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Opening extract from

The Queen's Tale

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For Hannah

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Chapter 1
The Magic Mirror

Look.

How many times do I have to say this?

No one ever seems to get it, so I will repeat it yet again.

I never wanted the stupid mirror in the first place!

The mirror was a present from my new husband, King Frank. We hadn't been married

very long, and he was still at the stage where he was happy to spend money on me. I really wanted shoes, but Frank didn't take the hint. Not even when I left the catalogue open at the right page with a big cross next to the red high heels.

The mirror was gift-wrapped. I tore off the ribbons, ripped off the paper and held it up. I didn't like the size, or the shape, or the frame, or the chain. In fact, I didn't like anything about it. The glass reflected my unimpressed face.

"It's *magic*, darling," Frank explained. He was beaming. So pleased with himself for coming up with such a wonderful idea.

Huh.

"I sent away for it," he told me. "You look into it and say a little rhyme and it tells you how beautiful you are."



Now, I know I'm beautiful. I don't need to be told. And I know a thing or two about magic as well. I'm highly skilled in witchcraft, but of course Frank doesn't know that. I've got a Seeing Pool in my secret lair down in the castle dungeons. It's state of the art and it tells me everything I want to know. The lair is also where I keep my bottles of poison, my chest of disguises and some other stuff I'd rather Frank didn't know about.

So I don't need a Magic Mirror. Besides, they are so last year.

"What's the rhyme?" I asked. I couldn't care less, but it was clear that Frank was dying to see how it worked.

"It's written on a card tucked in the back of the frame," Frank said. "Go on, darling. Give it a go."

I tried not to yawn as I turned the mirror over and found the stupid card.

"Read it out, then," Frank pleaded. He was really excited.

"*Mirror, mirror, here I stand,*" I read. "*Who is the fairest in the land?*"

The mirror did a swirly thing that made me feel a bit ill. Then a big, green face appeared. It was some sort of ghastly Genie. He had horns on his head and a ring in his nose. I didn't take to him at all.

Frank was really impressed. His eyes boggled. It was his first taste of magic.

The Genie leered at me and said, "*You, O Queen, are the fairest in the land.*" Then with a pop he vanished, and my own unimpressed face swam back into view.

That was it. Pathetic. It didn't even rhyme. Also, the Genie had a silly voice that didn't go with his looks. Sort of high and squeaky. Annoying.

"Amazing, eh?" Frank cried. "What do you think? Do you like it, darling? It was very, *very* expensive. But only the best for you!"

"Thank you," I said. "It's a very – um – kind gift, Frank."

Just then, Snow White skipped into the room. She's my step-daughter. Frank adores her, but I'm not keen.

"Good morning, Daddy Dearest," said Snow White. She threw herself into her father's lap and showered his beard with kisses. Then she turned to me. "Good morning, Step-mother," she said. "Isn't it a lovely day?"

"It is, my love," said Frank. "What do you plan to do this fine morning?"

"I shall pick some flowers," said Snow White. "And then I shall go and play with my friends, the forest animals. I do love them so. But first, I shall sing you a little song I made up

about bunnies. It's got a dance that goes with it."

"Isn't she wonderful?" Frank asked me. "So sweet. So pretty. So talented. So – "

"Mm," I said. "Well, I must be off. I'm going to the shops." And I stormed from the room before I said something unwise. Behind me, Snow White skipped around, pointing her toes and singing some drippy song about bunny rabbits hopping in the sunshine.

"Don't forget your mirror, darling!" Frank called after me.

"Tell a servant to put it up in my bedroom," I snapped. If the truth be told, I would rather it went down the well.

I ordered up the golden coach and went out for the day. I bought two new coats, four pairs of shoes, six dresses, a ruby ring with earrings to match, and nine handbags. I went to Boots

and topped up on lipstick, nail varnish and poison. I also treated myself to coffee and cake at the best hotel in town. The macaroons were to die for.

I enjoyed myself. It was good to get away from Snow White for the day. There is only so much of her that I can take.

