

The air was cluttered with hanging photographs, dangling low like the lush branches of a rainforest. It was impossible to tell where the ceiling ended and the sky began for the columns of photos seemed to stretch upward into the very farthest depths of space. In the middle of the ink forest a singular man sat at a desk. The chaos of the room seemed to have no effect upon him, for his dark navy suit was pressed and straight and his posture was erect. The man simply sat in a small wooden chair and rested his chin contemplatively on his hand, staring out a large window in front of him. His features passed in and out of remembrance in a matter of seconds but his eyes left a lingering impression. Grey like a storm cloud they pierced through a person until they tore who they were apart -- violently, like the eruption of an atomic bomb. With those grey eyes the man watched.

Through the window humanity waltzed. Children pulled hair, young adults stole kisses and the elderly allowed the weight of gravity to force them toward the ground. In the eyes of the man they were all but children. But he refused to compare himself to their father. There was no compassion in those grey eyes, no capacity for forgiveness. He saw them for who they were and the sting of its horror had dulled long ago. He'd had hope for them once. Once, his photos had been less and he'd had hope for the children dancing below. The man closed his grey eyes for a second and reflected upon the thought that had rustled through the photographs. There was no change when the eyes flashed open again, for hope devastated leaves a wound that scarring simply cannot mend.

At the beginning, whether that be seconds or millennia ago, the man had had a desk, but no photos. The room was surprisingly small and at its center was his old companion from a time yet to come and across from it his old enemy. He didn't yet see them for what they were, but that would soon change.

“What charming glass...” he'd said, setting a bag of unimportant memories upon the floor and reaching out a hand to stroke the crystallized beach. The surface was smooth and cool against his trailing fingertips and the man smiled slightly. Back then, his face hadn't been as forgettable. He was young, and his hair was thick and raven black. His nose and chin were pleasing and well framed by equally dark eyebrows. In general opinion the man was considered handsome.

“Handsome except for those eyes,” they'd say. “Too sharp for my taste.” As his trailing fingers left the glass surface the grey eyes glittered.

“You’re The Observer,” he’d been told. “You document what you see. Exactly what you, and only you, see. The truth.” The man had forgotten whether his position was one of choice or punishment, but that hardly seemed to matter anymore. There was simply him, the glass, and the photos.

It was only upon sitting down at the desk that the man realized the glass was no mirror, but a window. The glass curved and bent the images but the man could just make out the twirling and spinning shapes. “People,” he’d said in amazement, “real, actual, *people*.” Without pulling his eyes away from the show he reached blindly for the camera he’d been informed was inside the desk drawer. He snapped a photo of the bending shapes and held his breath as he waited for the camera to release the photograph from the realm of the-yet-to-be.

When the photo was in the man’s hand he frowned. The picture was entirely black. He snapped another and the result was the same. Puzzled, the man settled deeper into his chair and did the only thing he could do -- he watched. The first picture that came out correctly was that of a little girl and boy playing.

After some considerable time staring at the glass the man realized that the images were coming into sharper focus. Before him a little girl, blonde curls and pink dress, was skipping rope. Standing beside a tree he saw a boy of a similar age, brown hair and overalls. The image was still slightly blurred as the little boy approached and the girl stopped, but in a moment everything was clear.

The boy took hold of the rope and the girl pulled back. The boy’s face had contorted into something savage and in a quick movement he’d shoved the girl to the ground and was kneeling on top of her. She clawed up at his face and red began to leak into the scene. The children rolled over and their mouths were open in beastly cries that the man could not hear. “Stop-” he’d tried to say, a hand reaching out toward the image of the bloodied children, “My God... stop!” It didn’t stop.

He stood up from his desk, the chair scraping against the floor in the quick motion and clattering to the ground behind him. He looked wildly around for someone to do something. The glass looked coolly back at him and he was struck hard in the chest by the answer.

The girl had got hold of the rope and was looping it around the boy’s neck when the man had reached his camera. She was pulling the string taut when he rolled the film. The camera clicked and the image blinked away.

The photo shook slightly in the man's hand as he retrieved it from the camera. The picture was in complete color. He'd intended to look quickly away from the photo, but he couldn't. It was some time before he attached it to one of the strings that hung from the endless ceiling.

After that it didn't take long for the strings to grow into the forest they now resemble. Hour after hour the images cleared and the man documented what he saw. He waited for the camera to run out of film, or for the strings to fill up but there was no escape from his duty.

Time ticked mercilessly forward, and the man became his title. His handsome features blurred and all that remained were his eyes. Shining through the tangled forest of horror they no longer hoped to see goodness; they no longer hoped to see lies. For him the masks that humanity wore to the ball were forever destroyed. But he counted himself lucky, because at least he knew.