

Title: My Soul's Reflection in Other People's Eyes

I have witnessed hate
in the faces of racism
in the mouths of fear
in the hands of phobia
I have watched people
turn whole lives
into symbols
into threats
turn people into
something less than human
And I stand here a stranger to it
after fifty years of life
I have seen hate
all around
and still
it has never found a home in me
Maybe that is why
it feels so unreal
how easy some can trade
another person's humanity

for belonging
for certainty
protecting their insecurities
as fear dressed up as truth
I do not understand hate
but I have seen what it does
how it flattens a life
how it blinds
how it turns a person
small
Still
something in me refuses
empathy is not weakness
compassion is not blindness
to it all
this is something different
something unbroken
something that still feels
I have seen hate
all around
and still
it has never found a home in me

I do see

I see the wound beneath it

the fear beneath it

the insecurities they hide

the pain looking for somewhere

to place blame

I know what it is

to turn that against myself

I know what it is

to not want to try to change

I did not hate myself

but there were parts of me I didn't like

I could not accept

and I turned that discomfort and pain

into action

I met what was broken and was transformed

by going through it

In order to survive

I learned how to recognize pain

more truthfully

what I once fought inside

became part of what taught me

how to recognize pain in others
without meeting it
with fear, anger or disregard

What I once turned inward

I have seen others turn outward

I have seen my soul's reflection
in other people's eyes

I have witnessed hate

turn fear into armor

I have witnessed hate

turn their insecurities and self-doubt
into a need to place blame

I have witnessed hate

turn a wounded self

into a weapon

I have witnessed hate

turn their fragile certainty and internal pain
into cruelty dressed as truth

But empathy is not surrender

understanding is not forgiveness

compassion is not blindness

and I refuse the harm hate can do
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