



## The Glass Cell

*Patricia Highsmith*

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**The Glass Cell** Patricia Highsmith

Rife with overtones of Dostoyevsky, *The Glass Cell* combines a quintessential Highsmith mystery with a penetrating critique of the psychological devastation wrought by the prison system.

In 1961, Patricia Highsmith received a fan letter from a prison inmate. A correspondence ensued between author and inmate, and Highsmith became fascinated with the psychological traumas that incarceration can inflict. Based on a true story, *The Glass Cell* is Highsmith's deeply disturbing fictionalization of everything she learned. Falsey convicted of fraud, the easy-going but naive Philip Carter is sent to prison. Despite his devotion to Hazel, his wife, and the support of David Sullivan, a lawyer and friend who tries to avenge the injustice done to him, Carter endures six lonely and drug-ravaged years. Upon his release, Carter is a much more discerning, suspicious, and violent man. For those around him, earning back his trust can mean the difference between life and death.

## The Glass Cell Details

Date : Published June 17th 2004 by W. W. Norton Company (first published 1964)

ISBN : 9780393325676

Author : Patricia Highsmith

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Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Crime, Thriller, Noir

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## From Reader Review The Glass Cell for online ebook

### Faith says

Carter is an innocent man convicted of financial chicanery. While in prison for six years, he suspects that his wife is having an affair with his lawyer. While this book has a twisty plot and the moral ambiguity that I expect from Highsmith, I was bored by this book. Too much time was spent in the prison setting with its predictable violence and general unpleasantness. I liked the book a little more after Carter was released, but that still didn't redeem the book for me. This was just adequate Highsmith.

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### Bettie? says

Description: *Philip Carter has spent six years in prison for a crime he didn't commit. On his release his beautiful wife is waiting for him. He has never had any reason to doubt her. Nor their friend, Sullivan. Carter has never been suspicious, or violent. But prison can change a man.*

Opening: **It was 3.35pm, Tuesday afternoon, in the State Penitentiary, and the inmates were returning from the workshops.**

When Highsmith started communicating with a prisoner she was drawn into his story and this is the fictionalised account.

3\* The Glass Cell  
5\* The Cry of the Owl  
3\* The Price of Salt  
3\* Strangers on a Train  
3\* The Two Faces of January  
2\* small g

5\* Ripley #1  
5\* Ripley #2  
4\* Ripley #3  
3\* Ripley #4  
3\* Ripley #5

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### Jennyb says

I liked this book, although I think that, compared to contemporary standards for suspense novels, it is probably a little tame. It's like comparing a Hitchcock movie to the Bourne Ultimatum. What transpires here happens slowly, and it's subtle enough that it may bore the pants off more impatient readers. However, if you are not one of those, you will probably enjoy that Highsmith is a talented writer, if not a flashy one (She reminds me of another of her similarly overlooked contemporaries, Paula Fox). She's also not one to tie up a

conventional happy ending with a big red shiny bow -- the accumulation of suspense brings an ending that leaves the reader unsettled; if there's hope on one level, there's an even more profound sense of unease on another. Having been published in the early 60s, the book is a little dated, but nothing too annoying. For the most part, it reads well, and if it brings up an older era, it is one where not everything required breakneck pacing and a flashy Hollywood ending.

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### **David K. Lemons says**

I usually read 3 or 4 books at one time until one finally grabs me and forcefully pushes me into my chair, sitting passionately, insistently on my lap, threatening me in a rasping voice, "Take only me and only me, now!"

A history of Rome, Andrew Jackson, and Damon Runyon among others retreated into the corners of my bed stand and I had to finally finish Patricia Highsmith's "The Glass Cell". I gave it 4 stars, not that it was so compelling, but I've been reading her now for nigh on 20 years and use her as a balance in my reading life. ("Engage me and stay with me a little, while I read more serious, demanding books of all genres".)

Each reader may need a companion writer like this who can make the reader feel settled as they go forward into uncharted intellectual territory, not that Jackson and ancient Rome were that to me, but kind of like having a scotch and soda to sip (you can do that, too, and have two reading companions.) Now, that I've finished "The Glass Cell" I will go to my bookshelves and choose another book as I continue--one of the non-intrinsic rewards for finishing a book in the first place.

Highsmith had spent sometime researching prison life, perhaps not for this book, but her details do ring true based on non-fiction accounts that I have read. John Grisham is very good with this, and her account of the treatment of Carter, the protagonist, in the jail setting seems just as authentic as Grisham's. His time there, his wife's visits, and legal developments involving his case and release slowly simmer into an undramatic boil.

Any of Highsmith's work is normally a fairly easy page-turner, but with her apparent method of applying daubs of suspense like a pointillist, I sometimes felt I had not read a sentence or overlooked a paragraph, so I went back over the pages I thought I had carefully read--a chore I hate doing, skimming for a clue--but no, all was intact, nothing missed.

So, in this way I may have stumbled upon Patricia's enticing style: hinting at information that should have been fact as expected by the reader, but then sliding off that point, leaving it exposed, and daubing further away in a whorl instances similar to that one being focused on and perhaps revealing pieces of missing parts and only when you stand away from the panoply of all these moving but settling fragments will you see the whole...but maybe not.

With Highsmith you never know from where the surprise will come. Somehow, she reminds me not only of Georges Seurat, but also of Albert Camus.

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### **Yiannis says**

Εξαιρετικ? βιβλ?ο.

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## Darwin8u says

*"Life is funny. It is necessary both to see oneself in perspective and not to see oneself in perspective, yet either one can lead to madness. The two things must be done at the same time."*

- Patricia Highsmith, *The Glass Cell*

An innocent man is sent to prison for six years and once let out, addicted to Morphine, he attempts to reconnect with his son, his wife, and her lover. Highsmith is the master of motivations and psychological thrillers. She knows what makes people tick and what it takes to break the clock. In 1961 she received a fan letter from a fan in prison. Soon they started writing back and forth. She became fascinated with the psychological trauma incarceration can inflict upon a man. There is, underlying almost all of Highsmith's stories, the image that within all men (and women) a bit of the sadist, the criminal, the psychopath. Most of us, however, are never twisted into a position where our own personal monster emerges. Highsmith loves looking at what makes the monster and is amazing in her ability to describe the mental state of those caught in the dark machine that lurks just under the surface of our own brain.

This isn't her best, but for fans of Highsmith, don't overlook it.

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## Bruce Beckham says

In her treatise '*Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*' Patricia Highsmith explains how simple ideas come to be the 'germs' of her novels.

Having now read several of her non-Ripley works, I am really beginning to appreciate her ability in this regard.

'*The Glass Cell*' is about a guy who is incarcerated – probably unluckily – for his association with fraudsters. He becomes concerned that the diligence of his lawyer in filing continual appeals is because of the access it provides to his attractive wife. Worse, as the months behind bars become years, it seems his wife may succumb to such entreaties – though she denies there being a relationship.

Although he is eventually released from prison, and is reunited with his wife and their son, it seems the lawyer has infiltrated their social circle. Now, though the bars might be gone, the protagonist is forced to watch from inside his 'glass' cell – powerless to prevent what he suspects is the continuation of the affair.

That is the 'germ' – and all that is to be added is, "What will he do?"

On such a rudimentary skeleton of a plot hangs almost the entire the flesh of the novel – and what I find remarkable about these stories is how they remain constantly gripping without deviation. I ask myself what intangible skill is it that the author possessed to make so little go so far?

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## Judy says

I have now read six novels by Patricia Highsmith. She was truly a unique and excellent writer. Unique because of her unabashed look at evil and psychological misfits; excellent because her books are shorn of frills while she puts her readers smack inside the heads of her protagonists, whether male or female.

Earlier this year I read Rachel Kushner's prison story *The Mars Room*. *The Glass Cell* is also a prison story but in this one a man goes to a State Penitentiary for a financial crime he did not commit. In fact, Philip Carter was framed. He is no hardened criminal. He was a naive guy, madly in love with his beautiful wife and toddler son, and in no way prepared for the brutality of prison.

The book opens in the early months of his six year sentence. Philip's naivete leads him into an incident of extreme prison guard violence, only exacerbating his victim hood. All through the first half of the story, Philip is hoping his lawyers can get a retrial while he tries to hold onto his marriage.

Some months ago I also read *An American Marriage* by Tayari Jones, another story of a wrongful incarceration, this time due to racism, impacting a young marriage. In *The Glass Cell*, Philip becomes suspicious that Hazel, his wife, is having an affair with one of his lawyers.

As gruesome as his time in prison is, Philip gets a lot more savvy about life. His easy-going personality goes through change after change. So the true excitement begins when he is finally released after serving the full six years and systematically goes after his enemies. He has learned much about how the criminal mind works and how to get away with criminal activity!

Highsmith came to write *The Glass Cell* after a fan letter from a prison inmate led to a correspondence between them. It is a perceptive fictional account of what she learned about the psychological trauma caused by imprisonment and an indictment of the failure in rehabilitation by the prison system. It is also a compelling read.

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## Lou Robinson says

An excellent dose of Patricia Highsmith, with plenty of suspense and violence. A book of two halves with the first based around Philip Carter's time in prison for a crime he didn't commit. The second his return to life outside back in New York. Great stuff again from Highsmith, her writing certainly has longevity, this is as relevant now as it was in the 1960s when she wrote it.

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## M.J. Johnson says

As a Highsmith fan I wasn't disappointed by this book about a man who is changed both physically and mentally after spending six years in prison for a crime he didn't commit. It is very dark, psychologically disturbing and morally ambiguous. I daresay for some readers there may not be enough action in the book, but I loved the chilling way the story slowly unfolded. It's a book that stays with you and continues to

resonate long after you've put it down.

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### **Bill says**

I didn't like this nearly as much as the other books I've read by Highsmith. Apparently based at least partly on truth, from letters she exchanged with a convict in 1961. Quite naturally, then this is also the story of a convict who serves six years in prison for a crime he didn't commit and then gets released and reunited with his wife and son.

The book is mainly about relationships the convict forms, both with other inmates while in prison, and with his family and friends after he gets out. Unfortunately, I didn't really find this to be compelling reading, and the suspense that Highsmith is famous for just isn't there.

Also, pretty much all of the characters have so many flaws that they are really impossible to like, at least for me. There is a fair amount of action in the novel, but I still didn't find the book gripping at all, or really all that interesting. I will try others of her books however, as I have really enjoyed the other ones that I have read so far.

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### **Louise says**

This was my first Highsmith. I look forward to reading many more.

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### **Maria João Fernandes says**

"Sem o resto do mundo para dizer a um homem quando devia comer ou dormir, quando devia trabalhar e parar de o fazer, sem todas as outras pessoas a fazer coisas para imitar, um indivíduo podia ficar louco."

Ao aproximar-me do fim dos livros da Patricia Highsmith, penso que qualquer leitor apaixonado pelo género mistério devia ter vergonha, se ainda não conhece a autora. Por outro lado, esperam-lhe grandes estranhos, maravilhosos e assustadores livros! Ninguém escreve como Patricia Highsmith e as suas personagens são as mais estranhas, miseráveis e perturbadas. São as personagens mais reais que alguma vez conhecerão.

Philip Carter foi acusado e condenado a seis anos por um crime que não cometeu. Após o tempo na prisão, caracterizado por alguns momentos de violência, o nosso anti-herói de pouca sorte volta para a sua família. Física e mentalmente danificado, viciado em morfina, vê a sua vida complicar-se, ao contrário do esperado.

"A Cela de Vidro" é um retrato vívido e convincente da vida numa prisão, onde os guardas fecham os olhos em troca de alguma coisa e onde os prisioneiros constroem reputações na hierarquia do poder. A segunda metade do livro, foca-se na vida como ex-condenado, onde a adaptação é exigida e a cicatriz da prisão sempre visível.

Numa sociedade que defende um conjunto de valores para separar o Bem do Mal, não há ou haverá lugar para uma segunda oportunidade, porque o prazer do julgamento do outro é muito superior à satisfação pessoal de saber que se está a agir com o coração.

"Já imaginaste estar sentado numa prisão a ler Emily Bronte? As coisas não são assim tão más, pois não?"

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### **notgettingenough says**

I begin this post with a warning to the many devoted Goldfinch fans who evidently put the latest Tartt magnum opus on a par with the Bible. You won't like this, not one little bit. You see, I put down The Goldfinch smack bang in the middle of it and picked up The Glass Cell, which I didn't stop reading until I finished it. 'OMG, How COULD you? The greatest book in the whole history of books ever and you did THAT????' I can hear them all, as I write. Well, I did, so there.

I needed to take something to an afternoon of film noir and the only goldfinch in existence which weighs two ton was not what I was going to take with me. For a start, what if it pooed in the cinema? That alone would weigh more than this petite offering from Highsmith.

Rest here:

<http://alittleteaalittlechat.wordpress...>

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### **Andy Weston says**

Highsmith's often disturbing story concerns Philip Carter, a 30 year old engineer, who, due to a combination of bad luck and foolishness, finds himself serving a lengthy prison sentence in the American south in the 1950s. The first half of the novel, with Carter incarcerated, is especially dark, with a strong undercurrent of the author's dissatisfaction with the state of the US prison system.

Though Carter returns to his wife and child after release, he is far from the naive and amicable man he was. As well as a harrowing condemnation of the effects of the prison system the story explores the destructive effects of suspicion and guilt.

It is a dark story with such strong imagery that it will linger long in the memory.

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