The Doppelganger

I stood in a room of mirrors. All around me I saw nothing but me. I’d realized that I’d drastically changed since my time with the Eurégyeans, and I hadn’t taken the time to evaluate these changes. I glanced around the mirrors, seeing every detail of my worn, tired body. My dark hair had never been allowed to be in its natural state; the Eurégyeans saw curls and brown hair as a nuisance and ugly. They allowed me to keep the color, but not the style. My tired eyes made the blue in them look gray. I was taller than what I saw in the mirror, I thought. But then again, I wasn’t one to stand in front of the mirror for hours and hours. In fact, I was almost sure this was my first time every doing it. I could see the sheaths my swords rested in. Ferrum’s sheath was light and thin, and its shiny metal glistened in the sunlight. Engravings decorated its exterior. I wasn’t quite sure what these meant, but they looked pretty cool. Ferrum was forged from a special form of iron-bauxite mixture, making it sturdy but light. It was helpful in sudden attacks and fast opponents. Ferrum rested at my right side while its evil twin, Nox, rested firmly at my back. Nox was much longer and heavier than Ferrum. It was also made from obsidian, giving it a dull purple-black color. Its sheath was exactly the same color, except it was only dyed leather. It too was decorated in random runes and characters, all of which made no sense to me.

As I scanned my appearance, I heard someone yell. I flinched and turned my head in the direction of the scream, my reflections mimicking my every move. I ferociously glanced around the room, only coming to find that the only one in this room was me. Then I heard it again, but this time it said, “You weakling.” I turned to see that my reflections no longer mimicked me, instead, they mocked me. The octagonal room contained eight mirrors, and “me” said something different. One called me a psychopath, another a traitor. One called me a flat out liar. One yelled the word “coward” incessantly, and eventually every one of them mocked me incessantly. In the center of the room, I fell and clasped my ears, trying to block out their mockery. This was futile, since they only got louder. Then I thought to myself, “This is a dream, nothing more than a figment of my mind,” although I knew it was my mind repeating what I thought of myself. Frantically, I searched from something to wake me up, only to find nothing in the room but a cold stone floor and endless mockery. I sat there for a moment, taking in their insults. For a moment, I believed every word they said, for deep down I knew it was true. Suddenly a dark haze filled my mind, and I considered laying on my sword. But then a flash of light entered my darkening eyes. It was Ferrum and Nox. Realizing what this meant, I unsheathed Nox and proceeded to smash each of the mirrors until every single one of their mockeries silenced.

Nox’s mass easily shattered the mirrors. Tiny shards of glass pierced my body, but at that point I didn’t really care. I watched as each twisted version of me transformed into broken glass, their sinister laughter ending in a howling cry of defeat. Soon eight mirrors turned into four, then two, and then one. As I walked up to the final mirror, I saw this last form of me glaring into my eyes. He said nothing, perhaps fear had forced his mouth to quit speaking. I was wrong. Before smashing his mirror, I took a moment to evaluate my last opponent. At a glance, this reflection was my twin. But almost immediately, I found minor differences in him. His eyes, rather than my sapphire blue, were dark gray and cloudy, and they seemed to be staring right through me. His skin was tanner than mine and it seemed smoother. In his left hand he held a sword similar in color to Nox, but it lacked the mass and components of Nox. It was longer, but seemed much lighter than Nox. Behind him I saw a black mist twisting in some phantom wind. Then he spoke, “Hello, Apollo.” His voice was that of a soothsayer, smooth and relaxing. He lacked the condescending tone of the other mirror doppelgangers. Rather, he seemed compassionate and calm.

“Hello,” I said, unsure of what he was doing. “Who are you?”

He remained silent for a moment before replying, “I am Atrius. I am you. And you are me.”

“How is that possible?” I asked, still unsure.

“Everything is possible, Apollo. The fact that you are standing in this room is very impossible, as it does not exist, but yet you are here.” He stood there for a moment and awaited for my reply.

“If you are me and I am you, how are we so different?” I asked.

“Every coin has two sides, Apollo. I am simply the other side of your coin, the hidden side. I am essentially your locked away power, your hidden potential.”

Surprised by his answer, I asked, “Hidden potential?”

“Yes, deep within you-or rather all four of you-is a ravenous source of power. This power is not sentient and cannot be truly tamed or used without completely destroying its user. But if it gained sentience, that is another story.”

“What kind of power?”

“A power that the likes of humanity has never seen. A power that is beyond the measure of any human measurement. And it lies within you, waiting for its chance to spring forth and show itself to the world. And it’s gained sentience. I am that power, essentially.”

For some odd reason, I was enticed by his power. I felt a deep and irresistible urge to obtain this power, and I was willing to do anything to get it. I was sure that he knew this too, as I saw a smirk come across his face as I pondered what he said.

“I can help you Apollo. I saw what these mirrors said about you. You are insecure about yourself, and you struggle with it. I can help you overcome it. I can help you overcome that struggle and make you who you are supposed to be,” Atrius said, his words flowing from his mouth like crystalline water into a tranquil pool.

I was shaking in my shoes. A river of tears erupted from my tired eyes and fell to the cold stone floor. I fell to my knees and buried my head in my hands, trying desperately to restrain the tears. Finally, I relented and said, “Every day I struggle.” I cough and sniffle before continuing, “I struggle with my morality, with my sanity. These aliens, these savages, they’re messing with my mind. They’ve molded me into a killing machine, a robot who takes orders from an evil emperor on a distant world. Everything I’ve done is ‘for the good of the empire.’ ‘Apollo!,’ they’ll say. And I’ll immediately submit. They’ll order me to slaughter a group of my own race ‘for the good of the empire.’ They’ll tell me to destroy a monument built by human hands ‘for the good of the empire.’ They’ll poison my mind with those sayings, and eventually I will do it ‘for the good of the empire.’” I paused for a moment to regain my composure. “Now I’m here in Karachi, taking orders from other people. That’s been my entire life-Apollo do this ‘for the good of the empire.’ Or now it’s, ‘for the good of humanity.’ They’re all words, empty words! That is my struggle!” I look up and find Atrius mirroring my position.

He looks up and says as if he had sobbed as well, “Then do something about it. You and I cannot change a thing about us separated. But together we can give them what they deserve.”

Suddenly, a wave of rage flowed through my veins, and I looked at him straight into his clouded eyes and said, “Then how do I do it?”

“Simple. Break the barrier,” he said with mystery. He presses his hand on the glass and smiles. I glance down at Nox, whom I had had a death grip on for the entire time, and look back at Atrius. He shook his head in affirmation. Slowly, I hoisted Nox above my head and slammed it into the mirror. Shards of glass flew everywhere as the last mirror crumbled under the power of Nox. Once the mirror had shattered, I looked beyond the pile of shards to see Atrius still standing before me, a satisfied look on his face. He smiled and said, “Thank you,” and then, all at once, he flew forward and transformed into a cloud of black fog. The fog collided with me and I fell to the ground, the fog slowly dissolving into my skin and then slowly faded away. Then the room went black.

I awoke and sat straight up on my cot in Karachi. I was out of breath and felt as if I had just run a marathon. I glanced around the little room, making sure I wasn’t still in a dream. The room still looked the same. A stand-up mirror stood in the corner of the room right next to a stool. The little desk I’d used to telegram Dhruv was still there with the pen I used. I got off the cot and walked over to the window, which was the largest item in the room. The sun was high in the sky. I guessed it was around nine-thirty, since the city wasn’t entirely busy yet. I saw the thatched roof homes lining the city streets of Karachi. Beyond the curve of the dusty road was the surprisingly calm Indian Ocean with several destroyers patrolling the coast. The sea breeze felt good as it rushed in as I opened the window. The sound of a car horn could be heard amongst the noises of the city. As I stood contemplating the view, Leonidas came in. “Oh you’re awake.”

“Yeah, what’s up?” I ask as I turn around.

“General Hopkins needs us. We’re heading to Lhasa today,”

“Oh yeah, that’s right. I’ll be there in a minute.”

“Ok, but they’re antsy. Best you hurry before they send security,” he said as he walked down the corridor. I sighed and changed into my mandatory rebel uniform. It looked like normal street clothing, but in reality it was a set of very nimble but powerful armor. I was told it would withstand extreme heat and cold, and it was water- and bulletproof. But I figured they were just exaggerating. On the left sleeve was a small, red stitch of a bird. It resembled a phoenix on fire, with its wings flared. It was our symbol, the symbol of rebellion.

I grabbed Ferrum and Nox and put them on. Before I left, I stood in front of the mirror, making sure I had put the entire uniform. I looked closely at my eyes and flashed back to my dream, or nightmare. They were blue, and not the cloudy gray of Atrius. I smiled slightly and walked out of the room, not realizing my reflection remained.