

My mind is like an endless hall of mirrors.
Twisting, turning, a sharp curve here, a slow arc there.
Some have accused me of retreating too deep into the halls.
Say that I tended to get lost wandering the corridors.
Really, though. It's just harmless travel.

Some days, it's when I'm bored.
Other days, it's when I'm stressed or anxious.

It's been happening for years, years prior.
Back deeper into the hall.
Maybe even before being "programmed."
I don't know, I can't remember that far back,
but I sense there is a "far back."

Breaking, shattering.
My voice echoes in silence.

Eccentric, odd, strange
Animalistic, wild, monstrous

All reflections in the mirror.
How long will it take until I find the real "me"?
I'm getting fed up with this search.

I draw my sword, spin it in my hand,
go to drive it into the silver pane before me
with the cowering, withdrawn reflection.

My sword jerks. Stops mere centimeters from the mirror surface
as a thin hand reaches up and pulls at the hilt.
"Let go," he whimpers.

I yank it away. He grunts and grabs at the chain
connecting his neck to the blade.
"Let go," he repeats.

Xavier no. I:
Welcome to My Hall of Mirrors

But I don't hear him. I only see
his disheveled hair and
unhinged smile,
his shivering lips and
wild eyes.

"Let go!" he screams.
But I don't see him. I only see
me.

He lifts up his arms
and gestures abstractly with his hands
before wrapping his fingers around my arm. "Let go."
I shake my head and go to drive the sword in again.
He screams and chokes
—I watch—
before throwing his entire self backward
and ripping the sword from my hands with a crunching clatter.
Lost eyes find terrified eyes.
He grasps his head with his hands and moans.
My withdrawn reflection starts to cry.

I can only stare.
The scene fuzzes with a wet film
that I angrily brush away.

Voices clamor in my ears. Clamoring for attention, clamoring for me.
I barely turn my attention to them.
They don't really want to be around me.
But my reflections cry out in pain and loneliness.
I glance back to the man curled up on the ground
among the glass shards,
his arms wrapped around our sword.

A rough hand slaps my back.
I jump, the mirrors shattering in my head, and turn to see my friend
always all smiles.
"You drift off again, Xavier?" He laughs. "Come on."
I force a smile back. "Alright!"
Some days I wish they could see it. But most days,
I'm glad they can't.

Reverberations.

I murmur inside my mind.
My feet tap on the reflective surface of the floor
before swiveling in place.
A sigh.

How peaceful this world is
in comparison to the psychotic chaos
of the outside.
Outside the mirrors.
Outside the safe place.

A silence.
A broken murmur cuts through the noiseless murk.
A weary song.
I don't remember where I heard it from;
all I know is that it's nostalgic.
Nice.

Grief cowers beside a shattered pane
speckled with crimson blood.
Sadness tries to hum along,
but a cracked Anxiety shouts for him to stop.
Embarrassment, humility.

I wish memories
Emotions, really,
were easily altered, changed, erased, added,
programmed in like a simple line of
ones and Zeros.
I don't understand the point of some of them.
They cause so much pain.

A mirror shard cuts into Anguish.
Bitterness won't smile.
His home feels thicker, stronger than some of
the others.
Though you can't see it from the surface.

Apathy eerily smiles at me.
His creepy stare never flinches away
or startles.
It's so obvious
he's powerful.

The virus lurking within.
Quarantined for so many years.
Out of sight, out of
broken, fractured
mind.

Hide it.
I can't anymore—!

Calm shatters without my even touching it.

The ground below me
begins cracking and blowing
shards up into the air
as the mirrors I never wanted
to have
increase in their primal frenzy.

I grab my sword out from the sheath
at my side to try and

Stab it
Stab it
Kill the Core
Destroy it

And my past self follows
by my side
his chain bouncing as he hurries
to not be left behind.

Crying out—
me rushes ahead of me
as my legs give out
and I collapse.

The walls explode by my side.

The noise
of all the mirrors
is unbearable.
I can't stop screaming.
That's not me, that's not me,
right?

The mirror halls,
my world, my wonderful world,
crashes down around me

Xavier no. II:
My Mirror Broke

I restart the song.
I don't have much for singing
so I vocal the beat
—the rhythm—
instead.

Anxiety is calm again.
to an extent to where I don't
notice him.

As I approach the Core
of my mirror halls,
the song falters from my mouth.

I didn't want to admit it. You know,
if I don't have to, right?

But the deeper I go,
the more negative the mirrors become.
Mirrors broken but still screaming,
shouting,
clawing for me to notice them. To acknowledge them. To embrace them.

My steps move faster.
I trip on a pile of mirror shards.
A casualty.

I don't know if I can live with the truth.

I've reached the Core.
It always feels so insignificant
in my mind.
Pulsing, whirring, twirling,
it sparks with pent-up energy,
emotion.
But here, right in front of it,
facing it dead on...

It's bigger than I imagined.
The problems.
The bugs.

I'm afraid.

It hurts—
I know.

Run away.
Hide.
I'm scared.
It's okay.
Hide.
Run away.
Ignore the
Truth.
Unstable
Fractured
Crackling

and smashes to black.

My past self clings to my hand
as I dangle from a dark pit
of overwhelming fear.
His wild eyes
unhinged smile
shivering lips
Seem more like comforts now.
He pulls me up.

The Core is cold
full of trapped,
pent-up
mirrors.
They warp and stare at me as I
trip and collapse into the center.

The mirror that makes up
the ground

snaps like an icy sea of turbulence,
and I watch
as my past self only clutches my sword
close to his chest,
and the mirror reseals before I can grab the edge.

My body cracks against a reflective floor.
As I sit up, I sit up in twenty different mirrors
surrounding me on every side.
The same hall with those same emotions.
Where can I go
when I am trapped in the prison of my mind?

Xavier no. IV:
The World in My Head

My footsteps fade off as I slow my gait down the edge of the mirror hall.
This is just one of many, really.
Criss-crossing up and down, intersecting as if weaving together to form the embryo of a world.
Only, and I suppose the unfortunate thing is, I've let the halls grow. Maybe I liked it.
Maybe I liked the way I got lost down the corridors and through the rabbit holes.
Maybe I preferred the deep recesses of the reflective walls than to the deep scars of reality.

Oh, but then it falls apart.
It always falls apart, it always has to crash under its own weight buckling the supports inside my heart.
And like always, I gathered the shards most salvageable to piece together a new hall.
A single hall, just that, quiet and easy.
Again there was my sigh of relief, a pressure released as if the mirror labyrinth once created were an abscess ruptured out.
It was peaceful again, it was safe again.

The thought makes me want to laugh now.

“Peaceful.”

That hall, a distorted mosaic of the bones of a world built up over months, over years?
Of course, it's difficult to remember, but one of those fallen labyrinths was “peaceful,” too. Isn't that right?
You loved it, you cherished it, you enjoyed every crack and every flaw and every bloody mess that resulted from its neverending construction. Casualties.
It didn't matter that its continuous usage added to the strain of its foundations, warping the rebar and snapping the cement. It didn't matter.
It didn't matter. You heard the screaming of your reflections inside, but it didn't matter. It was safe. It was “peaceful.”
It was better than the empty reality outside the labyrinth where the chill of loneliness bit your flesh like frostburn.

It was better, so you thought, ignoring the necrosis of your mind and the abject anxiety stabbing into your heart.
And then, as a candle was lit to cut through the darkness of the halls—
—the foundations broke, and the thousands of glass panes reflecting back thousands of contorted versions of yourself—

They collapsed.

But you and I both know that what you saw with the candle drove you to destroy the foundations yourself.

You've been on this one a long time, haven't you? This new labyrinth's quite large, and you've been trying so hard to keep the electricity running this time.
But the lights have flickered more often than you'd like them to.

“I've been doing quite well with this one,” you muse as you pace along the expansive mirrored corridors alongside myself.
“I've been doing quite well with this one,” you hum

as you watch
as I smash another reflection with my cut-up, bloody fist,
the scars that never heal criss-crossing over one another like our own mirror labyrinth. But when I say “our,” you know full well it's really just you.
You know what I am. I'm not you. But you are me.

I like to pretend I'm the master of my mirror labyrinth, but you know as much as I do that the only master in this hell is you.

So, what is it now?

When you were faced with the truth of one of your labyrinths, you had no choice but to see the darkness inside of it. Its Core. Its Core is nothing but the essence of your labyrinth. And no matter how many you build, and how far you go to overhaul the aspects of yourself you loath, the Core will always remain

as that twisted room.
You had your chance that time, didn't you? To kill it. To kill the reasons why you hide within the halls of your mirrors. But you saw what was within and shut down.

And now you're back. Back in your new labyrinth. You're all too aware of the Core, right? You know you have to face it. But I know I speak for you when I say that the Core is nightmarishly dark. No one can blame you for avoiding the inevitable. Though by avoiding the confrontation that matters the most, the cycle will just persist time and time and time again.

Breaking your way out of the mirror halls do nothing but harm you, you know that. And we've learned that you don't have the control over the mirror labyrinth that you think you do. So if you can't smash your way out, and you can't face the Core alone...

My footsteps cut off as I turn my tired face to a blank mirror. There isn't anyone in it but myself, staring back at me. Or maybe it's me staring back at you.
Facing the Core means confronting what you'd rather not. And this entire time, you've been so focused on your reflections that you've no idea of the infection lurking within yourself. In all honesty, I'm not sure the infection you've been blaming is here.
The mirror labyrinth began with you, didn't it?

So then, end it with you.

Purge the malware within your own heart. If negatives are like bad programming, then I see no problem with the sword of the Lord being pulled from your rusted arsenal.
Maybe then you can attack the Core with all your heart and with all your soul. If you're divorced from the mirror halls, it can't hold you back any longer.

Maybe then you can finally be free.
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The floor is silent. It makes no echo
as I pivot my pace.
A sigh, a cry, a mind
not quite whole when it's made up of mirrors.

How peaceful this place is
in comparison to the psychotic chaos
of the outside.
But who am I kidding? The inside is nightmarish
-torturous-
-vain-
a silly manifestation of all my years afraid of my own reflection.
Perhaps not me
-whole-
But the pieces of me
the panels that make up the labyrinth.
Every emotion,
outcry,
sigh,
peace of mind
piece of mind.

Afraid of humiliation,
afraid of the mocking, of the belittling,
of the hurt, the fear, the abject anxiety
that eats at me like locusts
as all I try to do is survive through the stings.
Loneliness, perhaps,
perhaps loneliness,
the strongest of all, the talons that dig in deep and won't let go,
that whisper that no one cares,
no one likes you,
no one appreciates you.
Loneliness breeds bitterness, breeds apathy, breeds anger,
breeds a hate for others,
but moreso
just
a hate for myself. For myself, of myself.
I hate for myself. I hate to protect myself.
I hate myself. I hate... No, it doesn't align. I can't finish the line.

Who would want to be around someone who's too sensitive,
too loud,
too whiny?
The needy want, the neediness, the need.
-I need-

What is it I'm looking for? I don't understand.
I loathe, I know.
I loathe the fractures of me. The flaws no one can see
but me.
They see everything, the mind whispers,
they see awkwardness, and weakness, and confused childishness.
You look small, sound small, behave small.
Say it. Say it. You don't want to say it, say it. Say it.
A bitch in youth's clothing.
Is that what you think you are?

Twisted mind, that's what you insist.
Evil thoughts, negative emotions.
Murder. Anger. Hate. Kill
the feeling inside of me that writhes like tendrils
when I'm faced with what I can't control. Can't command.
Control freak
in your control box
controlling every face, every pose, every fragment
of your crawling, flawed, blemished, imperfect flesh.

You spit at what you can't twist into perfection
with your scarred fists still bleeding
from all the mirrors you've broken.
What did you think would happen
when you tried to hide away the parts you hate the most?

You sing when you're alone.
You cry when you're alone.
Your song is warbled, out of tune, cracked.
It's so intolerable to hear, the mind whispers,
and you shut up as soon as motion betrays an intruder.
Sadness likes the song. It likes to hum along,
but Anxiety tried to ruin it, it doesn't want to listen
to its own song back at it. How embarrassing.
How flawed.

Perfection, you say, is unobtainable,
and yet you hyperfixate on the unobtainable.
The subtle behaviors, the steady feelings
that pound like a heart, like a drum, like a shrieking cacophony of words you can't voice
because you're too afraid to give them control.
Everyone is staring, your mind whispers,
they think you're a freak. How flawed you are. How broken you must be.
What a child. What a creature of clumsy kindness.
Is that what you think?

You're proud of your eccentricities
until that little worm of doubt whispers
that they stare
-they judge-
-they sneer-
-they question:
How old must she be?
How childish can you get?
That doesn't match.
But I like that, you say,
I like that, but maybe it does look silly
-and vapid-
-and stupid-
and how childish, yes,
how childish.

I hate
myself
the parts of me I overblow
and want to fix
bury
bury bury bury
beneath layers of shattered glass and blood and
myself, I hate myself,
why can't I be "normal"?
But I don't want to be like everyone else.
But no one will like you, no one will ever like you, who would want someone like you?
Hush now, listen to the broken glass beneath your boot
as you pace through what you've buried.

Look at it
Look at it
Child, look at it

There
There you dig,
you seek,
you look for what isn't there.
You try to ignore what is.

Self-hate, why do you self-hate?
Back to loneliness, yes,
back to loneliness and the root of the Core.
Loneliness leads to
Isolation leads to
Hurt leads to
the expectation of a strike, a slap
from someone who ignores you once again.

It stings worse without contact.
Your deepest passions, your joy
desired to be shared with others
and rejected with neglect.
Loneliness leads to
the feeling like you aren't enough
like your passions aren't enough
like everything you do is a disappointment
a crash of fallen expectations
a blemish against the eye

Loneliness leads to
the feeling like you are not understood
like your mind is an outlier
like you are a failure
for not keeping up with the march of others
running the same race you are

839 words of loneliness in this poem
7 million words of loneliness in your labyrinths
The Mirror Corridor forces you to look at yourself
incessantly
sick and sick and sick and sick and tired
of obsessing
over the cracks of my mind
Eccentric, odd, strange lies one
misconceptions of a beautiful mind
Animalistic, wild, monstrous lies Zero
misconceptions of a broken mind
Hurt, destroyed lies X
lies only lies only lies
Is that what you think?

You can be hurt but never destroyed.

Bitterness can't let itself go.
Envy stalks the success of others.
Sadness spins its wheels in sludge.
Anguish can't understand its own keens.
Grief is blind to everything except memories.
Terror cowers at its own invisible shadow.
Neediness whimpers for reassurance of visibility.
Calm often overpowers to hide the panic inside.
Anxiety claws its heart out with one hand
and its skin off with the other.
Apathy has given up with everything
and everyone, and itself.

Aspects of yourself that you loathe are really,
truly lovely,
really.

The Core
is nothing but the essence of your labyrinth
is a twisted room
is nightmarishly dark
is why you hide within the halls of your mirrors
is the malware contorting what you hate about yourself
The mirrors are warped
because your perception of the mirrors you never wanted
is warped.
We all have mirrors.
You've built your castle with them
to monitor every flaw and shatter what you hate.
Control. You want control over yourself.
Breathe.
B r e a t h e .
B r e a t h e .
B r e a t h e .
B r e a t h e .

De-warp the mirrors, tease out the tangles of your emotions,
sort out the broken pieces
and seal them back together again
with solid gold.
Melt the Core.
MELT THE CORE.

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Tear down the walls
Thrust the sword -in your heart- through its mechanisms
Scream like you're the only one screaming and the only one fighting
Because this began with you
And will end with you
You are high voltage
You are the master here
And you have the metal conduit
Of the Lord's sword
In your hands
As you electrify the Core
And melt its blinding wall
And you scream like you're the only one screaming and the only one fighting
But you know you aren't alone anymore.

the core is melting
and the heat of my high voltage
eviscerates the crooks
and hairpins
and channels
of every bend and every corner and every corridor
of the mirror labyrinth

until I stand in nothing but silver and gold.

Xavier's footsteps cut off as he finishes his stride alongside me
out of what was once a labyrinth of mirrors
of self-reflection
of self-preoccupation
of self-loathing
and as he turns, his smile is evident
even before I see it.

He sheathes the sword after kissing it once on the pommel's center gem,
a rainbow-rimmed eye of a white so pure,
it must only be from Heaven's forge.

"Now you can finally be free."

His hand is as warm as his emotions.

"Now we can finally be free."

I stand in molten silver and gold staring into a reflection that stares back warped. By my side, Xavier rocks on his heels. His hand's resting on his sword pommel at his side with its wondrous rainbow eye as he asks why I'm scared, Why I doubt, Why I don't want to move. The rainbow eye I saw in a dream that maybe was not a dream. A blond woman with a bob cut and a blue blouse told me that Christ was wanting to speak with me atop an empty concrete warehouse. We rode the elevator, and she was simply smiling. I was shell-shocked that Christ chose me. The elevator paused at the last level: usually, Christ walked the gardens on the roof, but today, He was in the dark. A piercing white light shining like a grain of rice against black paper or a star in the night sea. I couldn't make out His face within the light. Only His flowing white robes and hair and hands, outstretched before Him with a rainbow disk floating between the palms. The iris pulsed, flowing from the milky core through the wiry colors raised up the way the muscle of an iris is. I knew, upon seeing it with my eyes, that it was the eye of God. Christ told me two words in a heavenly language, and the dream ended.

“God wills it.”

Xavier draws his sword. He rests the blade in his palm, clutches the hilt in his hand, and admires the pommel. He asks what's wrong with it. I say that the dream doesn't make sense. Why would Christ be in a dark, miserable, empty, concrete warehouse? Why would the angel be a blond woman in bright blue? He expresses that it's probably symbolic, but he knows as much as I do so is probably just playing along. I let him, if only to get it off my chest.

I had another dream, maybe a year after the first. I rode a boat with fourteen or so tween boys and a Middle Eastern man in soft blue robes who was very quiet among us. I saw him as Christ, but no one recognized him but me. But I was disarmed, because I saw his face when I shouldn't have been able to. We landed at an island, and the man led us up to the double doors of a concrete warehouse and vanished, as if to say, You're ready. The doors led to a narrow chamber, and more doors, these ones without handles, but as I led the boys, the doors opened at my approach. Several chambers we passed through, one containing a small chapel lit by candle glow and an older woman in blue satin sitting in a pew alone. Her head was down. I couldn't see her face. We walked past knowing to speak with her was a waste of time because she was evil in disguise.

Xavier tests the sword's balance in his hands with a light toss. He casts me a funny smile as he asks who the woman looks like. I confess, a politician with views contrary to the Bible despite her religious affiliation. He asks when I had this dream. I confess the year, 2017. She most likely was often still in the news.

We reached the end of the doors and entered a labyrinth of yellowing, peeling wallpaper and cluttered antiques. We became separated, some alone, some with another, but our confident intent—to destroy the evil within the facility—no longer was so confident when it began to seek us and hunt us down separated and alone. I hid in a bellhop shaft with a boy, he could have been one of my cousins, for all I know, and was so scared.

We reunited at an open room—maybe a ballroom, or an expansive entranceway—, where the evil force stood before us wearing the skin of an antagonist from a video game who was a demon in disguise, tempting people from God with forbidden knowledge. We had nothing to defeat it with. And within moments, it burned like paper as a light erupted from behind it, as if an angel or Christ himself intervened. It spoke of being happy to suffer before it disappeared and we knew it would return again someday, but in the moment, we had won.

With a raise of his eyebrows, Xavier offers that the two buildings don't sound the same. That the one was empty and dark, much like a parking garage, and the other was cluttered and lit, like a haunted home made livable. I never did see the outside of the first concrete building. Maybe it was not the same, yet it still made little sense, Christ being in a place such as that. Xavier is about to sheath the sword before hesitating to glance at the eye of God and offering, that maybe it's symbolic for Christ being here, in our faith-barren world, and maybe the woman in blue was not an angel but someone I know, may come to know, or never had a chance to know, or simply a messenger, or perhaps an older me. After all, the other woman in blue was not the same. She was the evil one in the skin of the woman who told me that Christ wanted me to come to him. He confesses that he can't understand, or maybe we can't ever understand, if the man in the second dream was Christ or someone misleading me, and I believed him. Maybe it doesn't matter. The meaning remains the same: Beware false prophets, and false believers Beware fragmenting when the Church cannot stand apart Beware putting confidence in the self, especially in matters related to the spirit. Yet even through our failings, God is still there providing his protection.

He offers me his sword. I take it, feeling a little numb. He pulls, tries to pull, my attention from the silver and gold around our boots and to the white around me. The emptiness. I don't reciprocate his request.

Xavier laughs, as if someone told the funniest joke ever heard in all his life. He forces me around by my shoulder, and says that I've been seeking my story within the reflective corpse of my prison.

There isn't white, like I think, there's a planet. There's life. All of it captured and bent within the mirror labyrinth's ruins. Again, he asks why I'm scared, Why I doubt, Why I don't want to move. I say that I don't want to lose the world I made.

the characters I created the stories, good and bad. Xavier insists he's not seeking his own death—in fact, life would be so much better out there anyway—, and he's been aching to leave for what feels like forever now. He gestures to the reflection, the mimic, the imitation, of my world, and reminds me that if I'm not happy there, why should I grieve what's lost? I go to hand back the sword; he pushes the hilt deeper into my palms. I express that I'm afraid that my dreams were nothing. Only dreams. Or, worse, a testing I failed. False teachings I believed.

There was one more dream, The same night I had the second one. I was sitting outside on a rather unrealistic version of my alma mater's campus. I was drawing. Three lions approached—two female, one striped, and one male—, and in that moment, I was sure I was to die.

One of the females called me a small fry—a waste of her time—before the three leapt impossibly into a window high up in an apartment building right on campus.

Xavier beams. He tightens his grip on my fingers, and thereby my fingers on the hilt. He says that God has plans for me. God will protect me. God will lead in matters of the heart and of discernment. God has warned me to not credit my talents or misplace my confidence in myself. God has promised that even if I get lost, He will be there. God has shown me the value in my art, and the target audience of my writing. He asks me about the image God put in my head of the bookstore shelf in the fantasy section.

I cower a bit from his face and his expectations. I don't know how to write another novel I'm scared to try again facing another failure I've played with so many approaches but quit them all I'd considered avoiding it in favor of another medium I can't proceed without knowing what to do so I don't quit again.

Xavier points out that I'm gripping the sword too tightly now. I'm not giving God room to speak. I'm not looking anywhere but at my own failings. I need to let this story go to be its own thing, for God, but I'm scared of making the wrong decision and failing again.

Besides, my writing is like my depression. I make my characters miserable to feel better about my own misery but it only makes me more miserable.

I write my characters are believers because so am I, but their world is bleak and abandoned by God. I give my characters visions and symbolic dreams but give them punishment and confusion from them.

Xavier points out that it's because I'm still viewing them through the distorted lens of the mirror.

Of myself. Of the Core, melted. Of the reasons the Mirror Labyrinth was built. How do I be free? I ask. He pulls me, again, from the molten silver and gestures out at the planet around me.

He reminds me that the lives of everyone living on it is more than their suffering and heartache. That they have joys and weird idioms and inside jokes. They have brotherhood and sisterhood and families. They have human legacies. If they must suffer, give them a joy. If they must despair, give them a light. If they must die, give them a life.

I ask if I can keep my website, my imprint. Reflections. He looks baffled. Why not? he says. The melted silver and gold will always scar its surface. But it is now free.

Xavier gestures for me to follow him across this new planet's surface to find the stories that need to be written and the characters that need to be drawn.

He says that healing needs bravery. I take a breath—and a final look—before putting my back to the reflections and taking his hand.

I'm scared, I confess. What if I look back? I expect irritation or worry, concern, doubt. But he only twists a grin of wistfulness and wry mirth. If you do, he says, make the scar part of the story.

A story which is no longer warped in my own mirrors.