

PaintMeInGlass

Christin Taylor

Debbie and I stand in the middle of her stained-glass studio, a brick schoolhouse nearly a century old. We're in Marion, Indiana, a town I have lived in, but live in no longer. She started her studio after I left. Now she is pointing me toward the tall windows along the northern wall where light pours through her work. She is making a rectangular window in the style of Frank Lloyd Wright.

"Frank Lloyd Wright," Debbie motions to the window as if he were standing just beyond, "said glass is a crystal thin sheet of air, suspended in air, to keep air in and keep air out." I look up at the windows and see the air holding air, the glass separating and sifting space. For a moment the frozen liquid disappears and all that's left is bending light, color swirling through air.

She shows me some of her glass painting. One by one she pulls out pictures of angel wings, shields, or letters painted in calligraphy. On one angular piece a rose bursts from black paint, a silhouette reversed, red light pouring from black. I imagine her body curved over the workbench, paint in hand, her fingers moving over planes.

"Did you know this paint contains ground glass?" she asks, moving the pieces on her workbench. "When the two properties of glass are placed under fire they fuse together," she says. "They can never be separated." And I try, for a moment, to imagine

the pain of such a fusion, the moment at which light would sear the body.

Before I met Debbie, I knew she had suffered. A mutual friend told me how a strange and rare virus seized her body, paralyzing her organs one inch at a time like water rising to her chin, but then, like an outgoing tide, receding. Her family thought she might die, but she didn't.

Debbie is putting together a stained-glass piece for an art show. The piece is wedged into place on the surface of her work table. She has lined the sections of glass up edge by edge, row by row, and around the corners she has pushed the glass together with long wooden strips nailed to the table.

Between the glass long strips of silver solder wait for welding, the heat of which will seal them at the joints. The glass, however, will never be glued, stuck, or melded into place. It will always be separate pieces, simply resting in the grooves of the iron with nowhere to slide, no way of escape. In this way, Debbie has made her art.

Mostly, Debbie's window is clear glass, broken into rectangles or squares. But along the middle, separated out into symmetry that dissipates, closer to the bottom of the piece, are sections of green, blue, and yellow. Some pieces are swirled with ridges that only show up in light, others are still like the surface of a pond. These little

squares of color fleck from side to side, dancing over a palette of clear.

"Metallic oxides in the glass make the color," Debbie tells me. "Only when the glass is placed under fire, the hottest fire you can think of, does the color ignite."

And then only in light is the color dazzling, I think, holding various pieces up to the sunlight which is casting slants across the room.

I think of the days of my life, the moments that pang with light, that suck my breath away. I think of the muted days, when any tone of beauty is hushed. I think of all these pieces hung together, meaning nothing on their own, only sliding side by side, held by the solder of my days. I stand next to Debbie, holding close the warmth of her presence. Her body has been seared with light. The evidence is one small scar on her neck—a tracheotomy's kiss. *

Christin is a freelance writer and adjunct professor trying to make her way through the world with words and faith. She and her husband live in El Segundo where they spend their evenings with friends.

