

Mary Three Times

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It has so worked. 11.37. Eleven hard pinches and one soft one for the half past and it's seven minutes later than we agreed but that's good, I'm closer to the time. It's freaking happening. And I'm wondering whether Livi is feeling the same but I can't message her now, we agreed no phones, that we had to switch them off. Besides, it's too close to the time. I need total concentration. The harsh whiteness of the screen would make my eyes all weird in the dark and I need to focus.

Stop. Need focus.

It's already 11.39 and I've wasted two minutes thinking about it and Livi in her bedroom and us comparing afterwards and her being so pleased the pinching thing worked. I hope it worked for her, too, because it will be something she can tell Gracie. That she was wrong and the pinching thing does work when you can't risk an alarm clock. If Livi's slept through, she'll be so pissed off. And I'll be pissed off because it'll just be me and I don't like the idea of it just being me because. Well. Gracie used her phone when she tried it but I can't risk making a noise in the dark because Mum or Mick will spring in here asking *what's going on, what are you doing, you should be in bed, you've got school tomorrow*. And that'll be it, nothing, the whole plan = ruined. Livi's mum and dad are the same: one little noise and it's lights on, Sage starts barking and her mum gets all puffy in the face because she worries about Sage barking at night because the new neighbours have already complained once, and that's why Livi's not allowed sleepovers anymore and pretty much why I'm not allowed sleepovers at all, because I always end up laughing too much or too loud and it really pisses Mick off. I heard him say it – *the kids laughing in the night, it*

really pisses me off, can't you make them stop? – and Mum doesn't want to annoy him so that's that, no more sleepovers. And that's why we're doing this on our own in front of our own mirrors.

But the upside is that me and Livi have the same dressing table. I got mine first, for my birthday, and she liked it so much that she asked for it for Christmas and I didn't mind her copying because copying is the best sign of flattery, or whatever it is people say, and she did ask me first and I said it was fine. It was a good job Argos didn't sell out, being Christmas and everything. So, providing the pinching thing worked for her too, we're going to look into the same mirror at the same time. If she woke up at 11.37 as well, that would be so spooky. It would sound like we made it up. Gracie would be so annoyed.

Can't look at it yet though. It takes a bit of concentration apparently, like looking deep and not blinking and not breaking eye contact, like you do with the new girls at school. Like Abby Heyward's first day, when Livi eyeballed her at break time to see what she would do and she looked away, down at her shiny new shoes, went bright red and obviously wished she'd never had to move here and start a new school and try and make new friends because everybody's already got their friendship groups and no one wants to add new people in, especially girls with different accents and red faces. I'd rather eyeball new girls though than do what me and Livi are about to do, if I'm honest. Like, I'm glad we're doing it, it'll be worth it for the look on Gracie's face, but I'm a bit like what if I get really freaked out? What if I'm never the same? Me and Livi said we'd get out of bed at exactly the same time, at five-to, so we don't risk making noise or getting cold so we can't concentrate. So before then, we said we should do breathing exercises, deep breaths like we're about to attempt a world record or have a baby, even though we've both said there's no way we're having

babies. Deep breaths, in and out, to settle our minds so we don't get scared. I pretend I'm breathing into a paper bag like they do in films, but I still feel tingly at the end of each breath, though I can't tell if it's excitement because I'm dying for this to work, for it to work for both of us, so we can go in and tell everyone else that it does work, that we saw it, that we saw *her*, and seriously that Gracie was talking shit when she said she saw snakes instead of hair because that's Medusa, not *her* – I'm not saying her name yet – and Gracie didn't even do it right and just made it up to sound cool. But she didn't sound cool when she said the snake thing because instantly I knew that was rubbish, but no one said anything because Gracie's in year nine and we hadn't even tried it yet and so nobody would listen to us. But once we've done it and seen it, seen *her*, then we can go back and tell them and everyone will know that Gracie's snake thing was bullshit.

11.49. My room looks kind of blue from the streetlight outside which is a surprise as I'd expected the kind of *black-black* where you can't even see your hand in front of your face. The blueish light shows up the path I've made through clothes and homework and plates and up to my dressing table and the table itself is clear for the first time like ever, but I can't look at the mirror yet, just in case. Sitting here like this, on my own, my breath is deafening, even when I breathe slowly, as slow as I can, and I'm sure Mum and Mick can hear me breathing too loudly, and they'll be in here any minute asking questions and turning lights on and ruining the whole thing and Livi will be mad at me. There'll be no one to back up what Livi sees and people will think she bullshits like Gracie even though they've both got different mums and that can make all the difference when it comes to DNA and things like lying. Although lying could be nurture rather than nature, who knows.

Not looking at the mirror when all you want to do is look at the mirror is agony. It feels like it's in the centre of the room. My eyes are sore from not looking and from being awake; they're as dry as when we've been ages in the car to Dad's house or after the sleepovers we used to have at Livi's where we tried not to sleep at all. We only made it to seven a.m. once.

I'm not thinking about it. I'm not thinking about how she'll appear and whether she'll have snakes or whether she'll be crying blood and what if I scream and wake Mum and Mick. But it's six minutes to go now so I need to get ready.

Wiggle my toes.

Blink my eyes.

Ignore my heart and stomach.

Feet on the carpet, the carpet that's usually Sunset Pink but now looks grey. My dressing table that now looks grey. The chair grey. Darker but. There. Sit on it. The edge of the mirror. Not yet. I'm touching it, I shouldn't. It's cold. It might disturb something, disturb her, but I need something to grip, my hands won't stop shaking. Maybe Livi's holding her mirror. We didn't discuss this. We didn't actually discuss what we'd do just before. How we'd look up and - Oh God. I can't look yet. It won't be midnight. Even with all this thinking, this over-thinking, four minutes can't have passed. But time goes weird when you're -

The edge of the mirror. The corner of the bed, the divan mum calls it, but I've not heard anyone else call it that so I won't say it either. It's just a bed. And it also looks grey. Everything. Like I've climbed into an old telly.

Crack-creak.

Heart leap.

It's not me. It's a snore. Just Mick. So disgusting that I can hear it from here. I never want to get old.

But that's funny, it makes me realise: no cars, no cats, no other night sounds I'd expect to hear. Foxes. Wheelie bins falling over. Midnight's not even that late but it's silent outside.

Livi will be doing the same thing as me, sitting on the same chair, her back straight, her even straighter hair falling down over her shoulders. Will she be thinking of me? Picturing me and my mirror that's the same as hers? It's all we've talked about for days. We're the first ones doing it in year eight. She'll want to know I'm doing it right, she'll get mad if I don't do it right.

It must be time. No use putting it off any longer.

I say it quickly, the thing that's been flashing in my ears like a curse. Daring me to think it.

Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary

I'm whispering. Nothing happens. I clear my throat. Try again. There's a squeak like the lads at school whose voices haven't broken properly.

Bloody Mary

Bloody Mary

Bloody Mary

Dare myself to look up. Dare you. Dare. There's a flicker. Heart pound. A crack of light like someone's shifted the curtains behind me. But I haven't and no one else has. Mick snores. Say it again. Louder.

Bloody Mary

Bloody Mary

Bloody Mary

Why did we agree this? Why am I on my own? I should never-

She appears. Instant. She's not there, then she is.

Eyes. Blue grey. Not fierce or monstrous but sad and grey. Bags. She shouldn't be up this late either. Pale skin. Blue, like she's cold. Cracked lips. A thirst. Her hair is long, not curly, not straight, but certainly not snakes. Alert, like she's listening. Eyes on mine.

She's not terrifying. She's not a demon. She's not going to shriek in my face. She's just a girl.

Her lips start to move but I can't hear what she's saying. I lean closer. She does the same, like she knows about Mick and doesn't want to get me in trouble.

Go back to bed, she says. Go back to bed now.

Then I feel the tiredness, like somebody's poured a bucket of sleep over my head, and I do what she says. Scurry back to my bed, flip the duvet over my shoulders and don't look back.