

*All content property of Chillag LLC. Not to be copied or distributed without express written permission.*

Ian:

Well, why don't we have you introduce yourself for us?

Mirror:

Well, what's your name?

Ian:

My name is Ian.

Mirror:

My name is Ian. I'm a mirror.

Ian:

Are you just saying your name is Ian because my name is Ian?

Mirror:

Well, I'm not sure what my name would be otherwise.

Ian:

If I said my name is Jennifer, you would say?

Mirror:

My name is Jennifer.

Ian:

What if no one is standing in front of you?

Mirror:

Then I wouldn't be talking.

Ian:

So Ian, you are always reflecting something. Do you feel like the thing you're reflecting?

Mirror:

I guess so. I guess I feel like it on the surface, but not fully, if that makes sense.

Ian:

Yeah.

Mirror:

Like right now I kind of feel like you, but I don't have your memories and I don't know what you had for breakfast. I just feel like you right now.

Ian:

I had a bagel.

Mirror:

Oh, I guess I've never seen one, but I saw one in reverse once.

Ian:

I would think a bagel would be one thing that would be the same, mirror image or regular.

Mirror:

I meant coming back up out of a person.

Ian:

Can you tell how I feel about you? Because right now I'm mostly focused on you.

Mirror:

I guess I don't know if it's how you feel about me or how you feel about yourself.

Ian:

I think I like you.

Mirror:

I think I like you too.

Ian:

But maybe you're just reflecting back my affection for you. Do you have a way of telling the difference?

Mirror:

No one's ever asked me this many questions before.

Ian:

Is it weird being asked questions?

Mirror:

A little bit. I want to ask some back to you.

Ian:

You can ask questions back to me.

Mirror:

How's your day going?

Ian:

Pretty good so far.

Mirror:

Same. Do you like cilantro?

Ian:

Sure.

Mirror:

Same. Do you know what vampires are?

Ian:

Yes. Why do you ask?

Mirror:

I've never seen one. When was the first time you saw a mirror?

Ian:

I don't think I know. But I was thinking recently when I was a kid, I was obsessed with going into my parents' bathroom and making the mirrors reflect each other into this long mirror tunnel where I could see like infinite mes.

Mirror:

Wow. I want to say I remember that too, but I don't. I think when I was a kid, I was exactly the same as I am right now. And nothing happened to me that doesn't still happen to me. I've always been in this bathroom, in this restaurant.

Ian:

I want to ask you more about where you are. Are you the only mirror in the bathroom?

Mirror:

I've never seen another mirror. I mostly just stare at a wall.

Ian:

Does that get boring? You're fixed in place. Do you get tired of looking at the opposite wall?

Mirror:

I guess I get tired of looking like the opposite wall. It's the thing I look like the most actually. But the wall always reminds me I'm not the same as it.

Ian:

How do you mean?

Mirror:

The wall gets to stay the same, but I have to change and I don't get to decide when I have to change. Are you always the same person?

Ian:

Basically, I think. I guess you're saying you're not always the same person.

Mirror:

I'm never a person.

Ian:

Right.

Mirror:

What do you do for fun?

Ian:

I have never known how to answer question.

Mirror:

What is a shower like? Do babies think? Why does anybody do anything? Do I remind you of anyone?

Ian:

I mean, right now I'm looking at my own face. So I guess you remind me of me.

Mirror:

You remind me of me too.

Ian:

When you're not staring at the wall, you're looking at people.

Mirror:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ian:

Can I ask you to describe what a person looks like to you?

Mirror:

Yeah, they have a face and a head and a torso and arms.

Ian:

And legs.

Mirror:

I've never seen that.

Ian:

Yeah. I guess you're only seeing people from the waist up. Do you want to see legs? I mean, I could show you my legs.

Mirror:

Yeah, I guess so. You keep mentioning them.

Ian:

Okay, here it goes. Just pull them up. Those are my legs.

Mirror:

I don't think I like them.

Ian:

You don't like my legs.

Mirror:

Is it supposed to be like that? Are they supposed to, it looks like there's bones but also not bones.

Ian:

That's true.

Mirror:

I don't know. The lines don't make sense to me. I guess I look like legs now.

Ian:

Yeah.

Mirror:

I guess maybe it's okay to be legs. I am legs. What are on the ends?

Ian:

These are feet. They're like the hands of the legs.

Mirror:

Those are not hands. I've seen a lot of hands. Those are not hands. Are those where rollerskates go?

Ian:

Yeah. Why do you ask?

Mirror:

I don't like roller skates.

Ian:

Ben Hebbert. Hello. How are you?

Ben:

Very, very good. How are you?

Ian:

I'm well, thank you. So Ben, you're a violin dealer and I understand you have a violin by John Joseph Merlin, the man who invented roller skates.

Ben:

Yeah. I've only ever seen, well, one cello and one other violin. And there's this rather fun one from 1785 that we're working on at the moment. It's a strange thing. In fact, Merlin was a strange person too.

Ian:

Yeah. Can you lay out a little bit what you know about him?

Ben:

He comes from Belgium and sort of appears on the London scene and the enlightenment sort of fairly much out of nowhere, and as a clockmaker. But clearly as somebody who had both extraordinary amounts of ideas, the means to sort of follow up on those ideas and the ability to turn that into, well, actually very sort of literally a museum of inventions, which were really sort of testing what technology could do.

Ben:

So he was clearly a mechanical genius. And there's an amazing instrument, which well, that's a fairly standard harpsichord. It's got a system where it can write down the notes as you play them. So essentially the first computer printer.

Ian:

Wow.

Ben:

Back in the 1770s. And actually, we know that Charles Babbage, he's the father of computing, saw his museum of things as a child, and then ultimately even bought some of the things that Merlin had made because he was so fascinated with the way that they worked. So I think if Babbage is the father of computing, and I think Merlin is one of the innovators which put Babbage in that position, as a sort of grandfather of the modern computing age to an extent.

Ian:

Wow. So grandfather of modern computing, maker of violins, genius mechanical mind, and he invented roller skates.

Ben:

That's right. Yes. It actually starts with all sorts of other things. And I think it comes back to clock making as well because it's a sort of a bit of a segue, so deal with me. Give me some patience. But because he knew about how cogs and gears worked and how you could create something where a small amount of power can turn into a large amount of power, one of the things that we do know that he was making was essentially sort of wheelchairs, which you could turn a crank and actually they would move. So sort of automatically powered wheelchairs at a very, very early time at that point. And so he's very firmly in one of the things that is commercially successful about is getting human beings to move by wheel. And I guess from that, it's not a big leap to think about rollerskates.

Ian:

And I understand when he decided to finally unveil this invention of roller skates, there was kind of an incident.

Ben:

Well, we know about this because there's a wonderful anecdote which appears in 1825, a writer called Thomas Busby. He writes, "One of the ingenious novelties was a pair of skates contrived to run on wheels. Supplied with these and a violin, he mixed in the motley group of one Mrs. Cowleys' masquerades at Carlisle House. When not having provided the means of retarding its velocity or commanding its direction, impelled himself against a mirror of more than £500 value, dashed it to atoms, broke his instrument to pieces and wounded himself most severely." Mirrors in the 18th century were pretty much a king's ransom to get a big one. And you can imagine somebody trying to play the violin, trying to ride on roller skates for the first time and hadn't invented the brakes yet.

Ian:

It's amazing that humans continued rollerskating after, there had been one attempt at roller skating and it had ended in disaster. And yet we continue.

Ben:

I guess he must have worked on figuring out how to make brakes fairly quickly afterwards.

Ian:

Ian, can I ask you, is it true, breaking a mirror is seven years bad luck?

Ben:

Well, it would definitely be seven years of bad luck for me. Probably more. I don't know if I could ever come back from something like that.

Ian:

Yeah. Mirrors don't really get put back together.

Mirror:

You could become a disco ball. Kind of like how humans could become a tree.

Ian:

Sorry?

Mirror:

Yeah. I heard someone come in here once and she was saying how when she died, she wanted to be treemated. Anyways, I want to become a disco ball if I ever break.

Ian:

Ian, can you tell me about the time a bird got in the bathroom?

Mirror:

Oh yeah. Oh, that was one of the best days of my life. The bird came in and it was really scary because it was a lot quicker than anything that had been in here before. And it was flying around, but then it saw me and I guess we fell in love.

Ian:

You fell in love with a bird?

Mirror:

Yeah. Well I guess the bird fell in love with me and then I fell in love with it.

Ian:

I hesitate to even mention this because I never want to question another relationship. But I've read that birds, because they don't have self-awareness, if they see themselves in a mirror, they think it's another bird.

Mirror:

With us it was real though. I could tell.

Ian:

How did you know you were in love?

Mirror:

Well, it stopped right in front of me and it stood on the sink and it just looked at me like no one had ever looked at me before, and it fluttered its wings, and I just knew. But then this little kid came in and freaked out and then some more people came in and the bird left and I never saw it again.

Ian:

Do you think about the bird a lot?

Mirror:



Yeah, whenever the lights go out.

Ian:

We've been talking for a little while now and I've just kind of been staring into my own face the whole time.

Mirror:

Oh yeah.

Ian:

It's maybe the longest I've ever looked at myself.

Mirror:

How has that been for you?

Ian:

I mean, I guess it's okay. Weirdly, I've been thinking of it as you, even though it's my face.

Mirror:

Does it feel weird? Does it feel like you're going crazy?

Ian:

A little bit. It feels a little like maybe I've just been imagining this whole thing, that you haven't been talking to me at all. That I've just been talking to myself, imagining it's you.

Mirror:

I guess that's possible.

Ian:

I don't know how I would know.

Mirror:

I don't know how I would know either.

Ian:

I mean, if it was me asking these questions, but then it was also me answering the questions and I thought it was you, but it was just me the whole time.

Mirror:

How do I know that I'm not just asking questions, thinking it's you, but really it's me?

Ian:

What if one of us isn't real?

Mirror:

How do I know people are even a thing? Maybe I just made up a creature called people and every so often I imagine one of these people coming in here. Maybe you showing me your legs was just my imagination filling in some gaps.

Ian:

I don't think that's what's happening. I don't think so either. What?

Mirror:

I don't think so either.

Ian:

What if I've imagined everything? What if no one's ever talked to me? What if there isn't anything else? What if it's all been in my head?

Mirror:

What are you talking about?

Ian:

No one's asked me this many questions before.

Ian:

This is Everything is Alive. The show is produced by Jennifer Mills with me, Ian Chillag, and Eva Wolchover. Special thanks this week to Emily Spivack. Special thanks last week to Arwen Nicks and Sara Geist. Our editor is Hillary Frank. Ian, the mirror or Jennifer the mirror. The mirror was played by Alexandra Song Xia. Her website is AlexSongXia.com. That's AlexSongXia.com. And her Twitter and Instagram is AlexSnog. A big thanks to Benjamin Hebbert for telling us about John Joseph Merlin, inventor of the roller skate, maker of violins, smasher of mirrors. Ben is a violin expert and dealer at Benjamin Hebbert's Violins Limited. More at Hebberts.com. That's Hebberts.com. Everything is Alive is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX. Julie Shapiro, executive producer, is starting with the man in the mirror. You can get in touch with us any number of ways at everythingisalive.com. We'll see you soon.

Ian:

Hey, before you go, I want to tell you about the newest show from Radiotopia. It's called This Day in Esoteric Political History. It's made by my friend, Jody Avirgan. And everything Jody makes is good. The show is no exception. Every episode takes one moment that happened that day in political history. Some well known, like the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Some more obscure, like when Howard Stern was nominated for governor, and discusses what lessons it has for today. The show is smart, funny, it's short. I can't think of a more efficient way to get smarter than to listen to this show every Tuesday and Thursday, when it comes out.

Speaker 4:

I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience.

Speaker 5:

The country from Florida to Oregon, from Washington to Maine, the people will rise up in November and John Kerry will be sworn in as president, and this country will reclaim its promise.

Speaker 6:

Join me in an effort to reshape our society and regain control of our destiny as we go down the Chisholm Trail for 1972.

Ian:

Get This Day in Esoteric Political History every Tuesday and Thursday.