

# The mirror between us

TINATH ZAeba

The Oldest has always walked ahead, her shadow stretching long across the ground. She is the first, always the first. The first to test the ice in winter, daring the thin crust of frost to hold her weight. The first to trip on it, knees breaking through with a sharp crack, before scrambling up with laughter stitched into her breath. Behind her, the Youngest stands at the edge, watching, shivering not from the cold but from the fear that the cracks that caught one sister might one day catch the other too.

That is how it has always been. The Oldest faces the world first. She bends beneath the weight of expectations, learning early that every step will be measured. The Youngest follows, inheriting a story already half-written, a path already marked with footprints.

When the Oldest laughs, the Youngest learns to echo it, hoping the joy might be borrowed. When the Oldest falters, the Youngest carries the memory of her stumble, fearing the same ground will give way. The Oldest lives by the Youngest — not just in the shared tilt of their faces or the echo of their voices, but in the choices the Youngest makes before knowing she is making them.

There is comfort in that closeness. And there is terror.

The Oldest wears expectations like armour. She is the experiment, the one who learns where the walls stand and how much space is safe to claim. She discovers silence early, swallowing words before they can spill into the air. She becomes the example, the rule, the first test. Her story glimmers with brilliance, but it is lined with rooms where the air feels too thin.

The Youngest inherits both light and shadow. She runs faster because the Oldest clears the way, but she hesitates too, remembering where the ground once cracked. Every triumph is doubled — hers, and also the Oldest's. Every fear feels like a hand-me-down, worn even before she tries it on.

At the dinner table, this inheritance is plain. The Oldest sits with her fork neatly in place, fielding questions about grades, plans, and futures. The weight of expectation lands on her plate before the Youngest has even lifted hers. The Oldest answers carefully, carrying the family's demands like a shield. The Youngest remains quiet, yet the lesson is written into her: if the Oldest bears it, so will she.

But one evening, the Oldest sets her fork down and



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refuses to shrink. Her voice trembles but does not break. She says no — softly, firmly, against the grain of silence. Across the table, the Youngest freezes, learning. In that moment, defiance passes like a gift from one sister to the other. Years later, when the Youngest finds her own voice, she will realise it was borrowed from that night.

The mirror between them cuts both ways. The Youngest wants to be like the Oldest, but wonders if every stumble must be repeated, if dimming oneself is an inheritance too. Yet to want to be nothing like the Oldest feels like its own kind of loss. Who is the Youngest, if not also her reflection?

And for the Oldest, the mirror wounds as well. She hopes the Youngest will run where she slowed, speak where she was silent, shine where she was dimmed. But pride is edged with ache. In the Youngest's face, she sees the proof of what might have been, had the world been kinder. The Youngest becomes her dream and her wound all at once.

It is a strange inheritance between sisters, this weaving of pain and resilience. Trauma does not always roar; sometimes it hums beneath the surface. The Youngest hesitates because the Oldest once did. The Oldest aches when the Youngest refuses to shrink, because it reminds her of all the shrinking she had to endure. Yet strength passes

between them too. Every burden the Oldest carried steadies the Youngest. Every risk the Oldest took cracked open a door for the Youngest to step through.

The shadow, the silence, the laughter, they pass back and forth, shifting shape but never disappearing.

Perhaps the art is not in fleeing the mirror, but in standing within it. To see not only the cracks but the way light refracts through them. To hold both ache and hope without letting either define the whole.

Sisters are never free of each other. They are mirrors — fractured and luminous, distorted yet unbreakable. Not identical, not interchangeable, but bound in ways that wound and heal at once. When the Youngest looks at the Oldest, she sees not only who she is, but everything they both might be. And when the Oldest looks at the Youngest, she sees not only loss, but proof, that her path was never wasted, that every shadow became shelter, that every risk became courage for them both.

They are, in the end, two stories braided together. One steps first, the other follows. But neither walks alone.

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## Of September

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With a glance, I see a visage, well-known and dear, He stands, a portal to days gone by, like the pane Through which the mango's bough in youthful cheer Whispered tales of innocence, sweet yet vain. But now my gaze rests upon the parchment's field, Where rustling pages echo leaves once sealed, Falling softly, as if to reclaim the past In this solemn chamber, where memories last. I gaze upon him, yet know not his fame,

As though my very birth was tied to his name. He departs, My soul in anguish, till I find him nigh, Like the mango tree that waits beneath my window's sky. In whispers soft, I speak to him, where I dared not to the mango tree, I love him as the wind caresses branches where the mango blooms free, He lingers by my side through hours, A warmth enduring, like sunlit hours after the leaves have ceased to be.

Azra Humayra is a sub-editor at Rising Stars.



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