

2018 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Fiction Category

Second Place: “Glare” by Gabriel Rodriguez

“Would you say it’s more of a sociological problem, or more of a psychological thing?”

I can’t really concentrate on anything right now. I slowly inch my chair away from the table to find a spot that has some relief, but it’s pointless. I can’t move too far from table, because then it’d look weird if I backed up too far. The source of that cursed glare is coming from keys that are resting upon the table in the worst position imaginable. Through sheer bad luck, the keys are resting on the key ring, which puts them at an angle. The keys are sitting directly under the lights in this classroom, so that means the reflected beams of light are shining directly into my eyes, no matter what position my chair is in, or which direction I look at. Even when I close my eyes, there’s still a bright orange spot from the glare. There seems to be no escape.

“... they can conform and accept the current means to achieve their goals, or they could reject...”

Could I get away with taking them and stuffing them in my pocket? Don’t worry. I’d give them back once class is over. I’m not *that* terrible of a person. At least, I don’t think I’m a terrible person.

(Glare) (Glare) (Glare) (Glare) (Glare) (Glare)

You know what? Let’s try to figure this out, just as a fun little hypothetical.

This is an evening class, and it's 7:00 right now. It's dark out, so that means I can use the large, uncovered window to my left as a mirror, so let's get a view of the room. The class is very small, just seven people, and I can see everybody. There's the table I'm at with three people including me, and there's the back table, with four people. They're all on my left. By glancing at the window, I can see that (Glare) two of them are on their laptops, one of them is looking right at the teacher, and the other is writing in their notebook. The people on the laptops both seem to be focused on the screens. One of them types frequently, so I guess they're taking notes. I'm not sure about the other one. They're not really typing, and they haven't been doing anything for a while.

"...their first thought might be to..."

Now that I've paying attention more (which I am now realizing is a very creepy thing to do) they really aren't doing anything. They're just watching the screen. Maybe they're waiting for something? Based on the reflection, their screen is an unchanging (Glare) white in the window, so it doesn't look like they're watching anything. I can't really make anything out (Glare). I wonder what they're waiting for.

"...other things to worry about..."

Whatever. I can check back on that situation later. I need to move on, so I can fix this (Glare) problem. I shouldn't be worrying about the back table anyway, because even if anybody back there were to look in my direction, my body would block their view from the keys in question, so this was a complete waste of time. That means the real issue comes from the people at this table.

This table is made up of two rectangular desks pushed together, and the chairs are opposite of each other, with one side facing the large, dark window, and the other (Glare) side faces the entrance/exit doors. Earlier, I positioned myself so that the window is on my left, and the board is front of me. There's a girl on my right, and she's facing in the direction of the window. She's looking forward, so I'm in her peripheral vision on her left. (Glare) Hold up. What's she even looking at?

“...at that point...”

She's not really looking at anything. She's just looking forward.

“...all they can think about is the next...”

Oh well. Moving on. The owner of the keys is in front of me, and she's on my left. She is most likely completely unaware of the nightmare she has created for me, but I'm not going to fault her for it because it's not like it was intentional.

What was I doing? (Glare) Right. Grabbing the keys. She's facing the teacher, and has her chair turned to face him. That means that her back is turned to me, so I don't have to worry about her (Glare) at all. And speaking of the teacher, his main focus is on the person who asked the question, but they're sitting at the back. He still looks in the general direction of people at both tables, but that isn't hard to do, given the small number of people here.

Those damn (Glare) keys are probably the biggest problem in this whole plan. They'd be noisy, so I'd have to pick them up slowly, but then if I were to do that, they'd probably shine like a strobe light, and then the window girl and the teacher would see me (Glare) and then I'd make a scene. I don't even want to think about what would happen if I were to get caught trying to (Glare) steal car keys.

What can I do about this? The only people I have to worry about seeing me is the teacher, and the girl staring out the window, because nobody else is able to see the keys. The teacher has everybody in his sights, most of the time. Fortunately, he's slowly pacing around in an oval shape, so he has his back turned to me occasionally. The girl looking out the window is another (Glare) problem, because I can imagine that she'd turn her head at something interesting, like a weird sound. Jingling is strange enough to catch her attention, as well as a random, sudden movement. What can I do?

On the table, I have my textbook, and a thin notebook. I put my hands into the (Glare) pockets of my hoodie to see what I have. I have my phone, and pencil. It's point is dull. So, so, dull.

"...the reasoning makes perfect sense to them, but..."

How about this?

1. Place pencil on desk
2. Wait for teacher to turn back to me
3. Flick pencil across table
4. Window girl turns to look at the pencil, which will be on her right, away from me
5. Snatch keys when nobody's looking
6. Clear throat/cough to mask jingling of keys
7. Regain sanity
8. Return keys before class ends

I need to get real here. Now that I'm thinking about it, I can't pull that off. I don't think that I can accurately flick a pencil across a table. Even if I pull that off, she might look in my

direction instead to see why the pencil just slid across the table, which really defeats the (Glare) purpose. Also, that's a weird thing to do. I don't want people to think I'm weird. On top of that, I don't think I have the reflexes, coordination, or even the basic motor skills to do all of this in a couple seconds.

And why is stealing them my go-to solution? There are probably so many easy and legal ways out this. (Glare) Probably. I could try to shut my eyes, but then it'd look like I was sleeping if I were to do that for too long. Also, there's still that persistent orange dot, even when I shut my eyes. No, scratch that. It's worse now. Now there's a technicolor "Z"-type shape wherever I look now, even when my eyes are open.

You know, if I just tell her that they're bothering me, she'd probably move them. But that's a weird thing to ask, isn't it? Hm. Maybe I could (Glare) get up and move somewhere else? But then again, I don't want her to think I don't like her. The other table is full, and everywhere else is empty, so if I were to move, I feel like I'd be saying (Glare) "I don't want to be near you."

"...and they can be used to reinforce a behavior, or to prevent one. It can be as something simple..."

And if I were to get up, they'd all stare at me, wouldn't they? I'd get up and they'd all turn their heads to (Glare) look at me, and then I'd have to come up with a reason why I got up, and I really, *really*, don't want to have to deal with that now. What was the original plan then? (Glare) Dammit. Oh. Right. I was going take the keys for a little bit and then (Glare) and then what? Oh my God, why is this so frustrating?

“...and that clash creates some dissonance...”

Let me try this again. Nobody’s changed their positions, based on the window reflection.

I haven’t changed at all either. I think I look pretty composed. It’d be hard to tell that **(Glare)** something **(Glare)** is **(Glare)** bothering **(Glare)** me. Oh God, I can’t do this. Can’t think, can’t think, wait, wait, wait, wait. Just think of something.

Like a song.

Buhdududuhhh **(Glare)** Buhdududuhhh **(Glare)** Buhdududuhhh

Buhdududuh BuhdududEH Buhdu**(GLARE)** DAMMIT.

God, this is so irritating. Way more than it should be. I feel so stupid for having this be a major problem for me. This is a such a tiny **(GLARE)** issue. I know that people in this class are coming here immediately after getting out of work, or maybe they have families to raise, and here I am, an unemployed bum, getting bothered by a **(GLARE)** pair of goddamn keys.

You know what? I kind of want a scream a little bit if I’m being honest. You probably wouldn’t be able to tell because I still look **(GLARE)** fairly composed in that window there. Nice, cool, and calm. Maybe it’d come out as a very tiny one, one that makes people

question whether (GLARE) they heard something or not. I want to go for a very

“muffled in (GLARE) a pillow” type scream.

...

I’m gonna go for it:

“.....”

It came out as a little hum, so it could have been worse. Nobody else noticed, thank God.

Or at least they’re not (GLARE) giving any signs that they did. That’s fine. I think I’d

much prefer some silent judgment (GLARE) instead of obvious disapproval. But still,

that was incredibly unsatisfying. I think I kind of wanted my throat to feel scratchy and sore

afterwards. That weak little hum was the equivalent of scratching around mosquito bites. It

doesn’t feel good, so you think “screw it, I’m gonn-“ (GLARE) *Goddamn* it.

“...have I actually answered your original question yet?”

I should just do something already. Just move to a different seat and ignore the gazes. It’d

only last, like (GLARE) what, eight seconds? They’d probably all forget anyway in

a couple of minutes. (GLARE) Or I could just say something. Spit it out. Just say

“This might be weird, but can you move your keys? The **(GLARE)** is bothering me”.

I should take the **(GLARE)** KEYS, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD JUST

(GLARE) TAKE THE KEYS AND PUT THEM IN MY POCKET OR

SOMETHING! MAYBE I SHOULD SWAT THEM OFF **(GLARE)** THE

GODDAMN TABLE OR MAYBE I SHOULD SHUT MY **(GLARE)**

EYELIDS TOGETHER SO TIGHT THAT MY EYELIDS MELD TOGETHER OR MAYBE I

SHOULD **(GLARE)** SLAM MY FACE AGAINST

(GLARE) THE WINDOW UNTIL IT OR MY FACE BREAKS

WHICHEVER COMES FIRST. YOU KNOW, THE SAME WINDOW WHERE I STILL

LOOK COOL AND COMPOSED **(GLARE)** AND OVERALL JUST

CALM AS FUCK?! I SHOULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS

(GLARE). ANYTHING. HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO

WAIT? IT FEELS LIKE IT'S BEEN AN ETERNITY

MY **(GLARE)** WATCH (WITH ITS OWN

LITTLE TINY (glare), WELL SCREW YOU TOO, WATCH)

SAYS **(GLARE)** IT'S 7:15. ONLY TWO

HOURS TO GO.

FANTASTIC.

“...That clear up anything?”

“...”

“...”

“...”

“All right, let’s move on. We still got a lot of stuff to cover tonight.”