



ERIN JENSEN

Otherworldly Stories

In "The Brew," a powerful story from Karen Joy Fowler's new collection, **BLACK GLASS** (Marian Wood/Holt, \$23), a woman stands in a hotel lobby staring at an aquarium. "Sometimes," she tells herself, "we can find a smaller world where we can live, inside the bigger world where we cannot." Other worlds, worlds within worlds, shifting realities — all these inform Fowler's highly imaginative short fiction. In the title story, a zombie terrorizes the United States in the form of Carry Nation, and this gigantic hatchet-wielding Amazon becomes the obsession of Patrick Harris, an undercover Federal drug agent. A Christ story involving a 15-year-old boy unfolds in 17th-century Japan in "Shimabara." "The Elizabeth Complex" assembles a composite life story from those of formidable figures like Lizzie Borden, Elizabeth Taylor and Elizabeth I. In "Duplicity," two American women are taken captive by noseless aliens in the Brazilian rain forest. And in "The View From Venus: A Case Study," Venusians analyze the romantic practices of college-age students in Berkeley in the late 1960's. More earthly but equally inventive narratives include "Contention," which describes a housewife's loneliness; "Go Back," in which a young girl discovers her father's infidelity; and "Letters From Home," an affecting meditation on what became of the narrator's boyfriend in Vietnam. There is much that is fantastical about Fowler's fiction, but also much that is rooted in a solid emotional reality; in fine-edged and discerning prose, she manages to re-create both life's extraordinary and its ordinary magic.

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