



# Magic Mirror

by Marline Bates

I had just fed my baby her first bowl of Pablum and I was depressed.

Having heard that breastfeeding my baby would help me lose weight, I had delayed giving her solids until she craved them so badly she was supplementing her diet with Legos and carpet lint. People were still asking me for my due date.

I needed to get away.

"Let's play hide and seek," I said to my kids. "I'll hide first."

I crept down to the basement and slid behind a pile of boxes, fishing gear and old appliances. "Count to 300!" I called.

I plunked myself down onto a sleeping bag beside an old full-length mirror with a crack in the upper left corner, one I had never seen before.

"It's not fair," I muttered. "I went to church and took in seventeen stray cats last year. Why me?" I sighed. "I feel like the fattest of them all."

"Snow White," I heard an oily voice say.

"What? Who...?"

"Snow White! She's the fattest of them all. After she married Prince Charming, she developed an underactive thyroid and a passion for Poptarts." Now, coming, as I

do, from an age where computers issue your paycheck, drive your car, write your letter, take your temperature and burp the baby, I was less surprised at a talking mirror that you may suppose. "I'd kill for a Poptart," I said. "Practically the only fattening things I've had for years are babies."

"Ah, but three of them!" mirror consoled.

"So? Look at Maybelle Smyth. Five kids and she looks like a Tab commercial," I said. "She looks gaunt, malnourished in fact," mirror said. It sounded so sincere. "She probably has cancer."

"She runs five miles a day," I protested.

"She'll drop dead of a heart attack by the time she's forty years old," the mirror said in comforting tones.

"She *is* forty!"

"Fifty," mirror amended hastily. "Besides, does Maybelle Smyth make brownies every Sunday night like you do?" I shrugged.

"There you go. She's an unfit mother."

"What about Sadie Brumwich—the one that decorated a cake with the Battle of Waterloo for my baby shower? *She* hasn't gone up two dress sizes with every pregnancy," I wailed.

"Anorexic," mirror said. Its voice became gentle.

"Come, come, babykins, come to mirror and let's see. Don't be sad."

Reluctantly I stood up and sucked my stomach in as far as it would go. Nothing happened. The mirror whistled.

"You'd make a great model for a Rubens painting," it said.

"You think so?" I smiled a little, and then frowned and grabbed a handful of fat.

"You have big bones," mirror said solemnly. "Turn around."

I turned and strained my neck to see what the mirror was showing me of my rear profile.

"Did you know Marilyn Munroe's hips were 38?" mirror asked.

"Really?" I said, and then moaned. "But her waist was 22!"

"She was deformed," mirror said. I turned around as mirror's voice became hauntingly smooth, almost hypnotic.

"Look at you," it said. "You're slender, thin, fragile even. See?"

I peered more closely into the mirror and gasped.

The fat body that had made me vandalize the mirrors in the changing room at Sears day before yesterday was gone! In its place was the real me—the lovely, lithe me of my inner psyche.

Just then the kids found me.

"Where have you been?" they said, looking into my eyes.

I was obliged to take my turn playing hide and seek, but I returned to the mirror later that day, and whenever I could thereafter.

I immediately began noticing changes in myself. I found I was able to enter into a discussion with friends on diet and exercise without developing a migraine. And I no longer got chest pains watching Charlene Kickit on TV.

Soon, however, my husband noticed my frequent trips to the basement.

"Where are you going?" he would ask me as I opened the basement door.

'Cobwebs,' I would reply. When I had supposedly :leaned out the washing machine filter eight times, sorted all the baby clothes into pink, blue and mildew, and decimated the spider population, I began to run out of excuses. It was then my husband became enthused and leaded to do a little basement-cleaning himself.

He was moving an antique TV to another spot when he found the mirror and unceremoniously carted it toward the things-to-junk pile.

I threw my body in front of him. "No! Leave the mirror!" I cried.

"Why?" he asked. "What do you see in this old thing?"

"Myself, only skinny," I said.

"TH get you a new one," he replied.

"No. This mirror is one of a kind. It's—it's a magic mirror," I confided.

He had that same look in his eyes as he had on the day he was told I had given birth to a second daughter. He withdrew and put the mirror back where it had been. That evening my husband was a paragon of involved fatherhood.

Other than letting me do the dishes, mop the kitchen floor, and get the kids in bed, he wouldn't allow me to move a muscle. He changed the TV channel for me, fluffed my pillow, and when he actually put his dirty sox in the hamper, my eyes became misty.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" he asked tenderly.

"Just answer one question for me," I said. "Which would you rather me be? Julia Child with overtones of the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe? Or Suzanne Pleshette with overtones of Shelly Long? You can't have both."

He thought for a moment and answered, "I want you just the way you are."

"Look me in the eye and say that," I said.

"Yourself," he repeated, looking me full in the face, "only sane."

"I knew there was a catch."

But that clinched it. My visits to the mirror ceased, and I began to be able to think about having another baby without needing shock treatments.

I thoroughly expected my husband to try to throw the mirror out, especially when spring came and he had to sort and repair his fishing gear. He didn't.

Last night I was folding laundry in the utility room when my husband came down into the basement. He didn't notice me watching him as he stepped with a practiced air behind the pile of boxes, fishing gear and old appliances.

"Oh, man!" I heard an oily voice say. "Will you check out those biceps!"