

Monster with an Image Problem

Adapted from folklore by Anjana Sen

A very beautiful woman had a beautiful son. All she ever told the boy was ‘You are beautiful – you are just like me’. She took pains to see that the child never got near a mirror and to keep him away from everybody. They lived away from the town and did not welcome visitors. When the boy began to ask questions the mother ignored him – she was dying.

“Why do you have to die?” the frightened child asked

The only answer he got was “The doctors say it’s Narcissism.” as she breathed her last.

So the terrified boy grew up alone and angry. He learned only to think nasty thoughts, grumble and hurt. When he met the townspeople they smiled – but he could not smile back. His smile muscles had not been exercised and had wasted. He could frown and grimace rather well though. His face muscles responded to the thoughts in his head because that’s what face muscles are supposed to do. Our hero could not understand why people did not like having him around. If someone did come near, he did not see any admiration in their expression, so he lashed out and growled.

When he was hungry he would go into town carrying a huge club and plunder kill and torture at will. This was a monstrous nuisance so the town elders put their heads together to come up with a plan to put an end to this terror. They were all peaceful people and it never crossed their minds to use violence. They put up a huge mirror at the entrance of the town.

The terror worked him self up into a particularly sadistic mood that day and lumbered towards the town.

‘Egad! What’s this?’

He saw his reflection in the mirror for the first time. A huge hulking monster seemed to lope towards him in a menacing way. It was horribly ugly!

When he stopped to stare the reflection monster stared right back. Our monster was frightened and angry. He struck out at the hulk even as the hulk struck out at him. CRASH! The mirror smashed into smithereens some big some small. Thousands of ugly hulks surrounded him, one in each tiny sliver of smashed glass. If he threatened the reflection with the club – it threatened him right back. The only way to get the club to bash the hulk was –found by trial and error – to aim the club at his own head. So our poor terrified monster clubbed him self to death, much to the relief of the peace-loving townspeople.

Get to exercise your smile muscles every now and then and check out your self-image. Keep your friends about you and allow them to tell you when they don’t like you and why.