

Framed Papers

by Foster Trecost

He fished a tissue from a hidden pocket and dabbed his forehead, then called the cops. Red dots spotted the otherwise white cloth and when the police arrived, he displayed his blood like a court-ordered indictment. He demanded her arrest and she in turn demanded his. The police looked at each other and then at the therapist, who looked like he needed a therapist. No one got arrested, but feeling compelled to take official action, they wrote her a warning: *Don't throw binoculars at people.*

And they weren't pocket-sized binoculars, bearing little resemblance to those used for spying on birds in the backyard. These were military-grade and seemed better suited for a battlefield. They struck him just above the eye. Gashed him good. A scar-leaving laceration.

Before that he'd drug her to a hypnotist who may as well have been a palm reader. She didn't throw anything but when they went to an intimacy clinic, she threw slurs and slights one after the other, but nothing that wasn't true. If he was going to call the cops, that's when he should've done it. Instead they went to a therapist who, in the name of clinical remedy, put a weapon in her hands.

She said it wasn't working, that she couldn't see anything and the shrink, always quick with comment, said it's because she was looking at the wall. He had gone to the University of Michigan, was certified in just about everything. Framed papers told the story. But that's not where she was supposed to look. She was supposed to look at the man across the room, the binoculars pulling her close, but still a safe distance away. So she looked at him. Then she looked *for* him. All she found was someone who needed to pluck his eyebrows. Then she saw something else:

A woman crouched in a corner, tears smeared across her cheeks. A hand offered itself. She hesitated but took it and was helped to her feet. Seconds later the same hand struck again, and she fell back to the floor.

That's what she saw.

When the binoculars left her fingers, she knew they were on a good path. They tracked across the room with baffling precision. He watched from behind a disbelieving smirk, like there's no way she'd flung a pair of military-grade binoculars at his head. She could barely believe it herself.

Once they decided she posed only an acceptable danger to society, the police let her leave. She meandered through the city, mostly adrift but with a hint of intent she couldn't place, but knew was there. She passed a café that called to her, but not loudly enough. A tavern beckoned with a different voice, but she kept walking. Shoe stores and bookshops offered not the slightest temptation.

Then she came upon it and knew without knowing it had been her destination all along. She walked in with restored self-assurance and made her way to the counter. She smoothed a sheet of paper onto the worktop and asked, "Can you frame this?"

He looked at the paper, then at her. "It's what we do. Just choose a frame."

"You choose it. The frame's not important."

He complied with a slim black border unlikely to detract from what it outlined. She waited while he worked and smiled when he was done, then smiled again because she had smiled.

Framed papers tell the story. The warning, an important part of hers, has graced the living room wall ever since.

