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Through the Window Pane

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Through the Window Pane

The window pane felt sweet and cool against her cheek. She had been plagued by uncomfortable warmth ever since they had brought her here and the sensation offered to her by the window was a welcome one. Why was it always so Goddamned warm in hospitals? It was probably some Freudian ploy; to make the atmosphere excessively warm, quiet, and womb-like or some stupid psychological thing. An attempt, perhaps, to make the crazies feel better about being there. Well, if that's what it was, it wasn't working. The heat was oppressive and she was feeling nauseous.

She pressed closer to the window, cooling the entire right side of her face while at the same time fostering the hope that if she pressed hard enough, she would by some rare and unusual process of osmosis, move through the pane and into the dark, bottomless alley below.

Just as she felt herself begin to transcend into the street, she caught a glimpse of the smiling doctor reflected in the window. The image caused her to be pulled back toward the suffocating room. In the once-removed reality of the window, she could see that the smiling doctor was still smiling and still looking at her.

"What are you thinking about?" "I'm thinking about why the Hell you look so Goddamned euphoric all the time. I'm thinking that you sure as Hell must know something that I don't know." All of this she said in what she knew was probably a vain attempt at offending the doctor enough so that she would get fed up and leave her to be alone in the bright, hot room to be by herself.

"I smile because I'm happy." said the doctor. "I want you to be happy, too." she added cheerfully.

"I'm touched." she said shifting her gaze back into the alley.

Hanging from the building across the street there was, she noticed, a sign. It read: "FIRE STAND PIPE CONNECTION. Fire stand pipe connection. She had never heard of this before. What did it mean? Anyone building a fire should stand, due to the pipe connection? No. Maybe this was where the fire, the stand, and the pipe all connected. No. That didn't make any sense either.

What does it mean? I don't know," said the doctor. She paused theatrically and then went on. "Life can be confusing sometimes and it's hard to know what it all means." She was still smiling. "Philosophers have spent hundreds of years asking themselves that same question."

She looked up from the sign to the reflected doctor, suspended by the light of the room against the blackness of the night outside. The doctor was still smiling, looking prophetic and pleased with her answer.

Not life. She said. " Not what life means. What does the sign mean? "

The doctor looked upset (though still smiling) that she had wasted her profundity. "I don't know what it means " she said, casting a glance through the window at the sign. It seemed that she didn't really care, either.

For a while, neither said anything. The room would have been quiet, but for the dull beam of the doctor's smile and the gasps of the heater as it struggled to pump still more warm air through its vents.

" Why did you do it? " she asked, interrupting both the heater and her smile.

" I didn't, obviously." she said. She was tired of this question.

" Why did you try to do it? " Undaunted by rudeness and sarcasm, still the doctor was not ready to give up.

She looked out the window, forgetting the doctor, the bright room, the heat. Aware only of the pane, cool and linear against her cheek.

" Why? " The doctor repeated, thinking that she had not been heard.

"I don't know. " she said, not lying. The doctor's smile faded at last. Clearly this wasn't the correct answer. She sighed, she stood up, she straightened her skirt, and she left the room - all in one poetic movement.

It was very quiet now that the doctor and her smile were gone. She pressed her forehead and palms again to the cool numbing pane of the window and closed her eyes.

"I don't know." she said again. To no one.

Jennifer Read