GARDEN *of* AYDEN

BY SUKAIYNA GOKAL



MIRROR

The Heritage of Ilona and Scintilla

A GARDEN OF AYDEN STORY

Foreword

It is very easy to fall into the habit of looking at ourselves in the mirror and see nothing worthy of love and light. We find the things that make us interesting and human and beautiful and transform them into flaws. We are blinded by our inward-looking and are unable to see the abundance in our lives. We don't notice the flowers blooming or the sunlight spilling on the grass, or the love in our mothers' eyes when they look at us nor do we notice the homeless person on the street. And so, we lie back and become the victims of life: everything we experience happens to us. Even more, we are so busy feeling sorry for ourselves and finding things to be sad about that we don't even see or help others who are far worse off.

What would happen if we really opened our eyes and our hearts to the beauty of our lives and the Earth we live in? Maybe if we look hard enough, we won't find anything to be sad about at all.

Maybe, even in the darkness all we will see is light.

There is always abundance if you look in the right direction to see it.

Mirror

The Heritage of Ilona and Scintilla

Ilona grew up in a big, bustling city on the 56th floor of a beautiful glass building. When she was a little girl, her favorite thing to do was stare out the glass window of her bedroom and count the number of twinkling lights she could see turned on in the buildings across from her. Right before falling into slumber, she would count the number of people she saw sitting by their windowsills, and wonder what their lives were like, thinking about how many people had such different stories, curious to know everything about the world around her.

But as Ilona grew older, she got bored of the view. She got tired of the staring out of the window. All she could see was her own reflection in the glass. Ilona didn't like her reflection - the more she stared at it, the more imperfections she found on her body. She began to hate the way her nose curled downwards when she smiled, or the way her face seemed asymmetrical, or the bags beneath her eyes, her thin lips, even her knees and toes. And by the end of her lengthy scrutiny, wallowing in a cloud of melancholy, she would close the curtains, shut the lights, and go to sleep.

As the days went by, Ilona found her reflection in everything. She somehow managed to find mirrors everywhere: in shop windows, in puddles, in silverware. Because she thought she was so unattractive, her thoughts turned into thoughts about her life. She complained about the things she had and the things she didn't have. She compared herself to other people, jealous of their clothes and toys and happiness.

Nothing was good enough, not even herself.

"Ilona, you are so smart," people would tell her.

"Ilona, you are beautiful," they'd insist.

"Ilona you are so kind," they'd say.

"Ilona, look around you, you are so blessed!" she'd hear.

But no matter how many times she heard it, Ilona remained sad, feeling stupid, ugly, mean, and unfortunate. She thought they were all lying to her - because she thought her

reflections were the real truth. For even though she knew that truly, there nothing was wrong with her life, Ilona often forgot, too distracted by the mirrors around her.

“How can people tell me I’m beautiful if I can see for myself that my nose is obviously too big?” she’d insist.

“I only get good grades because the teachers are easy or like me. I’m not really smart. “She’d explain.

“I’m so fat, and there’s something wrong with me because I don’t have enough motivation to exercise and be healthy,” she’d say.

“I feel so broken, and I can’t do anything about it.” she’d tell her reflection.

“Why am I so sad all the time? What is wrong with me? Why can’t I just be happy?” She felt depressed. And so she was.

She blamed everything and everyone around her for her sadness. She blamed her mother for not being good enough to make her strong and capable. She blamed her father for not making enough money to buy her all the toys and gadgets that everyone else around her had. Ilona was a victim of life, floating beneath it, letting it happen to her.

A few things did make Ilona happy though. She enjoyed drawing. It helped her escape from her “misfortunate” life. She wanted to be good at drawing trees and flowers but couldn’t figure out how to draw them because she didn’t see them enough. She blamed the city she lived in.

She didn’t see the blossoming spring trees or the birds. She didn’t hear the laughter or the kisses or see any warm embraces. She only saw the sadness and suffocation of the grey concrete buildings around her. There would be days where the sun would be shining brilliantly above open blue skies and blooming flowers, yet Ilona couldn’t see any of it. She would still feel gloomy.

One autumn morning, Ilona decided to go for a walk to clear her sad mind. She stepped out of her building and into the crisp air. Though the sky was grey, the trees lining the damp sidewalk were beginning to change color, painting the street with strokes of red, orange, and yellow. The breeze picked up and Ilona buttoned up her wool coat. She muttered to herself about how much she hates autumn and the cold, her eyebrows furrowing and her chest feeling tight. She looked down as she walked.

A few minutes passed, and Ilona continued to walk aimlessly with her head down. A scratchy voice appeared from her right: “Spare change?”

She looked up and saw she was passing an elderly woman, sitting on the sidewalk above the subway fume grates, her back against a shop window. She was bundled in a filthy green blanket, and was surrounded by pieces of newspaper and plastic. A piece of cardboard leaned against the wall next to her, which had words written on it: “HOMELESS & TRYING TO GET BY. ANYTHING HELPS”. The air frosted as she breathed heavily. She had only a few rotting teeth left.

Her eyes twinkled with hope when she made eye contact with Ilona. Her eyes were soft and kind. “Please, Miss, I just want a warm cup of coffee.”

Ilona didn’t know what to say. She was unsettled by the woman’s appearance. She had some change in her bag but didn’t want to take it out. “I’m sorry, I don’t have anything,” she mumbled at her and continued on her path.

“That’s alright, Miss,” the woman said. Her eyes remained kind. “You have a lovely day.” Ilona caught her reflection in the shop window before putting her head down and walking away. Her eyes welled up with tears.

After hurriedly walking up the city streets, head down and vision blurred with sadness and stress, Ilona sat herself down on a park bench and cried into her hands. The woman’s voice echoed in her head. She felt all of the sadness of her world engulf her like a stormy wave. “Why didn’t I help her?” she asked herself. “I am such an awful person.” She pulled out her black journal to doodle but her mind felt too chaotic to create anything. She was exhausted - tired of feeling so awful and bleak. Her sadness and negativity had began hurting others.

A golden shadow spilled out on the ground in front of her. She suddenly felt a sort of warmth on her skin and in her chest that she hadn’t felt in a very long time. “Look up, Ilona,” a soft voice murmured. She recognized that voice. “Hello, Scintilla.”

“Hello, Ilona,” the voice replied. “Look up.”

She looked up and saw that the sun had come out from behind the clouds and had began illuminating the autumn trees in the park around her. It was beautiful.

“Ilona, you have spent so much time thinking about everything that is wrong with what you have that you didn’t even stop to smile and say hello to someone who has nothing. Or

notice the nuances of the colors in the trees."

Ilona didn't know what to say. Her chest and shoulders felt a little lighter. A lump formed in her throat when she took a deep breath and breathed in the scent of the morning rain on the earth beneath her feet.

But she still felt sad.

"Where have you been all this time, Scintilla? I've needed you."

"I haven't gone anywhere. I am within you and all around you," Scintilla replied. "But you haven't looked."

"But Scintilla, I don't know what to do. I feel so sad always - there is something wrong with me. I feel so powerless against this life."

"Why are you letting life happen to you, Ilona? This life is yours, and yours only. Yes, things in life happen that are out of your control, but only you can seize it, with your feet firmly on the ground and choose to live it with sadness or joy. Why not joy?"

Scintillas words resonated through her chest. That was all she wanted. "But how?"

"Look up." And with that, Ilona was alone once again.

As she walked home from the park, Ilona felt lighter, and for the first time in a while, her mind felt clear and she felt cheerful. She noticed the chirping birds and the sound of the breeze tickling leaves. She heard laughter and chatter. She wanted to draw it all and create something beautiful. But soon, she stumbled upon her reflection in a shop window and felt the wave of sadness engulf her once again.

The next evening, Ilona sat with her mother for tea, feeling gloomy as the autumn sky.

"Ilona, there is something I need to discuss with you," her mother said. "I know you have been looking forward to our family holiday to Europe this summer. But your father's business is struggling right now, and unfortunately we will not be able to afford it this year. I'm sorry. I wish things were different, but this is how it is and we just need to stay positive and hope things get better. But this will be good! You can have some down time and explore this city, maybe get a job."

"Oh," Ilona mumbled, upset. Ilona was angry with her parents for getting her hopes up and disappointing her. She thought about all the things she would be missing out on and how so many other people got to travel and how unfair her life was. She hated everything. "Why would you say we are going, and then not follow through with it?" she snapped at her mother. "I don't want to stay here in this stupid city all summer and waste my time!"

Her mother's eyes widened. "Do you know how lucky you are, Ilona? Do you not see the people on the streets who can't even afford food to eat? We have so much, and you appreciate none of it. Do you see me crying and feeling sorry for myself? I am tired of hearing your complaints and negativity. Get yourself together!" Ilona started to cry.

"Don't talk to me until you're pleasant to be around," her mother snapped.

Ilona stormed off to her room, slammed the door, and curled up in her bed, feeling lonelier and sadder than ever before. She, hating herself for reacting the way she did, but also hating her mother for being so harsh and hating her life for being so disappointing. She could see her reflection in the window and was drowning in her sadness.

The sun sank. Day became night, and Ilona lay in the sadness of the dark.

A warm glow emerged by the window. Ilona turned towards it and saw light pouring in from the city outside. She walked over to the windowsill and stared at her reflection.

"I'm a broken soul," she told her reflection. "I'm a horrible, selfish person."

But then she stopped. Ilona's angry thoughts echoed and vibrated around her. For the first time, she saw everything. Right before her eyes was the monster that had been created with all of the mirrors that she had created all around her. She felt awarmth in her heart. A glowing orb grew around her. Scintilla. The monster of her reflection walked away and disappeared into the night. She felt light. Her eyes felt soft, open, curious. She stared at the glowing city lights.

She remembered when she was a child, how curious she was about the world around her, how much she loved staring out the window and taking in the beauty of her surroundings. All she could see was the abundance of light and color and potential and energy rumbling in the city below. There was so much around her, so much beauty, so many people to meet, so many people to talk to, so much sadness to heal, so many things to see, so many things to study, so many questions to ask about the world around her. She felt an excitement in her

chest, an excitement for life, an excitement to breathe and to exist.

“It doesn’t matter what the past was or what the future may be,” whispered Scintilla. “Here is now and now is here. Life is tumultuous and unexpected. You are in control over the way you transform your present. Make it beautiful.”

Ilona took a deep breath and felt everything - everything but sad.

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Ilona spent her summer learning about people. Every day she walked to the spot where the homeless woman sat and talked to her, often bringing her coffee and snacks, as well as drawings she did herself. She learned that her name was Lena and she was looking forward to saving up enough money to get on her two feet and one day live with her children again. And most of all, she learned that Lena loved the city and her favorite season was autumn because she loved watching nature take its course before her eyes. She thought it was beautiful. Not once did she complain about the dirt on her blanket or her rotting teeth.

On other days, Ilona sat in parks and doodled and made friends with the trees and the birds and people. At night she spent hours staring out her window and noticing new things, as she did as a child. She always felt warm, and found an abundance of light in every moment of darkness.

One summer evening, Scintilla came to say hello as Ilona watched the city.

“How are you?” she asked.

“I am wonderful, I feel everything,” Ilona replied.

“You surely are glowing, Ilona. It suits you.”

“Thank you, Scintilla.” Ilona said. “Thank you for showing me how to look up and see abundance.”

“But Ilona, I never taught you any of this. I just tickled you here and there, and it all wiggled out of you. Thank you for being able to stand so tall. You were a ball of light already. There was always transparency within you. You can always seek the light whenever you need it because the light is within you.”

Ilona hugs Scintilla.

"I love you."

Scintilla stayed with Ilona in a halo of light and then she saw a wonderful flash of light that fed within her entirely. She sighed and felt blessed.

Epilogue

"You are an abundant ball of light. You are at the center of life and abundance is all around you. Feel your feet on the ground. Look at your surroundings. Notice the details. Find the energy. Thank the universe. Share your light. It is infinite. You are worthy of abundance, as all beings are. You are everything. You are present. You are perfect."

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