

Mirrored in Passing

by Olivia Smith and Rosalie Rutten

The billboard plays the same ad, a brutally endless trap. Only whispers of “Where did that one go?” perpetuate through the endless crowd of strangers to her ears. The infamous film sustains Juliette’s stagnance. How easily a bright future blows away with leaves of fall. As she walks with no purpose, guided more by habit than direction. The neutral smell of rain on asphalt is her only sense of comfort, until a sweet semblance of laughter halts her. A warmth falls upon her as she peers up from her feet—a child screaming of laughter flings flour on her father. She stares at the scene desiring that kind of laughter. “It’s the best bread on the block” an old woman whispers, causing Juliette to jump as she nods to the elder. ‘You should go in, darling, bread cannot bite,’ the old woman exclaims. The child inside breaks away from her father, and a muffled scream of “Nonna!” is heard, causing the old woman to hobble into the store. Juliette watches as the old woman hugs her grandchild with a sweetness she’d once known. The old woman slowly walks back to the shop’s door, holding a roll in hand, exclaiming “My door is always open to those who need a little bit of warmth my dear. ‘Nonna’s’ will give you the warmth you crave.” Juliette dares to enter, but rain pours down from the clouds and she abruptly exclaims, “Sorry, I’m late.” “My child, late to what in this weather?” “Just late.” With that she places her hood onto her head and continues on. Her mind drifts to a time when the world felt like hers to conquer, when warmth didn’t feel so far away.

*

“I can’t believe it!,” Juliette screams as the man on the phone shares the good news. The moment she has been waiting for her whole life has finally come; getting a lead role in an upcoming movie. Every long night practicing her acting skills, every contact she has made with actors and

actresses who felt like they were above an amateur that can't get a job, every coffee she drank trying to stay awake and motivated after another rejection. It was all worth it. As Juliette wakes up on this warm July morning, she finally can go grab a coffee because she likes the taste instead of needing it to stay awake. She walks to the set of her new life, past the gleaming skyscrapers and bustling streets that she now can appreciate. As she enters the set, a crowd of people come toward her with open arms. A tall man with a slightly gray beard says, "Welcome Juliette, our star!" Juliette has never felt so loved. When she walks to her dressing room to get ready to start filming the first scene, a boy with kind eyes and a gentle smile catches her eye. He notices her immediately, feeling the urgency to introduce himself and says, "Hi, I am Theo" as he puts out his hand for Juliette to shake. They smile at each other and Juliette knows she will never be the same again.

*

The drops of rain fall down with sharp intensity, Juliette numb to its harshness continues on until her foot slams into a puddle. Her once beautiful shoes, now wet and droopy. She clenches her fist in anguish, and tears threaten to spill from her eyes, unwilling to let them fall, she turns the corner, and spots it—the small ice skating rink that glistens under the droplets. Juliette hesitates by the rink, her breath as clouded as her judgement. A lone girl is in the center of the rink, the girl's pink scarf trailing behind her in her unpracticed attempt to soar. She watches as the girl flares her arms out struggling to regain balance, but falls to the icy ground, with only a thump and laughter filling the air. The girl slowly gets up and stumbles to the rink's edge, and as she looks up, makes eye contact with Juliette. Juliette's breath catches, but with the burst of laughter from the other side of the rink, Juliette realizes she is part of the rink's ambiance. Before Juliette leaves, she gazes to where the girl glides to meet her companions. The three figures—now four—linked hands,

guiding each other around the rink with echoing laughter. The young girl isn't lonely anymore, and Juliette longs to join them as the idea of putting on skates is like sunlight defrosting her icy exterior. But she knows she doesn't belong on the rink, yet her feet don't move from the edge. She is living vicariously through the girl and her friends, remembering a time when people actually liked calling her name. She glances at the girls surrounding the once lone one and is grateful someone knows her name. The cold air seems to grow harsh once again and the unfolding scene grants Juliette a surge of energy to turn a new corner.

*

As Juliette sits at her desk facing the skyline, she attempts to focus on her script, but her eyes keep wandering to the window, captivated by the bustling life below. Yellow taxis dart through the streets like busy bees, honking in their eternal rush. Children with backpacks hurry to school, their laughter faintly audible even from her high location. A wave of gratitude washes over her as she realizes she's finally living the dream that so many down below are striving for. As she starts to focus back on her script, an email from the director distracts her again. The subject line of the email intrigues her: "Bonding on Ice!" Excitement springs from her body and her face lights up when she realizes she will finally be able to get to know her coworkers on a deeper level, and maybe she will even get to see Theo again.

Juliette puts on her skates—worn but trusty from the rare occasions she's had time to use them. She puts on her fluffy white earmuffs, flared leggings, a thick sweater, and a coat with the fuzziest hood. Her cheeks glow pink, partly from the chill in the air but mostly from nervous anticipation. She wants to make a good impression. As she arrives at the ice skating rink, she notices everyone is already skating. Somehow, she got the time wrong and is almost 30 minutes late. Without pausing to gather herself, she laces up her skates and steps onto the ice, heading

toward the director to apologize. But in her haste, she misjudges her footing and tumbles, bringing two coworkers down with her. “Why am I always so clumsy?” she mutters under her breath. The two actors that she recognizes from a scene look at her and say, “Hey! What’s wrong with you!” as they skate away in annoyance. As some of the cast leave she notices Theo off in the distance. A pang of urgency grips her, and she skates toward him, calling out, “Theo!” He is in such a rush to get home, that he disappears in the crowd. With a sigh, she steps off the ice, sinking to the floor with a wave of anxiety.

*

Even as the cold air slows Juliette’s feet, it seems as though the city is caught up in never ending action. Hugging herself to accommodate the mass crowds swarming her, Juliette feels more invisible than ever. In times like these invisibility is a deranged super power. She could see all the love, mistreatment, and abuse that the city eternalizes. Suddenly a commotion hits the street making the steady moving crowd stop entirely. Juliette is jostled into the man in front of her. “Hey watch it lady!” the man exclaims. She mumbles sorry, yet her eyes focus on a homeless man who was nearly trampled due to the commotion. Policemen dash through the crowd looking for the culprit, damaging the homeless man’s belongings in their wake. Without noticing, Juliette finds herself kneeling in front of the man, helping clean his home. The man reaches out with a kindness in his eyes and Juliette nods in return. The city moves on without a care, but Juliette feels comfortable with this man as they both feel seen.

*

While Juliette looks into the eyes of the homeless man, the dimness of the city fades and is replaced by a striking voice she couldn't unhear. “Theo’s voice,” she realizes, cutting through the honks and chatter like it’s right beside her. In a blink, the city disappears. She’s back on set with

the faint scent of paint and hairspray in the air. Ahead of her, Theo and the director's heated voices echo down the hallway. Their words clash like a storm brewing on her route to the dressing room. She quickly maneuvers her way to a corner to hide. She notices they are fighting about a scene that Theo just finished writing. Her mind races: should she step in or pretend she didn't notice? She pushes forward since there's no time to get involved. She cannot be late again. In her attempts to be invisible, the director stops his assault on Theo, turning to her saying, "Juliette, how do you always get in the way of everything?" Juliette runs off with tears in her eyes. She hears Theo's voice calling her name, but she doesn't dare to look back. She has to stay professional, so she gets into her dressing room, wipes her tears, and gets ready for the next scene.

*

Juliette moves with more purpose. In efforts to escape the downpour she runs towards the awning of a run down cafe. Juliette's breathing and the pitter patter of raindrops are the only things heard on the street. She examines the cafe closely, brushing the dust from the glass door to reveal the name of the dilapidated shop as "The Marquee." A sense of nostalgia floods Juliette, as this was the same cafe she got her infamous latte from every morning before work at her first, and only, job. She often craved the sweet, spicy brew, yet couldn't find it in herself to come back here. She regrets it now. Her hand reaches out beyond the safety of the awning to feel the now misting rain. As she turns to leave, a girl seeks the awning's safety. "The rain is crazy today," she giggles. Juliette just stares at her. "Oh, I'm Rachel, sorry, I bet you think I'm weird for just speaking to you, but now we're introduced so it's not weird anymore." "What's your name?" Rachel asks. Juliette uncomfortably says "Juliette, um I was just leaving." "Your name is gorgeous, I remember some actress that had that name! Gosh, she was so cool. I think she even

came to the cafe all the time, but once her movie came out, she never came back. Maybe it was too low for her.” Rachel’s unexpected monologue halts Juliette’s movements. “I mean maybe something happened on set, maybe she didn’t mean to never come back” Juliette fiercely speaks. “I mean sure, but the world keeps moving right, just because something happens doesn’t mean you leave everything behind.” Rachel retorts. Juliette is at a loss for words, but whispers “The lattes here were the best I’ve ever had.” Rachel smiles, “Yeah, they were my dad’s favorite to make.” “What happened to him?” “Oh, he’s not dead, the business went under, but he took all the money he had and opened a new place.” “Is it that simple?” Juliette wonders out loud. Rachel answers without hesitation, “Never, but sometimes you need to revisit the things that fail to move forward. That’s why I’m here, Marquee was my favorite place, but now I need a new one. This is a goodbye.” Juliette smiles at Rachel, turning toward the front door and says “The last time I was here, it broke me, but today I’m walking towards a new success whatever the hell that means.” Rachel giggles again with understanding, and Juliette returns with a laugh of her own.

*

Something feels off this morning. As Juliette wakes up, the rhythmic patter of rain taps against her window, which feels soothing yet somehow foreboding. She suddenly gets spooked by the thunder that rumbles the entire apartment. She has to get out of bed, but her eyes keep fluttering shut, and her body feels heavy with reluctance. Work hasn’t been kind to her lately; the coworkers hardly acknowledge her and her director still seems mad at her. On top of all of that, she hasn’t had the energy to memorize her lines, so filming has been excruciating. She dresses and quickly tries to hail a taxi. The rain soaks her hair as all the taxis just drive right by her. Frustrated, she walks into The Marquee, hoping a warm coffee will ease her nerves before she tries again to get a taxi. She finally gets to work and it is almost too quiet. She walks to the

dressing room and she notices the name on the door says “Lainey.” Her heart starts rushing.

“Don’t panic,” she whispers to herself. Maybe her dressing room just got moved. Determined not to spiral, she heads toward the set and hears “Cut!” She looks at her schedule confused as she walks up to the director and he yells “Security!” She questions, “What do you mean? It’s me, Juliette.” His eyes, cold and lifeless, cut through her like a knife. “Juliette, I am sorry, but you are not the star of this film anymore. You have been late for group activities, forgetting your lines, being clumsy, and plainly just getting in the way of people’s personal business.” Without even waiting for the security to escort her out, Juliette runs out of the building with tears streaming down her face disguised as rain drops. She feels lost, unseen, and unloved. She tried her best, yet it wasn’t good enough. Everything she has ever worked for and wanted in her life is gone.

*

Juliette wanders into the park and sits on a bench overlooking the pond. She marvels at the still water as she finds her reflection staring back at her. The woman looking back at her is unrecognizable to her. It is harsh, and unfamiliar, yet she doesn’t recoil. Wanting to understand herself again, she doesn’t turn away. She only recognizes a man sitting beside her once his reflection joins hers. From nowhere the sun rays gleam against her face as she mutters “Theo” at the same time the man utters “Juliette.” The pair stare into each other's eyes with gazes of comfort which soon turns into confusion. Juliette decides talking could wait, slowly inching toward Theo, placing her head on his shoulder allowing a sense of contentment to overflow her numbness. The sun's reflection in the once static water reflects two lost souls who’ve found each other and themselves once again.