



The Glass Books of the Dream Eaters, Volume One

By Gordon Dahlquist

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Here begins an extraordinary alliance—and a brutal and tender, shocking, and electrifying adventure to end all adventures.

It starts with a simple note. *Roger Bascombe regretfully wishes to inform Celeste Temple that their engagement is forthwith terminated.* Determined to find out why, Miss Temple takes the first step in a journey that will propel her into a dizzyingly seductive, utterly shocking world beyond her imagining—and set her on a collision course with a killer and a spy—in a bodice-ripping, action-packed roller-coaster ride of suspense, betrayal, and richly fevered dreams.

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Editorial Review

Review

“A tale that combines swashbuckling adventure, a big dose of science fiction and burgeoning romance.”
—*USA Today*

“Rich...studded with treats...beautifully written.” —*Entertainment Weekly*

“Sweeping, highly original and absorbing...Defies categorization.” —*Dallas Morning News*

“Kinky, Atmospheric.” —*Washington Post*

“Ingenious.” —*Richmond Times-Dispatch*

About the Author

Gordon Dahlquist is a native of the Pacific Northwest, where he worked for several years writing and directing plays. Since 1988 he has lived in New York. He has been a member of New Dramatists, is a New York Theatre Workshop Usual Suspect, and a founding member of the CiNE. His works include *Messalina* (Evidence Room, Los Angeles: SPF, New York), text for *Babylon Is Everywhere: A Court Masque* (CiNE, Schaeberle Theatre; *Theatre Magazine*), *Delirium Palace* (Evidence Room, Los Angeles; published in *Breaking Ground*), *The Secret Machine* (Twilight Theatre Company at Solo Rep), *Vortex du Plaisir* (Ice Factory '99 Festival at the Ohio Theatre, WKCR'S Manhattan Theatre of the Air), *Island of Dogs* (4th Street Theatre), *Severity's Mistress* (Soho Rep Theatre, New York University; winner of Primary stages' Bug &Bub award), *Mission Byzantium!* (American Globe Theatre, NYTW's Just Add Water Festival), and *Reitcence* (Horace Mann Theatre).

He has written and directed several experimental films, that have been selected for the San Francisco International Film Festival, the Seattle International Film Festival, and the Northwest Film and Video Film Festival. He is a graduate of Reed College and Columbia University's School of the Arts. He has received two Garland Playwriting Awards for *Messalina* and *Delirium Palace*.

The Glass Books of the Dream Eaters is his first novel.

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Chapter One

Temple

From her arrival at the docks to the appearance of Roger's letter, written on crisp Ministry paper and signed with his full name, on her maid's silver tray at breakfast, three months had passed. On that morning, her poached eggs steaming their silver bowl (gelatinous, gleaming), Miss Temple had not seen Roger Bascombe for seven days. He had been called to Brussels. Then to the country house of his infirm uncle, Lord Tarr. Then he had been required at all hours by the Minister, and then by the Deputy Minister, and finally by a pressing request from a cousin desperate for discreet advice about matters of property and law. But then she found herself in the same tea shop as that same cousin—the over-fed, over-wigged Pamela—exactly when

Roger was said to be soothing her distress. It was quite clear that Pamela's only source of disquiet was a less than ready supply of buns. Miss Temple began to feel tremulous. A day went by with no word at all. On the eighth day, at breakfast, she received the letter from Roger regretfully severing their engagement, closing with the politely expressed desire that she take pains to never contact nor see him in any way for the complete remainder of her days. It contained no other explanation.

Such rejection had quite simply never occurred to her. The manner of dismissal she barely noticed—indeed, it was just how she would have done such a thing (as in fact, she had, on multiple galling occasions)—but the fact of it was stinging. She had attempted to re-read the letter, but found her vision blurred—after a moment she realized she was in tears. She dismissed the maid and unsuccessfully attempted to butter a slice of toast. She placed the toast and her knife carefully on the table, stood, and then walked rather hurriedly to her bed, where she curled into a tight ball, the entirety of her small frame shaking with silent sobs.

For an entire day she remained indoors refusing all but the most bitter Lapsang Soochong, and even that watered down (without milk or lemon) into a thin, rusty beverage that managed to be both feeble and unpleasant. In the night she wept again, alone in the dark, hollow and unmoored, until her pillow was too damp to be borne. But by the next afternoon, her clear grey eyes ringed red and her sausage curls lank, waking in pallid winter light (a season quite new to the warm-blooded Miss Temple, who judged it objectively horrid), the bedding tangled about her, she was once more determined to be about her business, and brisk.

Her world had been changed—as she was willing to admit (she had a young lady's classical education) did happen in life—but it hardly meant she was obliged to be docile, for Miss Temple was only docile on the most extraordinary occasions. Indeed, she was considered by some a provincial savage if not an outright little monster, for she was not large, and was by inclination merciless. She had grown up on an island, bright and hot, in the shadow of slaves, and as she was a sensitive girl, it had marked her like a whip—though part of that marking was how very immune from whips she was, and would, she trusted, remain.

Miss Temple was twenty-five, old to be unmarried, but as she had spent some time disappointing available suitors on her island before being sent across the sea to sophisticated society, this was not necessarily held against her. She was as wealthy as plantations could make her, and sharp-witted enough to know that it was natural for people to care more for her money than for her person, and she did not take this point of materialist interest to heart. Indeed, she took very little to heart at all. The exception—though she found herself now hard-pressed to explain it, and though lacking explanations of any kind vexed her—was Roger.

Miss Temple had rooms at the Hotel Boniface, fashionable but not ridiculous, consisting of an outer parlor, an inner parlor, a dining room, a dressing room, a sleeping room, a room for her two maids, and a second dressing and sleeping room for her aged Aunt Agathe, who lived on a small plantation-derived stipend, and who generally alternated between meals and slumber but was enough respected to be a suitable chaperone, despite her lack of attention. Agathe, whom Miss Temple had only first met upon her disembarkation, was acquainted with the Bascombe family. Quite simply, Roger was the first man of reasonable status and beauty to whom Miss Temple had been introduced, and being a young woman of clarity and loyalty, she found no further reason to search. For his part, Roger gave every impression of finding her both pretty and delightful, and so they were engaged.

To all accounts it was a good match. Roger's expressed opinion aside, even those who found Miss Temple's directness difficult would admit to her adequate beauty. They would also happily admit to her wealth. Roger Bascombe was a rising figure in the Foreign Ministry, cresting the verge of palpable authority. He was a man who looked fine when well-dressed, displayed no flagrant vice, and who possessed more chin and less

stomach than any the Bascombes had produced in two generations. Their time together had been brief but, to Miss Temple's experience, intense. They had shared a dizzying variety of meals, strolled through parks and galleries, gazed deeply into each other's eyes, exchanged tender kisses. All of this had been new to her, from the restaurants and the paintings (the scale and strangeness of which prompted Miss Temple to sit for several minutes with a hand pressed tightly over each eye), the variety of people, of smells, the music, the noise, the manners and all the new words, and further to the particular strength of Roger's fingers, his arm around her waist, his kindly chuckle—which even when she felt it came at her expense she strangely did not mind—and his own smells, of his soap, his hair oil, his tobacco, his days in meeting rooms amidst piles of thick documents and ink and wax and wood varnish and felt-topped tables, and finally the, to her mind, devastating mixture of sensations she derived from his delicate lips, his bristling side whiskers, and his warm searching tongue.

But by Miss Temple's next breakfast, though her face was blotched and swollen about the eyes, she met her eggs and toast with customary ferocity, and met the maid's timorous gaze just once with a narrow peremptory glance that served as a knife drawn across the throat of any speech, much less consolation. Agathe was still asleep. Miss Temple had been aware (from the husky, insistent, violet-scented breathing) that her aunt had lingered on the opposite side of her door through the day of her (as she now thought of it) Dark Retreat, but she wanted no part of that conversation either.

She launched herself out of the Boniface, wearing a simple but frankly quite flattering green and gold flowered dress, with green leather ankle boots and a green bag, walking crisply toward the district of expensive shops that filled the streets on the near bank of the river. She was not interested in actively buying anything, but had the idea that looking at the assembled goods of the city—of the world—making their way from so many different lands to this collection of shops might serve as a spur to new thinking about her own new state of affairs. With this in mind, she found herself eager, even restless, moving from stall to stall, her eyes roving without lingering over fabrics, carved boxes, glassware, hats, trinkets, gloves, silks, perfumes, papers, soaps, opera glasses, hairpins, feathers, beads, and lacquered items of all kinds. At no point did she actually stop, and sooner than she had imagined possible Miss Temple found herself on the district's other side, standing at the edge of St. Isobel's Square.

The day above her was a cloudy grey. She turned and retraced her steps, gazing still more intently into each exotic display, but never—if she herself were a fish—finding the item that would hook her attention into place. On the Boniface side again, she wondered exactly what she thought she was doing. How, if she was with clarity embracing her new sense of loss and redefinition, did nothing—not even an especially cunning lacquered duck—generate interest? Instead, at each object, she felt herself driven onward, prey to some nagging urge she could not name, toward some unknown prize. That she had no conscious idea what this prize might be irked her, but she took comfort from the implication that it did exist, and would be potent enough to alert her when it came into view.

So, with a resolute sigh, she crossed back through the shops for a third time, her attention entirely elsewhere, confident, as she crossed the square toward the nest of monumental white stone buildings that made up the government Ministries, that her interest was—in a word—disinterested. The matter lay not so much with the perceived faults of her own person, if any, nor the perceived superiority, if any, of a rival (whose identity she was, out of idle curiosity alone, in the back of her mind trying to guess), but merely that her own case was the best example at hand. Or was it the only example? Still, it did not mean she was troubled by it, or that she'd no perspective, or that for any future affections of the now-beyond-her Roger Bascombe she would give two pins.

Despite these absolutely rational thoughts, Miss Temple paused upon reaching the center of the square, and instead of continuing on to the buildings where Roger was undoubtedly even now at work, she sat on a wrought-metal bench and looked up at the enormous statue of St. Isobel at the square's center. Knowing nothing of the sainted martyr and in no way devout, Miss Temple was merely disquieted by its vulgar extravagance: a woman clinging to a barrel in surging surf, clothes torn, hair wild, ringed by the flotsam of shipwreck, with the water about her churned to froth by a roiling tangle of serpents that wrapped around her flailing limbs, coiled under her garments and wound across her throat even as she opened her mouth to cry to heaven—a cry one saw to be heard by a pair of angels, winged, robed, and impassively gazing down from above Isobel's head. Miss Temple appreciated enough the size of the thing and the technical achievements involved, but it nevertheless struck her as coarse and unlikely. Shipwreck, as an island girl, she could accept, as she could martyrdom by snakes, but the angels seemed fatiguingly presumptuous.

Of course, as she looked into the unseeing stone eyes of the forever serpent-beset Isobel, she knew she could have scarcely cared less. Her gaze finally followed her true interest, toward the nest of white buildings, and so, quickly, she formed a plan, and with each step of that plan, a perfectly sound justification. She accepted that she was forever divided from Roger—persuasion and reunion were no part of her aims. What she sought, what she in fact required, was information. Was it strict rejection alone—that Roger would rather be alone than be burdened with her? Was it a matter of personal ambition—that she must be shunted aside in favor of promotion and responsibility? Was there simply another woman who had supplanted her in his affections? Or was there something else that she could not presently imagine? They were all equal in her mind, of neutral emotional value, but crucial as far as Miss Temple's ability to situate herself in her new loss-inflected existence.

It would be simple enough to follow him. Roger was a man of habits, and even when his hours of work were irregular he would still take his mid-day meal, whenever he did take it, at the same restaurant. Miss Temple found an antiquarian book shop across the street where, as she was obliged to purchase something for standing so long watching through its window, she on impulse selected a complete four-volume *Illustrated Lives of Sea Martyrs*. The books were detailed enough to warrant her spending the time in the window, apparently examining the colored plates, while actually watching Roger first enter and then, after an hour, re-emerge, alone, from the heavy doors across the street. He walked straight back into the Ministry courtyard. Miss Temple arranged for her purchase to be delivered to the Boniface, and walked back into the street, feeling like a fool.

She had re-crossed the square before her reason convinced her that she was not so much a fool as an inexperienced observer. It was pointless to watch from outside the restaurant. It was only from inside that she could have determined whether or not Roger dined alone, or with others, or with which particular others, with any of whom he might have shared significant words—all crucial information. Further, unless he had merely thrown her over for his work—which she doubted, scoffing—she was like to learn nothing from observing his working day. It was after work, obviously, that any real intelligence would be gathered.

Abruptly, for by this time she was across the square and in the midst of the shops, she entered a store whose windows were thick with all shapes of luggage, hampers, oilskins, gaiters, pith helmets, lanterns, telescopes, and a ferocious array of walking sticks. She emerged some time later, after exacting negotiations, wearing a ladies' black traveling cloak, with a deep hood and several especially cunning pockets. A visit to another shop filled one pocket with opera glasses, and a visit to a third weighed down a second pocket with a leatherbound notebook and an all-weather pencil. Miss Temple then took her tea.

Between cups of Darjeeling and two scones slathered with cream she made opening entries in the notebook, prefacing her entire endeavor and then detailing the day's work so far. That she now had a kind of uniform and a set of tools made everything that much easier and much less about her particular feelings, for tasks requiring clothes and accoutrements were by definition objective, even scientific, in nature. In keeping with

this, she made a point to write her entries in a kind of cipher, replacing proper names and places with synonyms or word-play that hopefully would be impenetrable to all but herself (all references to the Ministry were to "Minsk" or even just "Russia", and Roger himself—in a complex train of thought that started with him as a snake that had shed his skin, to a snake being charmed by the attractions of others, to India, and finally, because of his still-remarkable personal presence—became "the Rajah"). Against the possibility that she might be making her observations for some time and in some discomfort, she ordered a sausage roll for later. It was placed on her table, wrapped in thick waxed paper, and presently bundled into another pocket of her cloak.

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