

Breaking Through the Pale  
Evelyn Klebert

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## Table of Contents

A GREY MOURNING .....	1
CONTACT.....	5
DANCING ON THE THRESHOLD .....	39
ISOLATION .....	52

*Before we are born, we are listeners.  
And as we grow, we learn to  
stop hearing.  
Then as we are older, we are  
disturbed by the silence.  
We are no longer comforted by the whispers  
of life.  
And finally,  
Before we leave this world, we lean  
hard against the pale.  
And find joy in what we had forgotten.*

E.K.

### Dedication

To my mother who taught me not to accept limitation  
And to my husband who re-made my world into  
A glorious place to be.

Breaking Through the Pale

# A GREY MOURNING

It was a grey morning in October and I walked alone through the foggy streets of New Orleans. Not a soul was around, besides my own of course. The brick cobbled street of the French Quarter that I meandered down was wet from condensation in the air. It wasn't the best section of town. When it was deserted, as in these early morning hours, it was a place where unwary travelers disappeared without a trace – never to be seen again, and sometimes sadly never missed. I knew all of this but I pushed on, not asking myself if I would be missed, because I knew the answer to that. At this moment I felt myself invincible, truly convinced that all of it didn't matter.

The fog was so thick in these early hours that I couldn't see very far ahead of me. Even the sound of the hard soles of my boots striking the pavement seemed to be muffled and absorbed by the fog. Eerily I walked onward almost in utter silence. And then in the distance, many yards ahead of me, I could almost make out a figure – a pair of legs casually draped off the edge of a staircase. The presence of another made me stop. I hadn't anticipated anything but isolation on my trek. But then I shook the traces of fear out of my head. What did it matter after all? I hadn't anticipated anything; I hadn't cared.

I began to walk again. As I got closer to the pair of legs, the rest of the form became discernable. It sat perched on the steps in front of one of the many old buildings on this street. I could see that its face rested on its curled fist and its gaze was turned in my direction, watching my approach. The hair was pulled back and the dark green coat loose around the frame, but

it was unmistakably a very young woman – still a child. I turned my face away from her, intending to walk right by her without even speaking. I had almost gotten past the staircase perch, when I heard her feet hitting the pavement. The sound startled me but I kept walking. And then her rapid footsteps caught up with me.

I turned to her and found her face upturned and smiling at mine with amusement. "What do you want?" I said with almost a perceptible growl in my voice.

She laughed, "We have an appointment. Don't you remember?"

I touched my face to try to rub away some of the ache that I felt in it. My chin was stubbly with the beginnings of a beard – one born of lack of care. "You must be mistaken. I made no appointment with anyone."

She tossed her short brown locks as if to brush my words aside. "No sir I am quite sure. I am never wrong about these things you know. Last night in a moment of fitful restlessness you called out to me. And here I am. I never ignore a cry for help."

I looked at the tiny girl beside me in the oversized green coat and thought perhaps that she was mad. The steps she took were light and rapid, and she bounced with the carefreeness of a child. It almost made me angry the joy she effused, just being. It was too familiar, too reminiscent of the boy that had once been. "Please leave now. I came here to be alone. I don't want anyone's help."

She looked up at me. Her blue eyes suddenly reflecting a deep pain, such as when a child is first brushed by the cruelty of the world. That look briefly cut through the iciness that had settled around my heart. "I'm sorry," I whispered under my breath. "I just don't think it's safe for you to be out here."

The pain in her eyes softened a bit and she smiled. "If it's not safe, why are you here?"

"Oh, I'm safe enough. There isn't much that anyone could do to me."

Again she shook her head reminding me of a very stubborn child. "You are wrong there. You think nothing can be taken. There is much in you that is valuable. It is not lost, only locked away in a safe place."

It was like something out of a nursery rhyme. Her words were nearly nonsensical. "What do you mean locked away? How could that be without me knowing it?"

The blue eyes got big. "Because they are precious things. They are gifts that you were given and they are hiding from you, because they are afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Afraid that in your despair you would unthinkingly destroy them, not really understanding what you did. And so they hide and wait for the day that you are kind to yourself again so they can come out."

I had picked up my pace as we walked, and I noticed she was almost skipping to keep up. We passed on the side of a park now. The morning mist hung especially heavy over its small pond. The blue eyes flitted over the scenery, the green trees and the black, wrought-iron benches, as though she was equally content to stay silent as to speak. With an uneasy restlessness that had made a home within me as of late, I broke the quiet, "How do you know these things? That is, if they are true."

Again she smiled at me indulgently, as if all the answers were blatantly obvious. "I am a mirror. Right now I am your mirror because you are unable to see for yourself. You are so blinded by the pain of the moment that you can't see clearly."

"And what is it I can't see?"

"That you are not nearly as hurt as you think. And that you haven't lost as much as you've given away."

I swallowed with difficulty; my throat was feeling very dry. Perhaps with fear, fear that the child might not be quite as nonsensical as I originally thought. I began to wonder if I was

*A Grey Mourning*

dreaming, and decided that it didn't much matter. I had become entranced by her optimism. There was plenty of time later to return to my conviction of hopelessness. "And what is it I've given away?"

She turned her rosy child-like face up to mine again. Smiling with a playful twinkle in her eyes, "What do you think? Me of course. You've given up me."

Her words stung me. What did that mean? That I'd given up her. And then in a soft wave of memory it flooded over me. Not her, but the child inside of me that was always my inspiration, always the spark of hope, of wonderment in life. I'd let it slip away, no in truth given it away freely as though it were unimportant.

And with these realizations, in that very moment, I felt a small place inside me open up, a place that let the light back into a darkened soul.

She was watching me. I believe seeing straight into my thoughts. And then the dazzling smile once again, "But I've come back now, so it's all right. You asked me to you know. We had an appointment."

I took her small hand in mine and we walked for a long time that morning along the cobbled streets of the French Quarter, sometimes talking, sometimes laughing. And I kept her safe until the fog finally began to lift.