

Reflection

The couple tentatively wandered into the cave. The woman leading her young son by the hand as he stared curiously at the glittering crystalline surroundings. There was light coming from some unknown source, and on the other side of the cave was a large pool of water. Suddenly, a man seemed to emerge from the shadows on the wall, startling the family. His strange attire and wand at his side made it clear he was a wizard. He smiled warmly, and his eyes reflected the shininess of the walls around him. He raised his hands up in a peaceful gesture and spoke.

‘Fear not friends, I am the keeper of this cave, and the secrets held within.’

‘Then this is the Cave of Reflection?’ the man asked.

‘That is correct,’ the wizard replied. ‘Gaze into the pool and you will see the true form of your soul staring back.’

The man looked at his wife, then approached the pool warily. He knelt down and gazed into the water. Despite the pool being impossibly clear and still, the man couldn’t see the bottom. He stared at his reflection. Old, overweight, wrinkled, and so, so tired. Then suddenly, the pool rippled, and his reflection changed. Now he gazed into the eyes of a much younger man, muscular, wearing the finest leathers and mail, and carrying a sword. But more than that, he looked confident and noble, and there was a spark in his eyes that he hadn’t seen in himself for the longest time. He began to cry, not able to remember a time he looked so full of life.

Next, seeing her husband’s reaction, the woman rushed over to the pool. Her reflection changed as well, hair going from a dry grey to a lush, silky blonde. Her weary, wrinkled eyes into the bright, piercingly blue ones that had made many men swoon over her in her youth. And her clothes, turning from a simple sleeveless tunic into a fine silk dress with a silver tiara adorning her head. She too began to weep next to her husband.

After a while of holding each other and sobbing over the people they could have been, the couple got a hold of themselves and wiped their tears away.

The man chuckled a little to his wife, ‘If only we could actually look like that, huh?’

‘Oh, but you can, my friend!’ The wizard intruded; his sudden input startled the two once again. In their study of the pool, they’d both forgotten about his presence.

The woman stood up and clutched a handful of his robe, ‘How? Tell me now, please sir you must!’ she screamed desperately. The wizard gingerly removed her hand from his arm and held it softly.

‘There is a great treasure at the bottom of the pool. Retrieve it, and you will be transformed into the versions of yourself you see in the pool.’ He professed. The couple looked at each other excitedly for a moment. Then they paused, realising they’d forgotten about their dear son in all the commotion. He was frowning, unsure what to make of the situation. The woman went over and reassured him that everything was ok, kissing him on the forehead gently. The wizard slid over and placed a hand on the boy’s shoulder, giving him a wide, friendly smile before looking up to the woman.

‘Do not worry about the boy, I will take perfect care of him until you return.’

The woman considered this for a moment, then decided she was satisfied with this arrangement. She turned toward her husband and they both headed back to the water’s edge. They looked at each other, nodded, and dived into the water.

They both swam hard, kicking and battling the water as they pushed their way down. After about thirty seconds they still could not see the bottom, and they began to worry about running out of air. But still they desperately swam, wanting more than anything to become the people they saw in the pool. Finally, it appeared, a pair of glittering orbs. They were smooth to the touch, big enough to fit comfortably in their palms, and emitting a constantly shifting glow, the mysterious source of light in the cave. They snatched the orbs from the bottom and began to make their way back to the surface.

Back on the surface, the boy began to cry as his parents disappeared under the water. The wizard looked at the boy, expression changing from the epitome of friendliness to pure disgust, as if the boy were a slug he'd accidentally stepped on. He waved his wand and suddenly the boy's mouth snapped shut and his cries became muffled as he tried and failed to reopen it, finding it glued shut. The wizard cackled at the boy's struggle and turned back to the water. He raised his wand once again, this time towards the pool.

He grinned wickedly, the water turning from its clear, pristine, crystal colour to a deep, sludgy grey as it thickened into a glue-like substance that was impossible to swim through.

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We struggled as the water turned to muck around us. Kicking in vain, clinging to any hope of survival. With every second my strength waned. I could feel my lungs about to burst. My mouth gasped open, and sludge flooded my throat and lungs. I gagged and choked, unable to get the muck out. As my consciousness slipped away, my heart ached with the realisation that we'd been tricked, and my last thought was that I'd never get to hold my precious baby in my arms ever again.