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The Magic Mirror

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Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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Abstract

Mary Alice was a pretty little girl. She knew that, too. She knew that because her parents told her so everyday.

Keywords

Fiction; The Magic Mirror; Barbara Proenza

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THE DUNGEON

by John E. Paulits

Old Wizard Trondolf, bent with age, shuffled down the multitude of steps to the dungeon. There, Queen Melody, whose beauty was the talk of all the land, awaited. The wizard paused numerous times to get his breath for the trip was a long, exhausting one. When he reached the queen's cell, he motioned for the guard to unlock the door and let him go inside.

Seeing the wizard, the young queen rose from her pallet and immediately asked, "What is it to be, Trondolf?"

In his decrepit and wheezing voice Trondolf answered, "The king has proof of your infidelity. He has decreed the worse torture imaginable for you."

"No, no," the girl queen shrieked. The agony of the rack, the stretching and exploding of the joints until she would swear to anything. "Is it the rack?"

"No, not the rack."

"Is it the barrel? Please, not the barrel." The bloody death of being imprisoned in a barrel spiked with nails and loose, broken glass and rolled down the highest hill in the kingdom.

"No, my queen. Not the barrel."

"What then? What?"

"The king has devised an even more horrid end for you." So saying, Wizard Trondolf took a strange glowing powder from within the folds of his dull gray gown and threw it upon the queen.

"It will not be long now," he said.

The queen tried in vain to brush the powder from her. "What is the punishment? I have a right to know. What punishment can exceed the past cruelties of this king?" Then the queen gazed at her hand. She screamed. The skin had whitened and withered.

"Look at yourself," said Trondolf. And with the wave of one hand, a mirror appeared against the near wall.

The queen gazed and sank to her knees. "My hair," she moaned. "It's white. My face. What has happened to me?" She nearly choked as a tooth fell from her mouth. It was followed by another, then many more. Pain grew in her fingers, arms and legs. Small tufts of white hair dropped to the floor. Her vision weakened, her hearing failed.

"What is happening to me?" cried the ancient crone the queen had become.

"The King has chosen to unleash upon you the most torturous indignity of all. It has been heaped upon you in an instant." Trondolf turned to leave the cell.

"No," the queen croaked as Trondolf turned to go. "No. Don't leave me. I can't live like this. Not like this."

"You can," said the Wizard. "You will."

"No, no, no," cried the aged Queen, but Trondolf ignored her as the cell door shut. He contemplated

the long, weary journey up the winding staircase and moaned imprecation upon the years that had turned this slight exertion into an arduous task.

Inside the cell, the queen called Trondolf's name over and over. She haplessly scraped her withered hands about the floor of the cell collecting the now useless teeth that had fallen from her. Her eye caught the mirror Trondolf's magic had left behind. A smoky cloud crossed the glass and hid her ancient image. When the cloud cleared, the mirror showed her young self again.

But Queen Melody rejoiced only for a moment. She again looked at her hands: blue-veined, wrinkled, old. But the mirror showed her young. Why? More of her King's torture? Then she heard laughter. Her youthful image broke apart, and the King's laughing image stared out at her from the glass, triumph in his eye.

The mirror became blank again. Then in succession, the two images returned: first, her present aged self, then the glorious Queen she had been moments before. The Queen crept to the mirror and extended her hand. But the smooth surface of the glass repulsed her. The reflection was again that of a grotesque withered hag.

The Queen's head slumped onto her chest as she realized that Time, the most indomitable enemy of all, had established its eternal dominance over her. And that although old, she would be denied the one benefit of age--forgetfulness.

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THE MAGIC MIRROR

by Barbara Proenza

Mary Alice was a pretty little girl. She knew that, too. She knew that because her parents told her so everyday. From the moment she was born, she had been praised for her beauty.

Mary Alice would spend hours everyday primping before her vanity mirror, arranging her long blonde curls in various styles and saying, "Oh, how pretty I am!"

One day, the carnival came to town. Mary Alice demanded that her parents take her. Of course, they did. Mary Alice's sister, Jane, went along, too.

Now Jane was not as pretty as Mary Alice (at least Mary Alice told her so), but Jane was far smarter.

As usual, Mary Alice's parents bought her stuffed bears, balloons, and cotton candy. Near the end of the day and near the end of the carnival midway, was a booth. There was a gypsy woman in the booth. She wore a lot of beads. A red-dotted scarf was wrapped around her long black hair and through her ears were big loop earrings.

"Come, my children," the gypsy woman said.

"Try to win one of my many beautiful prizes."

"Oh look!" Mary Alice began, "I want you to win me that, Daddy!" Mary Alice pouted her finger to a prize on the top shelf: a very beautiful hand mirror, studded with green, blue, and red stone, outlined with pearls.

"A wise choice, my dear," the gypsy woman said. "Now, let's see if your father can win my most desired Magic Mirror."

"Magic Mirror?" Mary Alice questioned.

"Yes my deary, Magic! You see," the gypsy woman leaned closer to Mary Alice, resting one elbow on the counter as if to tell a secret, "it's magic because it will reflect your true beauty. If you are truly beautiful, each time you look into the Magic Mirror, you will become even more beautiful."

"I am! I am!" Mary Alice's eyes lit up. "I must have it, Daddy!" she whined. "Win it! Win it!"

All father had to do to win the beautiful hand mirror was to throw one of three coins into a jar. So simple! He tossed the first coin, and missed. He tossed the second coin, and missed even farther than with the first coin.

"Oh Daddy! Do better this time! Try harder, harder!" Mary Alice ordered. Then he tossed the third and last coin. It amazingly went in the jar. It was almost as if the jar moved a little to allow the coin to go in.

"I won my mirror!"

The gypsy woman reached high on the top shelf and retrieved the Magic Mirror. Handing it to Mary Alice. "Now, there's only one requirement, you cannot give the mirror away. It's yours forever. Yours and only yours."

Mary Alice yanked the mirror from the gypsy woman's fingers. "I sure won't," she confirmed.

The father thanked the gypsy woman for letting him win the mirror for his pretty daughter. "It was my pleasure," the gypsy smiled. "Your pretty little daughter deserves it."

The next few days, Mary Alice adored herself in her Magic Mirror. Each time she saw herself, she seemed to get prettier and prettier.

One day at school, Mary Alice and Jane met a new girl. She wore a torn, dirty plaid skirt. Her white socks were gray, and she had straight, stringy, uncombed hair. Jane suggested that they invited the new girl to sit with them at lunchtime. But Mary Alice replied, "No thanks! I wouldn't want anyone to see me with her. She's awful! I wouldn't even want to sit by her. I might get my pretty dress all dirty!"

Jane told Mary Alice that the girl was very nice and that she shouldn't make fun of people who had less than she had. It didn't matter to Mary Alice. Still she made fun of the poor girl's appearance.

That night, Mary Alice prepared for bed. She picked up her Magic Mirror and looked at her face. She let out a horrible scream. Her family came running to see what had happened to her.

"It's terrible!" she cried. "My face is ugly, there are scars on my face!"

Her parents were shocked. How could their daughter have scars on her pretty face. They examined Mary Alice. There were no scars on her face. It was the same face she had had this morning. They told her she must have imagined it. Perhaps there was a crack in the mirror. They examined the mirror. There was no crack. Her mother told her that her face was still pretty and tucked her into bed. The incident was forgotten. Forgotten by all except Mary Alice.

On Saturday, Mary Alice went shopping with her mother. Jane went along, too. In the shopping center, they saw a man in a wheel chair. He had no legs. Jane said how sad it was that people had to be like that. She said she wished everyone could have two legs.

"I think he should be in the circus!" Mary Alice spoke up. "He's a freak!"

Again that night, Mary Alice prepared for bed. She picked up her Magic Mirror. But what she saw in the mirror this time was even more hideous than before! The mirror revealed a badly deformed face, twisted and scarred. It was not the face of a little girl. It was the face of a monster! Mary Alice threw down the mirror and ran screaming into the hall. "I'm ugly! I'm ugly! I can't stand it!" Her hands were covering her face. Her parents were puzzled. To them, Mary Alice looked the same as she always did. But to Mary Alice, she was a horrible creature. Her parents could never convince her any differently. Never.

From that day on, Mary Alice wore large scarfs to school to cover what she thought was an ugly face. She never talked to anyone and ran straight into the house every day after school, for fear someone might think she belonged in a circus.

As the days passed, Mary Alice's condition worsened. It was not only the Magic Mirror she couldn't stand to look into, but any mirror, any window, any glass that reflected her grotesque features. The thought of being ugly drove Mary Alice crazy.

Finally, her parents took Mary Alice to a psychiatrist. And then to another. And another. There was no hope of Mary Alice ever being their normal, pretty little girl. Finally, when her parents did all they could to help her, they committed Mary Alice to an institution.

Her parents decided to destroy the mirror that caused their daughter so much grief. But when they searched the house, it was nowhere to be found.

They were very sad over Mary Alice. But as for Jane, no one could explain it. As the years went by, she kept on getting prettier and prettier and prettier.