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Echo

By Brooke Gardner

This isn't the first time I've seen her. She follows me inside my home every time I approach this wall. It is as if she is trying to tell me something, warn me of something. Perhaps she is just trying to scare me, make me freeze, paralyze me. Each time, she is successful in at least one of those. She copies my movements, an evil mime of sorts, copycat. Lately, I've been trying to avoid her. Her wretched smile imposing on my thoughts. Her sinister grin relishing in the idea of catching me. Is that her plan, after all, to catch me? She looks so hollow like she possesses no organs, no tissue, no blood. Her

eyes translate longing—is that the right word? She must be longing for something, but for what? She never attempts to respond when I ask. She only repeats what I say. Mockingbird, she is. She never breaks eye contact, a sign of dominance, I suppose. They haunt me in my sleep, those eyes, bloodshot veins emphasizing her ghostly blue irises. They're swollen as if she never sleeps. I assume she stays here, in this wall, waiting to pounce, like a deranged jungle cat. Deranged—that is what she is.

Tonight, I plan to make contact. Perhaps I could bargain with her to leave me alone. Maybe I'll hear her voice. I've contemplated as to what she must sound like—raspy, breathy, as if speaking takes a large toll on her lungs. Perhaps she has a child's voice, light and melodic. No, that would be too gracious, too nice of a description for her.

I make my descent downstairs to confront this grimacing mime. I see her. Her hair is unkempt, unwashed. Her eyes are the same as they always are: red and swollen. She stares at me as I stare at her. As I move my head left, she does the same. I pause, thinking I should run back upstairs and hide under my blankets. I cannot keep living like this, I think. I must do it tonight, right this instant. I look at her hand and reach for her, to touch her. Maybe we could have a mutual understanding, an agreement, to let the other live in peace. As predicted, she

raises her hand towards me as I do the same. We both look at our hands, my right, her left. She seems as hesitant as I am. Perhaps she is as scared of me as I am of her, like a cockroach or a mouse.

We regain eye contact. Slowly, agonizingly slow, we touch—my hand on hers, hers on mine. She's ice-cold and hard, like glass.