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BY KATHLEEN GLASGOW

Girl in Pieces

How to Make Friends with the Dark

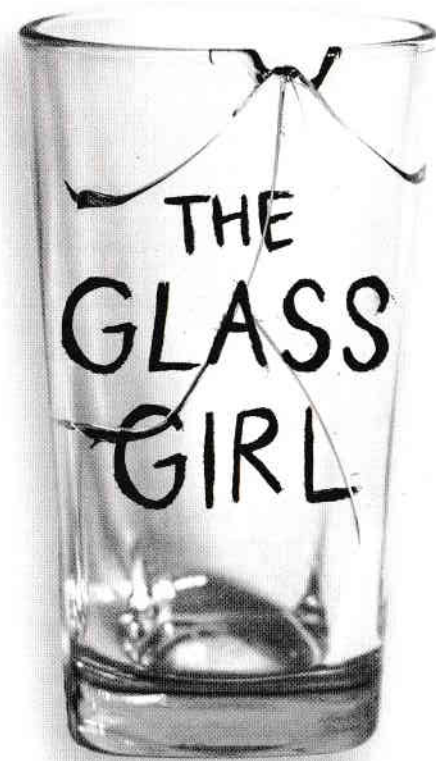
You'd Be Home Now

The Glass Girl

BY KATHLEEN GLASGOW AND LIZ LAWSON

The Agathas

The Night in Question



KATHLEEN GLASGOW



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THE
GLASS
GIRL

*The branches dug into her palms
She didn't mind the blood there
She kept going
Higher and higher
Leaves in her hair
Tears in her jeans
She didn't mind the blood there
Some fire in her heart
Pushing her higher
Away from the shouting
Away from the stares
Away from the world
Strong feet, bare on the branches
She didn't mind the blood there
At the top
In the sky
Able to breathe
The shouting gone
The stares gone
Leaned her cheek on the tree
Closed her eyes
Took it all in
Washed it all away, away, away
Such a beautiful world*

*When she dulled it all down
Smoothed its jagged edges*

Filed it all to ash

And watched it drift between her fingers

And then

A snap, a crack, and she fell

And fell

And fell

And fell

The shards of her nesting in the blood there

EVERY MORNING WHEN I wake up, I don't think I'm going to make it. Or maybe I think that I don't want to make it. I'm heavy with what I did the night before and I'm heavy with everything inside me and sometimes it is just too god-damn much to carry around. I am the kind of tired that makes your bones feel skeletal and clacky. I am the kind of tired that is cement in your shoes, X-ray vest on your chest, bricks tied to your wrists. But I get up. I drag myself out of bed and plant my cement feet on the floor and start the stupidity of routine because that's what it is to be fifteen: your mother will yell at you if you're going to be late for school; your dad will yell at you that he'll be late to work if you don't get a move on. Your teacher will embarrass you in class because you weren't paying attention. Anyone and everyone knocks into you in the hallway, sending you tumbling against the wall, and it isn't even on purpose. It's worse. They just don't even see you. You don't exist. You are not the tiniest blip on their radar of humanity. You'll see that person who took your heart and cleaved it in half and stuffed it in their mouth and swallowed and you want it back and you think you'll never get it and who can live like that? Or you'll remember your grandmother is dead and that's a giant black hole hungry for you, too. And who can live like that? Maybe there will be a shooter drill today and you'll have to huddle under the windows in art. Or maybe it will be real

this time and not a drill. The penguins in Antarctica have plastic in their blood. Fire. Floods. It's hot where you live in the desert and every year it gets hotter. But you have to get up because you're fifteen and that's what you do. Put on baggy jeans. Put on baggy T-shirt. Baggy hoodie. Baggy everything because you need to leave room for your pain to grow. Protect yourself. You've perfected a mask of powder and black eyeliner and a face for people to look at on the outside and maybe it's not really who you are on the inside, but who wants to see that? That part is too much and not enough. That part is all hollows and a gray, dying heart. Everyone says it will get better after all this. When you're older. Like it's a sentence you have to serve. Like it will toughen you up if you can make it. Like it will all be worthwhile. And maybe that's true, but it seems a long way away and a long time to carry that weight and the only reason you can get through the day is because you know what you can do at the end of it to make it worthwhile for a little bit before that comforting wave takes you away and drowns everything else out.

ONE

Ten, ten, ten, ten for everything
Everything, everything, everything

—VIOLENT FEMMES, "KISS OFF"

FRIDAY

IT'S LIKE WE'RE PLAYING spin the bottle, but without the actual bottle. I know exactly how it will go. The imaginary bottle will spin among us in a dizzying way and then slow, eventually pointing to me.

Cherie doesn't want to be the one. She says she's not good at it, even though she's only done it twice. She says she doesn't like the way people look at her.

Amber says forget it. Since she's the only one with a car and a license, she drives and says that's enough. If she has to stay sober, she shouldn't be the one. *I'm the ferry captain, she says. I'm navigating this drunken ship, so not me.* She doesn't like drinking, anyway. She tried it once and everything seemed okay; she was giggling along with the rest of us in Kristen's room as we passed Dixie cups of crème de menthe around, but then she vomited in her lap. We had to undress her and put her in the shower, me volunteering to stand in there with her so she wouldn't fall. I shampooed the chunks of vomit from the ends of her long hair as she cried. It's a good thing Kristen's mom was at her boyfriend's for the night. We found the crème de menthe on the very top shelf of a kitchen cabinet, the bottle dusty from neglect. It looked and smelled candyish, so we tried it. We were thirteen; what kid doesn't like candy? Anyway, that was the first and only time for Amber.

Kristen is pressed against the car door, pigtails with red bows fluttering in the wind drifting in the half-open window.

"Bella, you do it. You're the best. You don't care," she says, waving her vape pen.

"That's so disgusting," Amber tells her. "Sincerely gross."

"Everything is gross when you think about it," Kristen replies. "Who cares?"

In the back seat, next to Cherie, I sigh.

The bottle has landed on me. What Kristen said is what everyone always says to me, for everything, in various versions:

Bella, you do it.

Bella, tell your sister it's time to get off her tablet and come to dinner.

Bella, tell your father he's late with the check again.

Bella, find out if that guy thinks I'm hot.

Bella, I didn't read the book, tell me what happened so I can write this stupid friggin' paper.

Bella, Bella, Bella.

I close my eyes. I wish I was alone, but I'm not allowed to be alone, after Dylan, and I know I should be grateful my friends are trying to take care of me, but sometimes I just want some peace and quiet, no noise, nothing. Just . . . nothing.

Sometimes it feels like I live in a pinball machine and I'm the scratched-up ball, being knocked from one nook to the next, lights blaring, bells ringing. I can never stop the game because I *am* the game.

Amber pulls up to the curb around the block from the store. Some of the red letters on the sign above the store have gone dark, so it reads L_C_Y L_Q__R.

Lucky Liquor. Some of the older guys at school call it Lucy Licker. *Me and Lucy Licker hung out last night.* Explaining away puffy eyes, bad breath, as if anyone would actually care they were

hungover. Honestly, no one ever cares what guys do. Only what girls do.

Everyone in the car is quiet, waiting for me.

I make them wait a few minutes longer, like I always do. This is our routine. It never changes.

If Kristen drives, she says she can't do it. If Amber isn't driving, she says it makes her feel weird and she doesn't really like drinking anyway, so everyone forgives her. Cherie never does it anymore because a gross dude once grabbed the pocket of her hoodie and ripped it off. It's round and round, all the time, spin the bottle. It doesn't matter what we play: the pebble of our booze hoptscotch always lands on me.

It lands on me because they know I'll do it.

Bella is always up for adventure. Bella will do it. Bella is good at it. Bella will come through. Bella, come on.

Kristen and Cherie hold out their money and I listen to them breathe. Amber's eyes are turned to the left, toward the darkness outside the driver's-side window, so I can't see them in the rearview. I think she's mad, but she won't say it out loud.

Fine, I say. *Fine, you cowards.* I snatch the money, warm and wrinkled, from their hands.

Bella, they say. Bella, you're the best.

I'm not the best. I'm the worst. But it doesn't matter. All I want right now is to dull the sharpness inside me. The stuff that no one can see. The stuff poking me and making me bleed.

I open the car door and get out.

There are rules you have to follow, things you have to remember.

Like waiting a little bit, but not too long, and not too close to the store or somebody might get suspicious. An older lady in a Lexus, pulling into the store, pretending she's there just

for Arizona Iced Tea and Altoids. Those ladies are righteously judgmental and need to be avoided, even though they'll come out with plastic bags of wine they'll probably finish in a couple of hours. I mean, come *on*. The reason they're at this crappy liquor store in a crappy neighborhood is so nobody they know sees them buying all that wine in their *own* neighborhood. Because they drink *a lot* and don't want anyone to know how much. And there's always some old suit heading inside, frowning at the girl on the sidewalk (me) pretending to check her phone. *You need something?* he might say, his bald head shining. *You lost?* Even though that's not really what he's asking. You can tell because they always look you up and down. You can't pick them. They'll want to walk you back to the car, "make sure you're safe," check out your friends, be pervy. They probably have daughters and would die if they knew their daughters did this. We are all someone's daughter.

You have to choose carefully. It can never be a lady unless she's slightly disheveled and kind of dumpy (flannel shirt, cigs in pocket, flip-flops), which signifies she doesn't give a damn. She might do it, say, *You be careful with your party, now*, as she hands over the bag. *Don't get into any trouble.*

It can be a guy in his twenties, maybe, but not too cool, not too slick, maybe lonely-looking (taped eyeglasses, T-shirt with inscrutable cultural reference, dirty sneakers), but you can't let him think he can walk back to the car with you, or get your number, and you can't talk to him too long or it turns into a *thing*, which did actually happen once and ended with Kristen literally catching the guy's fingers in the car window as she furiously rolled it up, him calling us names, and Amber hitting the gas. We screamed hysterically in the car, everyone's voices blending together in a high pitch, but soon enough we were

buzzed (not Amber) and laughing hysterically. That's the kind of nice thing about drinking: what seemed to be one thing becomes an entirely different thing once you're drunk.

That can also be bad but I'm trying to stay away from bad stuff and thoughts. Like Dylan. Which was definitely a situation where one thing became another, and not in a good way. That was the night I had what Kristen refers to as Bella's Extremely Unfortunate Public Downfall.

Anyway, you need a person who doesn't care. A person going into the store for their own reasons. You want a person who doesn't even bat an eye, just listens to you and takes the money and comes back with their bag and gives you yours and takes the change and goes back to their car or walks down the sidewalk into the night without even saying *goodbye* or *where you partying* or *be safe*, because they've got to get on with the night, too. You need to scope out who is absolutely here for alcohol, who has to have it *now*, like you, and doesn't mind making an extra ten for their trouble.

You have to make it quick and clean. Blunt. I've learned a lot just from the few times we've done it this way.

Hey, will you buy me a fifth of vodka? You can keep the change.

You want a guy. Oldish, hair messy, ball cap, band T-shirt under a sports jacket, shuffling along in his low-rise Converse, smelling like cigarettes. Like one of my dad's friends, actually: used to be in a band "or something" and on the wrong side of cool now. Maybe thought he'd be a rock star, but now he's cubicle-bound during the day, dreams dead and gone in a blur of Excel spreadsheets. All he's got comes from this store.

On the sidewalk, I jiggle my toes inside my sneakers, pretending to scroll on my phone but peeking up furtively every few seconds to scope out the situation. If I'm being honest, I

don't actually mind doing this, because I know where I'll end up: feeling better. And a tiny part of me gets a little thrill from it.

Then I see him.

I can tell; he'll do it. This guy doesn't give a damn. Eyes on the sidewalk; doesn't care if I'm cute or hot or not. He doesn't give a crap about me. He's here for the same thing I am: to get drunk.

Right when he's about to pass me by, out it comes.

"Hey, could you buy me some vodka? You can keep the extra money." I make sure my voice is neutral my face expressionless. "A fifth. Not the little bottle."

He doesn't stop to stare at me. Look me up and down like the guys in suits. He's got things to do.

He barely stops. Nods. His hands have ink on them and his skin is dry as he takes the money and says, "Yeah, sure."

There's always that moment when my heart beats too quickly and my hairline prickles with sweat. Will he come out and take off in the opposite direction? I can't chase someone down. Will he come back and walk right by me, give me an evil grin, and say *Stupid kid* as he taps the bags and keeps going? That's happened a couple of times.

I track his progress through the barred glass windows of the store. Chips aisle, Gatorade, beer cooler, liquor aisle, then the counter, his lips moving, his nod to the cashier, the bottles being bagged up, my heart still racing, my palms a little wet.

I text Kristen. *All good.*

She texts back. *Hero.*

The gentle *bing-bong* bell of the door as he pushes it open and walks across the parking lot to the back edge, where I'm standing on the sidewalk, half hidden by a shrub.

He's got the bag in one hand and a case of beer in the other,

the Gatorade shoved in his jacket pocket, its weight making the fabric sag.

"Cheers," he says, and that's that, he's gone, shuffling down the sidewalk.

When I'm back inside the car, Kristen and Cherie cheer, but Amber stays silent.

"Bella!" they shout. "Bella, our queen!"

"First one's mine," I say, cracking the bottle and pouring as much as I think I can get away with into my half-empty bottle of Sprite.

It always is.

Amber is looking at me in the rearview mirror, her eyes darkening slightly.

"Jesus, take it easy," she murmurs.

"It's Friday," I tell her. "Just *chill*."

Kristen's fingers tremble as she scrolls on her phone. The nights are getting colder and she's not even wearing a hoodie or anything, just a thin tank top and jeans with holes in the knees. The tips of her ponytails brush against her bony shoulders. "People are hanging at Cole's," she says.

At the exact same time, Amber and Cherie say "*No*" and point to me.

Kristen sighs, shoving her phone in the back pocket of her jeans and jumping up and down to keep warm.

We're sitting on a picnic bench in the park, just four girls with bottles of Sprite and a bag of cheese popcorn on a Friday night. Innocence and fun. We won't be able to stay here long. The park closes at ten, and there are some sketchy-looking people drifting around.