

The Dark Side Of The Glass

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Sample file

This one is for Karen, my fellow Anglophile and world traveller, as she was there in that little run down pub in Bath where this story dropped into my head, and suffered gamely as I talked her through it.

This one is also for Paula Smith and Ensign Mary Sue, without whom I would not have been attracted to fan fiction, and would not have learned to come into my own as a writer.

Sample file

Chapter One

Concerning Rabbit Holes and All That

When Mary comes to, she is lying face down in the grass beside the road.

Her first conscious thought, beyond *Ow ow ow*, is *How long have I been lying here?* Followed closely by *Ouch* and *Am I really so unimportant that nobody has helped me?* and *Ouch* and *Where am I?* Followed again by *Ouch* as she tries to get her palms under her shoulders and push herself onto her knees.

Rain has pooled in her upturned left ear and her toes are frozen.

Everything aches. Her head throbs. Her knees and palms burn. Her left arm and left leg are bleeding from jagged gashes right above the joints that look way, way grosser than anything she's ever seen people sporting after a visit to the Makeup or Effects trailers. There's grit in the long cut of her arm, and when Mary flexes her fingers she can feel the sickening grind of grains of dust against her muscles. It feels disgusting, the way that frogs squashed by a little boy's shoe is disgusting, with a sort of oozing pop.

The Craft Services van that hit her is nowhere to be seen. The studio is gone, too, even though she was pretty sure she hadn't run that far. Something warm and salty stings her left eye.

She's on a street she doesn't recognize, at night, with streetlamps that only mostly work. They cast an amber glow over the glistening pavement, so perfectly moody that the scenery looks like something out of a cinematographer's wet dream. There's grass between the sidewalk and the road, and it's wet with a storm which must have passed over Mary while she was unconscious, if her wet hair and the rain that was in her ear are anything to go by. The air smells of...nothing.

Nothing at all. For reasons Mary can't fathom, it makes her heart beat faster, her shoulders ratchet up to her ears. It's unnatural.

The street is barren. It's a strangely harmonious mix of residential and store-fronts made out of the converted ground floors of houses, all dark and closed up for the night. There is, by some strange cosmic luck, or fate, or universal synergy, a phone booth less than a block away, on the corner. Mary hasn't seen a phone booth in years, and she's one of the few people who still uses them. She doesn't own a cellular phone. She never wanted to be distracted at work. She hates it when her coworkers tap away with their thumbs on their ridiculously tiny number pads instead of paying attention to who is going in and out of the studio gate, like they're being paid to do.

It takes Mary a few minutes to get upright. She is reminded unpleasantly of a wounded gazelle on the Serengeti: weak and tottering, but too afraid of attracting the wrong attention to bleat for help.

Her head throbs again, and then a very stupid realization bubbles up to the surface of her muzzy brain. She is alone. Totally alone. There is no one on the street. There doesn't even seem to be anyone in the houses. The whole place just feels *empty*. The Craft Services van driver, her boss, her coworkers have all just *abandoned her*, left her for dead on the side of the road. Nobody came after her. Nobody came out of a building. Nobody even stopped to make sure she was *alive*.

That says a lot more about how they think of her than horrible Mr. Geary's horrible insults about her not-actually-horrible scripts. *The ungrateful...jerky jerks!* Mary thinks, clutching at the gash in her arm. She used to have respect for Mark Geary, showrunner, creator of the characters she has enshrined in her heart, executive producer and gentleman in all the press. But not anymore. He is an asshole. The crew are all assholes. Even the stars are assholes.

Mary has given *City By Night* two goddamned years of her life. She just wants the show to love her *back*. Is that so very much to ask?

Apparently, it is.

Anger fuels her enough to get her over to the phone booth, helps her exchange pain for momentum. Clutching at the scarred metal frame of the door to stay upright, she stares in stupid incomprehension at the coin slot for a moment. Unthinkingly, she dips her left hand into her empty pocket, which is its own sort of special agony. She nearly cries when she discovers that she has no quarters. It takes her a few more fuzzy, swimming moments to realize she can probably make emergency calls for free. Hopeful, she fumbles up the handset and dials zero. The operator comes on, female and far too perky for Mary's dark frame of mind, asking what Mary needs or where she would like to be connected.

"I need help," Mary says into the receiver. She can practically hear the operator frowning, because, *duh*, why else would she be talking to one? "I was...I think I was hit by a car. A van. Whatever."

"Holy sugar!" the operator says, all professionalism thrown out the window. Mary wonders if the operator calls her husband *punkin*. "Stay where you are, Ma'am. We're tracing the call. An ambulance is on the way."

Mary winces; she's too young to be called "ma'am", and it's another dig at her self-esteem that she really does not need today. It's pretty thoroughly dug already.

"Thanks," Mary says, and lets the handset clatter out of her grip, relieved because it was pressing into the road burn on the heel of her hand. She slumps down the side of the phone booth to wait. She folds bruised elbows over her bruised knees and rests her head back against the Plexiglass and tries to stay awake. She's read that you're not supposed to go to sleep if you've hit your head, and she thinks getting smacked in the skull with a Craft Services van probably counts. The blunt object to end all blunt objects. The cord for the phone isn't long enough to reach all the way down to her head, so she just lets it dangle, detachedly amused by the way the operator's voice is squawking out at her. She's pretty sure that she's probably in shock. She's also pretty sure that the fact she's in shock isn't supposed to be funny, but she realizes belatedly she's giggling all the same.