

Silver Tree Short Story Competition 2022

Mirror, Mirror

Glen rolled over blearily to turn off his beeping alarm before he leant across the bed to give his wife Jenny a quick kiss. She burrowed further under her blankets in protest. Glen chuckled, knowing 5 am was far too early to expect any other response, but he had been working on the new job for weeks now and long hours were part of the deal. He had a long, hot shower to wake himself up and then attempted to shave while gazing at the steam-covered mirror. He had finished one side of his face before he paused, hand absently rubbing his chin, as he peered in the mirror to note there was more grey flecked through the dark brown than there had been the day before. His reflection continued, casually shaving the other side of his face.

Smooth strokes across stubble, light brown eyes showing nothing but early morning boredom, Glen watched as this face that was his own and yet somehow was not continued until it had finished shaving. Hands shaking, he reached up and felt the bristles still on the left side of his face as he stared into the now clean-shaven image in the mirror.

Eyes wide with shock and terror, Glen pushed himself violently away from the bathroom vanity and stared at his reflection. The Other Glen stared right back as it slowly put the razor down. Then it winked at him, cocking a finger as it mimed a slow-motion gun shot right at his forehead. Stomach twisting, Glen backed out of the bathroom, and stumbled down the hallway.

He hastily threw on the work clothes he already had laid out and raced for his front door desperately denying what he had just seen. Not real, not real, can't be happening, still half asleep, that's all, he reassured himself as he climbed into his brand new fully loaded pick up, emblazoned with his business logo. He took a few deep breaths to calm himself before turning on the ignition, then glanced in the rear-view mirror. Other Glen looked back at him,

its piercing light brown eyes somehow seeing right through him. Suddenly, it raised a fist and started to beat against the mirror wildly, its face contorted with rage.

Glen scrambled out of the still running car, breath coming in short gasps, as the spectre that wore his face kept smashing at the mirror. He backed away from the truck slowly, Other Glen now appearing in the side view mirror, still lashing out any way it could. There was a high-pitched *crack* and Glen saw with a surge of true fear the fault line snaking slowly across the glass. The Other's face lit up as its mouth opened with a silent yell of victory and its fists started pounding faster. Glen's nerve broke.

Blood pounding in his ears, Glen ran down the street with no thought in his mind other than to get away, get away. Other Glen was coming, and he knew deep in his gut it would all be over if it ever caught him. If it ever made it through from the other side, he was finished. The tyres of a car screeched as it braked dangerously as Glen dashed through traffic, barely conscious of his own surroundings. Where could he go, what was he going to do, he just needed time to *think* God damn it. Sweat snaked down his neck as he sprinted in frantic flight, face still half shaven.

He ran past an office building and his heart stuttered in his chest as he saw his reflection running with him, staring at him from the windows. The face that wasn't his was watching with dark determination, an almost rabid hunger lighting its eyes as it ran alongside him. Glen swerved down an alley, trying in vain to ignore his silent pursuer. He flashed past shop windows in rapid succession, Other Glen following him like the madly turning pages of a flip book comic.

At the end of the alley Glen had to pause, pulse racing and heaving for breath, staring fixedly at the ground in a desperate attempt to avoid the gaze of his tormenter. His heart rate spiked when he glanced at a puddle in the street no larger than his foot and Other Glen's eyes

flashed across its surface. Wheezing and clutching his side, Glen watched as the murky figure started to kick at the puddle somehow from behind. A bead of water broke from the surface and landed on the street with a wet *plop*. Ice lanced through his gut as more and more drops struck by the phantom kicks sprayed out of the puddle. The Other was getting stronger.

With a grunt of effort, Glen pushed off the brick wall and started a staggering run back down the street. He knew this wasn't possible. He *knew* that. So, it must be a...a glitch in the system. Or something. A temporary issue. All he had to do was stay ahead of the figure for long enough and the glitch would be resolved. He just had to keep moving. Someone would notice the error soon, surely. Hope rose in him like a fragile flame.

With his lungs burning like fire, and a stitch stabbing him painfully in the side, Glen clung to this idea. He just had to run down the clock. Things would be back to normal soon enough, he reassured himself as he ran. The life he had spent so long building for himself was at stake. He wasn't about to give that up. This was going to be a battle for time. He needed to outlast the twisted reflection for as long as the correction took. Other Glen was frantically trying to break through, presumably to throttle him based on its violent actions so far, also knowing that this was its only window of opportunity. It would only get more desperate as the seconds ticked by.

Thinking furiously as he ignored the mad reflection popping up in passing windows, Glen determined that it was probably safest to wait it out at home. He could draw the blinds, avoid the bathroom, stay away from all reflective surfaces. Yes. It might just work. Now all he had to do was make it back there.

Sweat dripped through his clothes as Glen raced back the way he had come, new strength in his legs from the conviction that he could beat his opponent. His newfound confidence withered and died as he ran past a window and a fist broke through it, glass shards

flying and sparkling in the sun as they fell into the street. Blind terror threatened to overwhelm him as he saw the figure draw back its arm and smash through another window, its hand sliced with cuts and bleeding freely, thick flecks of red now dotting the pavement next to him. Even wounded, it was keeping pace with his desperate last gasp for home. He wasn't going to make it.

Adrenaline surging, Glen did the only thing he could think of. He had to beat this. He closed his eyes, breathed through his nose, and sprinted in what he hoped was a straight line. His house was just a few hundred metres away. He bounced off an unsuspecting bystander but didn't slow at their exclamation of surprise and irritation. He ricocheted off a garbage bin but stayed upright, just, lurching onwards. And then his left foot caught an uneven edge of pavement and Glen's legs flew out from underneath him. His eyes sprang open as he fell forward, momentum drawing him down as he braced for impact. From the corner of his eye, he caught the flicker of movement.

He saw the puddle looming ahead of him, his reflection for once showing an expression of shock that he knew was identical to that he wore on his own face. He dreamily contemplated the rainbow oil slick on the muddy surface as he plunged on towards what he was sure was his impending death. The Other was waiting on the other side. It was over. He had had a good run, Glen mused as these last seconds stretched and crystallised around him. Maybe death would not be so bad.

He fell, splashing face first into the shallow puddle. Glen realised with alarm that he was still falling as he sank down past his neck, past his shoulders. He saw his own face rushing towards him, and he screamed, choking on the muddy water as he thrashed wildly but then his face was past him, going up, up to the surface. He felt legs kick his shoulders, then his hip, forcing him down, down until his entire body slipped below the surface. He struggled

against the suddenly restricting water, his movements becoming jerky and less frequent. He was suspended, stuck in time and place as he looked desperately back up at the surface, to the world.

He could still see the dark clouds rolling across the sky, but it was muted, foggy, like looking through smoked glass. Glen saw a water colour figure kneeling next to the puddle, trembling and gasping before it lifted its face, *his* face, up to the weak sunshine and spread its arms wide.

Other Glen had made it through. And it had worse than killed him. He screamed in rage and pain, pushing against the now immovable surface of the puddle, knowing the Other Glen could no longer hear him. He watched as the shadowy figure approached and then leant over him on its hands and knees, his own face looming god-like above him.

“Ten years of my life!”, it screamed, eyes wild. “Ten years you stole! But you’re back where you belong. And I’ve made sure you won’t ever be getting out again”. With a smile lit with savage triumph, Other Glen picked up a rock and tossed it into the puddle before walking away. Glen watched him go, the ripples slowly spreading as the figure faded away and then he was sinking down, down to where he had come from.