

THE LOOKING GLASS

In Veronica Roth's book, "Insurgent," (© 2012 by Veronica Roth. Katherine Tegan Books, p.381), there's this scene:

"Tris!" Tobias's voice is even clearer here. "I want to see her!"

I reach up and press my palm to the glass. The shouts stop, and his face appears behind the glass. His eyes are red; his face, blotchy. Handsome. He stares down at me for a few seconds and then presses his hand to the glass so it lines up with mine. I pretend I can feel the warmth of it through the window.

He leans his forehead against the [glass] and squeezes his eyes shut.

This is happening EVERY SINGLE WEEKNIGHT across the state of South Carolina. It occurs in the visitation areas of county (and city) jails. I know, because I went through it myself with my wife Jaime--or, then-wife, I should say, she's another ex now--two days a week, every week during my county internment. Nobody showed us to do it, and we were both oblivious to other prisoners and visitors. When we were standing on our assigned sides of that tempered glass--there was nothing else in the world, but us. Our hands naturally went to the glass, lined up: wanting so desperately to embrace each other, even if only for the last time; and we too, would place our foreheads together, divided by that quarter or so inch of intrusion. I never had to pretend to feel her warmth through the window.

The ordeal hurt her, taking its toll.

It hurt me too, but for her it was a breaking point.

Some prisoners are fortunate enough to have their loved ones stand by them for the duration. In prison, there is no intrusion, prisoners are allowed a hug and a kiss--they can hug their children. The visit is conducted at a table, and they may hold hands for the whole three hours allotted for a visit, if they wish. In my case--such is not my lot--my marriage was over well before prison, before my conviction, before my court date was ever even considered. It was in its death throes the moment cuffs went on my wrists.... Incarceration does that to families, it rips them apart, and the detectives use it to their advantage--pitting spouses and family against one another like cheap plastic chess pieces. I was a King, my wife the Queen, and once key pawns were in play; she was gone from me. Never to be recovered to the board.

When I return for a new trial--the glass will be cold.

My shouts, destined to echo within an empty castle.