

WE ARE GLASS

a short story collection by

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New Dawn Dies

These slow nights pass like a scalpel cutting through your flesh. There's no reprieve, not even when passing the dazzling young blonde too beautiful for mortal eyes in the murky hallway between shared bathrooms. I'd no idea what eye-candy like that was doing in a crap-hole like this. We barely ever acknowledged each other, nothing more than a polite smile and nod each time we passed. She seemed a strangely quiet girl, shy. Nothing but fleeting little nervous glances from under fluttering eyelids. I'd noticed that she was entirely flat chested but I didn't think much more about it. Some girls are. I was never a big mamma-breast kind of man anyway.

Tonight a screaming ambulance pulling up outside punctuates the monotony. The flashing blue light strobes the alley and breaches the flimsy curtains.

You can't remain transient forever. You can drink so much coffee you begin to feel like you're going to throw up. But finally, no matter what, you keep slowing down until eventually you stop. In the end your chromosomes break down and you become immobile in a world that keeps pushing on, turning unconcernedly around you. It doesn't matter, when all is said and done. You never did anything calculable.

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All the time Fat Eddie is wailing in the next room. Listening through these paper-thin walls to the destruction of a man by an invisible entity is quite disturbing. It's the drugs they've pumped him full of, you see. He doesn't know where he is or what's going on. He's dying of cancer. And the delusional son of a bitch keeps wailing and shouting incoherent babble in the middle of the night as he lays sweating and rotting in his bed. His death-room stinks of decay and it seeps from under his door into the stairwell.

You've smelt death's unmistakable aroma before. Life is senselessly cruel and from what you've seen death usually comes to us just at a time when you feel you're beginning to grow as a person. Death hangs over us all the time, waiting to teach us that it is our one and only master. All you ever want is more time.

You were just twenty-three when your brother was killed in the first Gulf War. And for what? Nobody gives a fuck. War is ultimately inconsequential. People live apathetically, in fact quite happily, under any established hierarchy. The history books are nothing but cheap words that drip from the iniquitous lips of the victorious. Terrorists and so called rogue regimes are no guiltier than our own legitimate governments.

I would never kill or be killed in the name of some scum-sucking government. Nationalism, like religion, is an illusory concept. And those who claim to be God's chosen race are fundamentally no different to those who claim to be the master race.

In the end, the only thing worth believing in is you. But these days it's as if someone else's deadened eyes peer back at you in the dirty shaving mirror propped up on the shelf amongst the few books you carry around from place to place. You're standing on the edge of the precipice, asking the question: "who the fuck am I?"

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I never had any time for philosophy or its cheap-ass sidekick, religion. You get hit around the back of the swede with a house brick and it ain't never gonna feel soft like a cushion. No amount of philosophising or praying ever changed that, and nothing ever will.

There is a muffled commotion in the hall as the ambulance crew struggle with Eddie's weight but it sounds like they finally manage to stretcher the fat fucker down the stairs.

You light another cigarette, listening out for the meat wagon to take the poor bastard away for good. And then you think back thirty-six years to that summer heatwave of 1976. Flowers in the garden. A piss-yellow butterfly, fluttering in the sunshine. Childhood memories, fragmented somewhat. But everything was beautiful then. Michelle with her clear blue eyes and short skirt. That was the first time you fell in love. Everything seemed so much simpler in those days. If only you could have known it at the time. Of course, you can laugh now at how young and naive you were, Michelle and you, ensconced in your blissful childish innocence. Broke your heart when her parents decided to move away and you never saw Michelle again.

Saccharin memories dissolve, become impossible to reconstruct. We remember things as we want them to be. And you're left with only the here and now. You are alone with only a fly on the bare light bulb for company. The bastard zips around your room looking for somewhere to lay its fucking eggs. Even so, you often leave her breadcrumbs or pieces of chocolate on the old pine table near the window.

It takes courage to accept the fact you're just some insignificant little pinprick somewhere on an island in the Atlantic, on a world spinning through the vacuousness of space. None of us have all the

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time in the world, no matter how slowly these nights drag by. All you ask is for two years of escape. You would give your life for just two years of guaranteed beauty at the end. You just want your own lighthouse isolated from the rest of humanity, from where you can look out at a twinkling, moonlit ocean and declare aloud, “how beautiful the sea.”

In one hundred years every one of us who pass wordlessly in the despairing halls of this damned flop-house will be gone and forgotten. If your sole aim in life is to leave a residue of your existence then you may as well be Jack the Ripper. It’s not difficult. Life is not sacred, it’s expendable. How else can you look at it? The ultimate destiny of the human race itself can only wind up one way – in destruction. Death at the hands of some genocidal force of nature. The sun going nova. The third world war. Whatever. It doesn’t really matter in the final analysis. You can only hope it will be sudden and painless. In my estimation, the only escape is to drink yourself to oblivion. Mary Kelly, Catherine Eddowes and the rest of them would simply never have existed if it weren’t for the work of old Jack. They’d have finished their lives in the complete obscurity of the cold piss-stained alleys they earned their living in. Poor, unfortunate bitches. How awful to be famous for being butchered.

The flattened cigarette stub smoulders in the ashtray. Outside you can hear them loading Fat Eddie into the ambulance and then its morbid siren fades into the distance.

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