

## Through the Glass – Sophia, Year 7, QLD

There is a man that always sits outside my window.

He wears tattered clothes, has a bristly moustache and brilliant blue eyes. He sits on the ground regardless of the weather conditions. A dog crouches next to him; its fur now blackened by the dirt the earth had inflicted.

They call the man ‘Mr. Filth.’ I do not.

People walking by will give him a dollar or two. His curiosity is always piqued by picking up the coin and studying it. Not delight. Not greed. Just curiosity.

He will then say, “God bless you.” The neighbours will be gone by then.

The kids will not give him a dollar. They will jeer at him and throw stones at him. They will call him stinky. Worthless. He does not say a word. Just stare at them, unblinkingly, until they grow bored and look for other things to do.

He wipes away a tear.

The day his dog died it rained hard. The days before I watched the pitiful thing cough up blood, shiver and sweat at the same time. The man could not do anything except pull her close and whisper soothing words until she fell asleep. That day, she did not wake up.

All at once the man rises. I look up in wonder at his height. He is a towering figure that can easily reach up to the ceiling of any house. His eyes burn with a gleaming determination. He picks up the shaggy dog, now smaller in death. I watch him knock on our neighbours’ doors and see their looks of horror when they recognize him. He points to their yard, then at his dead dog. The doors are slammed before he can mutter ‘Please.’

The rain kept pouring, yet he continues his journey around the neighbourhood, looking for any patch of grass where he could bury his dog. He eventually stops and lays still on his ragged blanket that substituted for a bed. He had knocked on my door, but I did not open it. I was scared. I did not want the people of my neighbourhood talking about me. I did not want to talk to him, or anyone at all. He hugs the now soaked body of his dog and lays still. He does not move again.

When he wakes up, he is no longer alone. The adults he had visited the day before returns, but instead of offers of help, they ask him to move on. They tell him he can’t be here anymore. He stands up. Many cowers in the face of his presence.

“I don’t have anywhere to go,” he replies. His voice is small and polite, quiet as a mouse. His accent marks him as someone from another country, an outsider.

The adults blanch and mutter among themselves. No matter what he does, he is a black smudge on the perfect neighbourhood paper. A blemish. A problem no one can handle.

He stands patiently as the adults continue to talk, not lowering their snake-like voices. One opens his mouth, his fangs glistening with malice.

“Well, I’m afraid you still must leave. We can’t have street tramps like you here.”

He smiles like he is about to eat a rabbit. The words are met with agreement, ringing through the crowd.

There the man stands, taller than each of them yet defenceless against their piercing venom. He speaks again.

“No. I have nowhere else to be. I don’t do anything wrong here. I’m staying.” These words leave his mouth in a puff of air.

I marvel at the distance between me and him. I press my palm against the glass of the window, wishing it would break, wishing I can run to him and offer him what he does not have.

Protection.

Family.

A home.

But I do not move. The glass does not break. His dog is not buried. The day passes on, and night falls.

After the sun rises, he scoops up his dog's corpse and walks to the park. He finds a piece of rusted metal and begins digging. He digs until the afternoon sun shines across his ragged clothes, perspiration shining on his weathered face. With a final heaving breath, he slowly lowers his friend into the soil.

He sheds a tear as he falls asleep next to the freshly dug grave.

When he wakes up the neighbours return. Fangs bearing, tails whipping, they hiss and scream.

“Move on old man!”

He shakes his head.

One of them, rage engulfing his face, raises a fist.

A purple bruise appears on his dirty face. Tears fill his brilliant blue eyes.

He does not stop them.

As I watch him, defeated and weary, a feeling rises within me. I want to roar at the snakes that defied the man, a single man, whose only wish was to bury a dog that he loved.

I picture the man all alone, dying because no one would give him the medication he needed. Love, kindness, hope. He is judged for something he was unable to help with. My fingers left permanent imprints on my window glass. My hands are marked by how tightly I grip the window frame. All these emotions, yet I can do nothing but watch. I am like a news reporter, reporting the bad news but never stopping it. I silently wish the window will break, shatter, and I can run to him, and apologize.

But the glass remains intact.

The sun rises and cast its scintillating rays over my darkened window. I arise with a heavy heart; my blood is led and my bones are sand. I trudge towards my window, I have to fight against my fear of human contact. My heart sinks like bricks, what will he look like today?

His eyes are guarded like a safe, the jewels inside never seeing the light of day. His tattered clothes weigh him down like a vice, his face haggard and pale. Beneath the dirty rags, I can see bones jutting out of his limbs like skewers. When is the last time he had eaten?

He does not move that day, he simply continues to lie down on the pavement, hollow cheeks and empty eyes imprinted in my mind. He has no strength to walk. He has no strength to say, "God bless you." When the dwindling amount of people gives him a coin. The purple bags rimming his eyes looks like everlasting bruises. His nails are chipped, his hair is littered with dirt, and his skin is filthy and reeking of lost chances and forgotten memories.

My eyes drift away from my window, towards my wallet. I know that inside lays a one-hundred-dollar note. I yearn to give it to him, talk to him, and he will talk back. We will stay and reminisce about our own old times and memories until sunset. In this daydream, I will have no fear of humans, and I will welcome him into my home. He will stay there until I found help. I will offer him food and protection. He will never suffer again, never face the wrath and venom of my snake neighbours. But even as I think about these scenes, I know the glass will refuse to let me. It will never relent no matter how much I want to help him. So, I am left with no choice but to accept my helplessness, as I watch him remain exposed to danger from the outside world.

Determination overcomes me. Upon opening the door, I start to cross the street. There is no point in waiting for my glass to break. On my palm, I feel the hundred dollars note. At that moment, I know he will not die. No longer am I content with simply standing by and watching the events unfold before me; I am ready to act and make a difference.

My glass has finally shattered.