned and sat up, opened his briefcase and fished out the Xerox of the desk calendar, looking at the schedule for this morning. His nine o'clock was a referral from Disability Determination Services. He looked at the patient file the receptionist had put in his briefcase before he left the office. White female, thirty-four, evaluate, capacity for employment, neuropsychological screening and report.

A shadow person slipping through the DDS filtering process into his office, there to take on dimension, color, sound, meaning. He needed to answer the questions: Could she think? Was she stable? Was she faking? Could she handle money awarded to her if the answer to these questions was "no"?

The smell of coffee lured him out of his reverie, and the sound of Ivy singing again as she came up the hall toward the bedroom. The same song: the unfaithful lover, and the one who was a fool to trust; and this time he knew what was wrong with Ivy's singing: she sang melody and harmony at the same time.

She came in carrying a tray with two mugs, a glass of milk, and the sugar bowl on it. "There," she said, setting it down on the crumpled blankets. "Isn't that nice?"

"Very nice," he said, coaxing his voice out past the knot in his throat. He slid the file back into his briefcase. "Thanks." He took a scorching sip of the shadowy dark drink. She had made it stronger than either of them liked, but he could use the caffeine after the edgy sleep.

"You'd better shower," Ivy said. She smelled of herbal shampoo. The towel around her was white against her tan; she stood with her shoulder blades pressed to the closet door mirror, her hands behind her back. He heard the groan of flesh on glass, wondered what she was doing. She giggled.

He slid out of bed, taking the coffee mug with him, selected a suit and underclothes for the day, and went into the bathroom. He closed and locked the door behind him.

Steam from Ivy's shower had been hand-edge-bladed away from the center of the mirror above the sink, leaving a clear space the loose shape of Ivy's upper body. When he looked at himself in the clear spot his shoulders blurred and so did his face, but his chest was in focus. "Hello," he muttered to his reflection, "are you as confused as I am?" He dropped his shorts and jumped into the shower before he could imagine his reflection answering.

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When he came out the mirror had steamed over again. He kept half an eye on it as he toweled off; did the actions of the flesh-colored blur match his own? Wasn't that its arm reaching up to towel off its hair when his own was rubbing the towel over his shoulder? He turned away from the image until he finished drying off and had to clear a space for shaving. In the round hole he squeaked away with an edge of towel, the eyes facing his were bloodshot, the lower lids puffy. The mouth smiled at him. Malcolm was sure he was frowning.

The purr of the electric razor drowned out any remark his image might make. Afterward he brushed his teeth, staring down into the sink, and dressed rapidly. He came out to find Ivy asleep in a quilt, her lips swollen and smiling, her arms hugging her breasts.

Trying not to make noise, he closed the hasps on his briefcase and snuck away, keeping his face turned from the mirrors that watched him through the house.

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"So? What's the state of the marriage?" Jason asked him at lunch.

"I don't know," said Malcolm. He hesitated, wondering if he should tell Jason about the mirrors. But it sounded too weird.

"I don't know," he said again. "I think she's found someone else."

"What do you want to do about it? Get counseling, work on the relationship? I think Sook's good for that. If you want a divorce, think about Taylor."

"First I want to find out what's going on."

"So I take it that means you're missing the Town Club meeting tonight?"

Malcolm frowned, then nodded.

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It was full dark when he got home. By now it was easy for him to slip into the house silently, and the darkness felt familiar. He didn't even try the light switch. He stood in the darkness listening. No sound whispered of Ivy's whereabouts.

He switched on the flashlight, watched its image bloom in the hall mirror. He aimed light at the side of his face and saw half a face emerge in the glass across from him.

"Where is she?" he murmured.

"I don't keep track of her," said the face floating in the darkness.

He stood silent a moment, breath suspended. If this were delusion...was that better than if it weren't? He wasn't sure. He only knew he was tired of trying to stave off the awareness of what Ivy was doing. Why not pretend it was real, learn its laws? He said: "If I turn off the light, could you find her?"

"I suppose."

He let the light die. He waited.

Presently a whisper rode the dark. "She's asleep up in the bedroom."

Malcolm slipped out of his shoes and walked closer to the mirror.

"Let me see you," the mirror said.

Why had Ivy killed the light in the front hall? Was her image a different person depending on which mirror reflected her? Did she like the front hall mirror, or was she punishing it by leaving it without light?

Unsure of reverse etiquette, Malcolm switched on the flashlight and shone it on his shoes.

"Don't be coy," said the mirror.

Malcolm's hand turned without his willing it, bathing his face in light from below. His features took on a Satanic cast. A chill iced his heart.

"Much better," said the mirror, though Malcolm didn't see its lips move. The image reached out its free hand, and Malcolm's hand lifted to meet it. Touching it, he felt not glass but warmth, fingertips to fingertips, palm to palm; not exactly the warmth of flesh, but a decent facsimile.

"What have you done with Ivy?" Malcolm whispered, his upper teeth trembling against his lower teeth.

"I? I've done nothing with that slut. She's not interested in me."

"Of course she is, she talks to you, she touches you...."

"Not me. Her own image."

"You. The mirror."

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"Have you gone over the edge, Malc? The mirror isn't a person. It's just a membrane where we can meet." The whisper lowered, silkened. "I've missed you," it said. "You've been avoiding me." Its fingers pressed through the slick surface and laced between his. Malcolm gasped for breath, felt his knees gel, but the inexorable grip from the mirror kept him on his feet.

"What—" he managed. "What do you want?" His voice rasped.

"You know, don't you?"

The hand holding the flashlight lowered; the light fell, rolled without breaking, ended up behind him, silhouetting his legs. An arm reached out of the mirror and hugged him against it. "I want a lot of things. But you know what the most important is right now, don't you? When you do it with her," whispered a voice close to his ear, "I do it with her image. But we haven't been close lately. Even last night, when the opportunity existed, you turned away. She's getting it day and night here in the house. We're going out and not getting any. Don't you miss it?"

Malcolm closed his eyes. His arm had disappeared into the glass, and another arm had come out, hugging him around the chest. He couldn't feel what his own arm might be doing below the shoulder.

"Don't you miss it?" said the whisper, as Malcolm pressed his cheek to glass that was unsettling and warm; the words puffed into his ear on a damp breath. His head turned and his lips and nose pressed against the glass, which was warm and wet and yes, yielding, and the taste of soured coffee amplified on his tongue, and something hot and wet and wiggling filled his mouth, and the hand which had not disappeared into the glass unlaced from its image hand and groped lower, pressing through the surface, worked a reverse zipper, and grasped something hard and hot, as something rough and warm grasped him and squeezed. His breath fled, then trickled in again. The grip tightened and loosened, tightened and loosened, and he was breathing with it, gripping with it, losing everything but the sense of hot rough movement driven by a force beyond intellect.

Even the kitchen had a mirror in it now, covered with kiss prints at Ivy's level.

Malcolm looked away from it as he dumped out yesterday's coffee filter and installed a new one, loading it with grounds and flipping on the coffee maker. Then, against his will (he could feel the muscles moving without his volition), he looked toward the mirror.

"What are you afraid of?" it said in his voice.

He hadn't wanted to disturb Ivy, so he had used the guest bathroom, which had its own supply of emergency toiletries. He had covered the mirror with a towel before stepping into the shower to clean off last night's stains: reverse cum or his own? He was afraid after he first put up the towel that hands would reach through the glass and pull it down, but he had showered in peace and shaved without image.

He was tired of this game now. He was willing to believe the night before was some weird response to exhaustion and neglected hormones, his imagination running away with him. He was ready to ask Ivy some outright questions. Maybe.

"Come on, Malc. Don't pretend this is just any morning after," said the image in the mirror.

He faced it without turning away. He smiled at it and it smiled back. He yawned and it yawned. He turned to the bowl in front of him and whipped the mixture of eggs, milk, and spices with a fork. Butter sizzled in the frying pan on the burner, greasing the air with invitation.

"The silent treatment?" said his image.

Malcolm turned his back on it.

"You know the more you resist me the stronger I grow. Where do you think that energy goes, all day long while you're pushing it away and compacting it? Now that we've breached the membrane, consummated as it were, our relationship is solid. You might as well relax and enjoy it."

Malcolm poured the egg mixture into the hot pan, listening to it fry. He loved the scent of pepper with frying eggs.

"Malc," said the mirror.

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He turned and, grasping the milk carton, poured white across the glass.

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"You want it. You know you want it."

Malcolm had just finished urinating. He glanced up at the men's room mirror and saw his image holding its cock. His hand tightened on his own.

"Not here," he said.

It slid its hand along its shaft and his own hand imitated it. "You want it. Doesn't that feel good?"

He felt himself swelling, felt the heat gathering. "Not here!" He sensed the door at his back, liable to open any moment; this rest room served half the fifth floor.

"Mmmm," murmured his image, grinning at him. Their hands worked up and down, with increasing speed.

"Not here!" he said to his own hand, but it operated without him. He heard approaching footsteps in the corridor outside.

His hand stopped. "No more tricks at home," said the mirror.

"What?"

It squeezed. "No more towels. No more milk. Look at me when I talk to you."

"What? "

The footsteps outside stopped, and something brushed the door.

"No more tricks. Say it."

"No more tricks," he said, and control of his hand returned to him as Jason walked in behind him. Malcolm stared at Jason's reflection, wondering if it ever spoke to Jason.

"Admiring yourself?" Jason and his reflection said, grinning and looking down at Malcolm's hand.

"Not exactly."

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While watching a woman interact with the children whose custody she was fighting for, his mind wandered. Of course there were places without mirrors. His office, for instance. He had a small mirror in the closet useful for some kinds of guided imagery, but since he had phased out of therapy and into government and court work he had stopped doing all those gimmicky things like chair work and visualization. His job now was not to direct, but to observe.

He could take the mirror out of his study at home and keep the door locked so Ivy couldn't put it back.

What had she been doing in there anyway? And the mirror in the front hall—that had to go.

Or maybe if he just didn't get close enough...no, that wouldn't work. His image could control him from across the room.

"Junior!" cried the mother, and slapped the little boy's hand. He had been reaching for a truck from a collection of toys Malcolm kept in a laundry basket for these observations. The boy looked up at his mother, tears trembling in his eyes, and sat back on his heels, hiding his curled hands under his chin.

The little girl, a four-year-old, stood staring up at Malcolm. He clicked into office mode and focused on her: He was a shadow to the people he was evaluating, but it was important to be present for the children. She pouted, then slid the top joint of her index finger into her soft pink mouth, her other hand creeping down under her dress and inside her frilly panties. A chill touched the base of his spine. She stared up at him with wide eyes, sucking her finger, while her other hand worked beneath the ruffles at her crotch.

He glanced at the mother, but she was oblivious, staring at the boy, who sat very still. At last she looked up at Malcolm, red streaks along her cheek bones, her eyes glittering. "See how they are after they spend a week with him?" she said. "Out of control! Liza Jane, stop that!" On her knees she crossed the rug and snatched the little girl's hand out of her panties and slapped it. "Stop that! Bad girl! How many times do I have to tell you not to do that? I swear, Doctor, I don't know what gets into them. They just won't mind. He's bad for them, I tell you."

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Malcolm looked at the frozen children and felt a knot tighten in his stomach. It was another case with no good answers. Neither parent was good for the children, and he would have to notify Children's Services Division about suspicions of sexual abuse.

The little girl's wide eyes stared up at him. Like too many children, she had nowhere safe to go.

He shut down awareness of his despair and made notes.

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On the drive home he thought again about mirrorless places. He could camp out. He could find an apartment somewhere and set it up without mirrors. If there was a mirror there, he could break it. He could break the mirrors at home...no, he had promised his image no tricks at home, and there were too many other places mirrors existed; with every mirror, the potential for blackmail. Even the foyer of the office building where he and Jason had their practice had mirrored columns, and there were mirrors in the elevators. Mirrors in the produce section at the supermarket. Mirrors in most public rest rooms.

A horn honked behind him. He looked up and saw that the light had turned green. He glanced at the mirror to see who was behind him, and saw his image's eyes looking back.

All his image would have to do was close its eyes for an extended period of time while he was on the freeway. Would it mind endangering itself?

He didn't know what motivated it. Maybe he could study it, learn to work with it and around it. Maybe they could compromise.

The car behind him honked again, and he drove on.

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He stood in the front hall darkness, the closed door behind him leaking only a crack of light that brushed the soles of his shoes and betrayed the mirror across from him with a narrow streak of reflected light. It suddenly occurred to him that without light he had no image, or at least his image couldn't control him. He stretched, straightened his fingers till they crackled, pressed his shoulders back, felt his own control in every part of his body.

Now that he knew the front hall could be a haven, he strode up the stairs in search of Ivy. In the upstairs hall mirrors he glimpsed an eternity of images stretching up and away, and wondered if they were all the same image that was trying to control him, or if they each had a personality. Did they torture each other? Were some kind to the others? Did any take their tone from him, or were they all different people?

Ivy was sitting in the bathroom facing the mirror, carefully stroking lipstick onto her mouth. Tears ran down her face and dripped onto the counter.

Malcolm stood in the threshold, beyond bathroom mirror range, though he knew the closet mirror could see him. "Ivy?" he said. "Are you okay? Is there anything I can do?"

At the sound of his voice, her hand jerked and red streaked across her cheek. Her eyes moved to look at him. "I—" she said. Her hand rose toward him, lipstick clenched between index finger and thumb. She looked down at her hand as though she didn't know what to expect from it. It gripped his arm, losing the lipstick, and pulled him into the bathroom.

"No," she said, her voice toneless. She was smiling, the smile stretched by the red streak. "Malc, I didn't mean...I didn't think... I—"

His hand moved out and twisted the lapel of her terrycloth robe, jerking it away from her breasts. "No," he said, looking at his image.

Ivy moaned and reached for his zipper, her other hand scrabbling at his shirt buttons. His free hand went to her breast and squeezed. Her flesh was soft; he was gripping her so hard he knew it must hurt her. "No," he said.

"No," she said, panting. Buttons rattled on the floor.

"No," he said, picking her up and carrying her into the bedroom, where they were in full view of the closet mirror. He set her on the bed and sat beside her, his hands moving over her breasts, fingers digging into them. Her next no was muffled as she leaned in and bit his shoulder.

"Why not?" said his image.

"Why fight it?" said her image, flopping down on its back and positioning its arms and legs.

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Ivy lay motionless on the bed below him, her eyes wide and scared. Her arms and legs were spread-eagled as though she were tethered to bed posts which didn't exist. "No," said Malcolm as he dropped his pants, his erection, like his image's, hard and ready.

He thrust himself into Ivy, groaning, "no." He glanced at his image, furious at being forced to use her this way.

His image was still on its knees, looking down at Ivy's image. It lifted its gaze to meet his and gave him a manic grin.

Malcolm felt as if he had been punched in the stomach. Ivy lay beneath him, her arms and legs taut as cabled wire, tendons showing in her neck, her head rolled sideways, away from the mirror. At least she didn't know he had forced himself inside her before his image ordered him to.

"Why fight it?" his image said, and lowered itself onto Ivy's image, pushing into her.

Malcolm closed his eyes, granting himself the privacy of his own darkness. Inside his eyelids light bloomed and sharpened, flickering around some central shadow, dancing in time with his thrusts. Even inside his head there was nowhere safe to go.



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Nina Kiriki Hoffman