

JAY DESHPANDE

A Love Poem for Vicki Vale

I cowl myself, as I'm no match for metaphor, but Gotham stands for something that screeches inside of us like subway cars and commuters flitting past, behaving like clever criminals. You were beside me and I woke up confused,

smog coming in like a sacred distraction and you should be afraid of this city. I am afraid of this city: I shudder at its impositions, shouldered buildings growing gargoyles in the night as if every block would break

and match my dreams. Purple streets leer and honk at you, tumbling stations and tympanic alleys reach out to take your face away. But consider this light under my eyes, my leathered wings,

and you'll know: you'll see how I hang here, inverted in morning, a lurching reminder of who we've been. Don't turn away—you also came here to climb the broken stairs. Forget about the buzzing, the clink

of talented glasses: now they're good as screams. And you want much from me, Vale, want me standing on promontories to tell you this fair city has already asked for everything and I, wet shadow, am here to stop it.

Only when we've climbed the cathedral stairs, barefoot, trembling, and come to those broad bells—only then will we know what tolls for our town. You were here for a vision. All the rest were here to take you home.