



★ **Glassworks**

Olivia Wolfgang-Smith

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In Olivia Wolfgang-Smith's emotive novel *Glassworks*, four generations struggle under the weight of unexpressed feelings, unsaid words, and unmet needs.

It starts with a bee. In 1910, heiress Agnes takes a renowned glass artist, Ignace, on a tour of the university arboretum, showing him the local flora and fauna that he will be recreating during his residency. He is stung by a honeybee; fascinated, he asks Agnes to sketch the bee's final moments. She renders a full scene of life and death.

In 1938, Agnes sends that drawing and a glass replica of the bee to her son, Ed. It's a pale substitute for parental regard. In 1986, with the drawing long ago destroyed, Ed bequeaths the glass bee to his child, Novak, quoting his mother: "surviving hardship enriches life and strengthens us to meet it." In 2015, Flip finds the bee buried in her car—a lost gift from a heartbroken stranger; perhaps a new beginning.

Each era is rendered in distinctive terms. In the early 1900s, the book's language is formal; it becomes more relaxed through the years until there is text speak in the mid-2010s. This is reflected in the characters too: Agnes is confident, even arrogant, in the beginning. Ed is nervous and insecure—a simple man with simpler tastes. Novak is resigned and protective. Flip is a screw-up who internalizes every negative ever spoken of her.

The emotional impact of each person's choices reverberates through the years with intimate psychological depth—mirrored in the intricate descriptions of the glass models. The connecting threads stretch thin as the book progresses, but they do not snap. Always, there is a Novak at the center of the story, reaching with breathless anticipation for happiness, stability, comfort, and forgiveness.

Glassworks is a layered, lyrical family saga about love and determination.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (May / June 2023)

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