

SPITTING IMAGE

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Greed is a hunger that demands to be fed. A ravenous craving that will never be satisfied.

Piper and Isla stared at each other in the mirror. They had been born twins, perfect reflections of each other clad in olive skin, hair of spun silver, and eyes of jade. Their voices carried the same note whether they sang or spoke. They even shared the same scar beneath their right eyes.

The doctor said they scratched each other in the womb, or perhaps they had done it as they clawed their way to life. But the day they turned sixteen, their scars darkened into ones that felt more like curses than accidents. Or perhaps they were an omen, a warning of what would become of them.

They had noticed it in the mirror Aunt Faye had gifted them. She said she'd found the object in a thrift store and that it screamed Isla and Piper. A whole \$35.00 for a gold ornate mirror with twisting leaves, thorned vines, and lush flower petals. At the top was a halo of six wings. The mirror had been placed at the end of the hall that divided their bedrooms so they could both enjoy it.

It was Piper who saw the contrast in her scar first, who noticed it was only in the gold mirror that their physical differences stood out. Isla was pure light in the reflection, as if her very soul was a star. She glimmered and gleamed, cutting through the shadows that bound themselves to Piper. The darkness clasped around her throat and hung down her back like a giant black cape.

It had been twelve years since that birthday, and things had only progressed. The reflections in the mirror had started to spill into the real world—tainting or blessing everything the girls, now women, touched.

Piper ran her slender fingers along her face. Dark tendrils wrapped around her hand, sliding between her fingers and grasping her like a lover.

“I can’t believe you still have this thing,” Isla said.

Piper frowned as a shudder ran down Isla’s body, sprouting chills across her bare arms. “What do you mean?”

“It’s creepy,” Isla said.

Piper rubbed her chest in an attempt to brush away the pang her words left. Isla had always thought the mirror was the source of Piper’s misfortune, but it didn’t explain the things that happened whenever they were apart and neither stood before it.

“It’s the only way anyone can tell us apart,” Piper insisted. Even as she said it, it wasn’t true. No one but them could see the altered reflections.

Isla arched her thin brow in response, her cupid bow lips pursed together.

“What?” Piper asked. She turned to her sister, no longer looking at the reflection. There was something in Isla’s expression that made Piper’s heart constrict. Her stomach twisted in turn.

“Ian and I are getting married.”

Sharp ringing whined in the back of Piper’s ears. She blinked as the sound swelled. “What?” she said again.

“He proposed last week. We haven’t told anyone else. I told him I wanted you to be the first to know.” Isla’s words drowned into the background as she continued, her hands moving like the flutter of wings.

“You can’t,” Piper said, shaking her head. “You can’t do that.”

“Piper.”

“Isla, you can’t.” Tears flooded Piper’s eyes. “Do you have any idea what that will do to me?”

Her twin crossed her arms. “You’re acting as if this is my fault.”

“It is your fault!” Piper’s voice raised, her voice breaking at the top as the tears spilled into her throat. “You’re literally determining my future. My entire life revolves around you.”

“God, Piper,” Isla growled. “Not this again. You need to get rid of it.” She pointed at the mirror. “This could have all been fixed a long time ago if you had shattered it when I told you to.”

“This has *nothing* to do with the mirror. It’s us! How could you do this to me?”

“I thought you’d be happy for me.” Isla’s eyes narrowed. They were the same height, but she looked down her nose at Piper as she shifted her weight back.

“You’ll kill me.”

Isla couldn’t marry Ian. She couldn’t marry anyone. It would be absolute torment for Piper if she did because the reflections in the mirror weren’t their only differences. Where Isla felt happiness and pleasure, Piper felt sorrow and pain. Her light soaked up everything Piper had to give, leaving her nothing more than a husk.

Piper experienced it for the first time when Isla received her first kiss. It had felt like knives along Piper’s lips. She’d had barely enough time to rush into the bathroom before her stomach turned and blood expelled from her stomach. Isla had been in the next town over.

The first time Isla had sex, she came home to find Piper had been rushed to the hospital for some mysterious affliction that forced her into a month-long coma.

If Isla got married it *would* kill Piper.

Isla scoffed. “It’s not going to kill you for me to get married.”

“Yes, it will. Whatever this is between us, it’s only ever worked for you. You feel nothing of the pain you put me through. I am not allowed to have a moment of happiness because you take it all for yourself.” Piper pointed to the mirror. “Just look at yourself. Have you ever even tried to give me a little bit of what you have?”

“It doesn’t work like that. That mirror is cursed—”

“The mirror shows us what you would rather stay blind to. Ever since we turned sixteen, you have grown brighter while I have withered away. The shadows cling to me now. They didn’t start touching me until you started getting everything you ever wanted.”

“Look at this house,” Isla waved her hands around the estate, “and tell me you are not successful. What do I have that you do not?”

“Everything!” Piper exclaimed. “Family, friends, a *husband*. I can’t have anyone because any time I try, *you* do something that breaks me. Even giving someone a hug takes a bite out of me. You are the only person I can be halfway normal with. Because when you’re with me, you can’t hurt me.”

Tears dripped off Piper’s chin. She took hold of Isla’s hands and squeezed. In the mirror, the shadows wrapped tighter around her and tugged. As if they were trying to pull her away from the light that grew brighter the longer Piper held on.

Isla pulled away from her grasp, shaking her head. “I can’t keep doing this,” she said. “I can’t keep sacrificing my happiness for yours. I’ve kept my life on hold for years because of you. I won’t do it anymore. You need to sort out your demons and stop blaming me for them.”

Piper stumbled back, the pain in her chest strengthening. She could feel the shadows tightening around her now, no longer a figment of the mirror. “You would kill your own sister in exchange to be married.”

“I would live my life instead of being stuck in the waste that is yours,” she answered. “Tell yourself whatever you want, Piper. But the only person you to blame for your misery is yourself.” She glanced at the mirror, to the shadows that writhed in its reflection around her twin like twisting, spitting snakes. “I’m done.” Those two words, so simple, fell like heavy stones.

Something inside Piper snapped. Shadows spun around her wrists as her fingers stretched out. Her nails were dangerously sharp. She didn’t think about what she was doing. Didn’t think about how loud Isla screamed as she grabbed her by the hair and slammed her head into the mirror.

The glass shattered, spraying thousands of shards into the air. Piper didn’t feel the sting of the cuts as she continued to pound Isla’s head into the broken mirror. Again and again. She lost count of how many times her skull struck the glass.

The skin of Isla’s face ripped apart. Bits and pieces fell away like scraps of paper. The smooth curve of her skull concaved with another sickening blow that punctured the air with a crunch. The shadows around her grew and shifted, pulsing with each hit.

Piper let go, and Isla’s body slumped to the ground, her blood glittering rubies over the glass. The only sign that she was still alive was the moan that escaped her broken face.

Piper stared as tears fell freely down her face. *What have I done?*

She didn’t know how long she sat there as Isla’s life slipped away. She didn’t know the sun had set until the automatic timer on her lamps clicked on and light flooded over Isla’s body.

Piper stumbled to her feet, swaying into the wall, and vomited.

She shut her eyes.

A broken sob escaped her as she turned back to her sister.

“Isla?” she whispered hoarsely. There was no response. “Isla,” she tried again. Piper turned her sister over. Her dull eyes looked straight through her. Blood oozed from the broken skin of her scalp, slicing down to the curve of her soft jaw. Its stain spread to the silver strands of her hair.

“Isla, I’m so sorry,” Piper said. “I didn’t mean to.”

A guttural response bubbled in the back of Isla’s throat, where a glass shard protruded.

Piper pressed her hand over the wound, trying to stem the flow of blood that leaked like a faucet.

“I’m sorry,” Piper choked. “I’m so sorry.”

Isla’s eyes rolled into the back of her head.

Piper reached for one of the shards and held it over Isla. Isla’s light flickered like the dance of a flame. Tilting the shard the other way, Piper froze. The shadows, *her* shadows, wound their way to Isla. Their smoky fingers plucked at the glittering light that rose out of her body, snatching it from the air and gobbling as if the darkness was starving.

Piper stroked Isla’s head, watching her in the crooked shard of mirror. “I’m sorry, Isla,” she said again.

She knew it was too late. Within seconds, the shadows stole the last of her light and Isla was dead.

Minutes, maybe hours, passed before Piper finally stood on trembling legs. She took a deep breath and held it before forcing it out. The hint of a smile touched the corner of her mouth.

For the first time since her sixteenth birthday, Piper felt good about something she’d done. With each merciless blow to Isla’s head, waves of joy had crashed over her. She had felt the rush of complete and utter euphoria.

She looked down at the shard within her fist and squeezed. It broke the skin of her palm with ease. There was none of that pleasure felt, but neither was their pain.

She frowned. Where was the joy?

The only pleasure she had ever known had come and gone.

Cold seeped into Piper's bones. She had lived the majority of her life with pain and suffering. Was she now damned to feel nothing at all? She didn't know which was worse. Especially after she had felt that glorious rush of vitality being ripped away.

A quiet buzzing came from the floor. Piper turned, her eyes searching for the source. It buzzed again, becoming more insistent the longer it took her to find it. It was with a drop in her stomach that she found the phone in Isla's coat pocket.

Ian.

The burn of bile rose in the back of her throat again. She silenced the buzzer as she walked down the hall.

What do I do now?

Piper stopped.

Isla was dead. What was she going to tell Ian? How was she going to break it to her parents? To their friends?

She couldn't come clean about what she had done. She'd be thrown in prison if not some psych ward. They'd tried to do that before. One way or the other, Piper would be locked up for good.

“Fuck.” Piper slammed the heels of her hands against her eyes. “Fuck fuck fuck.”

Teeth clenched, Piper turned out of the room.

The twinkle of Isla's engagement ring caught her eye. She'd been so stuck in her self-pitying ways that she hadn't noticed the large rock on her sister's hand.

Even dead Isla had everything Piper ever wanted.

You could have it. The thought whispered inside her head.

She just had to take it.

She twisted the ring off Isla's finger and slipped it onto her own. She held out her hand. On the floor, her reflection did the same, in all those little shards, and the shadows perked up to coil around her hand, as if inspecting the ring for themselves.

Piper looked down at Isla, her eyes now nothing but glassy marbles.

She could do it. It would be easy to take her sister's skin.

So, Piper got to work.

The first step was to clean the wound in her hand, wrap it, and think of a damn good cover story on how she got it. Like maybe Isla—*Piper*—had sliced at her hand in a fit of rage? The wound wasn't right, and she'd need other defense wounds. But it *was* something Piper might have done had Isla pushed her over the edge.

Fuck it. I'll figure it out later.

Piper slipped a finger under Isla's damp collar. Fortunately for both of them, Isla had worn black, making the blood easier to disguise. And even more fortunate, the blood *only* reached the collar of Isla's jacket. She pulled Isla to the side, away from the glass, to make it easier for her to strip the body. She couldn't chance returning to Ian in different clothes in case he'd seen her before she left.

She needed to hurry. How long did she have before Isla's blood wouldn't flow? She grabbed the shard she'd cut her own hand with and ran it down Isla's arm. Blood pooled to the surface.

Good.

Piper made more slashes, long sporadic lines like she had cut herself blindly. All before slamming her head into the mirror.

Piper could hear her parents now: "Well, she finally snapped."

She paused.

Hopefully the police wouldn't call in a detective.

No. No. They won't suspect anything. Not with how unstable they've thought me all these years. Mom and Dad won't even ask for an autopsy, I bet. Hell, I bet they'll be relieved.

A tug of pain jerked at her chest. She'd show them. She could be the perfect daughter they always wanted. They didn't need to know it was her sister's face she wore.

She was halfway through redressing Isla into a pair of satin pajamas when Isla's phone buzzed again.

Ian. Again?

Piper took a deep breath. She could do this. She could be Isla.

"Hey," she said sweetly. She winced at the crack of her voice.

"Hey baby, I was wondering how much longer you were going to be. I don't want to rush you, but our reservations are in an hour. Your mom and dad are already here. My parents still plan to meet us there, but I thought we could head out early."

Piper's mouth twisted. A sinking feeling opened wide in her soul as she looked down at Isla. She had driven out of her way to tell her about the engagement. And if she had to guess, this

dinner was so Isla and Ian could tell their parents. She hadn't wanted to invite her along because Isla had been embarrassed by her.

Or maybe she knew she would cause a scene.

Piper clutched the phone tighter as anger's scales rubbed against her.

"Um, I'm actually about to walk out the door now."

"How did she take it?" Ian asked.

I took it so well I killed her.

Piper shut her eyes. "Fine. I guess. She seemed upset but said she was happy for me."

"Good," Ian breathed.

"Yeah. Let me finish up here and I'll be right over."

"Ok, see you soon, baby."

She set Isla's phone aside, reminding herself that she'd need to take it. Hers was already on the nightstand, where she often left it overnight.

Piper shimmied into Isla's clothes, thankful that they had always shared the same size and style. She made a final clean-up of her hands, digging beneath her nails to make sure there wasn't a drop of blood beneath them. She swiped Isla's phone, shoving it into her pants pocket.

This is it.

She was about to take the biggest leap of her life. Her *new* life.

Piper strode back through the house, stopping beside Isla and the broken mirror. She picked up a small shard, one unbloodied, and tilted it to catch her reflection. The shadows sat languidly along her shoulders, stroking the side of her face in a lover's caress.

She traced her finger over the dark lines. Though she couldn't feel them, they reached back in answer.

“I’ll come back for you,” she whispered, gently setting the shard down. She turned on the toes of her shoes as she rose. “I’m sorry, Isla,” she said, looking down at her. “I’ll take good care of him though. I’ll take care of them all.”

Within twenty minutes, Piper was at Isla’s home. Her home. She made a quick dash for the upstairs bedroom, calling over her shoulder before Ian could stop her that she needed to freshen up and then they could go. What she really needed was to cut the edge off and stop her hands from shaking.

Slipping into unsodden clothes was the best she could do.

Piper was the spitting image of her twin with her silver hair and fine-pressed fashion. No one questioned her as she flashed a perfect white smile and then the sparkling diamond on her left hand. The way her mother had squealed and then burst into tears.

“Baby!”

Her mom pulled her into a hug so tight that Piper was thrust back to a childhood memory with a gold medal and pretty streamers, which was the last time her mother had hugged her like this. Her dad took her next, and it took everything in Piper not to burst into tears.

“My baby girl is all grown up.”

Piper had not felt happy in years, but as she slipped her arm through Ian’s on their way out the door, that is exactly how she felt. It rushed through her the same way Isla’s life had flown away. Perhaps this was the secret to happiness.

She just had to keep taking.

A month before, Isla mentioned a new position within her firm, but she had been hesitant and had not made the leap. The new Isla announced at dinner that, not only was she engaged, she was accepting the offer. The server was called back for another glass of champagne to toast.

There was something hungry in Ian's eyes when he looked at her. Something feral that made her blood heat. It spoke to the darkness that shrouded her and, as Piper tipped her glass to drink, she ran her tongue across her teeth.

He leaned into her ear, sliding a hand up the thigh of her designer dress.

"You seem different," he said.

Piper tensed and then eased as his tongue flicked against her ear. He didn't suspect a thing. None of them did. Not that his parents could tell. As far as she knew, Isla had only met them a handful of times.

He might.

"Different how?" She turned to him, looking down at his mouth lest he see the wariness in her gaze.

"You seem untamed." The last word rolled off his tongue in a purr. Chills raced along her skin and, when she met his gaze, undeniable need looked back.

"Do you think you can tame me?"

Ian had no idea what sort of predator rested at his side, hungry. So fucking hungry. Piper's jaw ached at the thought of what he might taste like. What he might feel like. She had starved her entire life, and now she was going to have her fill.

They didn't make it two steps into the house before Ian was on her. Hard hands that didn't hurt. She'd always bruised when Ian touched Isla. Hot lips crushed against hers, ripping the breath from her lungs. Piper grabbed his face, holding him hard to her as he pressed his hips into her.

"What's this?" Ian pulled her hand away from his face, looking at the bandage.

"Just a little cut," she said, drawing his mouth back to hers.

She felt the next question on the edge of his tongue and reached down to grab him through his pants. He was big, thick and hard and wanting. For *her*. Piper twisted her hand, rubbing her palm against the hard length beneath the denim.

Ian groaned and slipped his hand in her hair, the only evidence that she'd stolen the person he loved most forgotten.

It felt good.

Every kiss. Every bite. The tastes and scrapes were bliss.

Piper had never known pain like *this*, and she loved it.

"More," she said.

They fell against the console table at the corner of the entryway. Piper threw her hand behind her, clearing whatever trinkets Isla had carefully handpicked to decorate it.

Her hands were opening his pants and down them as fast as his were up her skirt. She clawed at his shirt as he kneeled before her. With a growl, he tore free of it and buried his face between her legs.

Piper's head lolled back, and her eyes rolled at the first flick of his tongue against her cunt. This is what she had been missing.

All the other men she had been with were dull in comparison. Who was she kidding? They had been boys, not men. They hadn't belonged to Isla.

Ian ate like he was starved. He worked his tongue and fingers in tandem, making her clench his hair so tight she thought she would burst.

She jerked his head forward. "More."

Even in the darkness, she could see the flame behind his eyes as he looked up at her. Grinning like a devil, he said, "You're a greedy little thing."

Piper rolled her hips forward, trying to entice him back between her legs. He obliged, but only for a quick taste before he surged forward and pressed his mouth to hers. He forced his tongue between her lips. She tasted sinfully sweet.

He grabbed a handful of her thigh with one hand and jerked her to the edge of the table. In one forceful thrust, he filled her, slamming the back of her shoulders into the wall. A loud gasp burst from Piper's lungs and she dug her nails into his arms, holding on for dear life as he hammered into her.

"Fuck. Yes." Her words came out clipped.

In the light, the ring on her left hand glinted. She held onto Ian tighter, opening her legs wider to give him access. Again and again he thrust into her, slamming the table into the wall with a loud bang each time.

"That's it, baby," she gritted.

You're mine now.

Ian grabbed the back of Piper's neck. His heated gaze turned feral as he locked eyes with her.

"Give it to me," Piper said. Her voice pitched as the note of her pleasure rose higher. She was almost there. She just needed a little bit more from him. "Give it all to me."

Chills laced across his shoulders, down his chest as his body tightened. He gave two more thrusts, and on the third, Piper threw her head back as they climaxed together. She let out a scream that echoed through the house, drowning out the ragged breath that Ian shuddered against her neck.

She rocked against him, riding out her pleasure as she spilled across his thighs.

Ian pressed his forehead to hers, his breath quick and ragged. "Who are you?"

Piper tensed, worry flecking every atom of her body. She felt his fingers stiffen on her skin, sensing the jolt that shot through her.

She tilted her face so their noses brushed. “I’m going to be your wife,” she said, just as breathless as he was.

Did it always feel this fucking good to take what didn’t belong to you?

Ian leaned back, those green eyes dark as a forest in a storm. Hungry, wanting, and full of question.

Two whole weeks went by before anyone gave a damn about Piper. That’s how long it took for her mother to ask her how she really felt about the engagement.

“You know how she gets.”

If they only had a clue how much I get now.

But it was the gnawing sense of loss tugging at Piper that made her concede to her mother’s insistence. Not for the woman she knew had been rotting for the last fourteen days but for the mirror.

The ones in Isla’s home were simple things, framed with plain iron or textured wood. They showed nothing of the truth. There were no shadows.

Piper drove to her own home as soon as she got off the phone with her mother.

The tears had been real as she stepped over the threshold. Isla looked worse than when Piper had left her. Guilt ripped through her like a hurricane, tearing through her chest with a vice grip. The stench was the worst of it. Foul did not begin to describe the odor that hung in the air.

Piper held the back of her hand to her mouth to keep from gagging. Bile simmered in the back of her throat. A fly buzzed past her head, making her duck and—

Piper swallowed.

The swarm of flies humming over the body wasn't the worst of it. It was the smooth carpet beneath Isla's head that made Piper pause. The rug, which had been littered with glass, was picked clean save for a small pool of blood gathered at the neck of the body. Isla wore a scarlet choker.

She curled her hands into fists. The other night wasn't a dream. She could still feel Isla's hair between her fingers from when she'd bashed her head into the mirror. This was all wrong.

Piper's gaze slid across Isla as she crouched on trembling thighs. She didn't reach out to turn Isla's face. She didn't need to look to know that the gashes along the right side of her face were entirely gone, her skull intact.

Clenched tight in Isla's grasp was a sliver of glass painted red.

Piper's eyes slithered up the wall, her breath tight in her chest as she looked up to the mirror.

A scream lodged in the back of her throat. Piper surged backward, her momentum throwing her on her ass. She whirled, falling on her side to look behind her. A whoosh of air burst from her lungs as she finally found her feet and stumbled into the wall. She sagged against it, turning blindly, to look down the hallway then back to the front door.

"No," she said, shutting her eyes tight. "Get your shit together, Piper."

She pressed her palm to her chest.

One eye cracked open, then the other.

Isla lay motionless on the floor.

But the mirror....

The mirror was perfectly intact save for the corner that was missing a single piece that matched the shape clutched in Isla's hand. In the body's hand. It wasn't Isla on the ground. It couldn't be.

Not when Isla was glaring at her, lurking over her shoulder in the reflection.

Piper turned her head one way and then the other. Beside her, Isla remained still as a statue. Shadows roved across their shoulders, caressing. One curled, shifting into what looked like a hand, and coaxed Isla's head to turn. She jerked her chin free and curled her lips into a vicious snarl.

"This isn't real," Piper whispered. *I've finally lost it.*

Light shuttered behind Isla's eyes and she surged forward, throwing her fists up and slamming them against the glass. The *inside* of the glass. The frame shuddered against the wall, making Piper jump.

Isla's mouth opened wide in a silent, vicious scream, her eyes full of sheer madness as she raged.

"Isla?"

Shadows slipped inside Isla's mouth and pulled, as if they meant to shut her up. But there was no sound. There was nothing save for the shallow breathing moving through Piper's lungs as she put the pieces together.

The shadows swept across her shoulders, hesitant at first then more persistent when she didn't swipe them away.

"You took her," she said.

They flicked like a cat's tail in response.

Her eyes fluttered down to Isla's body.

"How?"

Isla clawed at her face, her fingers sliding through the shadows as they funneled into her mouth. Her head thrashed. When her mouth was free of them, she spit.

Bitch!

Piper wasn't the best lip reader, but that word was unmistakable.

You fucking crazy bitch!

Isla hammered against the glass, despite the shadows that twisted around her wrists. Even angry, her light shone beautifully. The glittering gold of it refracted through the dark mist. The shadows tugged at the smaller strands of her glow, making Isla hiss and flash her teeth in response.

Piper ran her fingers along her face, tangling them into the strands of hair at her temples. This was bad. This was so fucking bad.

Of course the mirror had always been different, but... it took Isla!

Breathe. She needed to breathe and then everything would make sense.

The shadows slipped around her neck, settling against her like a scarf. A rush of chills raced down her spine. On instinct, she traced the line of her collar and dug her nail into the divot. The shadows curled around her finger in the reflection, fitting below her knuckle like a ring.

Long tendrils ran through her hair. They did the same to Isla, even as they tried to restrain her.

The mirror hadn't taken Isla, it had saved her.

The shadows were trying to help her.

Piper blinked. "Stop. Isla, stop!" Her fingertips graced the glass. "You're fine! You're ok."

Isla's gaze simmered. Her lips moved too fast for Piper to comprehend, but the obvious "fuck yous" and "crazy bitches" continued to rattle off. Spittle flew against the inside of the glass.

Piper wiped at it hesitantly. She jerked her hand back, but the flecks of spit remained, her fingertips dry.

The corner of her mouth tugged.

This was good. Isla wasn't dead, she was just...

Well, *trapped* didn't make Piper feel better.

No, she was, just... someplace else. In *there*, nothing bad could happen to her, and Isla couldn't hurt her. In there, she was safe. Both of them were.

Piper's light eyes scanned the edge of the frame. Dark swirls ran their hands over her body in the reflection. She cast a side eye to Isla, to her body, and back again.

"Now we both get to be happy," she said.

Isla's eyes widened. The color drained from her cheeks as her brow furrowed.

Piper smiled softly, taking the phone from her pocket. "Don't worry," she said. "I'm going to get you out of here."

Isla's eyes fell to her sister's hand. Her mouth fell open and she took a step back, butting against the shadows gathered at her back.

Piper turned her hand out and smiled. "I'm going to take care of him too."

Sweet satisfaction coiled in the pit of Piper's stomach at the utter shock that swept through Isla—because right after was the sheer force of betrayal.

Crying wasn't a hard thing for Piper to do. All she needed to do was choose one horrible memory Isla had inflicted on her and the tears came naturally. They welled behind her eyes as she dialed Ian. She took a shuddering breath that she let out in a choking sob when he answered.

"She's dead," she forced. "She's-she's dead!"

There was a moment of silence on the line before Ian responded. "What?"

Isla slapped the flat of her palm against the glass. The shadows had twisted their way into her mouth, gagging her from whatever profanities she had been trying to spew.

Piper rolled her eyes.

“She’s dead! She and that stupid mirror! There’s blood everywhere and– Oh God, baby, will you get here please? I don’t know what to do!” Piper turned, casting another look at the body, and choked on the breakfast she had before coming over. At least that wasn’t faked. The body did smell awful.

“Fuck,” Ian hissed. Metal jangled in the background, something hard fell to the ground with a loud thump. “Yeah. I’m coming. Shit. I’m coming.” Another fumble in the background as he rushed to get himself together. “Did you call the cops?”

“No,” Piper whined.

“That’s fine. I’m gonna call them. You stay right there, baby. I’m coming.”

She sniffled. “Ok. Please hurry.”

The tears stopped as soon as she ended the call. She let the phone drop to the ground, something the real Isla might have done in a panic. Piper ran her hands over her face, digging her nails in slightly to make her skin more flushed and distressed.

Her nose curled as she looked down at the body. She had done this. The least she could do was be there for her. Piper looked up at the mirror.

“Don’t try anything funny.” Whether it was directed at Isla or the shadows, not even Piper knew.

She dropped down slowly, careful to avoid the blood stain. She picked up the body and held her close, holding onto her. Tighter. Tighter.

And then nothing.

There was no remorse, no sorrow. And why should she feel sorry? Isla was alive.

By the time Ian and the police arrived, Piper had fallen into her role of the distraught sister. They'd had to pry her away from the body. They needed to examine it and couldn't do that while she was sobbing over it.

Ian held her tight, his strong arms a safe haven from everything that had befallen them.

"She seemed fine when I left. I thought she was better!" She sobbed into his shoulder, smearing snot into the threads of his shirt.

He didn't say anything as he stroked the back of her head.

Piper turned at the creak of metal. They were bringing Isla's body out on a covered gurney.

"We're gonna need that back." She nodded to the shard of glass one of the officers was placing into an evidence bag. She wiped the tears from beneath her eyes. "She was obsessed with the mirror— Just, don't lose it. Please."

Another round of tears fell free.

Behind Ian's eyes was a question, one not even he could bring himself to ask. She saw it in the emerald flecks of his bright eyes and the crease between his brows.

Five Years Later

"Why did you want to keep it?" Ian nodded to the mirror.

Isla's soft features had paled, her pastel eyes now a dull gray. She looked frail, like the ghost Piper had been all those years before. Her gaze was locked on Ian—pleading, wanting, hoping.

It had been a relief to discover that no one else could see Isla trapped inside the mirror.

Piper smiled. “It was the one thing she cherished most. She said it showed our true selves. I never understood it. I still don’t, but it makes me feel closer to her.”

Isla shut her eyes and shook her head. Her full lips twisted into a grimace.

Piper ran her hand over the swell of her belly. The darkness swirled between her fingers, lacing them together.

Her shadows had known before she did. One day she woke up to find them belted around her stomach, stroking softly, turning one way and then the other as if murmuring to what lied within. As she grew, they did too, their fingers becoming longer and more insistent.

Just beneath the skin, beneath all swirls of darkness, was the soft glow of light.

“Isla,” Ian said, breaking her thoughts.

She turned to him.

“I love you,” he said.

In the reflection, Piper smiled back, and beneath the shadows was a flicker of flame.