

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

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There are six others in front of my placement in the queue. Each rite takes precisely sixty seconds, which means there's exactly seven minutes until my life begins.

Once, through whispers in a crowd, I heard that when the body dies, the mind lives on for seven more minutes. Within that time, the brain recalls memories, essentially flashing one's life before one's eyes.

For me, it's different. I see the flashes of the past, but my life isn't ending. I am not dying.

There's power in crowds, and there's honour in being wholly entrenched within one. There's shame in missing that one vital trait that would complete you, envelop you fully within the group.

I glance at the people surrounding me. Their expressions are stony, the shadows under their eyes act like well-deserved trophies they wear with pride. And the crown jewels: their shadowed, hollow eye sockets.

I can't help the jealousy that bubbles up as I stare into their perfectly complete faces. There's nothing I want more than to join their ranks, freed from my eyeballs and their stems, like a ball and chain removed from a desperate prisoner, ready to reach his full potential.

Being eyeless is a symbol of honour. To be relieved of the prison that is sight means you can put your entire life and soul into your work. You don't even have the capacity for distractions or shameful leisure. You become a part of something bigger, serving the good system that created this world.

Some days I have to hold back from taking my eyes out myself. I would do it in a heartbeat, but the act is blasphemous. A convict cannot free himself from prison.

A minute has passed. Someone walks by me; they've just completed the rite. Their face is set in a carefully neutral position, but I know they're suppressing excitement. They've been blessed with the rite of enucleation, their eye sockets empty and free.

With their rite finished, I am one minute closer to being complete myself.

The crowd is thinning out. People have left the main road to follow their memorised routes, snaking through the perfectly angular streets to their place of work.

The further down the main road I walk, the more disgusting my surroundings become. Nonconformists and agitators abound in the small cracks and crevices that my government has yet to smooth out.

Ahead, there's a statue of our Leader, erected in gold and marble. It's the one thing I'll miss once my vision is gone. However, at the base of the statue are three blasphemers, fumbling around with stained fingertips. As I grow nearer, I realise they've desecrated the statue with graffiti; a crudely drawn picture of an eye, with the slogan 'save our sight!' scrawled beneath.

The people around me continue on like nothing happened. To them, nothing has. They can't see this act of sacrilege, after all, and I feel envy rise up once again. They're completely unaware of the squalor around them. I can barely wait for that kind of peace.

There's movement in the corner of my eye – a squadron of troops. With absolute precision, they weave through the crowd and apprehend the three blasphemers. As I pass the soldiers, I meet their eyes and nod with thanks. The military makes the sacrifice of keeping their vision in order to protect us from outside dangers. I could never have that self-discipline. There's nothing that will stop me from becoming sightless.

The devotion of our troops is admirable. I have nothing but appreciation for their sacrifice.

There's three minutes left until my rite. I'm shaking with excitement, already imagining the imprisoning light slipping away from me, silencing any stray thoughts, and my true dedication to working that will arise.

There's a crackle, and I hear the loudspeaker come to life. It's the hourly Worker's Creed, and I recite the words along with the speaker.

I submit myself to the honour of my work

My favourite line of the creed. It's a mantra I recite to myself, day in, day out, without fail.

And praise our saviour, our Leader

I say this with a bit more energy than usual. It's thanks to our Leader that I will be free in three minutes. I hope they forgive me for my excitement.

And the sacrifice they made

That they may suffer while we are free

Like our troops, our Leader made the same sacrifice of retaining sight. For now, in the flawed, uncoordinated, dangerous world we live in, it's necessary for our Leader to have their eyes for their own safety. One day, when the whole world is fixed, our Leader will join us in liberation.

But for that to happen, we need to put our entire selves into our work. Think of nothing but work. Remove all distractions and blasphemy. And only then, can we save our Leader.

I'm almost at my place of work. It's a path I've memorised over the years, preparing for the time when I won't have to rely on vision to guide me. But there's one more abnormality in the way.

A gaggle of children frolic through the road, eyes covered by their tiny hands. They're giggling and dancing with joy, impatiently imagining the day that they too will be sightless.

It's a pastime I partook in as a child. But I now know the game is disrespectful and a blasphemy to the sacred rite that is enucleation. They are too young to comprehend. And of course, there are practical reasons why children must be burdened with sight. They have to be formed before they can live. Wasting that time dancing and playing is a sacrilege.

I walk right past them, pretending I don't notice, just like the few others in the crowd who still pace alongside me.

It's finally my turn. My entire life has led to this moment and every second that follows it. The flashes of my past fizzle out and I know that former version of myself is dead. I am cleansed of the violating light. The last speck of my sight, my lifelong prison, vanishes.

I am left in all-encompassing darkness, and I know: I am reborn.