

Before you begin, you should know:

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*The OC is cast as Dame Judi Dench. She's not actually a Mary Sue. Wish she was =)
The cat's name is an inside joke between me and *my* cat.
This is one of the most difficult things I ever wrangled with while it fought me all the way.
Betaed with astounding courage under fire by athens7.*

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Picture credits:

snapshots from the TV show

<http://www.crystalhealingtools.com/blog/>

<http://volcano.oregonstate.edu/obsidian>

<http://www.spectrumwellbeing.co.uk/acatalog/tumblestonesntoq.html>

Alexander Jerry at http://www.allposters.com/-sp/City-Lights-at-Night-Blur-Yogyakarta-Indonesia-Posters_i2504355_.htm

Landon's photos at <http://www.flomphotography.com/Landon/>

Quintopics at <http://zach-quinto.com/>

Ben Fry at <http://benfry.com/writing/archives/date/2008/04>

<http://www.15acresinkent.com/page1.html>.

Thank you!

Here we go...

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February 6th, 2011

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Lessons for Gabriel Gray

*Night time has the strangest flavor
space to breathe it, time to savor
all that night air has to lend me
till the morning makes me angry...*

(JAMIE WOON, "Night air")

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In the beginning

In the beginning, what is known is very little.

A shadow. Somebody's shadow, observing. Stalking. Avoiding the light.

If anybody would put mind to detecting whose shadow it is, they would be surprised.

The body whose shape casts the shadow is so commonplace.

In the year 1820, William Blake painted the ghost of a flea. At the time of the Cold War, Gahan Wilson drew Khrushchev's shadow as a huge deadly blood-dripping machine.

Gabriel Gray is a commonplace man.

But his shadow is Sylar.

Sylar hunts. He explores, and he feeds.

When he is finally spotted, he becomes the prey.

Chased, ambushed, wounded.

A katana through his chest. Arrows pinning him to a wall. Shot, knifed, clubbed to death. Buried alive.

Captured, a snare around his neck like a stray dog.

Drugged. Vivisected. Kept alive to more pain.

He learns. What makes the world tick. How to survive.

How to defend himself, and how to attack.

He is a good student. What he is taught, he learns fast.

In the beginning, he was a hunter.

A cougar loves its prey.

From what others do to him, he learns to be a warrior instead.

A warrior hates his enemy.



What is known in the beginning, is fear begetting hate.

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The stalking

It starts with a shadow at night; but whatever the lighting, she doesn't seem able to leave it behind.

A glimpse at the corner of her eye. A blacker, thicker darkness next to the old elm tree. A quick something, moving on the pavement, on the opposite side of the road. The outline of a baseball cap, drawn for half a second on the garage wall by the lights of her car as she goes round the curve.

Then the whispers have come.

She never catches the words. There are words, and perhaps tunes hummed softly. A few bars, never enough to recognize them, then silence. Darkness.

It only happens at night, in the dark, and even then, it doesn't happen all the time. For a week or ten days the shadow will disappear, the tunes will fall silent, and she will almost believe it was a dream.

Almost.

Because at some point she begins finding traces in daylight.

A cigarette butt on her porch. One broken rose on her *Beauté Inconstante* bush. Her newspaper, refolded. One morning, a thin red string tied around her bottle of milk. She sighs. She waits.

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The first move

It is a rainy evening when he finally makes his move. She is out. He steps quietly on the porch, touches his fingers to the door, sliding them down to the latch. He hopes for a hard-to-crack lock, a bit of a challenge (things have been too easy, for too long), but the door is unlocked. Disconcerted, he enters, closing it quietly behind himself.

He knows already all that he needs to know about the inside of the house. She never closes the shutters, and seldom the curtains. He has been watching the old woman for weeks, biding his time, leaving around evidence enough for her to be aware of him, and allow him to gauge her reactions, but never enough for positive proof of his stalking. He feels ready now. He thinks he knows enough.

He doesn't care for the living room with the two comfortable armchairs, the polished olive-wood coffee table and the tall library filled with DVDs, nor for the large kitchen where a row of teapots lines up on the mantelpiece. He walks up straight to the bedroom.

He stops on the doorstep: the house is not empty after all. A large tabby-and-white tomcat is sleeping, curled on the fake fur bedcover.

He wakes up, stares at the newcomer in suspicion with curiously spotted eyes, then slinks down and under the bed.

He carefully dusts the back of his trousers, then sits on the edge of the bed, elbows on thighs, chin on joined hands, and waits.

After a while, the cat peers up from under the bed, sniffs from a distance. *Predator*, his nose is telling him. *On a hunt. Not hunting me. Large, warm.* The cat carefully jumps on the bed, curls up at the man's back, his spine pressing gently, and falls asleep again.



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Of arrowheads and glass

There is a volcano in Mexico.

Down one slope, a flow of black obsidian, scalpel-sharp.

Down the other, clear glass, like smooth green ice.

They say obsidian gives insight into problems, stabilizes, chastises.

Obsidian is not as hard as it may seem, but it breaks

into conchoidal shards thirsting for blood.

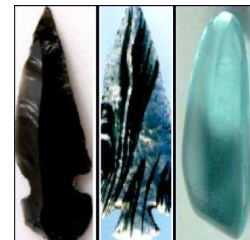
The blackness of black obsidian traps the sight

in the magnetic loop of haematite, until

a thin blue ray of light pierces the darkness

breaking it in long ribbons along the flow lines,

and turns the blade of winter into a drop of spring rain.



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An invitation to dinner

It is late evening when the click of the door is heard. The cat wakes up, uncurls, stretches himself with a yawn, and trots off to greet his human.

Muffled words come from the hall, then the kitchen, as a light is switched on and a tin of cat food is opened to soft purring.

The chink of a pan on the sink's edge, water running from the faucet. The hushed hiss of the gas burner starting.

"Won't you come and sit here? I'm fixing pumpkin dumplings." The woman's voice is clear and calm and obviously directed at someone else than the cat.

For the second time this evening, the man is surprised. His talents make him invisible for all practical purposes, and he's certain not to have slipped in his usual careful handling of his presence in the house. His curiosity is piqued. He stands up silently and pads over to the kitchen, stopping just on the far side of the doorstep. In the dark.

"Oh, good, there you are," the woman goes on without turning to look. "Choose your seat. It will be ready in a few minutes."

He waits for a moment longer, but still she doesn't turn, so he steps in and sits at the table in the middle of the room, right at her back and between her and the door. Safe.

"How do you know me?" he asks in a low, carefully neutral voice.

"I don't." She's busy with mortar and pestle, and the sweet, intense scent of nutmeg and cinnamon wafts through to him. "I have been feeling your presence since late October, like a pulsing of information reaching me. Like a sort of pressure-release, oscillating mechanism. Waves, pendulums, balance wheels... circling around me and telling me things about yourself. I don't know who you are, or what you want from me. I only know how you feel. Something that has to do with complex rhythms, and darkness."



It is darkness she feels coming from him now, pressing along her spine, although the lights are on. The cat doesn't seem to mind as he finishes his dinner and retires on top of the cupboard to wash himself clean.

"You will stay for dinner, will you? I believe you're hungry. We can talk later."

"Yes," he answers without thinking.

"Good. Would you mind uncorking the wine? In the fridge," she makes a gesture, and turns the other way to pick the grater.

"You'll find the corkscrew in the table's

drawer. And please pass me the butter."

It is like a sort of a dance between them, every move measured to avoid their eyes meeting.

Only his hand enters her peripheral vision as he pushes the cool brick of butter toward her across the pink marble surface of the counter. His relief at her restraint coming in waves.

The bottle of Gewuerztraminer opens with a pop.

"Glasses in the dresser... take the stemmed ones," she directs as she turns the melting butter and adds the crushed spices.

The cat has fallen asleep on his high perch, and snores lightly.

Soon two dishes are filled and ready, the hot dumplings covered in grated, salted sheep's cheese.

"I'm going to turn around now and serve you dinner. It's ok, I don't bite."

She turns, she is smiling with humorous gray-green eyes, and he can't understand. She should be afraid, not he. But what is really happening is a reverse sort of reality, and in this reality, she is right: he is the one who's scared.

"Why are you giving me dinner?"

"Why not? Never met anyone nice before?"

"Uhm... no."

"What a shame. Come on, eat. But first pour me some wine."

::

What becomes known

How little, or how much, becomes known during a dinner eaten in silence?

Eating together is the oldest form of peace among humans. The senses take the other in, charting the ways of the body in the most basic endeavor of taking sustenance. There is an intimacy to being seen eating, that escapes words.

"Sitting at a table, conversing with death", as the saying goes. The death of plants and animals becoming life for those who feed, and again death as waste builds up and cells die.

He eats, and she watches. Looking at his hands, still avoiding his face, concentrating instead on listening both with her outward and inward ears.

She hears the tender, puzzled disillusionment of wanting to be perfect, because the universe doesn't deserve any less, but it doesn't happen, nothing ever is quite right, and there's no way to make it perfect, nor to mend what went wrong. Resignation like an unwilling, soft moan of pain.

The muted hiss of acceptance that the ways of the world mean torturous death for him whenever he is found. She listens to fear echoing into anger, never surrendering freedom of mind and will. Vibrant determination to exact revenge of the same kind. Growling rebellion against whatever makes the world work this way.

He looks at the old woman, deploying all his senses, and sees a quiet deeper than the quiet of watches. A soft attention, missing nothing, accepting all. Even his very nature, which the world calls evil. A lifetime of watching, of caring, of not judging.

He feels himself leaning out from the hard, cold, forbidding darkness in which he is used to find shelter, toward the different, warm, welcoming darkness of her acceptance. He wonders whether it is safe to allow himself to let go, at the very moment when he does.

He lets go, with a sigh.

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This is a story

This is a story nocturnal.

This is a story of city lights in bright orange,

and red and white and blue,

a story of darkness in by-ways

and loneliness on a wet pavement.

This story tells of the cold of an autumn evening when one is walking on the street going nowhere while yellow light glows from the windows of warm rooms where people sit around a table.

This is the story of the rat who didn't make it back to its hole

of the dog who hasn't a home to trot back to

the story of the cat and the cat-flap

and of the starling found dead in the chill of morning.



::

After-dinner philosophy

"Allow me to tell you something," she says. "Allow me to touch you."

Being touched is being hurt. He tenses back on the chair, but she doesn't press forward. She waits. Until he passes both hands through his hair, slaps the left on the table, plants the other elbow, raises the right hand flat in front of her. Accepting contact but ready to push back. She mimicks his gesture, firmly presses her smaller left palm to his, and closes her eyes.

She feels dry smooth skin, clean-cut lines across the palm. Strong fingers, taut with tension now but sensitive, gentle.

"You want to be seen," she whispers. "You want the same attention you are the first to give.

The attention of a child. There is no attention like that of a child, for whom survival depends on knowing how to read the adults. You watch-- you watch watches. You pay attention to



delicate, complex, broken things that have been thrown away, which your mind, your eyes and your hands make alive again. But you feel invisible. Few look, and nobody sees. So you don't know who you are."
"How do you know? Is this your power?" He stares, eyes dark with hunger... and alarm.
"Don't be afraid, I can't read thoughts. I feel perceptions and emotions. Nothing that has words. I add them on, and a lousy translator I am most of the time."

Leaving his, she slowly touches her hands to his brow, his face, slides them across the cheeks, the ears, stroking her dried-up fingers through his hair, until he closes his eyes and hangs his head back in pleasure.

"I know you are born to fix things, those things whose beauty no one else can see. I know you can look inside them and know what makes them tick, how they can work to the perfection of their being, and that such perfection is something to reach for, because it can be and so it must be."

She covers his hands with hers on the cold flat marble surface of the table.

"I see how your father had you cutting open your pet rabbit to show you the inner organs. I see you faking interest in how to kill it, so as to disguise your wish to end its pain. I see how your father made you pay for your 'inability to hold off gratification', as he said. How relieved you were when your uncle-father taught you how to mend watches instead. Your shock that his wife let his pendulum clock to stay broken and mute. But who will ever mend you, son?"

"I am not your son! You don't even know me!" he retorts, eyes narrowed in anger.

She doesn't flinch.

"No, you aren't, and I don't. But everybody is somebody's son or daughter, for better or for worse. I feel you got the worse part, while I got the better. I wish to try and make it even, if I can. Because life can be cruel, and unfair, and the only way the living have to try and set things right is weaving stories. If I allow you to tell me my story, will you allow me to go on telling yours in turn?"

::



Night sings

The night is growing up outside.
The passing cars are fewer,
red back lights turning corners and disappearing
into the black of garages.
Children are tucked into bed,
some with a stuffed toy, some with a bedtime story,
some with their fear.

Dreams whisper in silent rooms,
timber creaks, a woodworm clicks
eating its way through the wardrobe door.
The burner turns on with a whoosh
and a gurgle of water through the heaters.
Outside, it starts to rain.
The minds of men tick on.

::

Her story

"What do you think I can tell you about yourself that you don't already know?" he snorts.
"You have powers, don't you? I feel them bubbling up in you like water on the boil. Surely some of them can help. You can touch me if you want. Or look at me. Touch my things. Ask the cat. Make yourself comfortable," she smiles, and leans back in the chair.
He stares at her, biting his lower lip. A long time passes in silence, only broken by their breathing and the kitchen clock ticking on the wall. He begins to tap his forefinger on the table in time, then rubs the pad on his thumb. She raises her eyebrows, he stops, blushing a little.
"You do nothing. You allow things to happen, and are witness," he blurts out.
He closes his eyes for a moment, and when he opens them again, they are both darker and brighter.
"You don't care for mankind as such. You don't care a damn for family, country, god. You care for life. There was someone and you lost him-- no, her. The wound hasn't healed."
His voice becomes more and more sure as he talks.
"Since then, you don't attack, but you defend. Rather like a sheepdog," he sounds surprised.
"If you don't allow yourself to catch those sheep, much less any ratty wolf that may come by, isn't it so? You would even defend me. You want to defend me from the wolves. Although you know perfectly well I am a wolf myself."
"See? it works," she says. "Anything else?"
"You have almost finished... whatever it is that you've been doing. Not quite as you would have wanted it, but more or less the best you could do." he looks up, perplexed. "What is this that I feel, an affection for things unraveling...? I have never found anything like that. People like things that grow or are built. More of everything, money, power, popularity. You like things going the opposite way just as much, at the same time as you love living things. And this has also something to do with me... What?"

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How to talk to monsters

Talking with you is like riding bareback
on a big-boned flying dragon with great wings.
It is delicate business. I can lean
a little to the right or left, and you may follow,
but if you don't, if I push out my balance
further than you are ready to accept,
then you slip out from under me. I fall,
and you may turn on me and devour me alive.
Even so, our conversation
of light touches and soft suggestions
is something we both want.
There is a lesson somewhere
that we both have to learn.

::



His story

He is of darkness. He's sitting here, in my kitchen, under the soft yellow light. I can see thoughts and emotions pass across his face like clouds across a landscape. His eyes go round when he's afraid, long when he's angry, clear and completely serene when he's focused on something. He's completely visible. But he's in darkness, dragged after him wherever he goes, wrapping itself around his back, his shoulders, throwing a shadow on his brow. Yet he is



curious of the light. I can see he wants to be bathed in light, and at the same time the darkness keeps the light at a distance. I see particles of energy coalesce around his silhouette, trying to reach him, and fail, and form a sort of halo surrounding his tighter halo of darkness.

I want to try coaxing him out of the black cold void and into the world of the living.

Will my words be enough?

"Your story must be told by night. It is a story of a dark room and a single spotlight on a workbench. You sit at the workbench, mending watches. You open them up and see

how they work; you open your own mind up and try to see who you are."

My voice is taking a deeper tone, like it is not me anymore who's talking. There's a shift in my vision, so subtle that I don't catch it at once. I was on the outside, looking at him and talking about him, and now I find that I am on the inside and talk about myself.

"I feel like I'm the only one to care in the whole universe."

I close my eyes, meeting the darkness within, twin of the darkness without. My breath gets shorter as more words come.

"Then things change. By chance or by fate, being seen. I am seen and I blossom in the light of another's sight, but then I am discarded, like a broken watch. And who will ever mend me? I was forgotten in a drawer. I was taken out, wound up, tried for a day, found lagging, thrown away as rubbish. I was looked at, and still I was not seen. I have a shape which doesn't fit the pattern of others' expectations. I found this makes me a monster in their eyes. My own mother looked at me like that. I didn't fit her image of me, and when she finally looked and saw who I was, there was disgust and shock on her face. She looked at me like roadkill."

There is pain, heavy and cold in the middle of my chest. Am I, is he carrying this weight into the darkness? I can't. I can't. I fight to surface, I return to myself. I open my eyes. I keep talking.

"You want attention, but you also want to trust those who see you. And you have suffered enough to know you can't. They all want something from you, something which has nothing to do with who you are, and everything with who they are. Sold. Captured. Used. Hurt. Killed. You are a mirror of what others did to you. The so-called good guys. So you search for witnesses of you, and once you find them, you kill them. You learn fast."

His breathing is a little faster. His eyes don't leave mine.

"I know how much you miss working on watches. I can see the peace on your face as you repair them."

::

Seen from above

Seen from above, the city is a cancer of lights infiltrating their way through the black of the landscape. So many lights, but they only make for deeper darkness around street corners, behind cut hedges.

Inside torn hearts.

Buildings like hives or warrens
raise walls of concrete where trees used to stand,
until they will crumble again
and new trees will grow
through blacktop instead of lamp-posts.
Colder, the stars look down



among thin shreds of clouds
with eyes which died millions of years ago.

::



Heart of darkness

She talks of peace, but she's in pain.
I can see her pain and for some reason it is different from all the pain I saw before. Much of that inflicted by me. She has been speaking in the first person for a while, and it was as though my vision doubled, and I was looking at myself. Feeling in hers a pain of my own. For as long as I remember, there has been a barrier between myself and pain. A wall of glass, like in the cells at Primotech. Keeping the danger in. I am used to

looking in, safe in the corridor. Curious, uninvolved.

Now the words of this old woman are tracing thin fault lines in the glass, and memories seep through.

That first man, I killed on impulse. He didn't want his power. It scared him. He was afraid of himself. But I, I wanted it and I was not afraid.

I was such an optimist. I believed that life, mutation after mutation after mutation, was striving for perfection. But I have found out that if the universe is striving, it is a desperate, random struggle against entropy. I have not been able to discover a weapon against entropy.

She talks of peace, then she falls silent.

I can't see her in all this light.

Since I was small, I have always been able to see well in darkness. Now I can't see her. I only see innumerable points of light, coalescing like a swarm of bees around her shape. Sitting at this table in a warm kitchen after dinner, with a cat purring half-asleep on top of the cupboard.

I want.

For a lifetime, I have wanted, and I believed I could never have. Then I found that I could, so I take what I want. I gather scattered powers, trying to meld them into completeness.

Why me?

Because no one else seems to care.

I do.

There is so much waste, so much dispersion. Lack of consciousness of what can be, and therefore must be. Time is running out, the Kelvin radiation lapping away at the sandbank of life, thrown across the flow of energy rushing down to the ultimate cold.

I am afraid of that cold. That silence. That darkness.

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Blindness

Desire is flame, but can blind eyes see the flame?

A blind man reaches for the warmth, and burns his hands.

A blind man cannot light his own fire, so he learns to steal it.

A child was trained to be blind to his desire and the desire of others, trained to be mute and still in front of the desire and power of his father, living a half-life, a secret life, in silence.

Then he opens his eyes and looks.

Will he not reach out for the flame of desire?

Will he not burn down the house where he was captive?

Because the flame is hot, licking his heart to life.



He wants to be consumed.

::

Book of Revelations

While we were having dinner, he sat at a square angle from me. The place of the devil, tripping the unaware.

He didn't look up while he ate.

But now that we have been talking, he's turned halfway toward me, forming a trine. I feel the deep pull of the energies that his powers have set into motion. There are things that I want to say, that I believe can be important for him as they are for me. I don't know how to say them. I don't want to preach. I would like to wait for more clarity, but I know we both are feeling time is running out, while the night rolls down the cusp of the sky toward morning. So I go ahead and speak.

"You have been witness to the plans other people have for you-- but what about your plans, Gabriel?"

Hearing his name startles him. A blackness fills his eyes, but he keeps silent.

"You collect powers, but what do you want to do with them? It is a beautiful thing that you don't start on a campaign to take over the world, like a stereotypical mad scientist. Bless you, you are not a stereotype. But having is often a surrogate for doing. Like children at a fair, too many things-- and missing the sense of them, what they can do. Your mother, Gabriel, who collected snow globes to fill the emptiness of her abandoned life. A woman who never chose for herself. Who never did anything as a free choice. Who resigned to live vicariously through you. She had plans for you. Her son the President. What are your plans for yourself?"

::

No words for this

He wants to be not-scared of what they will do to him, again.

(He knows there is a reason why they do.

He would do the same, because like them he wants power, and power as he knows it, is hurting others.)

He doesn't want to become those whose powers he gathers.

He wants to become himself, whoever that may be.

(He researches his way through his life, something only one of the others has ever been willing to do).

He wants to learn. (It is a rare quality.)

He wants to choose from whom to learn.

(Not either of his fathers, nor his mother. Not science either, anymore).

He wants to find. What? Perhaps peace. Or a place where he fits.

Wounded, he hobbles on, darker than darkness, searching.

::

Agenda

"My plans... 'Nothing makes the gods laugh so hard as the plans of a human being' ".

"And 'life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans'. I'm not asking you about your general outlook on life. I'm asking you about what makes you get out of bed every day. You are not a normal watchmaker, Gabriel. You are an outstanding watchmaker. What a waste of a talent, turning into a killer."

"You don't understand. The feeling of complete control over unlimited power. The lashing out of pure energy with exacting precision. There is nothing like that."



"Must be a good sensation," she muses. "Like flying aerobatics. Or the surge into gallop at the start of a cross-country."

"I don't know how those feel. I know I'm hungry. I want to know, I want to act in power and perfection, and I want to avoid being stopped. I want to avoid being taken. But it happens. Often."

"I could understand it if you were following an either/or pattern. Either others are the victims, or you are. I could understand it if you simply didn't want to be the victim. Who would? But you are not so simple. There is a way you seem to have, of taking in whatever hurt they do to you. A way of yours of being at once the prey and the hunter, the knife and the wound, the bullet and the hole through your chest. If you are on a hunt after yourself, being caught is something you both fear and desire. I bet that you don't care for victims as such. You know that being a victim doesn't automatically make one any better than the killer. Tonight I have changed the screenplay. I open your options. You can be whatever you wish. And look, there are no victims. Not bad, Gabriel, for a first try."

"If I can be whoever I wish, and I have an infinity of time, then choosing to be nothing but good feels a bit limiting, don't you think?"

"Maybe. Not from my point of view. A lot depends on how you define 'good'. You know better than I do that there is no black-and-white separation. Human actions have different motivations and different outcomes. How do you judge, by intention or effect? What if the intent is good, and the effect is a disaster because it didn't occur to the guy that he should gather enough information before messing with someone's life? There are three reasons for an evil action. Revenge, which solves nothing and only adds pain to pain. Carelessness, or its worst version, self-righteousness. And evil openly done for its own sake. This one at least is honest."

She smiles.

"That's what you are, Gabriel. You are honest with yourself. You don't pose as being a good guy. But you still haven't told me what it is that you want. Why are you here tonight, after stalking me for what, two months? What do you want, Gabriel?"

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Of wanting and having

"Never content."

That's what they said.

The child imagined a toy, and he believed it must exist,
as perfect and magical as his mind saw it,
because children are born knowing there is more wonder in the world
than they can even imagine.

What he received at Christmas was something else.

The stuffed dog didn't talk, nor run with him after a ball.

They didn't tell him how matching wishes and reality

is the work of a lifetime,

polishing wish, building reality.

"Never content."

The soul keeps wanting more.

::

Love is a danger of a different kind

"I want to know what your power is. I know it is different from any other I have met. But I can't put my finger on what makes it different. What makes you special?"

"Special? I'm the very opposite of special. I'm just like anybody else, or how could I ever know what grief feels like? Loss, betrayal... I remember what I experienced myself, I imagine what I never went through. Flesh and blood are the same for everybody. We are all mutants, even clones. The chicken in yesterday's sandwich had powers. Forget about distance and diversity. Think of entropy and feel. My power's name is compassion. Empathy only affects knowledge;



but compassion affects will. It makes you want to do something to make another's life better, even just for one day. One life at a time."

The cat wakes up, stretches, yawns, carefully jumps down from the cupboard onto the windowsill, then the floor, up one empty chair, and on the tabletop. Purring, it goes up to the woman who scratches his chin and his forehead, stroking between the eyes. The cat rubs his pink nose in the hollow of her hand, giving tiny licks with the tip of his tongue.

She goes on speaking, and now her voice is tired.

"Catch is, on the long run compassion doesn't change a fucking damn. It's frustrating. I am an old woman. I have done what I had to do and also most of what I wanted. You give me a chance to leave my power to someone, so that it won't be lost. I couldn't ask for more. I'm tired of living and tired of watching others suffer, so there's probably not much you can scare me with. When everything has already happened, there's nothing left to be scared about."

"What about the cat?"

She smiles at the green-yellow eyes blinking at her affectionately.

"The Unbreakable is a two-timer. He belongs to my neighbor, and they love each other, but he also likes to visit with me. You can have my power if you want it. But your life will never be the same. You will never willingly harm anybody ever again, because you will have the feeling in you of what it means, living the rest of your life knowing you could have done something to lessen the pain and you let the chance pass. You will know that nobody, whatever they may have done, deserves any more pain than the simple fact of being alive entails. Not even those who hunt you. Not even you."

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To regain flight

Sylar. A broken wrist-watch.

Sylar. A skylark without the "k"s.

Something damaged, something missing.

Time caught and stopped. A bird with clipped wings.

"Time flies" they say. What if time can also fight?

It's late. The night is getting old.

A deeper chill wraps in thin haze the houses, the parked cars.

An owl grabs one last mouse. One ultrasonic shriek.

Orion is plunging unseen down to the horizon.

Someone wakes from a bad dream, looks at the ceiling, trying to remember. Something about a hotel,

teacups flying, black magic.

She turns around and falls asleep again.

::

Barter

"Is this love?"

"Yes. And no. Yes, I love you. But no, I'm not in love with you. You know, people don't need to be out of their mind in love with you in order to love you, if you just allow them to. You are lovable, Gabriel. Any sane person can see that. I won't lie to you. I'm trying to give God a lesson, and I am asking you to help me. So this rather comes under the heading of selfish manipulation, if you ask me. It's up to you. Stay and feed your hunger, or go and never turn around."

"You know I won't go."

"Then take it."

"I can't."

"You can. You are not your father. You are not your mother either. Neither had compassion. You will have it if you take it from me. You will get back your wings, Gabriel."

"I won't."



"You want and you will, because you're angry. At those pillars of family and society, who call you a sociopath and shoot on sight. Don't you want to show them?"

"No," he hisses.

"Want to show them?"

"No!" he shouts.

"Want to show them and God omnipotent what you can do that they can't?"

"YEAH!" he roars.

"Then go ahead and kill me. Please."

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In the beginning

08:03:45 AM.

A door opens onto the porch of a neat little house in the suburbs of (...). A cat, a big tabby-and-white tom, trots out with a chirp and crawls under the hedge to the next garden.

A man follows.

He carefully closes the door behind himself, goes down the four steps, stands on the path, looks up. It's a beautiful cold day. A breeze is blowing. He leans down smoothly to pick up a snail from the concrete tiles, drops it down on a bunch of leaves at the side, goes on his way. His step is light. Yes, it's a beautiful day.

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*And he who was lost like a dog
will be found like a human being
and brought back home again.*

(YEHUDA AMICHAI, "Near the Wall of a House")

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