Summary

A lady faces an unwelcome change in her mirror image. Who she is and what else troubles her is for the reader to find out.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
the arm of a man who was little more than a stranger. How different all these things looked now, seen through the eyes of a fashionable woman, from what they had seemed to the dreaming mind of the young girl.

She had been so full of high hopes when she had first come out. That was a time when the pattern of a dress, the silky feel of a ribbon had conveyed more than the desire to keep up with the height of fashion. With her good looks, her accomplishments and polished manners, not to mention a handsome dowry, she had been confident to make a good marriage during her first London season. But the good families had not been too keen to connect themselves with a fortune that was only a generation old. Eligible bachelors had danced with her, but had returned her to her seat without expressing a wish to become closer acquaintance. Young men who had been happy to befriend her brother had shown no inclination to marry the sisters. At the end of her fourth season in London, she had accepted the only offer she had received.

She had married a man without taste or wit, with little conversation and no tenderness for her, but married she had and had acquired that status that was so crucial for a woman to achieve. Her husband was her badge of respectability, but he was no companion to her. After six years, she did not even know him well enough to guess his response to her absence at the breakfast table. She knew him hardly at all, and she no longer had any desire to know him better. What little she had found out was too much already.

A hot wave of embarrassment washed over her when she thought of the day she had unexpectedly entered her husband’s room. She leapt up from her seat. Whenever she thought of it, she made some involuntary movement, or blurted out nonsensical words like “Yes, indeed.” Then she felt silly about her lack of self-control and even more embarrassed than before. Yet how could she think of it without abhorrence? The boy had slipped out of the room and had been dismissed the same day. But the shame, the shame had stayed with her ever since. The problem, she knew very well, was not that boy.

So there would be no child to hold and cherish, no little one to love her regardless of who or what she was, because she was Mother, and that was that. Her own mother was long dead, nothing but a vague memory of sweetness and smiles, and her father, too, had passed away and with him all the flattering certainty of being important to one man at least. Her brother and sister would marry and leave her behind, and she would grow old and ugly and nobody would care about her ever again.

Yet what had she expected? Had she not known all along, ever since she had been old enough to be aware of the subtle politics by which members of her class chose their spouses, that rarely, very rarely did people marry for love? Had she not dismissed and ridiculed the notion that a woman would look for a man out of a dream, rather than an eligible match? Marriage, this was a faith she had subscribed to, should be advantageous, not romantic. What reason did she have to complain? She had embraced the only fate available to her.

She sat down again, wiped away an errant tear and tugged the bell pull. In a few seconds, Simmons would appear and get her dressed. Layers of clothes would cover her, jewels would draw the eye of any observer, an elaborate lace cap would distract from her face. She would go down to the breakfast room and live through her day like she had lived through any other day during the last six years, eating more food than she needed and less than she would have liked to eat, receiving calls from tedious acquaintances, going out in the carriage, dressing for the morning, dressing for the afternoon, dressing for the evening. And thus it would be for all the years still to come. More lines would appear on her face, and she would buy even more sophisticated dresses and sparkling jewels, so that nobody would look much at her features and by chance see the dejection that was etching its marks into the fine skin.
She heard steps approaching, and as her maid opened the door she steeled herself for the rest of her day, the rest of her life. She straightened her face and put on the mask of Louisa Hurst.

End Notes

I like to think about minor characters and what motivates them. I have always been interested in the Bingley sisters. It's so easy to see them as villains, and yet we know hardly anything about them. I've often had the impression that Louisa was very unhappy in her marriage.

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