

ALINKA SHARROCK

NARCISSUS

ONE DAY YOU'RE scooping dog shit off the asphalt Drive-Thru; the next you're promoted to store manager. *Nathan doesn't do dog shit.* The customer with the pinstripe suit always buys Bailey's Irish Cream. He tells me Zeus' Drive-Thru bottle shop is second to none. *Yeah, yeah.*

In the bottle, his reflection is distorted like a fat bull frog; beady black eyes, drowning in a caramel stream. How hideous those rounded reflections are—they say you are what you eat.

I check my reflection in the mirror; for it is the flat and true purveyor of beauty—perfect as always.

Perhaps you are what you drive too.

The fat Bailey's bullfrog clambers into his squashy green VW. From my view the windows appear convex and he has a neck a fat beyond belief. Another familiar car pulls in as the frog hops away. You are what you drive—*is dog shit a car?*

'Just checkin in Nath, no need to wet ya pants. Everything's all right in here then?' Sarcasm is in at the moment.

'Yes, everything is super good. One man tried to walk in with a lit cigarette. I told him where to go.'

My boss's face says, '*Good work Nathan. Your charisma is the reason for the new found business success here at Zeus'. I'm glad I promoted you.*' The mirror behind him shows me his bent back—and my flawless complexion.

I blow dust off the empty shelf as Victoria comes out of the freezer with a replacement Bailey's.

Nathan doesn't do freezers: too many soggy bottles giving off that fat, rounded,

untrue reflection he hates so very much. He'd much rather marvel at his undistorted reflection in the mahogany trimmed mirror; centre, back wall. Its smooth finish gleaming—his majesty to all mirrors.

One day a pure and majestic human being of twenty-three is beaming back at you; short brown waves, dark brooding eyes, skin of woven silk, even shoulder blades, jutting jaw—and the next the mirror is gone.

The dog shit that owns the dog shit car tells me it was his mother's mirror and family heirlooms should be returned when the owner tragically dies. *Yeah, yeah, yeah.*

Throwing tantrums is not in at the moment. Instead I stand, nod, and fake a bittersweet, understanding smile. His face says, *Nathan, you know we can't have you looking at yourself in that bloody mirror all day. It's bad for business.*

Nathan is perfect. Perfect reflection. Perfect. Nathan gets more beautiful every day. But Nathan needs his reflection. Do not fuck with Nathan's reflection.

11.45 pm, nearing closing.

You are your animals.

In walks Victoria.

Is a wet whore an animal?

I'm checking my reflection in a wine bottle. It's better than nothing. 'Where'd you come from?' I say without looking up, 'Go and get more replacements.'

'Welllll', she says, presumably smiling, adjusting her glasses, 'what else do we need?' *She's always fucking smiling at me.*

I try to fix my hair in an Absinthe bottle. Without looking up my comb points to the rectangle of shelving, that just this morning was occupied by the mirror. I roll my eyes and turn to her. My face tells her, *we need caramel coated spew, bubbly shit and monkey's urine.* 'Just three bottles of each spirit. Then you can bring in the banners from outside (*not a woman's job*) and we're out of here.'

Again with the smiling—how Nathan loathes all who cherish him.

I've counted up the last few notes in the till when a piercing crash shatters my delicate silence.

Christ on a fucking bike.

Dashing into the freezer, I would find Victoria—if I was not greeted by

hundreds of my own reflections gazing from dewy bottles at every angle—teetering on a step ladder, hand over her sorry, open mouth. *You will be sorry.*

The smell of tequila rises—I would notice Victoria dismounting the bottom step but I'm staring into my shattered reflection, sprawled in a star shape on the cold ground. I like the way my eyes bulge like a bull frog.

Nathan doesn't need that scummy mirror anymore.

The next moment I snap out of my trance because the wet whore's kissing me. I can feel her smile pressed up under my mouth. She tells me she loves me.

Nathan doesn't do love. Nathan only looks out for number one.

She tells me this is the only place we can be alone. Here in the dark, the damp. My face should be saying *care factor: zero* but it's hard to express yourself with the tongue of wild boar rammed down your fucking gullet. I should have noticed her flesh coloured eyes, burning into mine as I cursed her, but I'm trapped in her glasses: my reflection like a tiny, beady bullfrog gnome; big flat head, upturned nose, drowning in darkness. Who was this beautiful creature staring back at me?

You are who you love.

Her hand on my shoulder now resembles my own. I can see my face in hers; my strong arms, my broad shoulders, jutting jaw. I can even see through her glasses and into my own eyes. I begin to kiss Nathan violently. All around us hundreds of tiny Nathans watch from each shelf, eyes bulging.

You are who you love.

I had everything I wanted right there. Surrounded by my reflection, I would remember this wonderful place for all eternity.

The ones we love are the ones we will destroy. Vanity is a sin.