



Answers

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ANSWERS



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ANSWERS



The city streets were crawling with people. She wove among them, through this brisk young night with its brisk young things, its hustling loiters and energised youths. The air about her alive with wide-eyed laughter and drunken slurs and she pulled her tailored greatcoat tighter against it, shoved hands deeper into its pockets. Impossible not to be conscious of them as they came together, these creatures, these people, sparking off one another, social, communal. As always, they were just too hard to ignore.

She tried anyway, stepping over broken pavement, a rain-wet grey crumbling beneath her feet. Past street stalls and traders, boarded-up shops and pink puddles of reflected neon. One guy slipped out from behind a stall, grabbing her arm and insisting she stop and buy, his breath stale with beer and hashish, his eyes alight with something harder. She turned her head, let her hand slip out of its pocket and slide into his own. Skin on skin. It wasn't a sale he wanted, the flash of it was behind his eyes, the sour rush of his desire permeating his every pore. He wanted her pinned up against the dirty brick wall of the next alley, unwilling if that's what it took, and his determination to have her so scented rust up her nose. She forgot sometimes they were like that.

She raised her hand to cup his chin, let his name form as a whisper in the air between their lips, and he turned away with sudden, sharp reluctance to pursue her custom. If asked, he would not be able to describe her face; eventually he would not remember she had passed at all. She chose not to hurt him. What would be the point? He was irrelevant. He was just like all the others on these crowded night time streets.

At the next corner she raised her head and looked into the middle distance at nothing in particular. A dark face rising from behind darker hair, she listened momentarily, before turning right and continuing on. If she didn't pick up her pace, she was going to lose the trail.

These people around her were irrelevant. He, however, was not. And He was not so far ahead now, she was sure of it.

This was closer than she had been in a long time. Her eyes scanned side to side, reading the signs etched onto the world. The woman in neat pin-stripe on the corner, mouth gaping open-shut, open-shut, no sound escaping. The teenager out grifting, staggering now against a doorway and hunching double while vomiting bloody chunks onto cold and uncaring concrete. It was in the exhaled air, in the scent of Him clinging to the ground. It was in the minds of these few who had seen, wide, white eyes and the image of Him lingering in their heads. The old man against the wall clutching his bottle clad in brown paper, shivering so hard he was unable to take a single, burning gulp.

It was in the word they repeated to themselves, muttering, mumbling, begging.

Evil.

She hated them for that. For believing such things even mattered.

She headed for the main street, where the crowds were thickest. Her low heels clicking a regular rhythm, skirting brown paper and green smashed glass; the accumulated grime of the inner city, the detritus of so many million lives. She waded through it as she had always waded through it, through the centuries, down the ages, by stepping over the fallen and discarded and keeping her focus straight. He would be where the people were, He was drawn to them, He liked them. So she let herself be led by drifting sounds. Music too loud from an over-crowded dance club where neglected fire escapes would one day soon prove fatal. Some pimp in an adjacent alley selling cheap, laced dope that would kill his client's girlfriend. The laughter of a drunken reveller, liver already failing.

A collection of young men loitering awkward on a street corner, a few feet from an intense conversation between two girls. One girl, drunk, blonde, crouched on a cold grey step leading up to a barred building, head in her hands. Smudged black rings of tear-destroyed makeup marked her face. Her friend, taller, brunette, lethally thin, leant over her. Trying to find out what was wrong.

He was wrong.

He had passed here.

He had let the girl see more than she wanted to.

'Evil.'

The blonde sobbed. The brunette comforted. The boys waited uncomfortably, not understanding that which went on between women.

She paused her measured steps to watch, then moved towards the girls.

The blonde looked up, black-rimmed eyes forced wide. 'You...You're...'

'Hey!' the brunette tried to intervene.

She raised one hand, a firm, non-aggressive movement, to clutch about the brunette's throat. The girl fell back against the wall, hands reaching to her mouth, gasping, silent and so terrified she would never speak again.

She reached to the blonde and hauled her upwards, looking into her eyes.

'Sss... sss... ssssttop him. Stop him. H... h... he's e... e... e... evil.'

The blonde once had a childhood stammer, dealt with by years of speech therapy and expensive specialist attention paid for by wealthy parents and gone for near two decades. It returned now in a moment and would remain the rest of her life.

'He is not evil.'

She did not mean to engage with the foolish young people. But that word, it provoked her every time. The label, the definition of something they could not understand. What did it even mean? They gave it no detail, no evidence, just flung it out, a theological concept, a philosophical proposition. An abstract without reality. Yet it seemed to mean so much to them.

The boys came to defend their girlfriends. She found herself surrounded by four twenty-something young men, full of aggression and puffed-out chests. She turned, pushing one out of her way. He fell into the arms of his friend who would love him now the rest of his days. Another she span around until he had to crouch and clutch at the ground to keep the dizziness from overwhelming. He would not stand for a week, vertigo would plague him for life. The last, the biggest, stepped in front of her, all threatening muscle and spitting honour.

She looked up, through his eyes. She whispered something, a day, a date, a time, a place, not so far into the future, not so distant from here. The date of his death, the knowledge of how he would

die. She watched him stagger back from the sheer enormity of knowing, it weighing down his every muscle, every limb.

They were no longer in her way. And if perhaps she had allowed her dislike for their superficial labels to dictate her own reactions here, so be it.

She opposed Him. So by their own simplistic thinking, if He were evil, that must make her good.

She left them with that irony to contemplate and continued walking on.



SHE FIRST CAUGHT sight of His white, white hair, long around an equally pale face, as He stood outside some public bar. Leaning back and smiling, watching the crowd go past as if He were not a hunted thing. He was casual, relaxed as always. His obviousness worried her.

She faded back into the shadows of a condemned doorway. Perhaps it was the angle this vantage point afforded her, or maybe the crowd simply parted at the right moment, but when she looked again she saw He was not alone. Her first assumption was that it was some street girl. Thin, scantily clad. Tough and fragile both, looking for cash, if not pay in drugs and not usually His sort. That type were too distrusting, too cynical for His tastes. Not that He couldn't charm any of them if He had to, those who thought they'd seen it all and would never trust again, until He held out a hand and offered a smile. That smile of His could end wars. Or start them.

But her assumption did not play out. This was no street worker linking arms with Him, her clothes were too expensive, the jewellery weighing down her neck and fingers too fine. She was young, two

decades at most, and out of place in this part of the city. A rich girl out slumming it. Her laughter high pitched and nervous, she fluttered eyelids, blushed innocent when He whispered something dark. Young and romantic and illicitly attracted. And as always, writ large in the girl's thoughts, that label. *Evil*.

A terse breath escaped her lips, almost a cluck of the tongue. They were so quick to name, these people, wanting to define, to delineate, to tag. Yet all the while they remained blind to the real world evils surrounding them: a crumbling society abandoning its youth to the streets, its starving to the grave and filling its prisons to overflow. Did they not know real darkness was a mundane reality? A boring routine they never cared to consider while they so freely labelled others, then acted as fluttering moths eager to singe their wings?

She watched with pursed lips. The girl changed things. Or maybe she didn't, it was hard to tell. It could be some trap He was laying, the girl its bait. Or the giggling youth could be no more than a decoy, cover to buy Him time to get away. Maybe she meant nothing. Maybe everything. Impossible to know for sure.

So she held back itching fingers scratching to attack and watched as He stepped away from the wall, walking down the street with that enthralled young thing trailing in His wake. Now. Now was her chance, the best she was going to get. To calculate distance, impact, draw forth a tempest to confront and defeat, a fury that would crumble sky-scraping towers and crack streets in half. They would battle, of course. He would retaliate. But she held the advantage and she would win out. Finally. After all this time. She should. She could.

She waited. And when He disappeared from view into crowd at the end of the street, she pushed herself out of her doorway and followed at a safe distance.

He walked, it was all He did. So she did too, keeping a cool distance behind and too caught in the uncertainties to make a final call: launch attack or make an escape. Both seemed irrevocable and what if she was wrong? She could level the city to contain Him, but it would do no good if it played into His plans. Maybe that was just what He wanted and He'd taken the girl to tempt her to it, to raise her fury enough to rock a continent. Maybe. The what-ifs were too much and she'd fought too hard for the advantage here. She would not risk a mistake that turned the balance and made her the prey again.

He kept a steady pace, cross-sectioning the city. Around them the urban sprawl went on with its business, oblivious to that which moved through its belly. People laughed, fought, cried over that which could not matter. On one grey-black block where the lights were more patchy than most, pounding footsteps preceded three running youths, coming at them in a cloud of panic so tangy she grimaced to swallow it away. They by-passed Him without hesitation, though the girl hanging off his arm squealed. By the time they reached where she followed their momentum was a force unto itself, but she waved a hand and they veered around her without stopping. They carried a thunder with them, a guilt that dripped with the blood from their hands. It clung to their backs as they disappeared into the night, a weight they would never outrun.

She glanced down into the alley from which they had emerged, eyes picking out in the dead-dark space what few others would be able to see. A man lying alone, a slashing wound across his throat bleeding out onto the ground. His terror filled the air and for a moment she paused, opening her mouth to taste it, tart and unmitigated. Always such a tangible thing, the raw emotion of people, an ever-present force that seemed to matter even less than they did.

Sometimes she hated them for that more than anything. As if it were their fault she could see right through them.

She turned her back on the man dying alone in the rain and returned to her pursuit. Yet the distraction had thrown her, broadened her vision, and now she realised just where He had led them. A place of desolation with the scent of sea in the air. Salt lay its coat over everything and the slow, rhythmic push of waves could be heard forcing against some nearby shore. The wharves. He had brought them to the wharves.

Her stomach tightened. If this was where He'd hold up of late, no wonder she hadn't been able to find it. A network of warehouses and storage sheds built in better times, lit by street lamps sparse and broken. The buildings were mostly abandoned, businesses dying amid rising economic chaos only set to worsen. A creeping cancer due to spread to the city beyond like a kind of economic rust consuming all in its path. She paid it no heed. Such had happened before, such would happen again. Economies rose and fell. Empires rose and fell. The inevitability became mundane after millennia of repetition.

But here. He had brought them here. So close to the borders of land and sea, shifting territories with their constant movement against one another. Water, earth. Wet, dry. He stood beneath one of the few remaining street lights, a pool of dirty yellow spilling down from above, the girl hanging off his arm. Impossible to move in on Him here, such ill-defined places were dangerous, the definitions between them too blurred, indistinct. In border country, boundaries shifted, acting to define, to redefine. What was within. What was without. Any blow she attempted to land on Him in such a place could harm her in equal measure.

He leant back in that yellow light and looked up straight at her, all of a sudden, the grin on His face all too knowing. She did not re-

turn His expression, though for some time she did not look away. Understanding lay between them, thick in the air, as it always did. Dual awareness of the double-bind which stayed her hand, if His as well. There was some reason He was here, that He had brought the girl here, some answer she burned to know. Whatever it was, she would not learn it tonight.

She broke the gaze and turned away, aware of Him shifting to lead the girl into the warehouse behind them as she did. Drawing a long breath of rust and salt night air and knowing she would have to return in the morning. She did not expect Him to be here when she did.



WHEN SHE ENTERED the warehouse in the early hours of the next day, she knew immediately He was gone.

Shaking off the rain from her shoulders and hair, last night's cold splashes replaced by a light grey mist covering the city. She picked her way upwards to the third floor, not surprised to find His camp abandoned when she got there. Well, not quite abandoned. He might not have been there, but the girl still was.

The youth slept alone on the mattress in the far corner of the echoing space, used syringes smashed on the floor nearby, used condoms in the bin by the door. She frowned down at the debris; it must have been for the girl's benefit, for what use had He for that sort of thing? Elsewhere the warehouse was empty but for a fine layer of dirt. A space neglected, forgotten. He'd hidden His retreat well. He was everywhere here, in the air, on the walls, in the youth's sleeping head, but there was no trail leading away. All He'd left her with was the debris and the girl; poor clues with which to pick up the chase.

There was an old, frayed armchair across from the mattress. She sat in it and watched the youth struggle with sleep, tossing and turning and gasping. On occasion the girl's eyes would flicker. Probably why the drugs had been supplied; when she did awake, the girl would blame them for the stupor He had left her in. Not that He needed drugs to run holes through her mind, but He did like games, playing with these people who latched onto Him, always leaving them wondering.

Was He, or wasn't He?

'Evil,' the girl whispered, managing to roll over. She tried to sit up, reaching out to the cold space beside her on the mattress and finding herself alone. Fear pulsed out of her, a sudden rush of spice in the air. Her brain waking up.

And with each waking moment, the state of the girl's mind became increasingly obvious. Damn. It would be hours before her conscious brain recovered enough to draw anything from it. By then He would be so far away it would take her a year and a day just to find the trail again. All she could do now was walk out and take her chances picking up His trail cold.

She stood and turned to stalk towards the door. While the girl on the mattress twisted, sobbed, whispered some unintelligible plea.

'Help. Help me.'

A cracked voice, a harsh whisper. Something to ignore. Except by the exit she chanced a glance down and once more caught sight of the condoms in the bin.

A frown graced her features. She looked back at the youth on the mattress.

The girl's skin was slick with damp, the grubby off-white sheet sticking with sweat. A hand reaching out in need.

'Please...'

She looked through the girl's eyes. 'Shit.'

She strode fast back to the girl on the bed. Grabbing the flopping youth by the shoulders and hauling her up, staring into her head. The girl choked on the harsh mental intrusion, it hit her physically, as if some invisible object were being shoved down her throat and she gagged around it. Her head was still too clouded to get much, but her physical state was suddenly obvious.

The girl was pregnant.

Fuck.

That's why the condoms had been part of the charade, so the girl would think it was safe. As if that mattered to the likes of Him. But why? Was He planting a hook, an emotional anchor to drag up later? If so, why lead her here last night knowing she'd come back and find the girl? Was that part of His plan?

She let the girl drop, the youth drenched in the stink of her own desperation.

'What's your name?' she demanded.

'Eve... Evelyn,' came the girls' reply. 'He said he liked that name, he said...'

'He would.'

Large salt tears welled at the corners of Evelyn's eyes. Hurt radiated from her, but also a darker bitterness, not yet fully conscious. Anger. Hate. It had a strong taste, sour. A creeping darkness of blame. Beneath those tears, Evelyn blamed Him.

That didn't surprise. They always did look for someone else to be the bearer of their guilt. He had done nothing more than supply some drugs which would wear off soon and give the girl a night of illicit sex she had well consented to. It wasn't even like the girl knew she was pregnant, the worst she could blame Him for was skipping

out before dawn. And this was the evil they proscribed to Him? This was the grand malevolence they chose to define Him by?

'Evelyn, you have family?' She shook the girl's shoulder.

'Family...?'

The girl's voice wavered with tears into overflow, regret seeping out of her pores, oozing and muddy. Ah. Family were estranged, some long-standing rift surfacing raw and bloody in Evelyn's mind. Still it meant there was somewhere she could stash the girl until she figured out what His plans really were.

She grabbed the girl's hastily discarded clothes and began struggling to get them on her. The thin, sequined blouse, the short skirt, the high-heeled sandals. The task was all the more difficult thanks to Evelyn fighting against her, kicking out legs and arms in weak desperation.

'Stop it or I'll send you back under,' she warned, wondering if she shouldn't just do it anyway.

'His fault... He seduced me.'

'So?'

'I should never...'

'He can't do anything permanent to you,' she said, though she knew engaging in conversation was a mistake. 'Nothing you don't consent to. Nothing without your agreement.'

'He is evil.'

'No. You just want Him to be. You all just fucking want Him to be.' Her fingers tightened around the girl's arms. 'And He lets you. He thinks it's funny. He thinks it's understandable. He thinks it's only...' Her lips turned up in distaste. '*Human.*'

Evelyn's eyes pinned onto hers. 'You don't like him?'

She sat back, letting the girl flop onto the mattress still only half-dressed. *Like?* What had *like* to do with it? He liked people, but it

didn't stop Him using them with as little care as she did. It didn't stop Him using this girl.

'I oppose Him,' she corrected.

'Why?'

She started tugging the girl's blouse again, shoving the shoe on her other foot. She was perhaps rougher than necessary, but the girl should not ask questions about things she could not comprehend.

Why.

Why.

Why?

'Shut up,' she muttered. 'Just shut up and get dressed.'

'He's a devil,' Evelyn said, back to the same old mantra, faltering on the mattress but finally allowing her arms to be manoeuvred inside the dirty blouse. 'A demon.'

She ignored it. It had been a mistake to converse to begin with. People were irrelevant. They were there to be used as needed, picked up as weapons or distractions or traps, then discarded when no longer necessary. That was all. The rest of their babble meant nothing.

But in a flash of movement, Evelyn's eyes shot wide and she bolted upright. The girl grabbed her shoulders, gripping with stressed fingers, pulling her in, dragging her close. Her pupils were dilated. Her breath sour. There was hope as well as fear in her bloodshot, drug-ridden stare.

'You oppose him. You must be an angel. Are you an angel?'

For one furious heartbeat, all was still. Before she reached out and grabbed Evelyn by the hair, yanking her back so that Evelyn squealed with the sudden flush of pain. Pushing her forward again until they were eye-to-eye, less than an inch apart. She could taste all of Evelyn's blame and hate hitting out at her, all of her fear, radiating

and powerful. She breathed it in, sucked it inside. Swallowed it down in a cocktail of rage.

Then with calm deliberation, she leant forward and placed her lips on Evelyn's own.

She breathed out. All of the girl's swirling emotion, all her regret and despair. All of her useless, ridiculous hope. She breathed it back into Evelyn, forcing it into the girl, lips crushed together in a kind of kiss.

Evelyn sagged in her arms.

She pulled back only enough to whisper into the girl's throat: 'keep it.'

Evelyn tried to shake her head, as if she understood what this might mean.

'The child in you. Keep it.'

Her voice could not be denied, not when given the power of Evelyn's own desperation. The idea was already twisting down inside the girl and taking root, a seed in her brain.

Done. It was done.

Something, even if she wasn't sure what, was done.

She gave Evelyn a final shove and the girl fell back, unconscious before she hit the mattress. It would be morning before the girl could be dumped back onto family now, but she could not, would not, regret it.

His plans, whatever they were, would not be for Evelyn to carry the child to term. It was not possible, He alone could not leave so permanent a mark on the world. He could not create like that. But with her input as well, with the two of them contributing in equal share, they could affect something of the kind. They could create something, perhaps.

Now, between the two of them, something new would be born into the world.

And maybe then there might be some answers. Maybe then they might start to understand.

She stood in the neglected warehouse with the pregnant girl they had both conspired to damage at her feet and thought of demons and angels. Of like and dislike. Of good. Of evil. Of foolish dichotomies which meant nothing, explained nothing.

They were opposed. That was all. That was all there was.

Why?

'I don't know,' she said, only to herself. 'I just don't fucking know.'



IT WAS late at night and they were staying in a cheap motel.

Evelyn was asleep in the room next to hers, almost recovered. By day's end the girl had begun thinking straight and her parents would arrive by morning. She'd done the calling. It hadn't taken much of a twist to make them forget their anger, heal the rift in family relations. They would welcome their errant daughter back into the fold and it would be all big happy families again, at least for a while until their usual reality reasserted itself.

She did not tell them the girl was pregnant. Evelyn would find that out for herself soon enough.

He might try to get to Evelyn tonight, before she was back in her family's arms. She sat in bed listening for just such a thing, a light beside her she was oddly reluctant to switch off. Strange to find herself shy of letting the night in, a foolish fear of the dark. As if one lamp could change anything, as if fates were decided upon the

switch of an electrical current. The bulb burned low, creating shadows, and she sat with covers pulled to her waist, hands around her knees. Concentrating. Focusing. Sweating fingers clenched too tight. It was always like this when she was the one chased, when she had become the hunted one. Such was the way things were. They were opposed. Dangerous to one another. Always hunting, always running. One of them was always running.

She lay down and reached across to switch off the lamp.

She knew He was there, the moment the darkness came.

For long seconds she did not move. Fighting to exhale through tense muscles, not daring to shift an inch and listening with all she had. He was here. He wasn't going for Evelyn. He wasn't surprising with attack. He was simply here.

She let her eyes flicker open. He was standing in the darkest corner of the room, only His white hair giving Him away. Strands of it caught the moonlight from the window and when He saw she was looking right at Him, He shifted, slipping further into the silver patch of light. She could make out the shape of Him, the features of His face. His wide eyes, pale skin. They stared at one another. He was almost as frozen as she, her own fear reflected in His eyes. Each of them was the only being in all existence who could hurt the other, so was it all that surprising such fear was there?

He had not come here to battle, He had simply come. So she slipped one hand from beneath the bedclothes and held it out towards Him. It was enough. His first step was unsure, but after that He did not hesitate, stepping across to her. Across all the ages they had fought, moving in equal conflict. It was their purpose, their reason. They were opposed, they must battle. Such were the rules, she supposed, but if so she was ever conscious this must be considered breaking them. But what if it had been so long they were making up

the rules for themselves now? Either way, right or wrong, they'd been meeting like this for too many aeons to care.

He clasped her hand in His own, venturing a hesitant smile. A guilty smile, the smile of conspirators breaking the rules.

She smiled herself then, a very rare occurrence.



'YOU DID NOT TRY to stop Evelyn returning to her parents?'

They laid side by side in the hours before dawn, reluctant to lose time to sleep. They had barely spoken all night. After the sex and the time together, to realise you're lying naked next to your enemy and you quite like being there made words uncomfortable, hard to find.

Yet she found them now. She always did, after a while. Silence, often His preference, always seemed that bit harder to her.

'It is of no matter.' His voice was a soft drawl in the muted light. 'The girl was a game, nothing more.'

'You are lying.'

A wisp of a smile crossed His features, fleeting amusement bringing a flash of teeth, white like His skin, His hair.

'And You are cheating. Leave the battles until tomorrow, when we are enemies again.'

He was lying back in the bed, one hand resting on her hip. His eyes were half closed, but He was not sleeping. He never slept on nights like this; neither did she. Sometimes there was silence and they were comfortable within it. Sometimes they talked, if only of the long past. Never anything recent. To discuss something current cut too close, it reminded them they should not be here, not like they were.

So she was cheating, in a way. And like always, He tried to deflect the subject.

'She's pregnant,' she said.

He offered an uncaring shrug. 'It's not like she will keep the child. It needs both of us to ensure anything of permanence.'

'Yes. I told her to keep it. I made sure she would.'

He raised His eyebrows, betraying surprise. She tried not to notice. During the day when opposition dictated word and action, she was always looking for clues. Now she avoided them. She did not want to trick Him here. By guilty agreement, they had each long understood: when willingly laying with the enemy, it was important to be careful for the other. To stop them before they said too much. To not pay attention if they did.

'Why?' He asked.

'Why impregnate her to begin with?'

'I don't know. You were too close. I was struggling for a distraction. It...seemed like a good idea at the time.'

She sighed. 'Yes. It seemed like a good idea at the time.'

He picked up her hand, entwining His fingers with her own. Pale eyes and paler hair, there was almost no colour to Him. She watched His face, examined His features. She often did on nights like this, when the rain tapped at the window glass and the dark was lit only by a fat moon.

'I wonder,' He said, a soft sound into the silence.

'What?'

'I wonder what will be born into this world, nine months hence. I wonder what it will do.'

He did not sound concerned, or even all that curious. She raised a hand to trace a single dark finger along His jaw, His cheekbone.

'If people are to be believed, it will either be a destroyer of worlds, or saviour of them,' she said.

'Yes. They do like to think there's some grand plan.'

'Maybe there is.'

His snort was cynical. 'A plan would require a purpose. But throughout the ages there has been only this. Without end, without beginning.'

'There has to be an end. Somehow or another one of us has to win.'

He made a face, a dismissive gesture, even as His fingers tightened around her own. Deflecting again. He never did like talking about these things.

'All we know, You and I, is defeat or be defeated. And yet...' He paused, looking down at their entwined hands. 'And yet we don't even know what such an end will bring. Shouldn't we know? Don't you think? We who otherwise know so much?'

She had no answers for Him, but He wasn't expecting any. These questions were old, too familiar. He must have been thinking of them of late. Well, so had she. But it was not unusual for her to speak of such, to ask the questions, to seek the answers. He usually avoided it. He did not like bringing their daylight reality into these brief darkened hours of respite they captured for themselves.

He looked back up to her. 'Why did You not attack last night? In the city, You had Your chance. Why not take it?'

'The girl. I saw the girl. It was too much of a risk. I could not know what You were planning.'

'I plan nothing. Just like You,' He said. 'There is no plan. There is only ever...'

'That which seems like a good idea at the time.'

Above them shadows played across the ceiling, born of the moon through the curtains, shifting with the breeze from the cracked open window. She lay back and watched them. Perhaps He was right. It was hard now to understand her hesitation of the previous night, her reluctance to attack, to take that final step. Yet at the time the risk had seemed too great. Her need for self-preservation the only thing strong enough to temper her need to defeat Him.

'I remember when people huddled in caves,' she said, staring at the play of light and dark above. 'Scared of their own shadows on the wall. I remember chasing You through them. And yet I cannot remember the beginning.'

'Perhaps we have always been doing this. Perhaps we always will.'

'Have we forgotten? Is that all it is? Forgotten how it began?' She hesitated, thinking suddenly of Evelyn and her foolish, uncomprehending questions. 'Or why it began?'

She pushed herself up again to see what he thought of that, leaning on one elbow to watch His face. Black hair fell over her shoulder, across His pale skin. He looked down to it and, after a moment, picked up a lock, holding it between His fingers.

'You are enemy mine,' He said in a low voice, staring at the pinch of her hair. 'You are enemy mine and I do not even know why. I would like to know why.'

Across his face settled a rare frown. It disturbed her, she wanted to reach out and smooth it away. Before she could He shifted, picking up a lock of His own white hair. He joined it with the lock of hers, the colours mixing between his fingers.

'Evelyn's child,' she said as he frowned at the locks of hair. 'Perhaps people are right. Destroyer or saviour, perhaps it will bring an end after all.'

'Is it really important? The ending? Is knowing there will be a fixed and proper ending that important to You?'

'What point is there if one of us does not defeat the other?'

That brought back the smile in Him. 'Whoever said there has to be a point?'

The flippancy of His words did not reach His eyes. Instead she read a pleading in them: do not do this, do not speak of it, please. Let it go. But she could not and she did not think He expected her to. For when He looked up there was also understanding in His eyes and that kinship she never saw anywhere else. Which existed nowhere else. Only in Him.

She took pity on Him. Turned the subject to one she knew He'd prefer.

'Evelyn called You a devil,' she said.

It brought back His smile. 'A devil? Haven't heard that one for a long time. And there I thought this was a more secular age that did not believe in devils.'

'She also called me an angel.'

His smile turned into an outright grin. 'Those drugs must have hit her harder than they were supposed to. You, my friend, my enemy, are no angel.'

'No. And You're no devil, either.' She frowned at Him. 'But what if You are the evil they say You are? They use the word with such regularity, it must mean something. And if so, what does that make me? Good?'

'You know I'm not. Not like they want me to be. And neither are You.'

'Through every age it is what they have named us.'

'Which means nothing. Good, evil. Such things are mere creations from the minds of man.'

She swallowed. Hard. 'So are we.'

The words left her mouth tacky. But someone had to say it and she knew He would not. The skin around his eyes tightened, his head turned away, involuntary reaction. He did not want to hear this. He never wanted to hear this.

'You don't know that,' He said at last. 'People are meaningless. There to be used. How can You say they are somehow responsible for our very existence?'

'You don't know it's any different,' she returned. 'Their need for oppositions, for easy dichotomies to make sense of the world. Maybe it is the reason we are here.'

She was leaning over Him, insistent. When she swallowed she could taste the burn of acid, harsh in her throat. Her stomach was churning. That was the difference between them. He was happy to avoid the questions so as not to confront difficult answers, while she was determined to know the truth, no matter how sour.

There was pain in His eyes. As always, a pure reflection of her own.

'But what are we?' she suggested, more gently. 'What are we, if not the beings they created to place such tags upon?'

For a moment He was silent. Then He held up the locks of their hair which still lay in His fingers, the strands combined.

'Opposite. Opposed,' He said. 'From the colour of our hair to the expressions on our faces, You, my friend, who never smiles. Yet we act the same, fight the same, think the same way, believe the same things.'

'Fear the same.'

'There is only one I fear,' he said and, staring up at her, and an echo of that fear flashed across His face. But it faded quickly and He smiled. It was a sweet smile. 'And we desire. We love. The same.'

‘But what are we?’

He dropped the hair. Reached instead to kiss her, lips soft on her own. Then he drew her down to lie beside Him, winding a way into the tight circle of her arms. They lay there together, warm, comfortable, interlocking. His hands gentle on her skin.

‘We are opposed,’ He said. He sounded sad. ‘We are opposed.’



HE WAS GONE before she awoke. An old habit. Whoever first approached the other in the night was always the first to leave again in the morning.

A new sunlight hit the empty pillow beside her. She opened her eyes to find the rain stopped and the window open. For a long time she just lay there, not moving. Another old habit. Giving Him time to get away before the chase was on again.

After a while, she rose and dressed. Went down to the foyer to watch for Evelyn. The girl appeared with hesitant steps, looking lost, disoriented, which was only to be expected. Evelyn’s memory of recent days would be fading fast, if not already gone, but the scars, and the consequences, would remain.

An older couple approached the girl and Evelyn was welcomed back into the arms of her parents with tears and hugs. No questions asked, no explanations needed, just relief and reunion. It would not last. Before the week was out there would be fights, arguments, the usual family rifts would breach again. Reality as they created it for themselves would return in force. She could not change that for them. Only they could create change of permanence, even while they looked to others to blame or save.

Evelyn gripped her mother's arm. Her father ushered the women to a waiting car. Whisking the girl back into everyday life, community, suburbs, and taking the new life inside her with them. It would be a thing born of whim and frustration, created without thought to the past or consideration of the future. Without plan. Without purpose. Without reason why. Perhaps these people would find their object of guilt or salvation in the child. Perhaps they would find what they were looking for in the new thing to be born, after all. Destroyer of worlds or saviour of them or something else besides.

Perhaps then They might be left alone.

She watched them take it away and felt the care drain from her limbs as they did.

She left the motel in a stolen car and turned back down the road to the city proper. As she did, she began to search for clues, to scent for Him once more on the warm breeze. He would be working to put as much distance between them as possible and she would need to be quick to pick up His trail. She considered her options, thoughts ticking over. How best to track Him, how she might finally confront Him. How to ensure she would, in the last, defeat Him. She did not smile, but this was not a sign of discontent.

As she drove, all irrelevancies faded. The questions which burned in the night, the answers neither of them could give. The thing to be born nine months hence, to a mother who would not remember its conception and a world that would not be ready. He was right. It did not matter. Like the beginning, long forgotten, or like the unknowable end. None of it mattered. There was only one thing they knew, the only thing they could be sure of.

The only thing which held any meaning.

We are opposed.