

The Mirror

Our Earth houses numerous things, many of them good. However, it is also residence to one of the most evil manifestations ever known to man. At first glance, this manifestation looks harmless. It just looks like a mirror. In fact, it is a mirror. And what a mirror it is.

The frame is adorned with all things beautiful. It captures the radiance of a sunset, the glitter of a diamond, the crystal texture of a pure raindrop. The glass is so clear that if just placed alone, one would walk into it, not realising that the glass wasn't air.

Yet, this beauty only encrusts the dark insides of the Mirror. When the Mirror reflects its Subject, the image becomes distorted. The Mirror enlarges it, shortens it, grows it – it speaks an image that is the complete opposite of what the Subject really wants to see. The Mirror then plants that image in its Subject, who either has the choice to reject the image...or accept it.

The Mirror appears to many people on a daily basis. Its Subjects are so attached to the Mirror that they struggle to retract themselves. I view these manipulations every day and every night and what never ceases to amaze me is how quickly these Subjects believe what the Mirror tells them. They readily accept the image handed to them as solid truth.

Elle followed her friends into the bathroom for their regular morning routine.

Step 1: ensure your skirt is just the right length. Not so far above your knees that you are just inviting that detention slip, but not so low that only your calves are the star of the show.

Step 2: withdraw your fashionable, chocolate-block sized phone and briefly bring yourself up-to-date on the latest Instagram stories.

Step 3: review your face in the Mirror. It mustn't look too beautified, just some cute tendrils here and some clear skin there.

Elle usually refrained from the whole beauty – thing. However, recently she'd developed a nagging feeling that maybe she should. So, she'd trailed after her group of friends and soon became enveloped in the world of the Mirror. As she wriggled her skirt around her stomach area, Elle couldn't help noticing her legs. They didn't look like the well-muscled limbs she noticed her sporting friends had. They looked a little...straight. No curves or bulges of muscle. She examined them for a few seconds longer and got annoyed, so she decided to move onto step 2.

Each story rolled by like a sluggish YouTube ad. They had trouble buffering – Instagram was stereotypically slow on her brick – like phone. Elle decided that her phone wasn't doing much for her image, so she transitioned to the final step.

She twirled her hair around her finger until her tendrils were sufficiently curled. They didn't look that bad, it was just the picture they were framing that wasn't the greatest. By this time, the remainder of the group had finished their routine. Elle took one last look at herself and exited the bathroom.

The image was planted, the lies accepted.

I don't really know what triggered this new fascination with looks. I guess you could say my teenage hormones finally caught up with my age, or you could say my personality was changing. The point is, I now have this new obsession with looking in a mirror.

I didn't think it would be harmful. All my friends do it five days a week in the school bathroom and one to five times a day on their weekend Instagram stories (depending who it is). I guess that just proves that what seems to work for one person may not work for another.

The problem is, I can't seem to see myself in any positive way possible. When I look in that mirror for five consecutive days, all I see is plain, boring, ugly me. Ok, I know I'm not eyesore ugly, but I'm not drop-dead gorgeous either. I can't change the image of myself, no matter how hard I try. And I'm not sure what to do about it.

Amongst the backdrop of exams, the school term rapidly came to a close. Year 11 yearly reports were issued, end of term activities undertaken, energy levels drained. Despite Elle being in the very centre of this whirlwind, she could not escape the thought that she needed to change her actions. She had never been one to care about her reflection and the fact that she now did made her uncomfortable. Elle massaged her brain, searching into its depths, to arrive at a solution to her problem. She was intent on solving it herself, no external help was allowed. It wasn't until the very first day of the holidays that the much – needed epiphany arrived.

Elle had just awoken from a sleep honeycombed with dreams. Her head turned to view her clock and her eyes noticed the Bible sitting on her bedside table.

“Du-uh”, was the comment, followed by the castigation of, “You idiot.”

Elle could hardly fathom how she had failed to create this solution sooner. Obviously, she hadn't wholly absorbed her sixteen years of Christian upbringing.

Later in the day, Elle comprised a list of three Bible verses to aid her in creating a new reflection of herself. She then divided her two weeks of holidays into approximately three parts, with each part dedicated to meditating on and implementing a Bible verse.

Elle admired her list, pleased at her initiative, and placed it in the cover of her Bible. She was ready.

The image was uprooted, the lies questioned.

Part 1

*“So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.”*

“What are you doing?” Elle’s cousin took stock of the art materials laid out on the patio.

“Art.”

“I’d hardly call you the art – type, Eleanor.”

“Yeah, I know, but I was just in an art mood, you know?”

“I guess.” Taylor gestured towards the creation. “What’s it meant to be?”

Elle narrowed her eyes. “Is that meant to be an insult, or you can’t genuinely see what it is?”

“I can’t genuinely see what it is.”

“Oh.” Elle scrutinised her artwork thus far. She thought it was evident. “It’s a depiction of me, made in God’s image.”

“Oh.” Taylor nodded his head.

“I’m using it to help me remember a Bible verse. I’m a visual learner.”

“Oh, ok. Well, I’ll let you get back to it.” Taylor opened the screen door and walked back inside.

“Seriously?” Elle cocked her head and resumed scrutinising. She had sketched two giant hands, extending from each top corner of the page. They were cupped around a human – Eleanor Swanson - crafting her into shape. Surrounding Elle was a poof of substance; it was supposed to symbolise God’s image. Within the poof were connotations of God: a cross, a love heart, a crook. Elle’s perspective told her it made sense. Maybe Taylor was blind.

Vibrant watercolours soon filled in the blanks and the piece was hung on Elle’s bedroom wall. As she did so, Elle noticed herself in the Mirror. Her thoughts that were so common in the school bathroom made an entrance yet again.

Her straight legs.

Her brick – shaped pocket bulge.

Her not-so great face.

Plain, boring and ugly...

...yet made in God's image

“So, who cares?” Elle smiled weakly at the Mirror, although she wasn't wholly swayed by her comment. It was only a blanket, to keep her comfort while a rough wind raged outside. She still heard it and allowed its coldness to creep under the blanket. The development of a new reflection was going to take some time.

Part 2

“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.”

Elle's artwork had been attached to the wall for six days. It had done little to create her new reflection, but it was a genesis. She hoped that her second verse would help the process along.

The two weeks that were called holidays moved by in a satisfying sense of sluggishness, yet Elle found herself yearning for something to pass the time. She remembered that her class had made a forum of Christianity – related questions, so she decided to answer one or two.

The cursor scrolled through the comments, failing to arrive at a simulating query. It was almost at the bottom of the page when such a question was revealed.

People say that God doesn't have favourites, but the Old Testament seems to contradict that. God made a chosen people – Israel – and killed anyone that wasn't part of Israel. This seems to me that God does have favourites.

Now, where would I find a verse to disprove that? Elle thought sarcastically. She selected the comment box and began to type.

God doesn't have favourites. In the OT, God chose Israel to be his special people so they could spread God to other nations. But, he didn't just limit this to Israel. He saved many 'foreigners' who came to believe in God (e.g. Rahab in Joshua). However, in the NT, under the New Covenant created through Jesus' death and resurrection, God extended his chosen people to be anyone who wants to believe in him (i.e. the Israelites and the Gentiles). Titus 2:11 says that, "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people." Notice this doesn't say that God's grace is only available to the Israelites, or those who are religious. Instead, it says God's grace is open to all people. God doesn't care if you're an Israelite or a Gentile, a good person or a bad person, a pretty person or an ugly person. He just wants everyone to come to believe in him. That doesn't sound like favouritism to me.

Elle sent the message, satisfied with her reply. As she re-read her paragraph, she found herself drawn to her phrase, "a pretty person or an ugly person." Elle had always known this to be true. She always knew that God loved someone no matter their appearance. But, she'd never fully absorb it. Yet now, Elle found herself believing it.

When storing her laptop away, she caught herself staring in the Mirror again. It had metamorphosed into a window but was nonetheless still carrying out its task. As per usual, Elle noticed the same things.

Her legs.

Her pocket bulge.

Her face.

Plain, boring and ugly...

...and yet it somehow was different.

In the wake of her comment on the forum, Elle could somehow see herself as different. Yes, she still possessed a whole host of faults, but God didn't think that mattered. Despite whatever Elle thought about herself, God thought his creation worth enough to save.

That's got to be good enough for me, Elle thought.

She wrapped her blanket around tighter, some of the coldness going away.

Part 3

"Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."

The conclusion of the holidays and part three of Elle's exploration brought with it a conversation Elle was monumentally proud of. Months prior, Elle and Riley had pooled together their money to purchase tickets to Ed Sheeran's concert tour. The result: two tickets to the concert, including a Meet and Greet session with the pop sensation himself.

Riley arrived at Elle's house the morning of, hefting a bag stocked with clothes. It was dumped on Elle's bed and the two spent the morning selecting an outfit each for the night. Once they were sporting their chosen outfits, the pair stood in front of the Mirror in Elle's bedroom.

The contrast was unmistakable. Riley was wearing a simple, yet elegant, dress. It was a hybrid of what one would wear to a restaurant and what one would wear to a wedding. While her feet were comfortable in ballet flats, Riley wore her hair in a style reminiscent of complicated YouTube tutorials. Next to her was Elle, wearing a skirt and a fancy top. It wasn't a plain outfit, far from it, but it lacked the elegance that hung from Riley. Elle felt slightly uncomfortable as she stared at the reflection, but knew she shouldn't be.

“You sure you want to wear that?” Riley raised her eyebrows.

“Yes, that's why I chose it.”

“You don't want to impress Ed Sheeran?”

“I do, but I don't have to wear clothes to do that.”

“How else are you going to impress him?” Riley asked, incredulously.

“Well, I can be polite and animated and friendly. It's fun choosing an outfit to look nice, but, if Ed is anything like he appears to be, he's going to care more about my personality than my clothes. God does, and if my personality's good enough for God, it's got to be good enough for Ed Sheeran.”

Before the girls departed for the concert that night, Elle checked her reflection one last time.

Legs.

Pocket –

“Stop.”

She pulled the blanket so tight around her that the wind was only a chilly whisper on her skin. A comforted smile followed.

The image was suppressed, but the lies were waiting.

I didn't want to go back to school. But then again, to be fair, I don't think any of my peers did. We'd almost drowned in Year 11 and I don't think any of us were partial to the idea of doing that again. However, when Term 4 came, I put on my positive face and reminded myself that there was only a year left. That year was started with a Year 12 initiation session.

After my little exploration during the holidays, I was proud to begin school with a newfound concept of myself. I wasn't thoroughly happy with my image, but I was content knowing that I was highly valued by God, regardless of my looks. I was determined to be different during the bathroom routine. That changed as soon as I saw her.

The new girl had made no effort to abide by the school rules. Her skirt was way above the knee, showing off her athletic legs. Her face was caked in makeup, but it was done to perfection. Her hair was long a strawberry blond thing of beauty and her smile, it just seemed to make her even prettier. She was skinny, well-built and beautiful.

As we began our routine, everything I had read during the holidays flew out the window.

The Mirror cunning and it was depraved. Slowly, it began to resurrect the image it had planted in Elle all those weeks before. It took the lies that had never fully been destroyed. It perfumed them, intoxicating Elle and drugging her. It reflected her and the new girl side – by – side. While the girl was sharpened, Elle was smudged. I could imagine the Mirror grinning with malicious happiness as it gradually strengthened its influence over its once renegade Subject.

Time seemed to freeze as I tried to gather my thoughts. I felt like I had been pushed. winded. My mind was fuzzy. I couldn't recall anything. All I could see was me and her. Me: plain, boring, ugly, insignificant. Her: elegant, exciting, beautiful, popular. I started to panic. Everyone else was finishing the routine. I hadn't even started. How was I meant to do this? would it even matter?

The Mirror had almost completed its task. It continued to exaggerate the image, yearning to reclaim Elle. As the group began to leave the bathroom, the Mirror emphasised their reflections. They were beautiful; they were flawless. It pulsed with falsehoods, disguised to be truth. It took pride in Elle's horrified face. Her doubt seemed to strengthen it.

I watched, anxiously, as Elle began to succumb to the Mirror; imploding with repulsion and disgust. She could not tear herself away from it

No, it wouldn't matter. In the wake of that, I'm nothing but just plain, boring, old me. Nothing's going to work.

My breathing continued to heighten. There was something I was forgetting. Something important...what was it...

Suddenly, the Mirror weakened, but only slightly. It had noticed something. Elle's face was looking less horrified. It had an element of concentration, like she was searching for something.

CRACK!

A jagged fracture split the Mirror's glass, the sound reverberating.

Elle's tense body relaxed, and a relieved smile formed. She must have found what she was looking for.

I don't know how I remembered, but I did. I was questioning myself and stuck in an emotional fog when, next thing I knew, I was chanting, "God's image. God's image. God's image," over and over again. The verses had come to me. The new girl didn't matter anymore. While I knew that she was a thousand times more beautiful than me, I also knew that it didn't matter. I was beautiful in God's eyes, so who cared how I looked in comparison to the rest of the world.

I know that sounds cheesy, but it's true. And not true in the sense that, 'it's true for you, not true for me,' but in the sense that, 'it's true for me and true for you.' I'm so proud of myself. Before, I felt attached to a mirror and that routine. I'm still attached, but now I know what to do about it.

Our Earth houses numerous things, many of them good. However, it is also residence to one of the most evil manifestations ever known to man.

I view these manipulations every day and every night and what never ceases to amaze me is how quickly these Subjects believe what the Mirror tells them. They readily accept the image handed to

them as solid truth. However, what also never ceases to amaze me is the alternate reaction Subjects can have to the Mirror. They can ignore it. It's that simple.

The Mirror was cracked by Elle. It can be cracked by you.

The image was destroyed, the lies mocked.