

# The Reflection

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## Artist Statement

When writing “The Reflection,” it was important to me that I capture the struggle of everyday life. In my story, the main character is Stephanie who is a working lady in her mid-twenties that doesn’t care for life beyond the walls of her home. She enjoys her solitude until a fictional monster appears in her home and sends her on a quest to find the source of evil in its world. Once she finds the needed object at the end of her journey, she realizes that all along she was the source of the problem.

The point I wanted to get across was that the whole scene is a fragment of our mind. We can be Stephanie some days, but we also have those little moments that push us to think about how we are going about life. We may want to believe that we are not the problem, but sometimes we are. The only thing stopping us is our minds and to get over something like that it often takes a long journey and a simple look at our “reflection” to finally see what has been there all along.

Yet another morning. Good morning, world. I didn’t want to get out of bed today. Yet another day of work; another day of having to live this life. Another day of having to get dressed up for a job that is not great and having to see the faces of people who ask too many questions. I guess that’s part of being an adult. My routine? I get up, brush my teeth, wash my face, put on a bit of makeup, fix my hair, and get dressed. I usually don’t eat breakfast, so I head straight to work.

“Good morning, Ms. Stephanie, headed to work I see?”

Ugh, why does he ask me this every time I get on the elevator? Obviously, I’m going to work. I’ve seen you at least once a week for two years now. Honestly, I don’t know how much more obvious I can make it that I do not want to talk to you.

“Yep Stanley, like every other day.”

How can I not roll my eyes at such questions? I am not a mean person, but it would irritate me less if no one approached

me. Do I look like I want to be talked to when I am about to take my long commute across town just to get to my tiny office and slave away eight hours of my life? No. So please do not talk to me, ok?

“Ugh, rain again.”

The drive is along this curvy bumpy road that’s just surrounded by too many living things and plants. But in the gloomy weather, one can’t see their surroundings. The scenery is too distracting, you just need to follow the road and get to where you need to be. Stop daydreaming or else that is how you end up with a flipped car on the side of the road, just like the man in the accident that they showed on Power2K News yesterday.

Here I am at the office now. This boring old office that I’ve given two years of my life to. I’d say I have a few friends there, but even then, it’s not like I am ecstatic to see them every day.



Originally from the island of Saipan in the Northern Mariana Islands, Kristina Tenorio is pursuing a degree in Psychology and Russian at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa. In the future, she hopes to further her knowledge in the developmental field of psychology and work closely with children. Kristina extends her gratitude to her classmates and especially her supervisor, Dr. Anastasia Kostetskaya, for making this project possible. She hopes her readers enjoy “The Reflection” and understand the importance of occasionally taking a step back, reflecting on oneself, and living life to the fullest.

“Hey Steph, are you joining us tonight?”

I can't keep coming up with excuses, but I have to try and escape from this again. The last time we all hung out it was a disaster. We went out to town to this little hole in the wall and had to drink, eat, and ugh... talk. And then shortly after a bunch of people flocked in and the whole place filled up.

“Hey Kathy, no can do, there's some work that really needs to be done so I'm pretty busy.”

“Oh, is your apartment going to flood again? Or an emergency with your imaginary pet? Honestly, Steph, if you don't want to hang out with us stop making excuses. Be straightforward, because no one is forcing you to be anywhere you do not want to be.”

“I'm sorry Kathy, I just really am busy.”

And just like that my day has gone down the drain. I don't know what the problem is. I know I have issues, but that can't all be my fault, right? What's so wrong with having my alone time? People need that and I do not know why it's an issue for me. I want to be left alone.

The workday was over and now I could go home. This is usually how these go- I force myself up, hope it will be better, and then I only get there to be repeatedly disappointed. Getting home after all the stress is nice, but it's not like I go back home proudly. Sometimes I wonder what things might have been like if they were different, but then I think those thoughts should not run amok. I don't want to be a crazy dreamer because, of course, that would be unrealistic, and I am a very realistic person. So here I am, just driving home, thinking all these nonsensical thoughts, the sun starting to set before me. I think it's so beautiful, but the clouds block it and then it's over before I get to really appreciate it. I always hope to see more, but it never seems to last.

Ah, finally home at last. My little shelter and my safe space. No one here will pretend to be nice to me or ask me about my day. I have had a long day and wish to rest. I quickly warm up some leftovers, eat dinner, watch a short film with a glass of wine, then get ready to sleep. The best feeling is when you're ready for bed and you slide under your blanket and lay on the soft pillow. I feel like I am embraced by them and now I can fall asleep in snuggly cuddles of warmth. Tomorrow will be a new day and even if it is not the best, I will deal with it tomorrow. Goodnight.

“Hello,” said a soft voice.

Did I just imagine that? I must've imagined that. Go back to sleep Steph, you've had a very long day and it's probably the neighbors being loud again.

“I said, ‘hello’, I know you're not sleeping,” a voice said again.

Okay, what is going on. I quickly turned on my lamp and looked around the room. Where was this voice coming from? I must have had a really long day because I am exhausted and hearing things that aren't here.

“I'm down here”

“Ahhh!” I said.

“AHHH!” it said.

This was not happening to me. No, no, no this is not real. In the corner of my room was some glowing orb with nothing on its face but round eyes. I cannot even begin to think of what it could possibly be. Was it a ball of shiny feathers? Or fluffy glowing ball? And why were its eyes so big?? Why is it staring at me?! Stephanie, you must be really tired. You are going to lay down, close your eyes, and go to sleep because you are seeing things that are clearly not there and nonexistent. Okay, breathe, you're okay, everything is okay, just relax. Oh my goodness, what is touching me, what the HECK is touching me.

“AHHH!” I screamed before flinging this ball off of me. “What are you? Why are you touching me?!”

“I need your help,” it said. “Please get up now we must act quickly.”

I was most definitely losing my mind. This was not okay, and I wasn't going to deal with this through the night. Maybe I was just extremely tired, right? That's all it was, right? I save these for rainy days, but I need to take my extra-strong sleeping pill Dr. Narine prescribed for me. Ah, much better. Good night.

I woke up to another day. Last night was pretty odd, but I'll pretend as if nothing happened. Alright get up, get ready, and get to work.

“Good morning”

There it was in front of me again. No, no, no this cannot be happening. This is not real. I haven't fully woken up. I just need to close my eyes again.

“You know, pretending like I don't exist will not make me go away.

“Oh, I'm not pretending you don't exist, you just DON'T! Now go away!”

The nerve, the audacity it had... unbelievable. What am I even thinking? It doesn't exist, and if I am not at work in thirty minutes I will very much be fired. Okay Stephanie, just grab your things and go, the sooner you get out and get some fresh air then maybe your senses will come back. What? Why can't I move? Why can't I get out of the house or even open the door? Is this sleep paralysis? But I'm awake. No, no, no.

“I said, you cannot pretend like I don't exist. I've tried to be nice, but you're running out of time, Stephanie. You need to get yourself together and act fast because everything will come crashing down if our queen is not found. Please, we have to go. We really don't have time to waste.”

“You are being crazy. And you're not real. I'm not going anywhere.”

The room all of a sudden slowed down. The sound of the water dripping from my kitchen faucet faded away. The clock ticks became more distant. Everything became dark. All the things in the room took a cold, grey color as if everything were black and white, but it was the floor that lit up into a purple flame-like color.

“We have to go now—only you can save us,” the creature said more seriously now.

The wall behind my bed started to shake. The whole apartment grumbled, and it seemed like we were the only ones who knew what was going on. Life outside of the room looked normal. No one seemed to see the absurdity that was happening. Well, that wasn't surprising because I was pretty much losing my mind. The wall started to sink outward and a beaming portal opened. I must be dreaming.

The thing walked up to me and said, “You need to go in and find the carved wooden closet. That will lead you to her. When you find her, the peace in our kingdom will be restored. We need you, Stephanie.”

“There is no way I am going in that thing. You are crazy.”

“Then, my apologies, I will just have to make you. Do not stray from the path and remember to find what you're looking for.”

“What? What does that even mean?”

One second I'm standing by the wall, and the next I am flying through empty space. It's so dark and lonely here. I don't know where I am, but I know this is not where I want to be. It took me a while to fully see where I was, for the light was too bright, it kept shining in my face, but it seemed like I was deep in a forest. It was isolating, but I didn't feel scared. I was just alone.

I decided I would rather get up and walk somewhere rather than just sit down and be useless. I got up and walked deeper into the forest and the first thing that caught my eye was a little hut. I looked inside and there lived a little snail family. I figured if I was just pushed into a portal by a fuzzy monster, traveled here through space, and ended up in a forest, surely these snails would talk, well, because I must be crazy.

“Hello, good...creatures, could you help me figure out where I am?”

“Why you're in the forest of Tranquility, my dear. Did you just arrive?”

“I believe so, not too long ago.”

“Ah, very well, but you have not much time.”

“What do you mean I don't have much time?”

In a matter of seconds, they were gone. Was all this an illusion in my already big illusion? What was going on? I decided to walk further because I apparently “did not have much time.”

I stumbled across a dome in the ground and I looked in and found a rabbit.

“Excuse me, could you help me find the wooden closet?” I asked the rabbit.

“The thing you seek, is higher than you think,” it said.

“What? What does that mean?” I asked the rabbit even more confused.

And just as I had predicted the image disappeared once more. My efforts were useless because at this point it felt like it could go on forever. I was so tired that I decided to take a rest by a tree trunk. I looked up and gazed at the enormous trees

surrounding me. They were so majestic. I don't think I have ever seen such in my life. I guess back home, in reality, I don't go out that often. Huh. There was noise. What was that at the top of this tree?

“Who's there?”

“Hoot.”

“Yes, that's what I asked, who's there?”

The leaves and trees started to shake, and the breeze got stronger as down flew an owl, a large Great Horned Owl. To my own surprise, I wasn't scared of him, for I thought he was beautiful. He flew down to the ground and came closer to me.

“Hoot,” he gently said

“Hi Mr. Owl, if I may call you that? I arrived today in your forest and I am not from here and I am tired. I've been walking around the forest, asking creatures I'd meet on my way for help, and no one's been able to help me. Do you know where I can find the wooden closet?”

“Hoot,” it said again.

Great, this one didn't talk. I might as well accept my fate that I will just be stuck here forever. I plummeted on the ground and started crying. I felt so alone and all I could do was just give up now. I cried and cried, until my tear hit the ground and up sprouted a beautiful small rose. The rose bloomed before my eyes and out of it came a little paper roll that said, “The thing you seek, is higher than the trees.” I quickly realized, I'm too far below! Mr. Owl, I need you to take me higher up, beyond the trees!

“Hoot!” Mr. Owl said happily this time.

I climbed up the majestic beast and up we flew. I couldn't open my eyes until we flew right below the clouds, but I finally worked up the courage to. When I opened them, I was in awe. It looked like the forest ran for miles and miles. Nothing but luscious green fields containing the very creatures that support its life. It almost felt like a dream. Ha! A dream within a dream. We flew for about an hour until I noticed a hill higher than the trees and partly covered by a dark cloud. That was definitely strange, so I knew I had to at least see what was up there.

“Mr. Owl, up there!”

He gently tucked me tighter on his back with one of his wings to make sure I was secure and up we flew. The weather quickly changed, one second skies were clear and sunny, but the higher we got the skies darkened and the weather became chillier. We flew beyond the cloud and saw the top of the hill. It lay flat, but there was nothing on it. I signaled to the owl that that is where I wanted him to go. He gently landed and helped me off his back. I looked around but saw nothing.

“Hey Mr. Owl, I don't think the closet is here, we should probably get back down to the ground where it is safe. I... feel a little scared.”

I looked back, but he was gone. I had a feeling this would happen. I think he helped me with all that he could, so it was up to me to figure out what to do now.

“Hello, if anyone can hear me, I'm looking for a wooden

closet. This might sound strange, but this fuzzy monster told me that it was the key to saving it's home."

No one answered. And just like that, I felt so lost again. At this point, I wondered if I would ever get home. Am I even in the right place?

"Yes, you are," said a voice from behind me.

"Hello? Who's there? How did you know what I was thinking?"

I looked behind and saw a human-like figure walking towards me. I was relieved, finally someone of my own species! I could tell she was a lady, from her voice and from the beautiful black glittery gown she wore, but her face was covered with the hood of the gown. she came closer and stopped at about 6 feet in front of me.

"I can't show you the closet if you do not know who you are" she answered

"Well, that's a silly question, of course I know who I am. I'm Stephanie."

"No, who you really are, on the inside."

"I am a hardworking woman who holds herself well and lives her life?"

"Who are you?"

"I just told you!"

"WHO ARE YOU?" she shouted.

For the first time in years, tears rolled down my face from fear. I fell to the ground in front of her and felt completely powerless. I felt so vulnerable. What was happening?

"I'll ask again... who are you?"

"I... I don't know."

On the left side appeared the closet. It was a simple wooden closet.

"In there is what is causing our realm to collapse. It is the source of all evil and negativity that is trying to ruin our life here in the kingdom. Stephanie, we have tried to open it, but our efforts have been useless. Only you can do it."

I opened the closet and along the entire back wall was a mirror.

"It's... me."

"Yes." she said

"I don't understand, I am the source of all your problems?"

"Look closer, Stephanie."

In the mirror, images started to play. The first image was how sad Stanley looked after I was rude to him yesterday morning. The second image was Kathy feeling down when she got home because she wanted to spend time with me. The third was me. It showed the sad life I live. I did nothing and had no one. I didn't grow up to be successful, I grew up to be bitter; completely alone and completely lost.

"You cannot live life that way. You have people who genuinely care about you. You need to accept it as it is, as genuine kindness and love for you. There is no time to waste. Remember this."

I was back in the apartment again. Whether that was all a dream or not, I didn't care. I wasn't going to waste another second from now on.

What a beautiful morning it was! I can't believe I'm back home! And I have work today, that means I get to see Kathy! Oh wow, I'll be late if I don't leave now.

"Good morning Ms. Stephanie, headed to work I see?"

Oh my goodness, it's Stanley!

"Hey Stanley, yes I am! What a beautiful day it is. Have a good one!"

"T... thank you, Stephanie," he said happily.

The drive to work was so beautiful. The majestic mountain side, the beautiful flock of birds flying together, all so beautiful. It started to rain, but even with the rain it was beautiful, for after it came a rainbow.

I quickly parked the car and got into the office. I know I must have seemed crazy, but I didn't have time to waste.

"Kathy!"

"Hey Steph, good morning. Is everything ok?"

"Everything is perfect. And listen, if you don't have plans tonight, I'd love to go out to dinner with you and the bunch, say about seven o'clock at the new little restaurant downtown?"

"Really?" Kathy asked in disbelief

"Yes, really! So, see you there then?"

"Um yeah, I'd love to. See you there."

The End.