

A light comes up centre-stage, revealing a woman sitting in a chair staring out ahead. She is dressed simply, her hair and face unembellished. She speaks in a somewhat detached, observational manner.

WOMAN

When I got up this morning the first thing I did was use the bathroom, just as always. Afterwards, as I washed my hands in a liquid soap scented with chamomile, I happened to glance up...and there it was, ever so sheepishly looking back at me. I wasn't shocked or surprised. It's there every morning. Sometimes I look at it, sometimes I don't. But it's always there...there in the mirror...the replica.

(Pause.)

I'm not exactly sure when I first started seeing it. It wasn't as if it appeared overnight. It took shape gradually, over time. But I couldn't tell you when it began. When I see it now it almost feels as though it's always been there. But it hasn't. That's what makes it hard to look at.

(Beat.)

I think the earliest I can recall it beginning to take shape was about four years after I'd married Karl. Nothing too pronounced at first; nothing to set off any alarm bells. Just a slight stiffening around the mouth, the eyes ever so slightly less...curious. It's strange how these things creep up on you without you noticing. Until it's too late, of course.

(Pause.)

I married Karl in a fit of existential panic, and, like most decisions made in a state of panic, it wasn't a particularly wise one. He was older and colder, and quite successful. He ran his heart, mind, and business with ruthless efficiency. Not to be outdone by anyone, his rivalrous nature sought supremacy in all things – all but a popularity contest, that is, shrewd enough as he was to know that that was one battle he had no hope of winning. The very fact that he didn't give a damn what those around him thought of him made him doubly despicable to those who were unfortunate enough to have the pleasure – including most of my family. Unburdened by the need to please, he was free to treat people in whatever way would best achieve his goals, however callous the method.

(Beat.)

Why, then, would I have married such an autocratic bully, I hear you ask. Ah, but that's a trick question, you see – because *I* didn't. Not the person you see now. Not the one I can barely stand to look at anymore. No...it was a very different person that married Karl, as she wandered through the woods with her little basket, on her way to granny's house.

(Beat.)

She was...well, she was many things, but most of all she was lonely. Lonely and unloved. Yes, I know, I can almost hear the strains of a violin in the background

myself, adding its cloying accompaniment to those hackneyed words. How pathetic it sounds now – especially now. And how ironic that the emptiness I felt then took me firmly by the hand and led me to this hollow place I now dwell in.

(Beat.)

Back then, she was the middle child of middle-class parents with middling expectations of her. They loved her, I suppose, as best they could. But in truth, they were both so busy resenting each other there was very little emotion left to go around. Rather than their child, she sometimes felt they regarded her as an all too real and unwelcome reminder of a time when they were once intimate.

(Beat.)

Nevertheless, despite their indifference, she'd decided she was destined for greatness and before long would be celebrated and adored the world over – as a novelist. First a bachelor's in English at a prestigious university, followed by her master's, then on to a hectic life of publisher's deadlines, endless book tours, interviews, children, more deadlines, more interviews, more children, holidays in far-flung corners of the earth in order to reclaim her sanity, then back to more of the same, and so on.

(Pause.)

When she met Karl she fell for him in an instant. Not because of anything he said or did – though he could be very charming when he wanted. No, it was his face that sealed her fate. It wasn't particularly attractive or handsome – not by accepted standards. But it almost broke her heart to look at it. It was so pitiful and forlorn – despairing, even. He had the sort of features that gave one the impression he was perpetually on the verge of tears. How could she resist? She wanted to make it all better.

(With a sigh.)

Ah, the treachery of images.